

We Are Disciples

FALL 2023 SERMON SERIES
granthamchurch.org/sermons

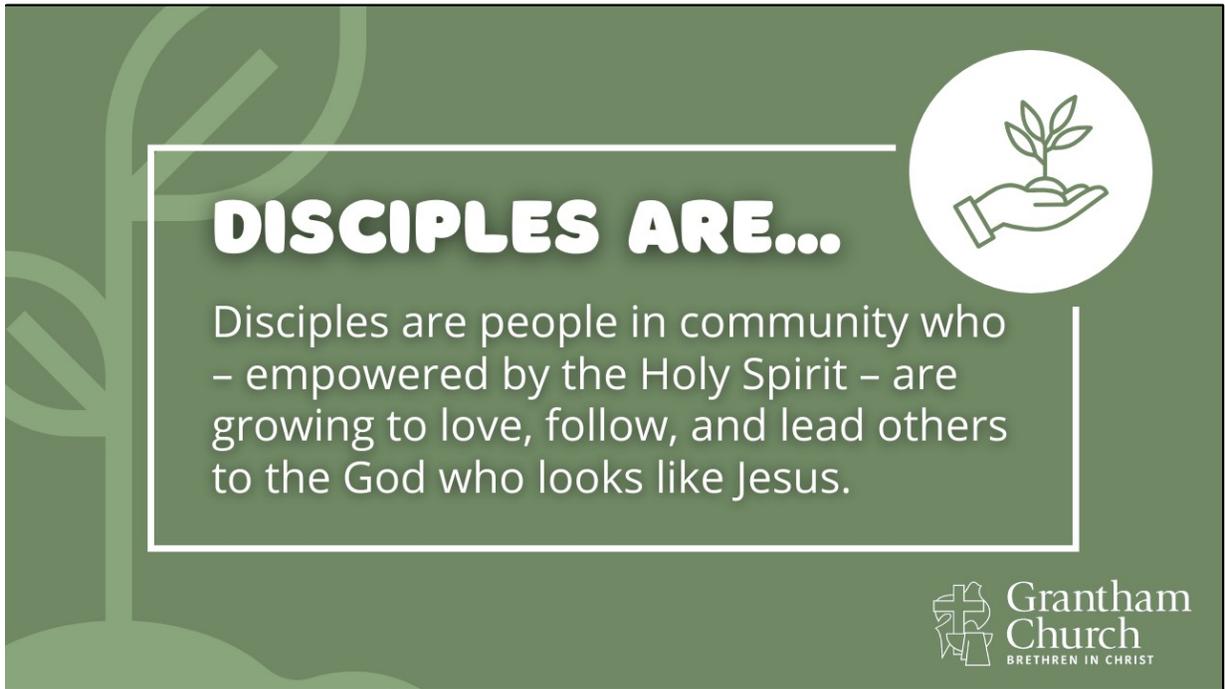
Grantham Church
BRETHREN IN CHRIST

[BRIEF INTRO]

- This is part 4 of a 6-part fall sermon series: *We Are Disciples*

In our highly compartmentalized lives, it can be easy to think about “discipleship” as something that happens only when we’re in the church building. But according to the New Testament, discipleship happens as we are knowing and following Jesus with other disciples—wherever we go! Being a disciple begins with knowing who we are in Christ, and this new identity is to be discovered and lived out in every area of life. What does this look like?

That’s what we’re addressing in this series by unpacking Grantham Church’s definition of disciples... [NEXT SLIDE]



DISCIPLES ARE...

Disciples are people in community who – empowered by the Holy Spirit – are growing to love, follow, and lead others to the God who looks like Jesus.



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[READ DEFINITION & COMMENT]

And we've been making our way through this definition a few words at a time:

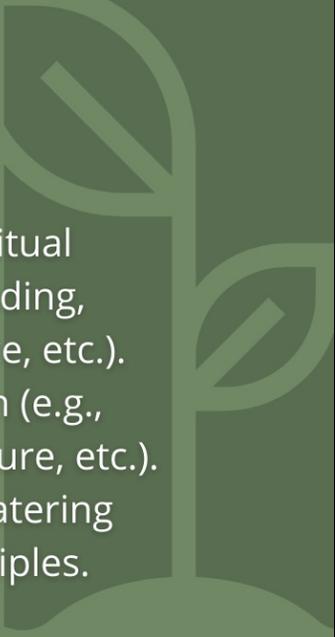
- The invitation to discipleship – identity, making Christ the center of our life and our church
- People in community – authentic Christian community comes out of Christ
- Who are growing – what does spiritual growth look like? How does it happen?

I said (just like organic life) there are right conditions for spiritual life and growth...

[NEXT SLIDE]

How is your soul soil?

The Right Conditions for Spiritual Life & Growth

1. Staying connected to “the Vine” through spiritual disciplines (e.g., prayer, fasting, Scripture reading, study, confession, fellowship, sacrifice, service, etc.).
 2. Giving the Holy Spirit something to work with (e.g., a teachable heart; your time, talents & treasure, etc.).
 3. Allowing for the planting of seeds and the watering of your spiritual life (soul) through other disciples.
- 

[READ & BRIEF COMMENT]

1. Staying connected to “the Vine” through spiritual disciplines (e.g., prayer, fasting, Scripture reading, study, confession, fellowship, sacrifice, service, etc.).
2. Giving the Holy Spirit something to work with (e.g., a humble, teachable heart; giving your time, talents & financial resources to serve Christ and the kingdom, etc.).
3. Allowing for the planting of seeds and the watering of your spiritual life (soul) through other disciples. (e.g., working the spaces of the church, listening and learning from your pastors, leaders, and other seasoned disciples)

And that brings us to today’s message, where we’re giving attention to... [NEXT SLIDE]

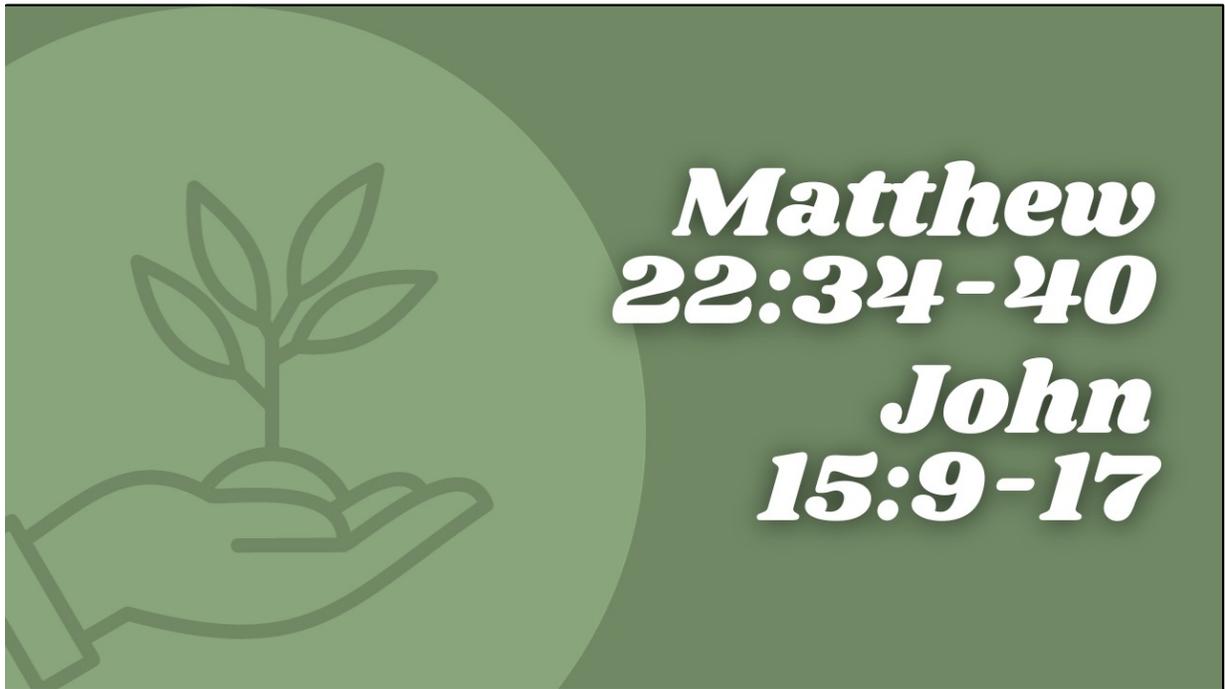
We Are Disciples

GROWING TO LOVE AND FOLLOW (4 OF 6)

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What do we mean when we say that we are “growing to love and follow” the God who looks like Jesus? That’s what we’re going to look at this morning.

Please open your Bibles with me to the Gospel of Matthew... [NEXT SLIDE]



[INVITATION TO STAND & READ SCRIPTURE]

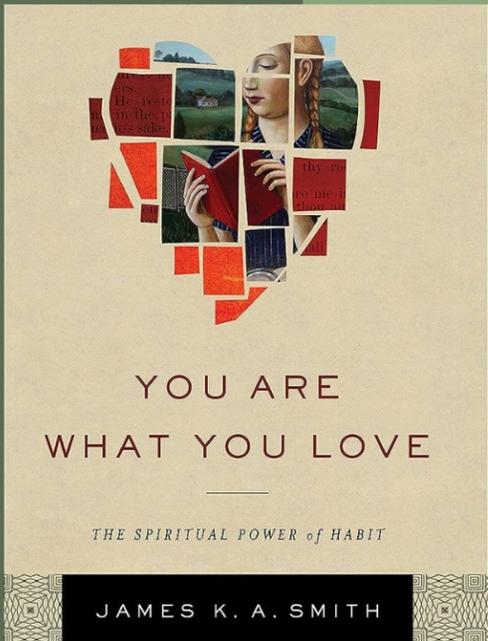
- “This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.” You may be seated.

[MY OWN SPIRITUAL JOURNEY]

- Growing up in a world of feelings
- Going to college and learning to think
- Learned that I could not “think” my way to greater faith
- Video: Brennan Manning’s invitation to love and be loved by Jesus

Just as we are not unregulated emotions (led around by our feelings), we’re also not brains on a stick. We don’t become disciples just by believing certain things, or even by obeying some rules. We can’t think our way into holiness and following the commands of Christ. Instead, as we heard earlier from the mouth of Jesus, we’re called to love God with our whole being, and then discipleship and obedience flows out of this divine love exchange.

That’s because we are first and foremost lovers. That’s what Jamie Smith writes in his book... [NEXT SLIDE]



“ What if, instead of starting from the assumption that human beings are thinking things, we started from the conviction that human beings are first and foremost *lovers*? What if you are defined not by what you know but by what you desire? What if the center and seat of the human person is found not in the heady regions of the intellect but in the gut-level regions of the heart? How would that change our approach to discipleship and Christian formation?”

You Are What You Love, pg. 7

[READ & COMMENT]

So, follow this. Smith is saying that we were created to be lovers, and that we are driven by our passions and loves. And more specifically, we were created to love and be loved by God—to enter the divine love relationship that is shared by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And this isn't just some theology lesson, it is the way things really are and the way in which we not only become healthy and whole human beings, and it is how we change and grow as disciples.

And did you notice from the Scriptures we read earlier... our life in the Lord involves the following: (1) aiming our love and passions at him (loving him - heart, soul, mind); and (2) loving and being loved by God is what leads to change and action. In other words, it is in a love relationship with Jesus that motivates transformation and the love of others.

And remember, God himself (in his grace) has initiated this divine love exchange...

[NEXT SLIDE]

1 John 4:10-12, 19 NIV

¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that **he loved us** and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹⁹ **We love because he first loved us.**

[READ & COMMENT]

Saint Augustine said that our hearts are made to find their rest in God. And so, if we're not aiming our love at Christ and abiding in his love, then we try to love substitutes and experience anxiety and restlessness. That's because as disciples, our love for Jesus needs to be the "heart center" of gravity for us. If he's not, and we don't aim and focus our deepest love and passion upon knowing Christ, then other loves and passions will take his place (idolatry). And then when we try to resort to thinking and learning our way into change and growth, we are deeply disappointed.

And this is how we can find ourselves saying that we "believe" certain things, but our living says otherwise. That is how some in the church get to this place of saying they have faith, but their life isn't backed up by Christ-like actions. And that's what James was going on about in his epistle of wisdom... [NEXT SLIDE]

James 2:14-17 NIV

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ **In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.**

[READ & BRIEF COMMENTS]

- Give examples of believing but not living it

Again, how does this happen? It happens because we’re not addressing matters of the heart: our passions and loves. Therefore, what we need to do is see discipleship as a way of finding congruity with our mind and heart—aligning our beliefs with our actions. But let’s be clear, it’s our heart (the center of our passion and loves) that will drive and fuel our growth. Until we examine our deepest loves and longings of the heart, and make sure that it is in fact Jesus who sits on that throne (*the* object of all our affections), then we can’t grow in his love and follow him.

And Jamie Smith believes that in order to keep Jesus on that throne of our heart, and ensure that he is the center of our lives, we need to see that “you are what you love,” and that love is a habit. He says, “This means that discipleship is more a matter of reformation than of acquiring information.” So, we need to orient our desires to God and what God desires. How do we do that? We accept our religious wiring and embrace religious practices... [NEXT SLIDE]



What is religion? *religio* - “to bind” to something

Religion is a socio-cultural system of designated beliefs, values, behaviors, and practices that provide meaning, purpose, and direction to a person’s life and to the world around them.

A functional definition of “religion” for Christians:

Practices of prayer, Scripture, sacrament, liturgy, etc. handed down to us so that we would be properly formed in worship.

[READ & COMMENT]

- Jesus was a religious Jew
- The NT doesn’t have a problem with religion; it has a problem with dead religion: hypocrisy.

And what exactly do we mean by “liturgy”? ... [NEXT SLIDE]



What is liturgy?

leitourgia - (Gk: *litos ergos*, meaning "public service")
the work of the people or our "public worship"

Christian liturgy consists of routines, rhythms, and rituals that express our devotion, worship, and obedience to Christ; liturgy involves formative practices meant to focus our love, deepen our faith, and empower us to live as citizens of the Kingdom.

[READ & COMMENT]

Again, Smith says: "The practices of Christian worship train our love... [it's] essentially a counter-formation to those rival liturgies we are often immersed in, cultural practices that covertly capture our loves and longings... That is why worship is at the heart of discipleship. We can't counter the power of cultural liturgies with didactic information poured into our intellects. We can't recalibrate the heart from the top down, through merely informational measures. The orientation of the heart happens from the bottom up, through the formation of our habits of desire. Learning to love God takes practice."

So, what does it look like to orient our hearts to Christ; to love him so that loving others and following him would be our deepest desire, and that these things would come as a natural outflow of our relationship with Jesus?

Here is what it looks like... [NEXT SLIDE]

Are you in love with Jesus?

Ways to aim our love toward Christ and grow as disciples

1. Spend time with Jesus.

(e.g., listening, talking, enjoying his presence, etc.)

2. Develop holy habits and routines.

(e.g., quiet time, worship, prayer, sabbath, etc.)

3. Walk with other disciples.

(e.g., confession, accountability, discernment, etc.)



[READ & BRIEF COMMENT ON EACH]

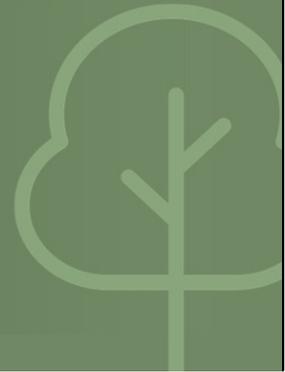
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Before I share some questions to think about in response to what we've heard, I'd like to invite a congregant up who is aiming her love toward Christ and has been discerning her calling as a disciple. She comes to share an update on what has been happening in her life in the past year, but also to inspire us to love and follow Jesus.

Would you please welcome Jess Jay-sitt as she comes? [NEXT SLIDE]



***Jessica
Jasitt***

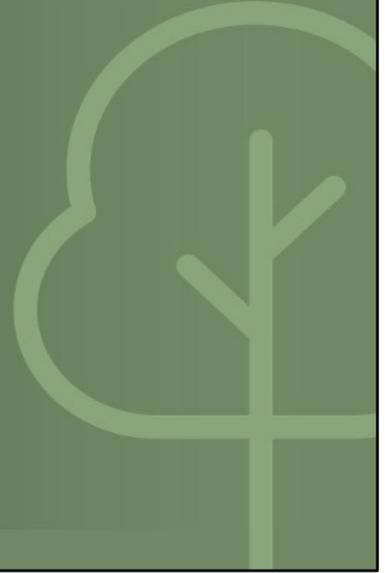


[FOLLOW JESS'S TRANSCRIPT & CHANGE SLIDES ACCORDINGLY]





<https://www.ydr.com/story/news/2020/03/23/wellspan-york-hospital-worker-tests-positive-coronavirus/2902608001/>







[STAY ON THIS SLIDE UNTIL SHE IS FINISHED TALKING – THEN GO TO NEXT SLIDE DURING PRAYER]

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GROWING TO LOVE AND FOLLOW (4 OF 6)

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[PASTOR DAVID - BRIEF PRAYER FOR JESS]

[BRIEF COMMENTS]

Finally, here are some questions to help us reflect on what the Spirit is saying to us, and to help us respond as disciples of Jesus... [NEXT SLIDE]

We Are Disciples

Growing to Love and Follow



Questions for reflection and response:

We Are Disciples

Growing to Love and Follow



Questions for reflection and response:

1. Have you been trying to think your way into deeper faith?
What would it look like to *love* your way into discipleship?

We Are Disciples

Growing to Love and Follow



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2. Are you experiencing God's love for you on a regular basis?
If not, what can you do to "remain/abide" in his love?

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Growing to Love and Follow



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3. How is the Spirit inviting you to put your words into action?
How do you need to step out in faith and follow Christ?

[READ & COMMENT ON EACH QUESTION]

1. Have you been trying to think your way into deeper faith? What would it look like to love your way into discipleship?
2. Are you experiencing God's love for you on a regular basis? If not, what can you do to "remain/abide" in his love?
3. How is the Spirit inviting you to put your words into action? How do you need to step out in faith and follow Christ?

[CLOSING WORDS]

[CLOSING PRAYER]



[CLOSING PRAYER]

Benediction

May the Father help you to live this day and everyday to the full,
being true to Him, in every way.

May Jesus, the Son, help you to give yourself away to others,
being kind to everyone you meet.

And may the Spirit help you to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all that you do and say.

Go in peace, church, to love and serve the Lord. Amen.