

The Staggering Simplicity of Living for Christ

John 8:31-32, John 13:34-35, John 15:8

Good morning, men. Let's do a shout out. The shout out goes to a group called Man Code. These are 20 men who meet at 6:30 on Wednesday mornings at the Christian Fellowship of Winlock in Winlock, Washington. There are four leaders, three are pastors. Dave Martin, John Vantrese, Jared Hunt, and Layman Ted Blankinship. Let's give a big round of applause and one, two, three, hoorah! Glad to have you guys with us here.

We are in a series called "A City of Disciples." To have a city of disciples there must first be a city of disciple-makers. We are teaching each other here how to be more effective disciple-makers. Disciple-making is God's designated way to release the power of His gospel on every problem facing our city, on every problem facing our men, their marriages, their families, their churches, their places of work and the community. Disciple-making is how God has chosen to release the power of His gospel on all of these things.

We are going through three specific weeks of teaching you how to disciple men using our definition of a disciple. It is a biblical definition. A disciple is someone, man or a woman who is called to live in Christ, that is the evangelism and salvation piece; equipped to live like Christ, that is the spiritual growth and formation part, and learning how to walk with God; then sent to live for Christ, which is what we will talk about this morning.

You should be at John 8:31. The problem that we are trying to solve here in talking about what it means to be sent to live for Christ is there are a lot of bad theologies out there about what it means to live for Christ. The title of today's talk is "The Staggering Simplicity of Living for Christ" and being sent to live for Christ. We developed the right theology about evangelism and calling. We developed a good theology about equipping and growth. We need to have a good theology of what it means to be sent to live for Christ because if you do not get this right, first of all you will damage yourself, second of all you will damage your marriage, third of all you will damage your family, fourth of all you will damage your church, fifth of all you will damage your place of work, and finally you will damage your community. You will not solve the problems and you will not release the power of the gospel on the city. This is very important to get this right.

Here are some of the ways guys get it wrong. A lot of guys think that this is a box you check and then you live your life. They live very licentious lives – lives of cultural Christians. These are the guys who openly profess Christ and cheat on their taxes. These

are the guys who openly profess Christ then cohabit with a woman. Whatever it is, it is licentiousness.

The opposite of a bad theology is to make it into a performance – do something to make God happy or avoid His wrath. This is the role of the legalist. You have the licentious and the legalist. Those are two bad theologies. Another way of looking at bad theologies is the prosperity gospel. Listen, if I haven't told you this before, the Bible will interpret it very differently. If you are reading it for happiness rather than holiness you will just see different things. It doesn't mean God doesn't want you to be happy, He does. But it is a byproduct of leading a life of holy obedience to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the love, grace and mercy of the gospel. Happiness is the residue of holiness. Holiness is not the residue of happiness. Pursue holiness and you will get this happy life.

I am starting to roll out the big idea. Here is the big idea for the week. Happy is not a word we want to throw away. A lot of people I have heard over the years, will try to draw is what I think is an artificial distinction between happy and holy that they are somehow mutually exclusive. They are not. **A man will feel most happy, most alive, and most useful once he learns how to do what disciples do: abide, love, and serve.** You have that whole prosperity on one side and on the other side you have the poverty theology.

ABIDE

Those are the problems we want to solve. We want to have a good theology about what it means to be sent for Christ. First up we want to talk about the word abide. We see in John 8:31-32. "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"

What are we talking about? Having good theology. What is good theology? Truth. If you hold to my teaching or if you abide in my teaching – this is the Greek word, *meno*. *Meno* means to abide, to dwell in, continue with, hold to. The idea here is that if you will abide in the teachings and that is the word, *logos*, the Word, if you will dwell in the Word, and Christ is the Word, if you will dwell in Christ then you are a disciple. If you want to live for Christ and be His disciple, this is a formula on how to be a disciple after you have sat and been equipped and want to go and be one.

The first thing to understand is that when we abide in Christ, and in His word, then we are His disciples. In the series, "Hanging Out with Jesus," we started with the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. I went back and eventually started at the beginning of the gospels but, the very first message in that series was the story of Mary and Martha.

You know the story. Mary was busy making preparations. She was busy serving. But Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to His *logos*, His teachings. Mary was very

upset about this. "Jesus, Master. Don't you care that I have to do all the work? Make Mary come and help me." What did Jesus say? "Mary, Mary. You are upset and worried about many things. But only one thing is needed and Mary has chosen it and it will not be taken from her." The most important part of being sent to live for Christ is to live with Christ. Surprise. This is what it means to be sent to live for Christ. It means to abide in Him. Remember Mary first. There will be plenty of time for Martha. It doesn't mean we don't want to do some Martha stuff, *diakonos*. *Logos* first, there will be plenty of time for *diakonos*. Mary first, there will be plenty of time for Martha.

What does this result in? It results in communion with God Himself; this relationship; this powerful sense of connection between me, a finite creature and my God the infinite Creator who did create me. It is the pinnacle of the Christian experience here on earth.

It is the prize. It is what we should be aiming for. It is everything. Everything overflows this. If you don't have this you don't have anything worth mentioning. If you don't have this abide part right.

You came to Christ, you come here to get equipped, you go to your church to get equipped and you go out into the world, it is Monday morning and figuring out ways to abide in Christ.

I remember back when you carried small paper Bibles. I used to keep one in my suit pocket in the days when you wore suits. I guess that is coming back again.

Back in the old days as a salesman, I would go to see somebody and it was important for them to make you wait for thirty minutes. You know you are going to have a thirty minute wait so you know how important the person is you are about to see. You can see how important the person thinks they are based on how long they make you wait. I would take my New Living Bible and I would try to abide in Christ. I was so steamed being made to wait and it somehow neutralized that a little bit.

How do we abide in Christ? We do it through the spiritual disciplines. There are many spiritual disciplines. I've written a book on this, and there are many other books on spiritual disciplines. Certainly, there is nothing more important than being with God in His Word, in meditation and in prayer. We also do this in community with other guys.

I always knew there was a God in heaven because I could see him in Ken Mohr when I had lunch with him every week for 32 years. Abide.

What does every guy in the whole world want to do? Make a contribution. He wants to lead a life of significance. He wants to feel useful and like he is doing something that matters. **A man will feel most happy, most alive, and most useful once he learns how to do what disciples do: abide, love, and serve.**

LOVE

Next up is love. You can think of these as the responsibilities of a disciple who has been sent to live for Christ. You can think of them as tasks. You can think of them as duties. You can think of them as attributes. The first responsibility is to abide. The second responsibility is to love. Turn with me to John 13:34. By the way, the abide thing – what is the first and greatest commandment? Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength – everything that is within you. Love him with the totality of your being. How do you do that? You abide.

Love. What is the second greatest commandment? To love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus framed it as a new commandment in this text. “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” What makes it new? It is not just loving your neighbor, but loving your neighbor the way Jesus has loved you.

If you do this what happens? All men will know that if you love one another that you are my disciples. You see it? If you want to be a disciple sent to live for Christ, then you have to figure out how to love one another. You have to figure out how to actually engage other people with the love of Jesus Christ. To love them the same way He has loved you.

How do you do that? You walk in the spirit. Be filled with the Holy Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. Everything you ever wanted to be as a human being is tied up in this walking with the Holy Spirit and the power of the Holy Spirit. When we say love one another the only way you will every be able to do that, especially if you had the plane trip back from Texas that I had last weekend, is through the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel that gets released on the problems you are facing through making disciples.

Juan Carlos Ortiz was born in Buenos Aires. He was a pastor all his life. I heard him so long ago. I heard him in the 1970s tell this story. He was a young pastor visiting from his church. Now he recently has been the interim pastor at the Crystal Cathedral. He went from there to there. He was pastoring in South America. He told this story.

Frankly, I probably have heard a hundred people give messages over the years. This is a little hard to say because I hope that somebody would feel differently about me, but this is the only message that I can remember that I have heard, from a long time ago. Basically, you even usually forget who was talking much less what they said if it was a long time ago. I remember this guy. This morning it popped into my mind – love – Juan Carlos Ortiz. I’ve never told you this story before. This is amazing.

He is getting ready to preach a sermon on love one another. He was diligent in his preparation and dove down deep into the Word and did all the exegesis and came up with all these great illustrations and prepared what he thought was an incredibly sound sermon to deliver to his church.

Then he stood up after the choir had finished their number and walked to the pulpit. God spoke to him and said, "Juan, how many times have you preached a sermon on love one another to your congregation?" He said, "At least a dozen times, Lord." "How many times in your other sermons have you made reference that your people need to love one another?" Juan said, "At least a dozen times, Lord." The Lord said, "What difference has it made?"

Then God left. He was telling him this halfway to the pulpit. Juan Carlos Ortiz steps to the pulpit and he looks at his congregation and he says, "Love one another." Then he sat down. People began to look at each other wondering exactly what was going on. They were a little confused. A minute passed. He goes back to the pulpit. He looks at his people. He says, "Love one another." Then he goes back to his seat. Now people are really confused and some people begin to murmur. They don't know what to expect. They don't know what is happening. What is happening in our church?

Pastor Ortiz came back to the pulpit a third time. He looked at his congregation and he said, "Love one another." Then again, a third time he went and sat down. Now the rumblings are beginning to grow. People are looking around at each other. An elder stands up and says, "I think I understand what Pastor Ortiz means." He turns around and looks at a man and says, "I think he wants me to love you. But how can I love you? I don't even know you." Then they began a conversation. Then slowly other people in the congregation begin to have conversations with each other. Phone numbers were exchanged. Dinner appointments were made. Financial needs were met. One homeless family was given an apartment they could live in. Another family purchased bus tickets so they could get back to their village. One man who was unemployed found work. In his own words, he said, "This is the greatest sermon I have ever preached." Three words. Love one another.

How do you do that? You do that through the power of the Holy Spirit who sends us to live for Him. Because of the great love with which God has loved us, He has made us alive in Christ. The big idea **is a man will feel most happy, most alive, and most useful once he learns how to do what disciples do: abide, love, and serve.**

My experience is, and probably yours to, most people think what it means to be sent to live for Christ is just to go do good deeds, and to do good works. It does mean to go and do good works, but it also means that you have to continue to abide in Christ. It means you have to continue to love one another and figure out what that means.

By the way, if you want some really good abide verses, read John 15:4-7. The Greek word *meno*, appears six times in Verses 4, 5 and 6. John 15:4 says, "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine." If you want to actually bear fruit, if you want to serve God and do something, then Jesus is saying you do that by abiding in Him. Again, it is another proof text for abiding.

SERVE

Third, to serve. Turn with me to John 15:8. “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” You see the connection here. Jesus is saying to be a disciple means to abide because that is how you will show that you are His disciple, and to love.

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit.” What kind of fruit? You have the great commandment, love God, and the new commandment, love one another. In serving you have the other two great commandments – one is the cultural mandate to tend the culture, and the other is the Great Commission to build the kingdom.

God calls us to build the kingdom and tend the culture. Some of you are called to culture. We teach here the holiness of vocation, that every job is a ministry. There are no secular jobs. Every vocation is holy to the Lord. You are an ordained automobile mechanic. You are an ordained attorney. You are an ordained real estate tycoon. You are ordained to do these things and it is ministry. You are serving God when you do your work. Did you understand that? When you are doing your work, you are serving your God. You don’t have to say I need to leave at five so I can do some ministry. You are doing ministry.

Then this Great Commission, the idea of being involved in the making of disciples. It could be that you do the work of making the disciples, or you do the work of being a disciple. Maybe it is that you set up chairs for the missions conference. That’s your thing. Or you go on a missions trip. That’s your thing.

How do we do this? To abide is the spiritual disciplines. To love, is walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. To serve is to understand your spiritual gifts. There are flyers on your tables. We have done this before. It lists all the spiritual gifts and shows you how you can begin to explore what your gifts are so you know where and how God wants you to serve.

Let me pull all this together in one grand example. I was in Texas last weekend. Something special happened there. It was a men’s retreat for the Texas Evangelical Free churches. The men in the Evangelical Free churches in Texas came to The Twin Oaks Retreat Center in Buda, Texas. It was unbelievable. There was such a deep hunger for God among these men. It was just a very spiritual weekend. I left that place on as much of a spiritual high as I can ever remember leaving anyplace.

Then I got to the airport. My plane was delayed out of Austin. Finally, they got it all sorted out and it looked like I was going to miss my connection in Houston, but no, they told 100% of the passengers and made the announcement, “Don’t worry. We are holding all of your connections in Houston.” I get to Houston and there are about six of

us transferring to Orlando and not only had the plane left on time, they released the plane 30 minutes early. How do you do that? I wasn't upset I missed the connection; I was upset that they lied to me.

It is so difficult to build trust and so easy to lose. I was just so upset because it was one airline that had never lied to me. Now all of them have lied to me. Because of this breach of trust, this disloyalty, this betrayal, I was really frustrated. Not because I missed the plane; I am really sensitive to betrayal and disloyalty like that. I was trying desperately to control my temper. They didn't have anyone at the gate to assist us. It was every man for himself. I found a gate agent who would help me. She was great. There were a few problems and she said, "I'm sorry." I said, "That's okay. I'm working on my Christianity today." I got a smile out of her.

Then I just needed to calm down, so I went over and tried to rest for a few minutes just to abide and rest and calm down. I thought, *I can't do this*. I got up and decided to walk around the airport and see what's here. I started walking and bam – chapel. I thought, *that is amazing*. I went down into the bowels of the Hobby airport and sure enough there is a chapel and nobody was there. I sat down and got caught up on all my Bible reading, and had an incredible time of abiding in Christ. I already had a chance to do neighbor love with the gate clerk, because I knew the next guy behind me was getting ready to take her head off. I was trying to do the right thing in the area of neighbor love.

I am sitting there in the chapel. I had this idea. I had been there about two and a half hours and still had another hour to wait. I had an idea. I thought, *I'm in a chapel in an airport. Who comes into chapels in the airport?* I looked in the guest logs and nobody. They were either people like me or people who have a need.

I had a copy of *Is Christianity For You?* I wrote on it, "If you just picked up this book, it was put here for you." I underlined the word *you*. "Please take it."

I was so filled with joy by that, I thought it is absolutely possible that God allowed me, or made me, miss my connection so I could go to this chapel and spend two and half hours to get my attention so I can leave a book because He is getting ready to send someone in the chapel who needs Jesus Christ. That is just my vivid imagination, but I am choosing to believe that is a possible explanation, and a much better one than I already have.

You should also know I was fighting off a migraine all that day, and all the next day, too. I didn't get home until midnight. I had a sore throat. I was coughing, my sinuses were filled up and I had diarrhea on Monday morning.

I was sick. I had my devotions on Monday morning. I thought, *I'm so filled with the joy of the Lord right now*, because as Jesus said in Luke 17:10, "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have

only done our duty.” I was filled with hyper joy even though I had a tough few hours, it was nothing. There are people who have problems in the world today but I am not one of them, and probably you are not either. The things we think about as problems are the inconveniences of affluence.

The big idea: a man will feel most happy, most alive, and most useful once he learns how to do what disciples do: abide, love, and serve. Let's pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

In Jesus' Name, we pray You would give us Your Holy Spirit and that you would help us remember this message, just like Juan Carlos Ortiz' message, love one another, that we would remember abide, love and serve. We pray that we would help the men in this city understand this is how they are sent to live for Christ; this is how they can release the power of the gospel on every problem they face – their marriages, families, places of work, churches and this whole community. For the glory of Christ. Amen.