

Discipleship: Seek
Matthew 6:33
Sunday, September 27, 2026

Last Wednesday during our Bible Study class, I was talking about the history of the Methodist Church in the United States. And one of the most remarkable aspects of the Methodist church in those early years was its growth. In less than 80 years, it went from about 2.5% of the churchgoing public to a little over 34%.

Which raises the immediate question of why? Why did the Methodist church grow so much faster than the Baptists and the Presbyterians and everyone else? Well, there are probably a lot of reasons, but one of them is certainly the fact that when Methodism came along, it was a brand new way of doing faith. The focus of the Methodists faith wasn't on "going to church" once a week. It was on living their faith.

In fact, the Methodists' primary "family of faith" wasn't the congregation, but small groups, which John Wesley called the class meeting. These small groups were weekly meetings where people came together to support and hold one another accountable for living like Jesus; for growing in their faith.

And, as a result, the Methodists *did* grow in their faith. These class meetings gave the Holy Spirit plenty of opportunity to work within them to change them into the kind of people who did the sort of things Jesus would do if he were them. And, as you might expect, the people around them were intrigued. You might even say, they wanted to get them some of that. So, the church experienced explosive growth.

But over time, Methodism, like pretty much all the mainline denominations, gradually slid from a movement focused on actually following in Jesus' footsteps, to a basically passive understanding of faith. Faith became a product; something the pastor dispenses on Sunday mornings in worship for the congregation to consume.

Today, we're starting a new sermon series on Discipleship. And some of y'all may be wondering, what *is* discipleship? Well, to start out, when most of us hear the word "disciple," we automatically think of Jesus' original disciples. Or, if we think about it a little more, we might call to mind some super-Christians we know who we'd characterize as disciples, people who actually try to live like Jesus.

But all the rest of us? Well, we're just plain ol' Christians. We try to be nice. We try to make it to worship every once in a while. However, we don't really feel qualified or compelled to be "disciples."

But I'm pretty sure Jesus didn't have that sort of distinction in mind when he uttered the words we just heard. I think he meant them for anyone and everyone who might come to believe in him.

And part of the reason I think that is these words come pretty much right after the prayer we spent the last three weeks studying: the Lord's Prayer. And the conclusion we reached (or at least that I reached) about that prayer is that it is a prayer of surrender. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are surrendering our minds, bodies, spirits, and souls to Jesus. We are proclaiming that Jesus is our hero and we want to grow up to be like him.

Which is exactly what Jesus says here: seek *first* the kingdom of God and all these things—food, clothes, all you need to live—will be given to you. In other words, actually seek to live your life as Jesus would live it if he were you. Orient your life entirely around doing what Jesus did—loving God and loving the people around you—and God will take care of the rest.

Dallas Willard refers to this way of living as being an *apprentice* of Jesus. That's a word we don't use much anymore, but up until the 20th Century, apprenticeship was the primary means of career training. We still see it in a lot of the trades like plumbing and electrical work. An apprentice is someone who follows their teacher around, watching what they do, listening to them as they explain, and then imitating them. It's exactly what Jesus' disciples did. It isn't about just taking in information. It's also very much about doing.

Now, I talk a lot about the process of sanctification. The idea that when we come to believe in Christ, we get the Holy Spirit and from that point forward, we should be working with the Holy Spirit to grow more into the image of Christ. Well, Discipleship—or apprenticeship—is just a practical way of talking about that process. It's how we work with the Holy Spirit to grow and become more like Jesus. It's what led to the explosive growth of the Methodist church, and the early Christian church for that matter. And it is absolutely essential for anyone hoping to enjoy the new, bountiful, and eternal life Jesus came to make available to us.

Which, of course, still leaves a very valid question: how? Jesus isn't around anymore, at least physically, so how do we become his disciples or apprentices? How do we go about seeking first the kingdom of God?

And this isn't a rhetorical question. I remember when I first came to faith. I was told in my Disciple Bible Study that faith was about growth into the image of Christ. But I had no clue about how to do it. What should I do? How should I do it?

And, frankly, my church wasn't much help. It was a big church. And it had all sorts of programs and studies and other churchy stuff. Maybe too much. Because there was no way for me to put all that stuff into the context of my own faith journey. I was paralyzed.

What I needed was some practical, step-by-step guidance on how to grow in my faith. What I needed was some practical guidance on how to become an actual apprentice of Jesus.

Well, that's what these (tri-folds) are about. They summarize what we're calling our Discipleship Pathway. I like to hike, and when I hike, I'm generally going from point A to point B. I'm progressing along a path. And usually, I've got a map to show me how to do that. Well, that's the idea behind our Discipleship Pathway. All of us are on a faith journey. We're all walking the path of discipleship; going from where we are now in our faith to where God wants us to be.

So, in a sense, this Discipleship Pathway is our map for our spiritual growth journey.

Now, at this point, I want to be careful, because this isn't like any map you've ever used. We are all different, so in here you're not going to find a one-size-fits-all plan to grow into the image of Christ.

What you will find is options, organized according to our mission statement: **Seek** to grow in our relationship with God; Grow in our love of neighbors through **Service**; and grow in **Sharing** the love of God.

So, let's look under "Seek". What are some ways we can seek first God's kingdom for our own lives? The first heading under "Seek" lists examples of how we might do that: a list of the things we as a congregation are already offering to help us grow in our faith. Things like weekly worship, Sunday School, Bible Studies, Discipleship Groups These are generally listed more or less in order of increasing growth; increasing discipleship. So, for example, a person who is just exploring faith might attend worship occasionally and, after a while, might start checking out Sunday school classes, and so on.

Then, the "what might growth look like" heading gets a little more specific, giving specific suggestions on how to grow within each of the examples given above. So, for instance, someone might grow in their worship by progressing from attending once a month or online-only to attending more often. A person might start out experimenting with different Sunday School classes and eventually work up to leading one.

Now, some of y'all are probably looking at this and saying to yourselves, "are you kidding? There's no way I can do all of this." And you're right. In fact, you're not meant to. Again, we're all at different places in our spiritual journey. And we're all created differently. We're all going to use this Pathway and progress in our faith in different ways and at different paces. Start simple: figure out where you're at, and then commit to taking just one more step down the path.

And remember, the focus is on growth. The focus is on becoming a more faithful disciple of Jesus; growing to be more like Jesus than you were last week or last year.

In other words, our focus is, and should always be, seeking first the Kingdom of God.

