

We're talking about discipleship today, and that's a funny word. Even two of the guys that I have spent the most time studying in ministry, Rick Warren and Mike Breen are guys who talk about discipleship and they would both define it in completely different ways, almost contradictory ways.

Mike Breen (who is a prolific author and a teacher to coaches and church-planters) would say that discipleship is the engine that runs our “vehicles” in the church: that discipleship is the underlying power for our delivery methods for the gospel. So to him, discipleship is all about conveying what we know and what we do. He would say a disciple is not a disciple... unless they make another disciple.

Rick Warren (who is the Pastor of Saddleback Church and author of the Purpose-Driven Life and Purpose-Driven Church) would talk about discipleship in more individual terms. He talks about personal discipleship, meaning discipleship has to do with your own habits and the things that you do in your individual life and walk with God. It's made up of your personal prayer life and your own time in scriptural study and worship attendance and it's your tithing and the things that you do in the ways that you grow in your own individual faith.

So you would never hear Mike Breen talk about *personal* discipleship, but you'd also never hear Rick Warren leave out one of the other purposes of worship fellowship ministry or evangelism if he's talking about the purpose of discipleship. And so this is a weird thing- if these guys who have intentionally spent years studying and discussing and writing and teaching about discipleship as a part of their larger works- if they can't agree on what this word means then that is an odd starting place for us. We can't assume that we're all on the same page just because we're using the same vocabulary. And I've noticed this and talking to people that I work with, talking to pastors, to people that do conference youth

ministry, and even church members right here at First Methodist. Being a “disciple” and being “disciplined” and “discipleship” mean different things to different people. So I want to take a broader approach to this and look at all of the different things that the disciples do in this passage. One of the subtitles of these verses is “The First Disciples of Jesus.” So these are guys that the Gospel writer says are disciples and so we're going to look at what they did to see what makes them who they are what makes them disciples

So looking at the people in this text, the very first thing we see is that a disciple follows. Everybody in this first section of John is following somebody. The spoken word artist Amena Brown once said that she thinks that John the Gospel writer was the first rapper. If you listen to the way he puts words together you hear it. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² He was with God in the beginning. that kind of sounds like spoken word or rap music. And in this section just a few verses later, John the gospel is portraying John the Baptist as having a verse, a featured spot on this track so to speak. So John featuring John says ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ John the Gospel writer puts this in this poetic sort of form because I think he thinks it is important. John the Baptist is rapping here about who comes after who- or who’s following who. He’s telling the crowd, all the people following him- “this is who I’m following.” “This guy just showed up on the scene, but he’s the important one.”

John has been drawing the crowds. He has been teaching and preaching. He’s been causing trouble and controversy for the religious leaders, but he’s got this movement going. He’s the Martin Luther or the John Wesley or the Rob Bell of his day and he’s got the followers to prove it, but he wants to be known as a

follower. So much so that he doesn't just mention this once. Because the next day he sees Jesus again and he tells his two disciples "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" and they leave and they literally follow Jesus. So we're 37 verses into the story of Jesus and we already have the first documented church membership change. They leave following John and they go to follow Jesus. They run up to him and they say "Rabbi, where are you staying."

Now that's interesting because John gives his readers some context here. John wrote this Gospel to an audience that included Greeks who would not have known the word "rabbi," and so he translates it as "teacher." So he gives the Greek audience a little bit of information, but his Jewish audience would have understood even more from that word. I'm going to let Rob Bell talk to us about the educational system in the Jewish world at that time.

[Video clip: Rob Bell, *Dust*]

May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi. They were serious about following the rabbi. If they were disciples, they weren't just students that learned the information, but they were in the trenches with him, which takes us to the second thing a disciple does, they don't just follow the rabbi, they live like the rabbi.

Breen says that as Christians we are supposed to have a life worth imitating. These guys thought John was worth imitating. They thought Jesus was even more worth imitating, and they come asking not just "where are you going to be teaching tomorrow?" but "where are you staying?" They want to go see it.

They want to stay with him. They want to be all in. They want to do life alongside him. They want to see the whole package so that they can replicate it.

My mentor Doug Fields took some of Rick Warren's work and put it into a book on youth ministry many years ago. And putting discipleship in practical terms, he came up with a list that he calls the H.A.B.I.T.S.

My friend and Doug's protégé Josh Griffin updated this recently with his own take on the H.A.B.I.T.S. There are some of the same things on this list, some rephrasing, some re-categorizing. And as cheesy as it is to make it an acrostic, I like that they chose "habits" as their word for these things. Habits take time and intention to develop. But they're automatic and they're effortless once they reach that status.

For all the years that I worked and continue to work with short-term teams in Ecuador, my boss has been Cameron Vivanco. Some of you know her, she has spoken here and preached at this church. But she was who taught me how to do my job in Ecuador. Over years and years with teams I listened to her train me, and lead groups that came in. As I changed from a Team Host to a Site Host and then even began training the interns myself, she was always the director. But she and Roberto and now their kids have also become my family in Ecuador. I would go to Sunday lunch with them after church. I stay with them at their house now when I'm in the country. And after living and working around Cameron for so many years, I go back now and I hear phrases that she says and I see hand motions that she does when she teaches and I'll go "Oh, that's where I got that from." I've been imitating her in ways that I wasn't even aware of. Ways that became

habitual for me after doing life with her, and with other people that she has trained.

Doing life, really doing life with Jesus is supposed to affect us the same way. We spend time in scripture and it becomes a part of us. We spend time serving others and it becomes something we love, and can't help. Our habits are going to make us into something, so Christlike habits make us Christlike.

The last thing that disciples do is that they lead others to their rabbi.

John already had followers, and he told them "that's who I follow," and so they went and followed him. John was always pointing people to Jesus. But look at those first two disciples. The text only names one of the disciples explicitly, but we believe that the other one present is John the Gospel writer himself. A guy so humble he doesn't name himself among the twelve, and when he has to refer to himself, he just says he's somebody who is loved by Jesus. But he writes an entire account of Jesus' life and ministry that became a book of the Bible. I'd say he led some people to his rabbi. And then we've got the disciple who is named explicitly and that is Andrew. He's the first of the twelve named here and already we're being told he's the brother of Simon Peter. This is a guy who is going to play second fiddle to his brother for all the rest of his mentions in scripture, which are pretty few, and this particular mention flies right by us to get to the meeting of the Christ and the guy who's going to become the first Pope. But in this quick mention Andrew does something super important. He goes and basically tells his brother the same thing that Jesus told him. "Come and see." Evangelism is as simple as that. "Come and see."

Some of my favorite churches to watch and to try to imitate have a focus on “next steps.” It’s a way to quantify where somebody is on their discipleship path. And that path isn’t always linear, but there are some steps on it, and some that are common to us all.

Jesus caused each one of these guys to take a step. He changes all four of them. John the Baptist gets to see fulfillment of prophecy and his own faith. John the Gospel writer has this religious experience- he marks the time, it’s 4:00 in the afternoon- because that’s the moment he meets Jesus and he is sent in a direction that causes him to write this testimony of his savior’s life and ministry. Andrew does his evangelistic work and tells his brother about the anointed one. Peter gets a new a name. All of them are experiencing this same moment in time, and all of them are taking steps. But each of them experience it differently in their lives and they take different steps according to how they are called and what’s next for them in their discipleship.

Discipleship is a path that we walk. There is always a next step. There is always a way to be more Christlike. There is always a way to follow, and to live, and to lead.

Amen.