

## 2 - Disciples vs Christians // John 15:8–17 // *The Whole Disciple* #2<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Vince Lombardi was the legendary NFL coach whose secret of success was that he never took the basics for granted. And so, he started out every season by holding out a pigskin before his pro athletes and saying, “Gentlemen, this is a football.”

We are spending a few weeks doing a Vince Lombardi-style return to the **basics** of what it means to follow Jesus, and this week we’re going to talk about becoming a disciple and next week about growing as a disciple, and for both we will be in John 15. So, turn there if you have your Bibles.

If I were to ask 10 different people in the Triangle the question, “What is a Christian?,” I’d likely get 10 different answers. And if I asked them, “Are YOU a Christian?” I’d get all kinds of responses.

- Some would say, unqualifiedly, “Yes.”
- Others would say, “*What do you mean?*”
- Some would say, “Yes, but...”
- Others would say, “No, but...”

<sup>1</sup> Sources consulted: John Mark Comer, “Practicing the Way,” preached at Bridgetown Church, October 2, 2016; John Mark Comer, “Be With Jesus,” preached at Bridgetown Church, October 9, 2016; John Mark Comer, “Become Like Jesus,” preached at Bridgetown Church, October 16, 2016; John Mark Comer, “Do What Jesus Did,” preached at Bridgetown Church, October 23, 2016; Andy Stanley, “Christian,” pt 1, sermon on John 13:33–34. And others as noted throughout; Ray Vander Laan, *In the Dust of the Rabbi, Discovery Guide*.

- Some would say, “Well, yes, I am a Christian but I’m not like...” or “Yes, I’m a Christian but I don’t think that...” or “I don’t agree with...”/“I don’t vote for...”
- If someone says they are a Christian and you ask them when they became a Christian, some would point you to a **particular moment**—a moment where they walked an aisle, prayed a prayer, got baptized, took a confirmation class, had a moment in a worship service, joined a church, or whatever.
- Others would say they’ve been a Christian all their lives. They’d say, “I mean, I was born to Christian parents—and I’m not a Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, or atheist ... so, what else could I be?”
- And there are some in the Triangle, and maybe some of you, who might say, “No, I’m definitely *NOT* a Christian.” And if you were asked to define “Christian,” it would go something like this (this is an actual definition I heard someone on YouTube give): “Christians are judgmental, homophobic moralists who think that they are the only ones going to heaven and secretly relish the fact that everyone else is going to hell.”<sup>2</sup> If you’re a Christian, this is what the world thinks about you, so be encouraged.

**So, again, what is a Christian?** And I know you expect me at this point to read a verse and say, “Here’s what the Bible says a Christian is,” but here’s a strange fact: “Christian” was not a term the early followers of Jesus called themselves.

“Christian” was actually a derogatory term given to followers of Jesus by their critics. We learn this in Acts 11. **Acts 11:26 ...And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.** “Were called” is passive, which means this wasn’t a name they gave themselves. Others gave them that name, and it was a bit of a tease—it means something like “little Jesusy people.”

<sup>2</sup> Andy Stanley, “Christian,” pt 1. John 13:33–34:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTXLNmDqJzo>

But that raises the question: If the first followers of Jesus didn't call themselves Christians, what DID they call themselves? And you see the answer given right there in Acts 11:26: *DISCIPLES*

- Consider this: The word "Christian" appears in the New Testament only 3x. Disciple is used 281x.

You say, "Well Pastor, that's mildly interesting, but so what?" *Here's what. Perhaps in changing the word that we use to describe ourselves, we've lost the clarity that the word "disciple" conveyed about what a follower of Jesus actually is!*

I want to suggest that "Christian" and "disciple" actually convey two different things. You see, "Christian" functions more like a sociological label, whereas "disciple" describes a lifestyle decision. And I want to further suggest that by moving away from "disciple" as our primary descriptor of followers of Jesus, we've obscured the fact that *a lot of people who call themselves Christians aren't actually Jesus' followers.*

**So, the real question to consider: What was, and is, a disciple? And are you one? You might say you are a Christian, but are you a disciple of Jesus?**

John 15 was Jesus' last extended teaching to his disciples, and in this teaching he conveys to them the essence of what it means to be a disciple.

(And let me note before I read this: As your campus pastors explained, we're going to end today, again, with a chance to be baptized if you never have. Baptism marks the beginning of the discipleship process—it's your first act of obedience to Jesus. (Last week 77 people got baptized at The Summit Church—that's 444 since November, and some of you today need to join that number. Today, I'm going to give you one more chance. And as always, we have everything you'll need—changes of clothes, towels, etc.)

OK, John 15, vs. 8; one of Jesus' last recorded teachings to his disciples: *[8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. [9] As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. [10] If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. [11] These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

*[12] This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.*

*[14] You are my friends if you do what I command you. [15] No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.*

*[16] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. [17] These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

Before we pull out the specifics of that passage, I think it will help to take a step back and see what "discipleship" meant in the first century.

You see, "discipleship" was not a concept invented by Jesus or the apostles. It was quite common, in fact, in the ancient world. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all had disciples. Lots of other Jewish "rabbis" during Jesus' time had disciples, too. (And by the way, "rabbi" just means "professor" or "mentor.") Rabbi Hillel, for example, was a

famous rabbi who lived just a few years before Jesus, and he had 70 disciples who followed him around everywhere. Or Rabbi Akiva, a famous rabbi who lived right after Jesus—Rabbi Akiva had only five disciples—though thousands of people followed him around Israel listening to his teaching.

In Israel, there was a whole established process for becoming a disciple. It was pretty competitive:

At age 5, every Hebrew boy started Torah school.<sup>3</sup> (“Torah,” of course, refers to the first five books of the Old Testament.) By age 10, they were all fairly well instructed in Torah; most of them, in fact, had it memorized.<sup>4</sup> And that’s when you had the first weeding-out process, with only the best students being invited to go on to secondary school, where they received further instruction in the Torah and the rest of the Old Testament. Only the really rich or the academically gifted got to continue on; the rest of the boys (who didn’t make the cut) were sent home to work with their fathers in the family business.

If you made the cut, at age 17, you’d be done with secondary school, and if you wanted to make a career out of religious studies, your job was to find a rabbi that you admired, and you’d apply to become his *talmid* (which in Hebrew means “disciple”). And when you identified one you wanted to learn from, you would go and sit at their feet—that was like your application for admission, and the rabbis would examine you with questions and put you through a series of tests to see if you were worthy to be their disciple. And these rabbis only chose a small handful of these applicants.

Rabbis were able to be pretty selective with their students because in those days becoming a religious ruler was considered the best of all jobs. Almost every Hebrew boy dreamed of being this one day. Young

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<sup>3</sup> All of the below are based on the research of Ray Vander Laan, *In the Dust of the Rabbi, Discovery Guide*.

<sup>4</sup> Which is why Jesus quotes from it so frequently in his teaching and why everybody seems to know what he’s talking about.

Hebrew boys didn’t dream of being **basketball players or rock stars**—they dreamed of becoming rabbis. They didn’t have posters on their walls of LeBron dunking basketballs or Bad Bunny doing hip-hop; they had pictures of rabbis holding out scrolls. And so, rabbis had the luxury of choosing only the smartest, most talented young men to be their disciples—in Hebrew, their *talmidim*.<sup>5</sup>

And these rabbis wanted to be picky regarding who became their disciples, because these young men would become their representatives and would continue on their work after they were gone. So, they chose only young men whom they thought had the capacity to become just like them.

You see, this wasn’t just about learning information the rabbi knew; it was about becoming like them. A little version of them. “A disciple,” first-century scholar **Ray Vander Laan** says, “**did not merely want to know what his master knew, but also do what his master did.**” I’ve told you this before—the highest compliment you could give a *talmid* /a disciple in those days was to say, “The dust of your rabbi is all over you.” That didn’t mean, “Bro, you need a shower!” It meant that you followed your rabbi so closely that whatever he had stepped in splashed up on you. (After I’ve washed my car, if I’m driving through a dirt parking lot or down a dirt road, I will slow way down and put a good 200 yards between me and the previous car. It drives my kids crazy, but I don’t want the dust of that car on my car. **For a true disciple, you wanted to be so close to your rabbi that whatever he stepped in dusted up on you!** If he stepped in dog poop, you wanted to smell like it.)

Which brings us back to John 15: Jesus has chosen for his *talmidim* the 11 guys now sitting with him in this room—he’s chosen them to know what he knows, and do what he did, and be his representatives on the earth when he’s gone.

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<sup>5</sup> *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*

So, with that context—could we re-read John 15:8–17? Because there might be more in it you recognize now: [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* [9] *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.* [10] *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.* [11] *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

[12] *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* [13] *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.*

[14] *You are my friends if you do what I command you.* [15] *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.*

[16] *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.* [17] *These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

OK...

## What is a disciple of Jesus?

(I'm going to give you four things based on these verses)

### 1. A disciple of Jesus is... someone who has received his love

- "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you, abide in my love" (v. 9). I've loved you; receive that love and abide in it. This was distinctive in Jesus' call to discipleship. Other rabbis didn't talk this way: Their instructions were all about "obey" and "do," but Jesus' discipleship was first about receiving his love.

- And that's because the whole nature of his program was different.
- Other rabbis chose the righteous and the accomplished and the gifted because these were the ones worthy and capable of being their disciples. They chose only the best of the best.
- But who did Jesus choose? Well, we know he chose a bunch of fishermen. And the fact that they were fishermen shows us what? That they hadn't made it through the cuts. Remember, there was a weeding-out process among the boys in Israel—the first at age 10 and the second at age 17, and only the best were invited to continue on in their studies; the rest went into lower-level religious jobs or back into the family business. The fact that these guys were fishermen means they had been eliminated from the selection process and gone back to the family business. I want you to let this sink in: When Jesus selected a squad to build his movement, he chose the B-team!
- Even more than that, he chose moral failures and outcasts—he chose, for example, a despised tax collector considered a traitor to his people—Matthew. He chose a coward with a fiery temper—Peter. And a zealot, who was essentially a first-century terrorist—Simon. And unlike other rabbis, he let women sit at his feet—and not even women of distinguished character—he chose former prostitutes and women like Mary Magdalene, out of whom he'd cast seven demons.
- One pastor put it this way: "When it came time to choose disciples, Jesus skipped all the wise of the day! The great scholars were in Egypt; the great library was in Alexandria; the great philosophers were in Athens; the powerful were in Rome. He passed over Socrates the great thinker and Julius Caesar the great ruler. He chose men so ordinary it was comical. No rabbis, no teachers, no religious experts, not even a synagogue ruler! Half were fishermen, one was essentially an IRS agent, and one was a former terrorist."<sup>6</sup>
- Martin Luther said that the love of God is different from all other loves, because every other love finds something lovely and loves it because of the loveliness—that's what we do. I find something

<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur, 2003 Shepherd's Conference, MP3 CD, track 6

lovely and I fall in love with it, but *“the love of God [is different, Luther said. The love of God] does not find, but rather creates, that which is pleasing to it.”* The love of God does not find, but rather creates, that which is pleasing to it. I love that statement.

- Jesus didn’t love these disciples, he didn’t love me, because we were lovely. His love made us lovely. He came not to find and reward the worthy; he came for the unlikely and the disqualified and the unworthy, to make them trophies of redemption and grace.
- A disciple of Jesus is someone who receives that love and abides in it. It’s the gift of salvation—grace, propitiation, justification, and redemption—that we discussed last week.

*So, first and foremost, a disciple is someone who has received the love of Jesus. Second,*

## *2. A disciple of Jesus is... someone ready to follow him all the way*

- In vs. [10] Jesus said, *“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love...”*
- To be Jesus’ disciple, you had to be ready to obey him, to follow him with no limitations or restrictions. He told the rich young religious ruler who had spent his whole life cultivating obedience to the law, who had been the best of the best, that to follow him he’d have to give up control of everything in his life, including his great riches. And the rich young ruler, amazing as he was, wouldn’t do it.
- Note that the word “follow” in our language now means something different. We follow celebrities and coaches and health experts on social media.
  - For example, I follow Andrew Huberman on social media. He’s an American neuroscientist who makes all these out-of-the-box health suggestions. Some of them are good and I follow them.

- But he also recommends that you take lion’s mane mushroom supplements every day, delay drinking any coffee until you’ve been up for two hours, and that you sit in ice water for at least 11 minutes a week.
- I don’t follow those things. Maybe I should. But the point is, I feel the freedom to take the suggestions I want from him and leave behind those I don’t. Sometimes his “research” seems to me to be a little spotty, and sometimes he seems kind of trendy—a health shock jock, and I’m pretty sure, for example, he recommends “lion’s mane mushrooms” just because the name sounds cool. And sometimes I just don’t want to do what he recommends. I want my coffee ready when I open my eyes in the morning.
- But bottom line, I feel perfectly fine saying I follow him and yet choosing not to follow those recommendations.
- But it was different with Jesus. To follow him, you see, had to mean total submission of your will to his. Jesus said, “Unless you are willing to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.”
- When you got nailed onto a cross, you stopped making decisions. You became totally under the control of another. That’s what it means to follow Jesus.
- Let’s be honest: Many of you follow Jesus like I do Andrew Huberman. You’re like, “Hey, yeah, he’s a really smart guy with a lot of great suggestions. I’ll do these and these ... ooh, I feel better already. But what he says over here about relationships, or money, I’m not ready for those yet.”
- You cannot be a disciple of Jesus and live that way.
- **Discipleship means, plain and simple, full submission to Jesus.** It means you forsake all that he has forbidden and pursue all that he has prescribed.
- Listen, we like to talk about coming to Jesus as bringing peace in our lives, and fulfillment, and that is true. But I’m telling you, at some point, if you’re really serious about following Jesus, obedience to him is going to take you 180 degrees opposite of the direction you want to go. Will you follow him there? If he tells you



to break up with a certain person, are you going to do it? If he leads you to deny some of your sexual urges and follow his commands on sexuality, are you going to do it? If he commands you to turn your back on your career and move overseas to take his gospel to the nations, are you going to do that?

*So, a disciple of Jesus is ready to follow him all the way.*

### 3. A disciple of Jesus is... someone committed to becoming like him

Look at verse 12: “This is my commandment, that you love one another *as I have loved you.*” Jesus is putting himself out there as an example and saying, “Live like I lived.”

When I was in college, there was a little bracelet that became really popular: *WWJD?* It stands for “What would Jesus do?” That’s a very important discipleship question—*WWJD?*

At The Summit Church, we have simplified the answer to that question into five identities—five identities that characterized Jesus’ identity that should characterize *yours*. This is what it means for his dust to be all over you.

#### (A) WORSHIPER:

- **Jesus said the Great Commandment** was to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and souls and minds, and that this was the heart of everything else. The center of the Christian’s life, plain and simple, is worship. The center of our discipleship is not community or mission or evangelism or justice work; it’s worship.
- And that’s because we were created for God. One of my favorite devotional writers, Chris Tiegreen, said: **“Worship is not part of the Christian life; IT IS the Christian life.”** You

could be really busy with all the other stuff, but if it doesn’t come out of a heart of passionate love for God, it’s all just dry, dead, religious formality.

- At The Summit Church, we attach two important disciplines to the identity of “worshiper”: 1. **weekly, corporate worship** (as in, coming to church each weekend, just like Jesus commanded—he says in Hebrews, “Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together”); the second is **daily personal worship** (a daily time where you meet with God, like we see exemplified in the life of Jesus). I hope you practice both.

*Here’s your second identity if you are trying to live like Jesus: A disciple is a...*

#### (B) FAMILY MEMBER:

- The second greatest commandment, Jesus said, was to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus intensified that here in John 15 in his last teaching to his disciples: **[12] This is my commandment [he said] that you love one another as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.**
- You are not only to love each other, you are to be so committed to each other that you lay down your lives for each other. You can’t do that for someone you’re not in relationship with, so let me just say this one plainly: **A commitment to Jesus is also a commitment to his church!**
- And let me just come straight at this one: I hear a lot of people say, “Well, I love Jesus, and I have a strong relationship with God; I’m just not that committed to the church.” How do I say this? That’s not true. You might have great respect for Jesus,

but Jesus very clearly said that if you loved him you would be committed to his church. He says it here in John 15. He told Peter in John 21, “If you love me, show that by how well you take care of my sheep.”

- You can’t say you’re obedient to Jesus if you neglect those he commanded you to love. The church is the bride of Christ. You can’t love someone and hate their bride. How do you think I’d react if you said to me, “Pastor J.D., we love you. Can you come over to our house for dinner? And here’s the keys to our mountain house, please enjoy it. But... these invitations are not for Veronica. We like you, but we don’t care for her.” That conversation is not going to go well. If you love me and want to be friends with me, you have to love and be friends with my wife. Thankfully, by the way, with my wife, that’s easy. People always like her better than me. People always notice me first because I’m up here, but if we get invited back to someone’s house a second time, it’s always because of her.
- The church, we say, is not just an event you should attend; it’s a community, a family, you should belong to. A family, Jesus says, where your connections with your brothers and sisters in Christ are even stronger than that with your biological families. (Don’t believe me? Read what he says in Matthew 12.)
- So, you are a believer in Jesus. Great. Are you a believer to his church?
  - Have you joined this church, or are you still a spectator? Some of you have been here for years and you’ve never joined. I don’t know what that means. Are you just not committed? Is this like a common law membership where you basically join our family without commitment?

- If you are a disciple of Jesus, you should join his church. Are you volunteering? Are you in a small group? Believers should be believers.
- Listen, this is a dramatic statement, but I say this with absolute earnestness—I’ve thought about it; this is not just a throwaway line: The measure of your commitment to the church is the measure of your commitment to Jesus.
- And you should come in person. I get it. Sometimes health considerations keep you at home. And if you’re sick, please, skip a week. But I think of it like this: Sometimes when I’m sick, I will quarantine in my room so I don’t get the rest of my family sick. And I’ve even FaceTimed into family dinner so I could be a part! That’s like “Super Dad.” But if every night, even when I’m healthy, I go up to my room and FaceTime into dinner for a few minutes, then you would be right to suspect my commitment to our family.
- You can’t follow Jesus and not be connected with his family.

*Here’s your third identity: A disciple is a...*

#### **(C) SERVANT:**

- Jesus said he came not to be served but to serve. We didn’t read this, but right before this teaching in John 15, Jesus took a water basin and a towel and washed his disciples’ feet. And he said, “This is how I want you to live, too.”
- An imitator of Jesus uses whatever power, position, or privilege that they have to serve.
- We apply that in primarily two ways:
  - The first is we ask you to consider how you are using your gifts and talents. You can use your talents to do one of two things: build a dynasty (for yourself) or a way to leave a kingdom

legacy (for others). Which is it for you? Do you look at your career as a way to build a dynasty for you or leave a kingdom legacy for others? Whose kingdom are you building with your talents? Yours or Jesus'?

- **The second way we apply “servant” is in how you serve at the church.** Everybody should have a ministry job in the church. Every week, around 1,600 volunteers serve in this church. That’s amazing. But it should be all of you that consider this church your home. Every member should be a minister. How are you serving? (If you don’t know, go to [summitchurch.com/serve](http://summitchurch.com/serve) or our Next Steps area at each campus to find out how to get involved. Even better, go to our **Explore the Summit** class hosted monthly at each campus. That’s the best way to get connected at this church.)

#### (D) STEWARD

- A disciple realizes that anything he or she has ultimately belongs to God and is given to us by him for a purpose. A steward, you see, is different from an owner. An owner owns what they have. A steward takes care of something someone else owns on their behalf.
- Jesus taught that God owns all we have, and one day we’ll give an account for how we use it.
- Jesus taught that there are two key moments in heaven. In the final judgment, all of us will be asked two questions:
  - *What did you do with my Son?*
  - *What did you do with my stuff?* You might think you’re ready for the first; are you ready for the second?
  - When it comes to your stuff—are you tithing?
  - That’s the first sign of faithful stewardship, but it doesn’t stop there. At the judgment, I’m not going to give an account for 10

percent of what he gave me; I’m going to give an account for all of it.

- Did I leverage what he gave me stewardship of for his purposes? Did I use HIS money to build a dynasty (for myself) or leave a legacy (for his kingdom)?
  - I’d challenge many of you, if you’ve been gifted with means, to think about that in your charity. Are you using it for his purposes? Listen, giving a chunk to have your name on a new building at UNC is fine, but will that matter in eternity? When you invest, you want to have good ROI (return on investment). Are you investing in things with good EROI (eternal return on investment)? Giving to the United Way or a hospital is good because they help people, but why not give to programs that help people from a kingdom agenda, not just focused on caring for their bodies but also saving their souls? Those are the kinds of ministries we support here at the church. Leverage your money for kingdom purposes.
- Maybe you don’t have a lot of money—you can still be a faithful steward of what God gave you. Open up your home to people. Host a foreign exchange student. Befriend a refugee. Visit the elderly or the shut-ins.

#### (E) WITNESS

- When Jesus talks in vs. **8** and vs. **16** about bearing much fruit, fruit that abides, he’s referring to two main things—one is our own sanctification, our own spiritual growth, the “fruit of the Spirit” in our lives; but also, just as importantly, he’s talking about being used by God to see people come to know Jesus.
- When you think about “fruit that abides,” what better example of that than someone who gets saved through your personal witness and lives forever with God?



- Jesus said his main mission on earth was to “seek and save the lost.” If his dust is on you, that will be the main descriptor of your life, too.
- What’s your job? Doctor. Lawyer. Architect. Teacher. Financial adviser. Professional athlete. Starbucks barista. Great. What’s your primary responsibility? To seek and save the lost.
- Summit, what’s your primary mission in the Triangle? To seek and save the lost.
- And not just here—around the world. This generation of Christians is responsible for this generation of souls all over the world.
- Our main identity is to seek and save the lost wherever they are; *we are his witnesses*.
- We’ve tried to make this really practical by asking all of you to have a “1”—**Who’s Your One?**—at least one person you are praying for, seeking to build a relationship with, and trying to point to Jesus. Do you know who yours is? If not, why not ask God to reveal to you who he wants that to be? (Go to [summitchurch.com](http://summitchurch.com) today and get some resources under the “Witness” identity for how to start that relationship or move it to the next level.)

*A disciple is not someone who simply wants to know what his or her master knows; it’s someone who wants to do what his or her master did. These five things are what Jesus DID. These five things are how the dust of your rabbi will be all over you.*

*Alright, here’s our last description of a disciple; I share it last because I hope you find it encouraging:*

#### 4. A disciple of Jesus is... someone chosen by him for amazing fruitfulness

Let’s just sit in vs. 16 and vs. 8 for a moment: *[16] I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, [and] so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. [8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit...*

- Jesus said this to a group of people who had been part of the B-team—fishermen and high school dropouts and moral failures, and he’s telling them it is God’s desire to give them abundant, eternity-impacting fruit.
- That’s what Jesus intends for YOU, too. It’s right there in your Bible. Jesus said those things *for you*.
- Honestly, this is the place that many of us will be most tempted to doubt Jesus. We don’t doubt Jesus, per se; we doubt his promises in and through us.
  - The Apostle Matthew tells the story of Jesus walking out to his disciples in the middle of the Sea of Galilee in the midst of a terrible storm. At first, it freaked everyone out because they thought Jesus was a ghost, but Peter recognized Jesus and said, “Lord, if it’s really you, beckon me to come to you.” And Jesus said, “Come,” so Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water to Jesus. But about halfway to him, Peter took his eyes off of Jesus and started looking at the size of the waves around him, and that’s when he started to sink. We always say about this story, “Peter lost faith in Jesus.” But technically, is that true? I mean, Peter hadn’t lost faith that Jesus could walk on water. Peter wasn’t shouting, “Hey Jesus, watch out, a grown man can’t walk on water—you’re gonna sink!” No, Peter hadn’t lost faith in Jesus; he’d lost faith in Jesus’ ability to hold him up. Do you see the difference?
  - The place many of you will be tempted to doubt is not Jesus, per se, but his ability to use you to do great things.

- Jesus said the weakest saint still had incredible power in ministry.
  - For example, in Matthew 11: *“Of all those born to women, there has not risen any greater than John the Baptist. But I assure you that he who is least in my kingdom...”* (If you asked Jesus who the greatest preacher was... “Least in my kingdom” means greater than John the Baptist because you have the Holy Spirit permanently indwelling you and that means from that point on, your power is not about your ability or availability.
- This is what is behind John 15:16... *[16] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit...* He wasn’t saying, “By the way, guys, I’m a Calvinist, just wanted to slip that in there.” He was saying, “I chose you to be my representatives. Like other rabbis, I was in charge of assembling a body of disciples, and I chose you all. I put my reputation on the line, and if you are fruitless failures, I look bad. And I’m not gonna look bad. I chose you; and I am fully capable of keeping my promise through you.
- And even if you’re so weak that you can’t channel the power yourself—you’re laid up right now in a hospital bed—you can do it through prayer. See the last phrase of vs. *16? I chose you... so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*
  - You have the ability, whoever you are, however weak you are, to change the world—not because you’re talented but because Christ’s power is accessible to you.
- I’m inviting you into MY work. See what he says in vs *[15]? No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father [all that the Father is doing!] I have made known to you.*
  - I don’t need you to do great things in the world. I AM doing great things in the world. I just need you to join me in it. This is why we always say that our ministry is not

attempting great things for God; it’s discerning where the Spirit of God is at work and joining him in it.

***When it comes to disciples, Jesus is not looking for ability; he’s only looking for availability.***

*One of the greatest sports movies of all times has to be the 2004 Kurt Russell movie Miracle, depicting the true story of the 1980 U.S. hockey team and their unlikely journey toward Olympic gold. Kurt Russell plays Coach Herb Brooks, an older hockey coach who had agreed to take on a struggling U.S. hockey program. The program was a mess. It was inflicted with all kinds of division and showmanship. ... There’s a scene where Coach Brooks presents his initial roster to one of his assistant coaches, Craig Patrick. And of course, it’s all unpaid amateurs, basically college hockey players, going up against the best professionals in the world.*

*Coach Brooks says: “Take a look at this.” And Craig Patrick says, “What’s this?” And Coach Brooks responds, “These are the people I’m taking to represent America in the 1980 Olympics.” And Coach Patrick says, “You’re kidding me, right? This is the final roster... You’re missing some of the best players.” And Coach Brooks says, “I’m not looking for the best players, Craig. I’m looking for the right ones.” (He was talking about ones that were teachable and humble and team-oriented.)*

*And with those “right” players, he beat the Soviets and won the 1980 Olympic gold medal.<sup>7</sup>*

Jesus didn’t use those exact same words in John 15, but he expressed a similar sentiment. He’s not looking for the best players; he’s looking for the right ones. Is that you?

<sup>7</sup> Over Soviets in semifinals; over Finland in finals!

If I could make this all really simple: Becoming a disciple means saying “Yes” to Jesus. Yes to his love for you. Yes to his offer to save you. Yes to his rule, whatever he asks. Yes to his mission in the world. Yes to his promise to bring great fruit from you.

**Are you willing to say “yes”?**

**The first yes is expressed in baptism.**

- Our two baptism questions, “Do you believe Jesus has done everything necessary...” and “Are you willing to go...?”—you literally say “yes” to both of them.
- Are you ready to say “yes” today? (There are two groups in particular I want to talk to...)

OK, heads bowed—make the decision to come. *As we stand, you come...*