

Wheat Street Baptist Church

“Wednesday with the Word”

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The Cost of Discipleship: Membership versus Discipleship

Vision Statement:

We exist to develop mature disciples of Jesus Christ who make a real difference in the world by actively seeking the justice, freedom, liberation and peace of God. (Key Passages: Luke 4:18; Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 1:16-20; Mark 6:30-44; Mark 7:1-23; Mark 9:33-37; Mark 10:13-16; Mark 12:41-44; Acts 1:6-11; Acts 2:14-21; Acts 2:43-47; Acts 4:23-37; Philippians 4:4-9)

Introduction: Over the next few lessons I will be talking about segments of our vision, mission and core values. We start tonight with what I believe is at the core of what the church of Jesus Christ is about. We are about making / forming mature disciples of Jesus Christ. Therefore tonight I want to talk about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ as well as problematize the distinction between membership and discipleship.

5. We believe that forming mature disciples of Jesus Christ is the primary work of the church. (Note: See page 10 for complete list)

Where does this value come from? It is directly related to Ephesians 4:1-16

Ephesians 4:1-16

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3** making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

8 Therefore it is said,

“When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;
he gave gifts to his people.”

9 (When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended[a] into the lower parts of the earth? **10** He who descended is the

same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) **11** The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13** until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, ***to maturity,*** to the measure of the full stature of Christ. **14** ***We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.*** **15** But speaking the truth in love, ***we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*** **16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, ***as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.***

Hebrews 10:19-25

19 Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, **20** by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), **21** and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22** let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **23** Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. **24** And let us consider how to ***provoke one another to love and good deeds,*** **25** not ***neglecting to meet together,*** as is the habit of some, but ***encouraging one another,*** and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Many churches have historically asked the question: "Is he or she a member?" I understand and respect this designation. We see in these passages that membership has a role / part in the process of becoming a disciple. It is important to know who has been led by the Holy Spirit to commit to their faith journey with a group of believers who gather at a certain place. This is important and is not to be disrespected or discounted. The problem is if we stop at membership and or allow it to become a barrier for inclusion and allowing those who may not "have formally" joined our particular faith community but are members of the body of Christ and who actively walk with us to be one with us. It can also be a problem when the designation of membership replaces the greater importance of the development of mature disciples of Christ. While the two aren't mutually exclusive we have ask ourselves what is the difference? We have to make sure we are mature disciples of Jesus Christ and that we are developing mature disciple of Jesus Christ who are actively living their faith in the world and working to make the world a place that reflects the love of God.

What does it mean to be a member of a church? How would we define membership?

What does it mean to be a mature disciple of Jesus Christ?

Is membership and discipleship the same thing?

Can a person be a mature disciple of Jesus Christ, come to Wheat Street, serve and never formally join our church? Why or why not?

How long does it take for the average person who visits a church on a regular basis to come to the point of heeding the move of the Holy Spirit to give their lives to Christ and or to join the church?

Top Ten Reasons Visitors Don't Return to Churches by Thom Rainer

- 1. Having a stand up and greet one another time in the worship service.** This response was my greatest surprise for two reasons. First, I was surprised how much guests are really uncomfortable during this time. Second, I was really surprised that it was the most frequent response.
- 2. Unfriendly church members.** This response was anticipated. But the surprise was the number of respondents who included non-genuine friendliness in their answers. In other words, the guests perceived some of the church members were faking it.
- 3. Unsafe and unclean children's area.** This response generated the greatest emotional reactions. If your church does not give a high priority to children, don't expect young families to attend.
- 4. No place to get information.** If your church does not have a clear and obvious place to get information, you probably have lowered the chances of a return visit by half. There should also be someone to greet and assist guests at that information center as well.

5. **Bad church website.** Most of the church guests went to the church website before they attended a worship service. Even if they attended the service after visiting a bad website, they attended with a prejudicial perspective. The two indispensable items guests want on a website are address and times of service. It's just that basic.
6. **Poor signage.** If you have been attending a church for a few weeks, you forget all about the signage. You don't need it any more. But guests do. And they are frustrated when it's not there.
7. **Insider church language.** Most of the respondents were not referring to theological language as much as language that only the members know. My favorite example was: "The WMU will meet in the CLC in the room where the GAs usually meet."
8. **Boring or bad service.** My surprise was not the presence of this item. The surprise was that it was not ranked higher.
9. Members telling guests that they were in their seat or pew. Yes, this obviously still takes place in some churches.
10. **Dirty facilities.** Some of the comments: "Didn't look like it had been cleaned in a week." "No trash cans anywhere." Restrooms were worse than a bad truck stop." "Pews had more stains than a Tide commercial."

While we think about membership and discipleship we have to also think about those things that turn people away from our church. How we manage a visitors experience is a central key to church growth. By reading these ten items can you see things we can work on at Wheat Street?

The Concept of Joining: Becoming Apart of a Faith Community

This concept is heavily rooted in what we consider as the birth of the Christian Church after Peter's first sermon. 3,000 people "joined the church." Let's review this passage and see what really happened here.

Acts 2:37-42

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" **38** Peter said to them,

“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” 40 And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” 41 So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

What was the response of the 3,000 (see verses 37-38)?

As a result of their response what did they receive (see verse 38b)?

So those who welcomed the message:

1. They were _____

2. They devoted themselves to:

(1)_____

(2)_____

(3)_____

(4)_____

Mature Disciples of Jesus Christ: The Cost of Discipleship

John 8:31-38

31 Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” 33 They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?”

34 Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. **35** The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. **36** So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. **37** I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. 38 I declare

what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father."

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means we continue in God's word. We allow God's word to make us what God wants us to be. Our lives are guided, rooted and fed on God's word. When we know God's word we will not be tricked by a lie or a liar. We will know what real truth is because God is "the truth" and when we truly know God we will be free because the truth sets or makes us free. If we do not abide in God's word we can be tricked, we will believe the lie and follow the liar.

The mature / maturing disciple of Jesus Christ abides in God's word (written, spoken, heard and seen).

In many churches we have used the following three as a sign of mature discipleship:

1. Attendance / showing up
2. Giving / financial contribution
3. Church Growth:
 1. Buildings
 2. Budgets
 3. Bodies in pews

But what I am arguing tonight is that this (the things listed above) do not equal mature disciples of Jesus Christ. Our goal is not to get bodies in seats but rather our goal is to develop mature disciples of Jesus Christ who come to worship God and leave worship to change the world through service, ministry, mission and activism.

Matthew 16:24-26

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **25** For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. **26** For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

What is a cross (See: Matthew 26:39-46)?

What does it mean to "take up their cross" or to take up your cross?

What is your cross?

Have you embraced your cross?

Is the cross all pain or is there joy or joy and pain in obedience?

Mark 8:34-38

34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **35** For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. **36** For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? **37** Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? **38** Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

What does it mean to “lose your life for Christ sake”?

What does this look like?

How do we know when we have done it?

Should this be our goal?

Luke 14:25-27

25 Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, **26** “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. **27** Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

What does Jesus mean when he says, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.”?

There is that cross again. What does it mean to “carry the cross”?

Is it the cross or your cross or both?

John 15:5-17

5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. **6** Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. **7** ***If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*** **8** My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. **9** As the Father has loved me, so I have 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** I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

12 ***"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*** **13** ***No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.*** **14** You are my friends if you do what I command you. **15** I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. **16** ***You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last,*** so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. **17** I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

What does it mean to "abide" in Christ?

For those who abide in Christ there should be a sign(s). One of those signs should be the fruit that they bear. So we have ask ourselves as a disciple and church what fruit are we bearing? If we are not bearing fruit and growing we have ask ourselves if we are abiding?

What kind of fruit should we be bearing?

The key here is love! We are called to love...when we love we open the door for growth.

1 John 4:7-21

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. **8** Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. **9** God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent

his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. **10** In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. **11** Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. **12** No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. **14** And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. **15** God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. **16** So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. **18** There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. **19** We love[a] because he first loved us. **20** Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister[c] whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. **21** The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

The Vision for Wheat Street Baptist Church

“We are a church with a rich history and an even brighter future.”

John 14:12-14

12 *Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If in my name you ask me or anything, I will do it.*

Vision:

We exist to develop mature disciples of Jesus Christ who make a real difference in the world by actively seeking the justice, freedom, liberation and peace of God. (Luke 4:18; Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 1:16-20; Mark 6:30-44; Mark 7:1-23; Mark 9:33-37; Mark 10:13-16; Mark 12:41-44; Acts 1:6-11; Acts 2:14-21; Acts 2:43-47; Acts 4:23-37; Philippians 4:4-9)

Mission:

We are in union with God’s work of liberation in the world. We reach outside the walls of the church to be the church. We are committed to innovation and change as God’s calls us to reach and disciple people by doing ministry that makes a *real* difference 365 days a year. We get people closer to God, their community and God’s will for their lives and the church by *keeping it real*.

Our Core Values / Beliefs:

1. We believe that God’s Word is the authoritative guide for the work of God’s church.
2. We believe that the Holy Spirit is alive and well and speaks to and through the church and we will be led by the Holy Spirit.
3. We believe that Jesus’ model of a daily ministry of liberation is the model of ministry we embrace and practice.
4. We believe that God is doing a work of liberation in the world and our goal is to hear God and be in line with the mission and work of God in the world.
5. We believe that forming mature disciples of Jesus Christ is the primary work of the church.
6. We believe in an open door and an open table, in that all people are welcomed at Wheat Street and they are eligible to serve, worship and give because they are members of the family of God