



## FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF A DISCIPLE

Countercultural Practices | 8.10.25

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Our kids, especially our older two, Avery and Liam, they're at the stage of now where we've got a step stool in our kitchen. They love to climb up on the step school stool when Stacy or I are cooking. And this is a watch, okay? But sometimes, as they watch another cake, can we add a few things to the recipe? And usually that's okay. That's this is gonna be an interesting thing. We're trying to be gracious. And so we said, okay, sure, let's, let's experiment together. So this July, Avery was over at our house with one of her friends from church, and they said, Hey, Avery lives out. She wasn't just over. She does live at our house. Her friend was over at our house and they decided to bake chocolate cake. And I'm like, Okay, this is gonna be awesome. Please don't ruin chocolate cake for me, guys. And they did, and it was actually really good. I mean, it was moist, and it was so good. And so Liam sees that, and says, Okay, I can cook too. And so a few days later, we're making broccoli, just sauteing some broccoli, and he had some interesting choice of spices he wanted to add to broccoli. And surprisingly, it tasted really good. It might have actually been the best broccoli of our life. So it was good. But that's the exception of the rule. It doesn't always turn out that way when Cook, when children join you in the kitchen, okay, sometimes you're just pretending to like what they made, whether drawing or in actual cooking. Other times it's good. Maybe you've had a moment where you had a great recipe that's worked, and you're like, I think I can improve it. And then you realize, after cooking it okay, I should not have touched a perfectly great recipe, or somebody handed down to you, like your grandmother. Great grandmother gave you a recipe that was tried and true. And the rule of law is, don't mess it up. Don't add anything, don't take it, don't be creative, just keep it the way it is, because some things are just right. Coca Cola. Found this out the hard way in 1985 and last service, just like people began to giggle, I think because they were still recovering from the trauma of the experiment they tried in 1985 they decided we should make a new coke with a new recipe and a new formula called the New Coke. They could have probably come up with a creative title, but they said, we're just gonna call the New Coke, and they thought this would be a better competitor. And the key word is they thought, because they were wrong in their thinking. It flopped. People hated the New Coke. And in fact, just within days, by the way, this is days before you can send an email or direct message somebody. This is when you had to do a thing called writing a letter and put an actual postage stamp on it and send it and physically send it somewhere. Within a few days, they received 40,000 letters complaining about the new coke. Seriously, guys, people began to protest on the streets. They began to hoard their old coke cans as a memorial of what used to be. Well, it got the attention of Coca Cola, and obviously, within three months, they reversed course, and they got back to their original recipe, and they called it Coca Cola Classic, and this is what we thank God for Coca Cola Classic, and Coca Cola realizing what was they should have never messed with a good recipe. Sales, sore people celebrated. Why? Because they were not looking for something newer. They were looking for something truer. They wanted the real thing. They wanted the original. And in the church world, sometimes we can get so innovative and creative and try new things and roll out new programs and be more relevant to the world and around us. And there is a time and a space for all of that as we adapt to a changing world. But if we are primarily driven by innovation, we run the risk of becoming the new Koch, meaning it loses the essence of what the church was about to be, it loses the essence of what the church was to be made up of. Maybe you're here today, or you're online with us, and this is your first time here, and you've told yourself, you know what, I'm gonna find myself a new church. And I'm so glad you're here, and I hope this is a community of faith that can encourage you and inspire you. But I gotta, like, give you a secret we're not actually trying to be a new kind of church, or a new church. We're actually just trying to be faithful to the church. Jesus died to birth. Jesus instituted the Church of Jesus, the spirit birthed the churches, and even now, 2000 years later, we're just seeking to be faithful, to be true to the original vision that Jesus had for his church, not to add, not to take away, but to be consistent. So today, what I want to do is level set some expectation of what the church is always meant to be about, and who disciples of

Jesus were always meant to be about, because in order to move forward faithfully, sometimes we got to go back to the basics, go back to the beginning of the church. So I want to take us all the way back to Acts two. At the end of Acts two, where we and you've read this before, but. It's one of the most precise descriptions of the Church of Jesus, closest to the resurrection and closest to the time of Jesus. And here, in Acts two, we get a picture of a discipleship and what church looked and felt like. The context of Acts two is that the church grew overnight from just 120 people meeting in an upper room for prayer meeting to over 3000 who were saved and baptized in one day talk about assimilation problems and a system being overwhelmed 1000s of people, and yet they knew they didn't have to over complicate things. They just had to stick to the basics of what Jesus envisioned for the church. So would you stand with me in honor of this reflection of the early church and an invitation to return to it faithfully in every generation? Let's read this together. Would you Acts two, starting in verse 42 let's read it. They devoted themselves to the apostles, teaching to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all as any had need. Every day, they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple and broke bread from house to house, they ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of the people. And as a result, every day, the Lord added to that number those who were being saved. Amen. Thanks be to God for His Word. You may be seated. I love the fact that food and eating together every day is a part of the early church. And that's the end of the sermon. You can go home today. That's all I wanted to say. But this is the description of the Church of Jesus closest to his life. And it begins like this, in Acts 2:42 they devoted themselves. Say with me, they devoted themselves. It's been said by many that in the American church there is a crisis of discipleship, and I think that's true, but I think we have a crisis of discipleship because we have a crisis of what devotion at the heart of discipleship is devotion, a real, loving commitment to a Savior. And what's true about these early disciples, as they experienced Jesus, as they saw him live and perform miracles, but they saw him die, and then he rose from the grave, He gave His Spirit, and now they're waiting for his return. All they could be is devoted to Jesus. They were devoted to Jesus when it cost them their own life. They were devoted to Jesus when it was not convenient. They were devoted to Jesus even when their spouse left them because of their faith in Jesus, or their kids turned against them, or their government turned against them, no matter the cause, the church was devoted this faith was in convenient faith, or circumstantial faith, or if everyone follows me kind of faith? No, no, it's even if I've got to give up my whole life for Jesus. He's worth it. So they counted this world not worthy of their life, but they counted the gospel as being infinitely worthy of their whole life. So they devoted their life to Jesus, and here in Dallas, we know what devotion is. Is any Cowboy fan like my wife, Stacey and my friend Mark Rowley, they're devoted. They've been patiently, prayerfully waiting for another championship since 1996 and they just are committed. No matter what, no matter who's coaching, who's a Cuba, we're gonna stay devoted. We know what devotion is. Friends. Devotion is when you meet somebody and you are foolish enough to move across country to live near them. It's when you find a cause that inspires you to give up everything to follow in view of that cause, that's devotion. And for these early believers, the only thing, the only person they could be devoted to, was Jesus. So they gave of their

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whole life to love and follow Jesus. And I have a feeling there may be some of you who are here today and you're interested in Jesus, you're considering Jesus. You just are kicking the tires. And I want to just lovingly invite you and even challenge you go all in. It'll be the best decision of your life. He gave His life, not just half of his life, but all. All of his life for you, and he's inviting you to a relationship where you offer your heart and surrender to Him in affection and thanksgiving for who he is. Don't just give him a part of your life or a part of your heart or part of your affection or No, make Him your life. Make him your love, and it will be the greatest decision you've ever made. How many of you agree that it is the greatest decision you could ever make? Go all in the life of a disciple is to be devoted to Jesus, as we read in this text, there are specifically four things I want to bring before your mind, of what they were devoted to when they came to Jesus and to the church. What did their devotion look like and feel like? Four things I want to present to you today that I think are going to be handles for us as we grow as disciples of Jesus. The first is this, they were devoted to learning truth. Devoted to learning truth. The scripture reads like this, in verse 42 they devoted themselves to what the apostles teaching, the teaching from the apostles. Who are these apostles? The apostles were the initial, original disciples of Jesus, who were with him when he did his earthly ministry. They're the ones who walked with Him, who saw the miracles he performed, who heard Him teach. They heard firsthand what Jesus said about the Father, what he said about himself, what he said about the Holy Spirit, what he said about the Kingdom of God. These apostles were eyewitnesses of the resurrection, and not only that, they spent 40 days with Jesus after his resurrection, as Jesus taught them, as he revealed how he is the fulfillment from Genesis to Malachi of all the Old Testament prophecies. These are the apostles, and now, as the church has just multiplied beyond their wildest imagination,

everyone's asking, tell us about this Jesus. I mean, we're hearing from this Roman soldiers that his body was stolen. We're hearing from Jewish leaders that he was a heretic and a blasphemer. So they went to the apostles who knew Jesus, just said, Teach us who Jesus is. Mind you, this is before they had the written word of God in their hands. This would be decades before the Epistles would circulate, even the Gospels will be recorded, and they could read the accounts of Jesus. So the 1000s of Christians who are coming to faith, they were devoted to the apostles teaching. They were all hungry to know who Jesus is. Today, we have the privilege of having the Word of God in written form, digitally or in print. We have the privilege of debating about which translation is better. Do you know how lucky we are with the privilege of commentaries and sermons, and you can choose to listen to who you are, who you want. It's a beautiful thing. We have access to God's word like no generation prior to us has had. But here's my fear. We may have it in our heart, in my in our hand, but we may not have it in our hearts. Plenty of opportunities, plenty of access. We've got it in our hand, but do we have it in our heart? Meaning? Is there a devotion to this in a world that is swarming with so many world views and philosophies and lies, things that sound really good and may even sound truthful, a disciple of Jesus has a commitment to learning truth of who Jesus is, who God is, how he intended the world to work, what is this grand story for the universe, and how do we find ourself in that there's a commitment to truth from God's revealed Word? Remember, on a mission trip to North India, many years ago, sitting in the home of a family who had never heard the name of Jesus, and telling them from creation to Christ, the story of Jesus. The end of the conversation, I just asked them, hey, after 2000 years of this gospel of this Jesus, what are you going to do with him? In unison, they said, we believe, we believe we believe we were to come back the next day. So we left a copy of the New Testament there, and when we came back, we found out this family stayed up the entire night reading the whole New Testament. They didn't want to sleep. That's what devotion feels like. We want to know Jesus. We've been searching for truth, hungry for truth, we've tried everything else, it's failed. But if he's real, we want to know Him. And that reframes our whole life knowing who Jesus is and the truth of God's Word. In fact, here's what Peter said in first. Peter two. Peter would say in verse two, like newborn infants, desire, crave the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation. He says, crave the word. Crave the gospel. Crave. Brave to know God through His Word so that you might grow up into your salvation. It doesn't mean that you get saved because of how much you know, but it's sort of like we buy clothes for our kids that are a little too big because we know they're going to grow into it. They already have it, but they grow into it, meaning you're saved by the grace of God alone. But every day, as we discover scripture, as we adapt the world view of God, we grow in understanding of how great his salvation is, how infinite His grace is. We learn what we've been saved from and what we've been saved to when we discover his gifts in our life and his plan and our in his purposes for which he saved us. All this happens with a commitment, a devotion to learning truth, truth of God, truth of the world he's created, truth of how we relate to one another, truth of what we find ourselves in his grand story, the early church devoted, first of all to learning truth. Second of all, they were devoted to caring relationships. They didn't just grow in knowledge, puff up in learning truth. No, their truth was translated horizontally in how they dealt with people. And here's what we read about them. In verse 42 they devoted themselves to the apostles, teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread. And that word fellowship is Koinonia, and agreed, there's no direct English translation. It's a deep, beautiful word, but it speaks of participating in life together, sharing in one another's story, communing with one another. It means, look, if you are with me and Jesus, I'm a part of you, and you are a part of me, it's not enough for God to adopt us. We adopt each other as siblings. In the body of Christ, there is this inseparable union we have with those in the family of Christ. This is what they did. They saw each other, and they belonged to each other. I love this phrase in verse 44 it says, now all the believers were together, all the believers. All means not just a few 100, but a few 1000 believers found a way to still be together. Who's it all well? Acts two tells us that all those who came on the day of Pentecost to around the around the upper room, and they were Jews from all around the world, Jews with different customs and culture and upbringings, speaking different languages. And yet, because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, all these Jews from all around the world found a way to what be together. And what happens in Acts 10 is that you have the first Gentile family, Cornelius, who comes to faith in Jesus, and God gives Peter a vision saying, Go to Cornelius home, who is a Gentile, and bring the gospel. And Peter, who is a good Jew, says, I can't do that. I'm a Jew. He's a Gentile. We're not supposed to relate to each other. But Peter follows the voice of the Spirit, not the voice of his prejudice, and he goes to Cornelius home, and he brings the gospel to them, and boom, the Holy Spirit falls, just like in the Acts two, and he did with the Holy Spirit, with the Jews, and they begin to speak in other languages and tongues and and and they are baptized, and they're saved. But here's what's beautiful about acts 10, Peter didn't just bring the gospel to them and leave. He stayed at his house. He stayed at the home of a Gentile. And this is what was so scandalous about what Peter did. It got him in trouble, because this Jew stayed in the home of a Gentile. But Peter was showing us the Koinonia, the fellowship of the family of God, is expanding from just those who are like us and look like us and have lived like us to those who come from a whole different part of life that this Koinonia, this fellowship of Jews and Gentiles, male and female, slave and free. This is what God intends for His church, not walls of hostility based on race or

ethnicity or socio economics. No, no. All were together as one body of Christ. Isn't that what we want to be church? We're all together as one church, one family. This is caring relationships. To say, I'm a part of you, and you are a part of me, and

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we're called to be deep participants of each other's lives. Verse 46 continues about how they care for one another every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple and broke bread from house to house, and they ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts. The early church had what they called Agape feast, agape, which means love. And so this was love feast, and they gathered to express love for one another and love for Jesus. They didn't just settle for the large temple gathering, which we'll talk about in a minute. They went home to home, and they broke bread. As they broke bread, they lifted up the bread and said, This is the body of Jesus given for us. Let's partake of His life together. Lifted the cup and they said, This is the blood of Jesus. US shed for us. Let's remember his sacrifice. Let's remember the cost that brings us together. Let's fight for unity, because this is what Jesus fought for us and won for us. He was the source of their union and their unity for the early church, this kind of a community was not a luxury. It's not optional. It was absolutely necessary and critical for their endurance. They were being slandered and pushed and prodded from every side, and soon they would be persecuted. They needed this kind of fellowship when they were discouraged, they needed this community when they were doubting. They needed this community when they were dissuaded or thinking, maybe, is it even worth it? They came back to their community and were reminded, it is worth it. He died for us. He's worth following, not a luxury, but a necessity. We got a note from one of our leaders in India this week, who is in the state of Maharashtra, and they told us that in his little city, 35 of their churches have been forced to shut down within a week. 35 church communities were told that, without delay, you need to not gather anymore, stop worshiping Jesus, otherwise there'll be severe consequences. And including churches we have had a chance to plant through our partners but our brothers, they ended the email to us like this, though this has happened, and in quote, they said, we remain in peace. Our hearts are steadfast, and all of our believers together are committed to worshiping the Lord no matter the cause that was their commitment, amen, let's praise God for their resolve, regardless of the cost. We will worship Jesus. We'll keep spreading the message of Christ, who alone is the Savior of the world. Why? Because suffering has a way of binding us together. When a church is persecuted, they can't fight over silly stuff, and sometimes I think the division of the American church is because of a lack of real persecution. You need the community of believers when things get hard, when trials come, even when temptation rises in our soul, this kind of a biblical community we read about in Acts two. It's not a luxury. It is an absolute, crucial, necessary part of our faith journey and our growth is discipleship. In discipleship, do you have this? Are you known? You see? Do you have people that you can call at 2am say, Man, I'm struggling. Here's what happened. Do you have a group of people where you can be fully yourself, not pretending, but to share heart and share struggles. This is true of the early church, and may it be true of us, and it is true of us. Ventri, it's the early church committed, devoted to learning truth, caring relationships with one another, and second of all, Third of all, they were committed to serving others, serving one another. Here's how Luke records it in verse 44 of Acts two. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They held everything in common meaning. As they gathered together, they held their stuff loosely, not with a closed hand, but with an open hand. They said, You know what? We're not owners of our stuff. We're just stewards and managers. And what you read is, as anyone had need, verse 44 says they sold their possessions and property and distributed the needs to all as they had need. They distributed their proceeds to all as they had need. So as need arose within the community, they said, We're not just going to care and like fellowship and break bread. No, no, when a need arises, we're going to be there for one another. We're going to serve each other. This is not a mandated government program, or this is not a forced kind of generosity, as the Spirit prompted their hearts, they voluntarily gave, they lovingly gave. Why? Because they realized Jesus gave of his whole self to them, and if Christ gave us his life, then we must give our life away to each other. So they sold their stuff when they said, Man, this could really be a benefit for so and so or sister, so and so or brother, so and so and as needs rose up, they said, Let us be a community marked by radical generosity, giving to one another. As needs arose, they didn't just give up their resources. They gave up their time and energy. They realized every person is gifted, just like every one of you. If you're in Christ, you are spiritually gifted with gifts intended for service. You may have a different gift than mine. It may look different, but it is just as necessary for the body of Christ. It is just as needed every Christian, from the youngest to the oldest, from the most experienced to the least experienced, a brand new Christian. To those who've been walking with just Jesus for 60 years, you are gifted. So serve in your gift. Fan up the flame of the spiritual gifts that God has given you. Our body is healthier when all of us, not just some or few of us, when we are operating in the gifts that God has given us. Don't you tell yourself that your gift doesn't matter. It does. It is an integral part of this community of faith that Jesus is building as this early church served in generosity and served their gifts. I love how Luke records what happened as a result. Verse 47 says, Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. The Lord added to their number as they were learning about Jesus and giving of their

life and community and communing with one another, the Lord brought growth. It is because when the watching world saw this kind of community, they say that's different. Something supernatural must be happening there. What they're experiencing they gather that's not a product of philosophy, that's not a product of an institution, that's not a product of human ideology or a religious system that's supernatural. There is no explanation for this kind of a gathering, or this kind of a community where all these different peoples who the world said should be separated and segregated, could come together. But when the world saw the power of the Spirit that marked the church with devotion and sacrifice and generosity and service, they decided we want what they have. We want to know about this Jesus. The early church grew because of the service of good news, which is the gospel, the proclamation of the gospel, service of good news. But they also grew because of the good news of their service. People stood in awe of the way the church served one another, four things, learning truth, caring relationship, serving others. And here's the last thing that marked the early church, knowing God, knowing what I mean by this. It's a little bit different than learning truth, learning through the discovering Jesus, knowing about him, but knowing God is intimacy, growth in our affections, not just in our mind, but our heart, experiencing the wonder of Jesus. Knowing God speaks to the emotions of our soul that are given over to Jesus, the affections of our soul that are stirred up in intimacy knowing God speaks of beautiful spiritual practices, like we just spent July talking about of prayer and fasting and intercession the book of Acts. Over 12 times, you read about a prayer meeting, some kind of prayer meeting happening, whether it was a few or a group of people, they were just praying, all of the action you see in the book of Acts is a result of a church praying together. It's a result of a church who said, God, we want to be so devoted to you. Here is our heart. We're not just gonna try to fit you in. We're gonna reorder our life to experience more of you. Jesus said in John that when the bridegroom is lifted up or away physically, then his disciples would fast and pray. What he meant is, when he is physically apart, there will be temptations in the human soul to be distracted, to be divided in their devotion. So he invited his followers to have practices of knowing him intimately and experiencing His love and being aware of his grace, because easy for our hearts to grow apart from a Savior who is physically apart.

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So the early church was committed, was committed to rhythms of prayer and worship and singing together and gathering together, because they wanted to keep knowing God. In fact, what you read about in Acts two by the outpouring of the Spirit of God comes as a result of a 10 day prayer meeting, and they gather for 10 days in the upper room. So we're going to just keep waiting until he moves, until the spirit comes. We have no other agenda except to just pray. How would you like it if I held you hostage for 10 days? Mind you, no UberEATS, no DoorDash bringing the meals. They just were devoted in prayer, in unity, in one accord, experiencing God in prayer and intercession. And that's what moved the heart of God to sending the Holy Spirit we read in verse 42 they devoted themselves to the apostles, teaching to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread. And to prayer. In the English translation, it reads to prayer, but in the Greek, there's a definite article before the word prayer. So it says, to the prayers, they devoted them to the prayers, meaning Jews had times of prayer at the temple. They were accustomed to three days. Three times a day, they would go to the temple, and they would have times of prayer. And when these Jews became Christians, you know what they kept doing? They just kept showing up to the temple in the regular times of prayer for the prayers. They just kept showing up to the temple to pray. But at this time, they were not praying for the Messiah. They were praying to the Messiah. They were not praying for God to send the Savior. They were just expressing their gratitude and thanksgiving that God has sent the Savior. They were thankful that the suffering servant had come, that this child, born of a virgin, had entered their generation, their story, they were praying out of gratitude, and as other Jews would hear the prayers of the early church as they showed up to the temple time after time to just continue their prayers, they were curious. Okay, tell us more about who you think is the Messiah. Tell us more about his life. Tell us more about what he did. They just had these rhythms of corporate gathering of prayer and worship, and verse 46 says, Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple. We're only asking you to come once a week. They came every day to the temple, to pray, to worship, to hear the apostles teach, these are rhythms of experiencing God together. That's why gatherings like this matter. So I invite you to make this a rhythm of your life, of your soul, because my soul needs to be reminded. I need the community of believers to experience God in this corporate way. So prayer nights or other invitations we have of experiencing intimacy with Jesus is significant. It is good for our soul. As the church did these things, I love how the Scripture is recorded in verse 43 everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. They were filled with all everyone. I don't think God's design for the church is to be at this cultural war with the world. We're not meant to be at war with our culture. How are we going to see people come to Christ? If we are what we are meant to be is to cause wonder in our culture, to cause wonder in the world, to stir up curiosity in our neighborhood, even with those who don't believe like us or maybe antagonistic to us, to stir up awe and wonder for them to see the life of a disciple, to see the life of a church, and for them to conclude on their own that's a living

miracle. There's no human explanation for that, for why they are devoted like that, why they give up their hearts like that, why they give up their resources like that, why they show up weekly and daily for each other. It ought to cause wonder in the world. So here's what the early church, the recipe of the ingredients that made up this community, learning truth, caring relationships, serving others and knowing God. And the church is marked by these things, because each person was committed to these things. The church is just the people. It's you, it's me. And if we want to be a church that reflects the Acts two church like I know all of you want to be, and I do, it means that every one of us is committed to these practical ways of growing as a disciple. Now what's interesting is, like a non Christian can look at this list and say, I can do that like I can learn truth, and usually, in a general sense, what that means is, okay, I'll chat GPT stuff and Google stuff, and I'll take a collection of truths, I'll pick what I like, and I'll leave out what I don't like. I'll create my own truth, but in a Christ centered way, in this framework of discipleship, that's not learning truth. Learning truth is ultimately about a person, Jesus, who said, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. Learning truth means God has revealed truth for us to discover, not for us to create. Learning truth means who God says about himself is true. What he says about us is true. What he says about our neighbor is true. What he says about our world is true. There is a different worldview that we adapt learning truth. Says, I embrace the truth of God, whether I like it or not, whether it's inconvenient or doesn't fit my preference. No, no, I'm going to go with his way his truth, as challenging as it might be, I'm yielding. I'm surrendering my life to His truth. In a general sense, people want to have caring relationship. They want to have BFFs, meaning they like people, just like them. They're trying. To people who have shared affinities and interests, but caring relationships and a gospel centered community and the framework of discipleship is different than that, isn't it? It's not just a love for those you are familiar with. It's a love for those you're unfamiliar with. It's love for those who might be even adversarial to you. Why? Because Jesus said love, who your enemies? That's an uncomfortable kind of love. Pray for those who persecute you not, promote you, speak good about you. No, no, the opposite. That's a supernatural kind of love that cannot be stirred up in the human self by the human self. It's a gift. It's a Spirit working in us. That's the kind of Radical Relationships we're talking about. The world's good with serving people as long as it's not costly, as long as there's a payback, but we serve people with no expectation in return. Why? Because that's how Jesus served us. I came to seek and serve the lost. We serve people sacrificially. We serve people when it's costly, when it's uncomfortable, when it requires something we value. Sometimes. That's how we serve people. Most people are good with knowing about God, learning about God, learning about God, but in the Christian view, it's not just knowing about God, it's knowing him. It's not just an intellectual assent or list of facts, no, no. It's a relationship. It is your heart growing in wonder of God speaking not just about him, but to him. It is coming alive with new desires for him and passions for him and a love for him that's irresistible and it's contagious. It's knowing him in a relationship. You know what the voice of your Shepherd sounds like? You know what the presence of God feels like, and you have a heart like Paul says, I just want to know Christ and Him crucified, to know Him in the power of his resurrection, even in the fellowship of His sufferings. I consider it the greatest value of my life. Just know Jesus. This is a supernatural kind of life. Here's what I also know about you and me, just like there are, like, personality types and love languages, like there is a bent in all of us that are drawn to one of these four things more than the others. Like some of you, maybe I'm all about learning truth, so like, give me a commentary. I'll sit with it for a month, and that's all I need. But say caring relationships with extroverts, just for those people, not for me. Others of you are like, Man, I'm good with knowing God and in times of worship, but I don't really want to read. I don't know about serving people, but the truth is, all four of these equally matter. All four of these are connected to each other, and there may be a tendency in yourself, okay, the hands are off the wheel. This where our naturally grow to. But I want to challenge you what which one these are you most resistant to? And that might actually be what you need right now in your life. That might be where the Spirit wants to do some of his greatest work. In this season, we become a fully transformed person when all four of these are working like a fire wheel in our soul, this is how it leads to deep transformation, where we embody things that are uncomfortable, that push us, that challenges us, but that might be where the Spirit is doing some of his greatest work. And like I said, these are not separated categories. They're connected. I learn more about God when I get to serve people and see the work of God in their life.

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I see people differently in caring relationships when I've learned from a Scripture how God sees them. So people that you might once have seen as enemies to be distant from now you see them as neighbors to love because you've learned from God's perspective, who they are, and you've spent time with Jesus having his heart for them. These are deeply interconnected to one another. So as we kick off this new ministry year, our staff is going to use some of these languages, and they say, Hey, this is a learning truth environment for you. We invite you if you want to go deeper in learning truth. Here's a Bible study. Here's right now media that you can access and read more in depth and hear more in depth teachings of Scripture. Or here's a caring relationship opportunity. It may be a support group or grief share or divorce care. It may be

being in a mentorship relationship, but here's a moment for you to be in a caring relationship. Maybe ways to serve others, to serve our student ministries, or kids or one another in service like this, or to serve outside of the walls of our church, to go on mission and to be on mission right here, to give of. Resources to the kingdom of God, opportunities to know God, prayer nights and worship gatherings and and and moments where we enrich our growth and intimacy with Jesus. So today, I'm just inviting you to consider, what's your next step of discipleship in this journey? What have you been most resistant to? Maybe that's where God wants to do his greatest work. But friend, I gotta tell you the greatest step you can ever take. It's to say I'm all in with Jesus to be devoted to him, and if today you are standing outside of Christ, come to him. Receive Him as Lord and Savior, follow him and let him deeply transform every part of who you are. Let's pray together, Father, we thank You for this invitation to be a people of love, living out of devotion, not out of duty or obligation, but our hearts that are committed to you and in this era of your church's history. And we just come back really, to the basics of what's true about these earliest disciples, and they both inform and encourage our hearts. There's somebody under the sound of my voice God who is considering JESUS. May this be the day they find themselves devoted. Maybe they don't understand it all. They haven't figured out everything, but they have just taken a step to say, You know what, I'm handing over the keys of my heart to the Lord Jesus, and may it be the day that added to the kingdom of God. Thank you for the work that you are doing here at Ventura, gathering all people from different walks of life to be in Koinonia, to care for one another, to serve one another, to give of our time and resources and gifts to one another, to know God together and be transformed by him. Can in this next ministry year, we pray that You would just accelerate what you already have done. Are doing in our body, and may it be a cause for wonder and awe in our community, Dear Lord Jesus, all these things, we pray in Jesus' name, and we said together, amen.