

A Transformed Heart  
An Ideal Disciple, Part 1  
Pastor Dan Erickson  
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Well, the 2023 NFL season starts today. For Green Bay Packer fans like me, it marks only the second time in 31 years that we will have a new starting quarterback. So, it should be no surprise that this sermon starts with a Packer analogy. The big question is this: Will Jordan Love be able to perform at the same level Brett Favre and Aaron Rodgers did for so many years? Maybe, though I am not really optimistic.

Yet, some in the Packers' organization insist Love has the necessary qualities or characteristics that will enable him to succeed in the NFL. That includes a strong arm that enables him to throw the football with velocity and for distance. He has demonstrated the ability to throw with accuracy. Love has a quick release and running speed that will enable him to avoid being sacked by pass rushers. He is able to "read" defenses, which is huge for a quarterback's success, and he seems to be able to generate the confidence of his teammates, which is a key "intangible" that good quarterbacks possess. If Jordan Love really has those characteristics, I might be pleased as a Packer fan.

Okay, that's enough about the Packers, for now. Many of you know that our stated purpose at Chisholm Baptist Church is to "love God, love others, and make disciples." In the past few years, we have stressed the importance of being intentional and accountable in our disciple making. Yet, what exactly is our goal? How do we know if our efforts to make disciples are successful? Yet, to be a disciple is to be a follower of Jesus Christ, but what does that look like in practical terms?

Well, here's the analogy: Just as there are certain qualities or characteristics that make a good NFL quarterback, there are also qualities or characteristics that make a good disciple. I would say they are essential to being faithful followers of Jesus. The pastors and other leaders of Chisholm Baptist Church have come up with a list of six qualities which we believe should characterize a disciple. We call it "Our Ideal Disciple."

Now, I have already changed that to "An Ideal Disciple." None of these six characteristics should

be unique to Chisholm Baptist Church. I think the Bible teaches that all Christians, no matter where or when they live, should exhibit these qualities. Some churches will emphasize some qualities more than others and may add or even subtract from the list. At Chisholm Baptist Church, we desire that every believer in Jesus develop and exhibit these six characteristics.

Now, we could quibble about the word "ideal" as well. One might argue that the truly ideal disciple, the one all of us should be trying to imitate, is Jesus. Yet, we use the word "ideal" to communicate that it is our goal that anyone who is a believer develops and exhibits these qualities. They describe what we want to be like. They describe what we want other Christians to be like or more importantly describe what God wants us, as followers of Jesus, to be like.

So, what are these six characteristics? Well, to help you remember them we have a visual. Some of you have seen it before. This is a picture of an ideal disciple, not a photo, but a drawing.

The six items to note are the big heart, the Bible being held in the hand, the cross above, the raised arms, the rays of light surrounding this person and the map of the world in the background.

Over the next six Sundays the plan is to talk about what each of these symbolizes and means. Our desire is that the Lord use these sermons, this focus on these six qualities, to help all of us, to help you, grow to be more and more the disciple He wants us to be. Let's pause and pray that would happen.

All six of the characteristics of a disciple are important, but the place to start is with the heart. The other five all involve things a disciple of Jesus does, but none of them can be done in a way that pleases the Lord without the right kind of heart.

So, what is the right kind of heart for an ideal disciple?

**Number 1**, It is a heart intent on trusting and following Jesus. What exactly does the Bible mean when it talks about the heart? **Matthew 22:37**

**“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your mind.”** Jesus’ point is that we are to love God with our entire being.

In the Bible, the New Testament, the Greek word we translate “heart” is “kardia.” That is not a big surprise. Today a cardiologist is a heart doctor. Even in the first century, people recognized the heart as a key organ of the physical body. Yet, then and now, the word “heart” is used to describe something more. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we use the word heart in connection with our deepest beliefs, feelings, and desires.

In the common first century view, the soul is the non-material part of who we are or really, our self, our true self. The mind and heart are viewed as parts of the soul. The mind is the intellect, but the heart is a bit harder to define. It is not really the emotions. Those were thought to reside in one’s bowels or guts. The heart is more the will or seat of the soul. You might think something to be true with your mind, you might be excited about a particular thought in your gut, but a true conviction and commitment comes from the heart.

So, the apostle Paul writes **Romans 10:9,10** **If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.** Believing in your mind that God raised Jesus from the dead, believing it to be a historical fact, is good. But it is “believing in the heart” that describes genuine, saving faith.

In **Matthew 15:8** Jesus warns **“These people hone me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me...”** He calls these folks hypocrites. What comes from your lips is what your mind decides to say and what you may even think is true. But faith, trust, confidence, commitment, come from the heart.

That is really what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. It is not about saying you are a Christian, saying you believe in Him. It is about a heart that is truly intent on trusting and following the Lord Jesus. But how does your heart get that way?

**Number 2,** An ideal disciple has a heart that has been regenerated by God’s spirit. Actually, that describes anyone who is a disciple, anyone who is truly a Christian. Regenerated means to be given life, to be made alive. God made this promise through the Prophet Ezekiel almost 600 years before Jesus was born. **Ezekiel 36:26** **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.**

This heart of flesh is one that is alive, not dead. This involves a spiritual heart transplant, from dead to living. It is the distinct mark of the new covenant that Jesus has instituted through His life, death and resurrection. It is what the apostle Paul is talking about in **Ephesians 2: 4,5** **But God...even when we were dead in our trespasses** (our sins), **made us alive together with Christ.** The KJV says “quickened us together with Christ,” a fine old word.

In **Titus 3:5** he describes it as the **regeneration and renewal of the Holy spirit.** Other terms used in the New Testament to describe this include rebirth, being born of the spirit, born of God, and being born again.

Now, it should be obvious that none of these are things we do, but rather what God does to us. A dead person cannot make or will him/herself alive. Only God can do that. Our role and response is to turn to the Lord, or we sometimes say repent and believe in Jesus Christ, believe not just with your head, but with your heart.

Sometimes in the New Testament this is called believing the gospel, receiving Jesus Christ, putting your faith or trust in Him. We often refer to it as becoming a Christian or being saved. It is when, enabled by God’s spirit, you put your faith in Jesus Christ, with your heart, that you experience salvation and forgiveness of your sins. That is when you become a Christian. You cannot be a Christian or a disciple unless your heart has been regenerated by God’s spirit and you are trusting in the Lord Jesus.

Now, I need to pause at this point and say something very important. This morning there are over 300 people in this room. I would be delighted to learn that all of you have regenerated hearts and are truly trusting in Jesus. But frankly, the odds are that is not the case.

My guess is that most folks who are not trusting in Jesus, who show up at Chisholm Baptist Church on a Sunday morning consider themselves Christians and often sincerely believe they are. So, I want to be very clear on some things. First, the fact you believe in God and are not a Jew or Muslim, does not make you a Christian. That may seem obvious, but if it doesn't quite make sense to you, we need to chat.

Second, the fact your parents are/were Christians does not make you a Christian. Yes, when you are a child, you often shared your parents' faith to a degree, but the Bible is clear. God doesn't have grandchildren. Each individual needs to turn to and trust in Jesus Christ.

Third, the fact you try to be a nice person and are frequently doing nice things for other people does not mean you are a Christian. It may mean you are from Minnesota, where niceness is a very real thing, but it is not the same as trusting in Jesus Christ.

Fourth, the fact that you have done some religious rituals does not make you a Christian. Being baptized, either as an infant or adult, attending church or being a church member, participating in communion, are all good things. But none of them equals trusting in Jesus Christ. And you can do any or all of those without a regenerated heart.

Likewise, a person can go forward during an evangelical event or repeat a prayer and not truly be a Christian. Those are outward actions that might reflect a heart that has been made alive by God's spirit, but it is possible to do either of them without trusting in the Lord Jesus.

Fifth, the fact you believe certain fact about Jesus doesn't make you a Christian. I sometimes say many people believe in Jesus like they believe in George Washington. They believe Jesus was born of a virgin, died on the cross and rose from the dead, and they believe George Washington lived at Mount Vernon, led the continental army and was the first president of the United States.

Yet, none of these beliefs really impact their lives. They are giving mental assent to historical facts. They believe with their minds, their heads, but not their hearts. Now, if you lived in any of the American colonies in 1777, believing in George

Washington would mean much more than believing facts about him.

Today, believing in Jesus means much more than believing facts about Him. It involves trusting not in yourself, but in Him for salvation. It involves having a heart that has been made alive by God's spirit.

Folks, I made sure these five common misunderstandings are listed in the sermon outline that is in the bulletin or on the app. It can help clarify in your mind exactly what it means to be a Christian, and you can use it to help other people you know, friends and family members, make sure they are truly trusting in Jesus Christ and have a heart that has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, which all disciples of Jesus need.

**Number 3**, an ideal disciple has a heart that is being transformed (present tense) by God's spirit. In Ezekial 36 God promises to give a new, living heart and then says **Ezekial 36:27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.**

Paul speaks of the same reality in **2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away behold, the new has come.** You cannot be a disciple of Jesus and continue to live like you always have. I like to put it this way: becoming a Christian, a disciple, involves being regenerated by God's spirit and trusting in Jesus. Salvation by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ alone.

Being a Christian, being a disciple involves following Jesus, seeking to live and love in a way that pleases the Lord. Yes, that means obeying His commands.

In theological terms we call this justification, being declared righteous at a single point of time, and sanctification, the process of becoming more and more righteous over a period of time, like the rest of our lives. An ideal disciple is someone whose heart is continually being transformed, changed, so that this individual can become more and more the person God intends him/her to be.

Okay, here is a question. True or false? An ideal disciple is one that never sins. False. All human beings, except Jesus, are sinners. All Christians or disciples of Jesus commit sins pretty much daily.

That sin includes not just actions, but many attitudes. And that sin includes not just doing or thinking wrong things but failing to do the right things or have the right thoughts.

Essentially, sin is failing to love God with your entire being, and failing to love other people as much as you love yourself. Again, no one but Jesus has ever done that perfectly. In fact, if you tell me, “Pastor Dan, I have not sinned in over a month, “ I probably would not conclude you were the most holy person I have ever met. Rather I would be concerned that you are blind to your own sin or maybe deceiving yourself. And I would maybe quote **1 John 1:8** to you **If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**

Friends, even though our picture of an ideal disciple has a bright white heart, there will be some imperfections, some dark spots. And if you are a disciple, a believer in and follower of Jesus, you should be more and more aware of those little dark spots as your heart is being transformed. The Lord will enable you to be aware of sinful actions and attitudes in your life. And you should be more and more troubled by that sin.

As God’s spirit transforms your heart, He will cause you to hate sin more and give you a desire and ability to fight against that sin. Maybe a good definition of an ideal disciple is: A believer in Jesus, who, by God’s grace, increasingly recognizes the sin in his/her life, and fights against that sin, and slowly, but surely wins those battles, by God’s grace and for His glory.

And the number 4, As the heart of an ideal disciple is being transformed, it overflows with love for God and love for other people. That is what happens when God’s spirit moves us to follow God’s commands. Because remember, all of His commands, really in both the Old and New Testaments, can be summed up this way. **Matthew 2:37-39 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**

Or to sum it up even more succinctly, we are to love God, and love others. In one sense, disciples of Jesus strive to do that, love God and love others. But we are to do so not in our strength, but

through the strength God provides. That is another way of saying, we love God and others with a heart that has been regenerated by God’s spirit and is being transformed by that same spirit.

Exactly how this works is somewhat of a mystery. But the Bible is pretty clear that we are the ones who choose to obey God, but God is the one who enables us to make that choice. A verse reflecting that is **Philippians 2:12b, 13 work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.** Or I love how the NLT puts it. **Philippians 2:12b, 13 Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.** Folks, that is another way of saying, God, through His spirit, has regenerated and is transforming your heart.

Because of obedience to God’s law, loving God and others, flow not out of obligation, but out of love. As we are regenerated and transformed by God’s spirit, we experience His grace and love. **1 John 4:19 We love because He first loved us.** Some versions say “we love Him” which is probably the correct interpretation, though the Greek text does not specify the object of our love. Actually, our experience of God’s love enables us to love both God and love other people. And it is that love which motivates us to follow Jesus and obey His commands. I am convinced that love is the best motive for obedience.

A basketball player may perform well for a coach he fears, but I think he will perform better for a coach he loves. And Christians who love God with their whole heart, are more likely to obey His commands more than those who merely fear being punished if they fail to do so. The more your heart is transformed into what the Lord wants it to be, the more you will love God and other people.

An ideal disciple of Jesus Christ, really any disciple of Jesus, has a heart that is intent on trusting and following Jesus, has been regenerated by God’s spirit, is being transformed by the spirit, and is growing in love for God and other people. If that doesn’t describe your heart, we need to chat. If it does describe your heart, then you will want to make sure you hear or listen to the sermons over these next few weeks as we explore something you want to be, an ideal disciple.