

BRAND RECOGNITION

Ps. Waweru Njenga – 8 January 2017

Stand Out Series

Sermon Notes

Text: John 13:35-36



Welcome back from your holidays. I'm so glad that you're here! This is a great Sunday to be here because we are beginning a brand new series. Over the last few years, every year, God has given us a word at the end of the year that has been our rallying call that year. Last year, it was 'Refresh' and we went through a 10-week Refresh challenge. I know that many here can testify that God refreshed us in 2016. And this year as we've prayed about where God is leading us as a community, the phrase that God directed us to, and it's the title of this series, is Stand Out! This is the year for you to Stand Out! I believe that this year, God's desire is for His people to stand out, in their faith, in the way we relate with our families, in the way we run our businesses and careers, in the way we engage in politics. This is your year to Stand Out! Amen!

So to kind of get our heads around the topic, I want to do a little word association, so here we go. We will show some graphics on the screen, if you know what brand they represent – please tell your neighbor – then remain standing. In case you do not know what brand they represent, we'll ask you to sit down: Media team shows logos of MTN, Coke, Nike, Fubu, Blue band, BMW, Benz, Arsenal/Manchester United. Finally CHRISTIAN.

Let's see if you're following me, right? So let's try this one: Christian? What's your definition? If I asked 5 of you on your row to discuss that question, chances are that you'd come up with 5 different answers!

Here's a couple of people's definitions of Christians

- a) A Christian is someone who is **baptized** into the faith- Whether child or adult
- b) Some that takes a class and goes through **confirmation** (how many here went through that?)
- c) Christians are people that were **raised** Christian– some of you (like me) grew up in a serious Christian family.
- d) Christians are people who pray the **prayer** of salvation. You prayed that prayer and you invited Jesus into your heart and now you're a Christian –
- e) Christians are people who **believe**. Especially the right things.
- f) Christians are people who **behave right**. You say you believe but are you doing the right things?

So, we've got all these different views, all in the same church.

And then, there's a group of you, and if you're really honest, you would say, *Well, for the longest time, I disliked Christians (and maybe I still do). Christians tend to be judgmental, narrow minded, holier than thou moralists who think they are the only ones going to heaven and are trying to make everyone else to be like them!* And you know what, if you don't feel this way, you know people who do.

The reality is that none of what we just talked about is described in the Bible as Christian. The term Christian only appears three times in the Bible, only three times. And even more surprising is that it was a derogatory term used by others to describe the followers of Jesus. It was a bad word, an offensive word, like some of the ones we sometimes use about other groups. As Ugandans, we use offensive names for others all the time - we have names for Somalis, we have names for Asians and we have names for people who are of mixed race. People on the outside look at a group of people who feel different – they're from a different place, or they speak differently, or they look different; and you look at them and you go, Ehh. And then eventually someone comes up with a term for all those ehh people, *Yeah, you're one of those*, [fill in the blank]! And nobody cares how those people feel being called that word – in fact it's often offensive to them! That's actually how the word 'Christian' came about. That's why it's only used three times in the Bible. And all three times, when you read them, you realize its outsiders describing this group of people whom they see as different.

The first time the word was used was in the city of Antioch. Acts 11 tells us how the political and religious leaders persecuted the early followers of Jesus forcing them to scatter to different cities. Everywhere they went however, they took the teachings of Jesus. One of the leaders, by the name of Barnabas, decided to relocate to Antioch where a large group of them had fled. And Acts 11:25–26 tells us (NIV) **25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.**

The disciples were called Christians by whom? By the people looking in at this whole thing. They didn't call themselves Christians. It was a label put on them by people who didn't understand them and therefore were suspicious of them. We see this confirmed in history. In 64 AD, the Roman emperor Nero decided to burn down the city of Rome so he could build a new one. But to manage the political fallout, he needed someone to blame for the fire because a report was going around that it was his fault. So here's what Tacitus, a historian, wrote, **'Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations called 'Christians' by the populace'.**

Christian was not used to describe Christ followers. The word used in scripture is *disciple*. And it is so clearly defined. Unlike the word 'Christian' which has been used to justify all kinds of things and which has been redefined and mis-defined till it stands for very different things, the word 'disciple' is a totally **different brand** that has a very specific meaning!

So what is a disciple? Well, **the Greek word for disciple is *mathetes* and it simply means a follower, a learner, a pupil, an apprentice, or an adherent.** A disciple is a person who says to someone else: *I need to make an important decision. What do you want me to do? Ok, that's what I'll do..* A disciple is a person that's looking to someone else and saying, *Give me direction, show me how to live my life. And before you even tell me what to do, I want you to know that my answer is yes, yes, yes. Whatever you say I will do!*

See, that's different than Christian isn't it? It's far easier to be a Christian. To get baptized, or to say a prayer, or to believe certain things, or to do certain things. But the word disciple means something completely different!

Why am I saying all this? You see, I believe God wants you to stand out as a follower of Jesus this year in your faith, in your family life, in your business, in everything that you do. He wants you to stand out as a follower of the most radical/fearless/revolutionary individual who ever walked on planet earth. And in order to do that, **you need to understand the brand that you were created to represent.** Jesus himself defined what he wanted his followers to be known for. We find that story in the book of John 13, which is our main text for today. See, here's what happens. Jesus is at the end of his ministry on earth, and he's about to have his last meals with his closest followers.

John 13:33-35 (NIV) *33 My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. "A new command I give you: A new command I give you: Love one another. 34 As I have loved you, so you must love one another 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

By this everyone will know you are my disciples. **Christians**—we can all be Christians. 80% of Ugandans are! Get baptized & conformed, say a prayer, believe certain things, do certain things. But to love each other the way that Jesus loved those guys means **being willing to die for each other!** It's like Jesus is saying, this is not about how much you know. It's not about whether you went to church on Sunday or didn't drink or smoke over the holidays. It's not all that stuff. The one thing, the litmus test, the bottom-line, the defining characteristic of the people that follow me are not going to be how much they even know about me or how loud they sing or how long they pray; it's going to be all about if they love one another. I mean this is a big deal. At that point Peter raises his hand. Yeah, Peter, what've you got on your mind?

36 *Simon Peter asked him, "Lord where are you going?"* He had missed the lesson!

In the next verse Jesus basically says, 'Peter, look, in a few hours a teenage girl is going to intimidate you so much you'll deny even knowing me'. It's like Jesus is saying, Peter—I don't want you to die for me. I don't even want you to go where I'm going. I want you to do something way more difficult than all of that. What could be more difficult than that? I want you to love these guys for the rest of your life. I want you to love them in a radical self-sacrificing way. I want you to love them in such a way that people on the outside look at your relationships, the way you love each other, and say, 'oh my goodness – who does that?' And I want you to create a community of people that are known for and characterized by unconditional, selfless, ridiculous, who-would-do-that kind of love.

I want people on the outside to look in and say, look how the men treat the women. Look how the women treat the men. Look how they treat widows. Look how they treat sick people. Wow. Look at how they treat their house-helpers and watchmen! Who does that? Look how they relate with people from different tribes and races. Look at how generous they are to each other. Look at them love! Who does that?

Can you imagine? In our workplace, in our neighborhoods this year, if we just got one thing right. If we decided this year, Forget rules; those things that Christians are supposed to do or not to do. We're going to be disciples – we're going to live lives of obedience and service. We're going to stand out by radically loving those God has put around us in the same way that Jesus loved those whom God put around him. We're going to put their interests first and be inconvenienced by them. Can you imagine what would happen?

As we've prayed about the future of this church, I'm excited about some of the things that God is calling us to. This church has had huge impact in just its first 6 years. But I believe God wants us to have a much bigger impact going forward. We're trusting God that we will grow the time we serve our community until we can give **5000 hours** of community service per year. We want to see over **70 New Life groups** in our churches, our college, our high schools and our primary schools. We want to train over **50 marketplace pastors** – professionals, businesspeople and students who lead communities of Jesus followers wherever God has planted them. We want to start over **10 churches** - communities of Jesus followers all across the world.

But the only thing that makes this thing worth it is if at the core, we are a community of people who are committed to radically following Jesus and to radically loving one another. Last year, we walked our entire congregation through a discipleship experience called Mizizi to help us connect with God and with each other. Many of us belong to LGs that walked through this experience together. This year, starting in February, we want as whole congregation to walk through Simama, another 10-week experience, which is focused on bringing freedom to our families. In other words the freedom God has given us we want to take out together to our families. We'll be talking some more about that next week but we want to figure out together how to love our immediate families in such radical ways that they experience freedom and become everything that God intended them to be. This is our year to stand out!

Let me end with the story of a testimony we heard last Sunday. One of our members shared about how she was stuck, without work, and facing a tough season, but her LG members, gave, checked on her, encouraged her, called her engaged her and prayed with her. She finally just got a brand new job, her fellow disciples kept her afloat by their love and generosity. Who does that? What kind of people do that?

This is your year to stand out! I believe that the thing that will help us stand out is not our prosperity. God will bless us for sure, but that's not the mark of a true Christian. It's not how much we pray this year. We are going to pray much for sure, but that's not what will set us apart! **The thing that will set us apart is our love for each other, and our love for those around us.**

TAKEOUT: Sign up for a LG. LG at Mavuno is where we practice love for each other. Otherwise it remains a vague concept. If you're in an LG, affirm your commitment to each other and resume your meetings. Don't lose steam after the holidays!

PRAYER