

COMMITMENT #7

A STRONG CHURCH IS MULTIPLYING COMMUNITIES OF DISCIPLES WHO KNOW HOW TO BE WITH JESUS, ARE BECOMING LIKE JESUS, AND MAKING DISCIPLES LIKE JESUS IN THE EVERYDAY STUFF OF LIFE.

Jesus didn't call us to merely make a decision for him. He doesn't need our vote of approval. He doesn't want deciders. He wants disciples—people who are devoted to becoming more and more like him in everything, everyday. — Jeff Vanderstelt

DEFINITION

A disciple is one who has trusted solely in Jesus for salvation, lives in light of his/her new gospel identity, and is learning to obey all that Christ commanded as he/she is being filled by the Spirit. A disciple is growing to know how to be with Jesus, is becoming like Jesus, and is making disciples like Jesus in the everyday stuff of life: life-on-life, life-in-community, and life-on-mission. In this context, gospel/Scriptural truth, relationships, accountability, and mission are prioritized and experienced. This leads to further evangelism and edification with new believers coming to trust in Jesus and the existing believers being conformed to the image of Christ. A mature New Testament church is marked by disciples who are increasingly mature in faith, hope, and love. The goal of our instruction is love (I Timothy 1:5). Ultimately, the world will know that we are Christ's disciples by our love for one another (John 13:35).

QUOTES TO PONDER...

It's possible to describe functions and directives without describing forms, but it's impossible to carry out directives and engage in functions without creating forms. —Gene A. Getz

In order to understand the scriptural meaning of the local church, we must think in terms of people in relationship—not structures, not meeting places, not buildings. New Testament writers used three basic concepts almost exclusively to describe the church as God's people in community. They were called disciples, brothers, and saints. —Gene A. Getz

*If the church is to recover its God-given identity and role in the world, it needs to be intentional about recovering the biblical story and its images. —Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story**

The early church broke down the barriers that had been erected in the ancient world between rich and poor, male and female, slave and free, Greek and barbarian, in a creative, confounding "sociological impossibility." A potent "gospel of love and charity" was exercised toward the poor, orphans, widows, sick, mine workers, prisoners, slaves, and travelers. The exemplary moral lives of ordinary Christians stood out against the rampant immorality of Rome. Christians' hope, joy, and confidence shone brightly in the midst of the despair, anxiety, and uncertainty that characterized a crumbling empire. Christian unity contrasted sharply with the fragmentation and pluralism of Rome. Christians exhibited chastity,



marital faithfulness, and self-control in the midst of a decadent, sex-saturated empire. Generosity with possessions and resources, along with simple lifestyles, marked their lives in a world dominated by accumulation and consumption. Forgiving love toward one another and toward their enemies witnessed to the power of the gospel. The lives of the believing community, nursed and shaped by the biblical story, enabled them to live as resident aliens, as lights in a dark world. In the cultural context of the Roman Empire, their “contrary values” led to a “contrary image of community” that was attractive. The Canons of Hippolytus expresses the desire that the lives of Christians “may shine with virtue, not before each other [only] but also before the Gentiles so they may imitate them and become Christians.”

—Michael W. Goheen

The only way the Christian life is brought to maturity is through intimacy, renunciation, and personal deepening. —Eugene Peterson

Whatever controls us is really our god.... The one who seeks power is controlled by power. The one who seeks acceptance is controlled by the people he or she wants to please. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our life.... Jesus’ ownership of our lives is not a control that manipulates us or takes away our dignity. He governs our lives... by being who he is without compromise and by insisting we become all that we are meant to be. And this can only occur through following him, obeying him, and maintaining a living, passionate kinship to him... God created us for himself. If we live with any center other than Jesus, we will be living incompletely.... Is Jesus’ desire to be the Lord of our lives some little fetish of his? Why is it so important to him? Besides the fact that he deserves it because of who he is, he knows he is the only one in the universe who can control us without destroying us. No one will ever love you like Jesus. The last breath Jesus breathed on this planet was for you. Jesus will meet you wherever you are, and he will help you. He is not intimidated by past failures, broken promises, or wounds. He will make sense out of your brokenness. But he can only begin to be Lord of your life today—not next month but now. —Rebecca Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker*

The best hermeneutic of the Gospel is a community of men and women who believe it and live by it. —Leslie Newbigin

The mission of Jesus is yours to participate in. It has always been God’s intention to choose normal, everyday people and to show His amazing power and glory through them. He’s not looking for the most impressive person because He already is that person. —Jeff Vanderstelt

BIBLE STUDY

Read Acts 2:37-47 and 4:32-37 and Romans 12:9-21.

What do the various commands in these sections have in common?



What kind of community emerges when a group of believers faithfully embody this?

How might this kind of community contrast with the normal operating reality in your context?

QUESTIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

Envision the communities of disciples who have journeyed with your church for at least twelve to eighteen months and reflect on the following questions related to their maturity and fruitfulness in making disciples.

Jesus said that the work of the Christian is to "believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:29). To what extent are disciples trusting in the finished work of Christ for all their righteousness? Are they beginning each day on the top of the ladder, having realized they have already arrived? Are they aware of God's love and confident they are accepted in Christ? Are they living thankful lives?

Are the gospel identities well formulated in the minds of those who are committed? Do they believe they are family? Missionaries? Servants? Saints? Citizens of the Kingdom?

To what extent are your disciples living in light of the story of God as the dominant story of their lives? Does it inform how they orient all of life? Which rival stories are vying for the hearts and minds of your people (e.g. American Dream, the perfect body, etc.)?

Jesus says, "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:35). To what degree do you see disciples in your church organizing their life around Jesus and His prerogatives, even when it comes at significant personal or social cost?



New Disciples: To what extent are your communities on mission? How frequent are your people having gospel conversations with not-yet-believers? How many baptisms have you seen in your church over the past twelve months?

Growth in Disciples: Can you identify people who are taking new steps of faith in obedience through their engagement with your church, such as starting to disciple their children at home, serve the poor, pursue the spiritual disciplines, turn from sin, or open their homes to neighbors on mission? Do you see any other fruit consistent with a faithful disciple?

How does pastoral care and familial support function in your Missional Communities and DNA (same-sex triads) groups? How many of the groups are living out the “one anothers” in meaningful ways?

A mature New Testament church is marked by faith, hope, and love. I Timothy 1:5 says, “The goal of our instruction is love.” To what extent do you see these marks present and growing in your church?

What other insights would be helpful to better understand this area in your church?

COMMITTED TO ACTION

What’s one thing you or your team could do this week to strengthen this area?

What would it take to see this commitment strengthened over the next year?

