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We are in a sermon series called Forward in Faith. Last week I spoke on the need to move forward in every area of life and how that begins with vision. If you don't know the call of God on your life – your first step is to pray and seek God until you receive vision from Him.

But while you are seeking the specific will of God for your life – there are things that are the will of God for all of us that you should be doing now. Or at least be moving forward in these things. For instance, Jesus gave the Great Commission to all of us in Matthew 28:19-20 which says:

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Some people might think that that command was only for the disciples who were there when Jesus spoke those words. But Jesus went on to say:

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

The UBS New Testament Handbook says that the age Jesus was talking about extended from the time of Christ's resurrection to the end of the world, or the end of time. The age Jesus was talking about does not end until His second coming after the Gospel has been preached throughout the world.

So, the Great Commission to make disciples is for every Christian for all time! Those original disciples did not live to the end of the age. So, the Great Commission is not just for them!

If you want to know the will of God for your life, it is for you to make disciples. This is not just for pastors or leaders or missionaries. It's for all believers. It is for you! You should be progressively moving forward in that calling.

We will be speaking on moving forward in faith for the foreseeable future. In this series we are using the word FORWARD as an acrostic. All these words are verbs: Follow – Obey – Resist – Worship – Abide – Reach - Disciple
 We will be preaching messages and probably some mini-series on each of these topics.

My message today is entitled FOLLOW.

When we talk about moving forward in faith, we are speaking of growing in faith, growing to maturity as believers, and being conformed to the image of Christ.

Once we are born again, everything in the Christian life is progressive – it requires moving forward. Hebrews 6:1 in the Amplified version says:

Therefore let us go on and get past the elementary stage in the teachings of Christ, advancing steadily toward the completeness and perfection that belong to spiritual maturity.

We should all be steadily advancing in spiritual maturity! It starts with faith, but Romans 1:17 says:

The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.

I know you were saved by faith, but your faith should be growing. The Christian life starts with grace, but James 4:6 says:

He gives us more and more grace.

I know you were saved by grace, but are you receiving more grace? The Christian life starts with hope and results in praise, but Psalm 71:14 says:

As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.

When you are mature in faith – you never lose hope. And you never stop praising. In fact, your praise is always increasing. And as you praise more and more, you spend more and more time in the presence of God. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says:

But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.

Spending time in the presence of God changes us progressively from glory to glory! All of this is a journey! Psalm 84:5-7 says:

Blessed are those whose strength is in You, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage... They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

Following Christ is a journey. And growing in Christ is a journey when we go from strength to strength. That means we grow stronger in relationship with God and with others. 2 Thessalonians 1:3 says:

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

Does this describe you? Is your faith growing more and more? Is your love for others increasing? If you are following Christ, it should be.

Here's a big problem in churches today – there are many believers, but few disciples and very few disciple makers! If we are going to make a difference in the world, but must do things God's way!

As the Great Commission says, we must obey the commands of Christ. His very first command came right after His baptism and temptation in the wilderness in Mark 1. Then verses 14- 15 say:

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," He said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

The first command of Christ is to repent of your sin and believe in Him. That is how you are born again. That is how you become a believer. But it doesn't stop there. The very next command of Christ is found in the very next verses. Mark 1:16-18 says:

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

At once they left their nets and followed Him. The first command of Christ is to repent and place your faith in Him. That's how you become a believer – a Christian. The next command is to follow Him. That's how you become a disciple.

So, let's define discipleship:

First – a disciple is a student, a learner; one who receives instruction from another. Secondly, a disciple is a follower. The Greek word for follow means to come behind me and follow in my steps in order to learn from me and to get where I am going.

When I was a kid living in Michigan and we had a big snow, it was hard for me to walk in it. So, I loved to follow my dad because then I could step into his footprints so my walk would be easier.

In the time of Christ, people would follow certain rabbis or teachers. They followed them to learn what they knew – but also to become like them. That's why Jesus said in Luke 6:40

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

The goal of discipleship is to become like Christ. It's interesting that the New Testament Greek word for disciple is mathetes. What's the root word you hear there? Math – the science of numbers. Math suggests that it takes effort to learn.

In fact, Vine's Bible Dictionary says that mathetes is means "to learn," from a root word math—, indicating thought accompanied by effort.

Discipleship involves work. A disciple is someone who is disciplined. A disciple is someone who follows Christ, learns from Christ and obeys Christ.

Please understand that there's a difference between being a **believer and a disciple**. For instance, we all know the Scripture "You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free." But do we know what comes before that – what it is contingent upon? Jesus said in John 8:31-32

If you continue in My word, then are you My disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Change comes as true disciples continue in the word. The Amplified Version says:

If you abide in My word (hold fast to My teachings and live in accordance with them), you are truly My disciples.

Notice Jesus said that those who abide in His word are truly His disciples. Jesus tells us that only Christians who spend time in the Bible on a regular basis are true disciples of Jesus Christ. In other words, true disciples know the Word AND do the Word.

Other believers are saved and going to heaven, but they miss out on the blessings that come to students of the Word, to true disciples. True disciples live in the Word. Their lives are ordered by the word – structured by the word – governed by the word and ultimately – blessed by God's Word.

True disciples are students of the Word who continue in the Word.
 You will not change for the better apart from God's Word.
 You will not grow in Christ apart from God's Word.
 You will not be a disciple or make disciples apart from God's Word.

Abiding in the word is more than occasionally reading your Bible.
 Abiding in the word is more than hearing a sermon once a week.
 Abiding in the word means to read the word regularly and then to meditate on the word, which means to think about it through the day. Joshua 1:8 says:

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Notice that successful people don't just read the Bible – they meditate on it – they think about it – they speak it – they do it – they live it. Immature Christians live on spiritual junk food. And they wonder why they have no strength – no wisdom – no direction – no life – no growth.

True disciples live in the Word. As we do that Jesus - said in John 8:32 *the truth shall make you free.*

Truth is the foundation of the Christian life. Truth is the way of deliverance from the power of Satan. Truth shuts the door to the lies of the devil. That's why Satan wants to steal truth from us. In John 10:10 – Jesus said

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

The thief He's speaking of is Satan. Satan is a thief who wants to steal everything we receive from God.

He wants to steal salvation and keep us lost.
 He wants to steal healing and keep us sick.
 He wants to steal freedom and keep us bound up and addicted.
 He wants to steal joy and keep us depressed.
 He wants to steal faith and keep us in fear.

He wants to destroy everything good and godly in our lives. How does he do that? The Bible tells us one way in Hosea 4:6

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Ignorance of God's truth is not a small thing – it's a huge thing!
 Not knowing the truth will destroy you!
 Not knowing what truth?
 Bible truth.
 Truth about who God is and who you are in Christ.
 Truth about who Satan is and how Jesus defeated him on the cross.
 Truth about the authority we have in Jesus' name.

But also truth about the practical areas of life:
 Lack of knowledge about how to handle money can destroy your finances.
 Lack of knowledge about covenant can destroy your marriage.
 Lack of knowledge about nutrition can destroy your health.
 Lack of knowledge about how Satan operates can keep you defeated.
 Lack of knowledge about how to relate to authority can destroy your career.

True disciples know and do the word of God and they apply it to every area of life and they teach others to do the same! But many believers never become disciples because they never learn to feed themselves the Word of God. Because of that they remain spiritual infants. They are believers, but they never progressed beyond infancy. Paul addresses this in In 1 Corinthians 3:1-3:

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly.

Believers who do not become disciples remain infants and they remain worldly.

They are more like the world than they are like Christ.
 They think worldly thoughts rather than spiritual thoughts.
 They live worldly lives rather than Christlike lives.

Here's some other differences between immature believers and true disciples.

- Disciples seek first the kingdom of God – but immature believers seek first the kingdom of self.
- Disciples believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior and live to please Him – immature believers only believe in Jesus as Savior and they live to please themselves.
- Disciples love God and love people – but immature believers only love themselves.
- Disciples do not forsake the assembling of ourselves together – but immature believers only come to church when they feel like it.
- Disciples see church as a place to minister and serve – but immature believers only see church a place to be served and ministered to.
- Disciples exalt the Word of God above their own thoughts and feelings – but immature believers exalt their thoughts and feelings above the Word of God.
- Disciples follow God regardless of the cost – but immature believers are not willing to pay any price.
- Disciples follow God regardless of the circumstances – but immature believers only follow God when everything is going well.
- Disciples die to themselves – but immature believers live for themselves.
- Disciples pray for others – but immature believers only want others to pray for them.
- Disciples make other disciples – but immature believers don't want to disciple anyone – they only want others to minister to them.
- Disciples give tithes and offerings generously and joyfully – but immature believers only want to receive, not give.

The bottom line is that immature believers are consumers. They follow God and go to church for what they can get out of it, rather than for what they can give.

This is not new. Jesus had to deal with this. In the sixth chapter of the Book of John, we read of a miracle of Jesus feeding 5,000 people with a little boy's lunch of 5 loaves and two small fish. The Bible says everyone ate until they were completely full.

The next day the crowds tracked Jesus down again and they said, "Do another miracle for us." And Jesus, knowing what was in their hearts said to them in John 6:26

The truth of the matter is that you want to be with Me because I fed you, not because you believe in Me.

He goes on to tell them that life is more than food and physical provision and blessings. He begins to teach them the hard truths about life. They were consumers who only followed Jesus for the free food! Once that stopped and His teaching got hard, they stopped following. John 6:66 says:

From this time, many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him. And as these people turn and walk away, Jesus looks at the twelve disciples and asks them, "Are you going to leave Me, too?"

I love Peter's response in John 6:68-69

Where else would we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that You the Christ, the Son of the living God.

I believe there comes a day and a point of life where every person who follows Christ needs to drive a stake of commitment down in the ground. Because people will walk away from you and you will be let down in life and sometimes, life will become overwhelming.

But at some point, you have to step up and say, I have made my choice. So – I have a couple of questions for you:

First – have you obeyed the first command of Christ by repenting of your sin and placing your faith in His finished work on the cross?

Secondly – for those who are believers – have you obeyed the second command of Christ to follow Him to be disciplined by Him?

To follow Him so that you can become like Him and also make disciples.
 Not following because of the blessings.
 Not following because He fed us.
 Not following because I think it's the formula for the good life.
 But following Jesus because He is who He says He is.
 He truly is the only way of salvation.

So like Peter said, Where else would we go?
 We follow Him because:
 He alone died for our sins on a cross!
 He alone rose from the dead with resurrection power!
 He alone has the words of life!
 He alone is the way, the truth, and the life!
 He alone is the author and finisher of our faith!
 He alone took our sin so that we could become righteous!

He alone is our Savior.
 But He is more than Savior, He is also the Lord!
 And He alone is worthy of our obedience, thanks and praise and worship!