

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

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When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

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You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

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to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

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Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

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When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

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You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

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to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

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Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

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When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

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You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

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to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

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Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

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When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

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You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

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to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

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Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

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When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

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You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

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to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

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Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

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When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

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You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

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to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

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Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

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When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

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You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

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to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

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#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

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Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

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When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

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believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

Some years ago now, author Dave Simmons took his two kids, Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old), to the mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted a big sign that said "Petting Zoo." The kids got excited and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," Dave said, flipping them both a quarter. They bolted away while Dave went into Sears to look for a scroll saw. This petting zoo consisted of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids paid their money and stayed inside the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shopped.

A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

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remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

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Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

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Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

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A few minutes later, Dave turned around and saw Helen walking along behind him. He was shocked to see she preferred Sears to the petting zoo. He bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at him and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, the petting zoo cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing Dave had ever heard. Apparently, the Simmons family had a family motto which was "Love is action." At that moment, little Helen repeated the family motto: "Love is action." She had given Brandon her quarter, even though no one loved cuddly, furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is action," around the Simmons home often and now she had incorporated it into her own lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think Dave, her father, did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as he finished his shopping, he took Helen back to the petting zoo. They stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. Dave had 50 cents burning a hole in his pocket, but he never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Helen had given her quarter to Brandon and Dave recognized a teachable moment. Love is action. Love is sacrificial. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. And love identifies you and me as a disciple of Jesus.

Can you and I truly follow Jesus today – some 2,000 years later? Yes, we can. It happens when we practice spiritual formation. It happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that our behavior and attitudes change for the better. It happens when we bear fruit. And it happens when we love one another.

HOW CAN I TRULY FOLLOW JESUS TODAY? (Part 2)**GALATIANS 4:19**

We're in the midst of a message series on the meaning of discipleship for today. It's called "Follow Me" which was Jesus' simple, straightforward invitation in the Gospels to several people to become His disciple. "Follow Me." How is it even possible to follow Jesus today? If I am mentored, coached, or disciplined by someone today – for example, in a particular sport, or on a musical instrument, or in a profession like medicine or law - I must spend some time with that person. I must be with that person. No one can follow Jesus like that today, so how can anyone truly be His disciple? Before Jesus left this Earth to return to Heaven, He provided ways for all of us to follow Him and to be His disciples in very real, authentic ways. Last week, we began a study of several marks of a disciple. When you see these characteristics showing up in a person, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at a genuine follower of Jesus. If some or all of them are absent, you can be reasonably sure that you're looking at someone who's not a follower of Jesus -- even if he or she claims to be one!

We looked at three of those marks of a disciple last week. They are, first, living in and under the Bible. A disciple of Jesus is becoming more and more familiar with the Bible every day, is finding ways to apply it to his or her everyday life, and recognizes that, because it is the voice of God, it has authority over his or her life. In that sense, we live under the Bible. Second, disciples of Jesus are marked by intimate and persistent prayer. We relate to God as our Father and we talk to Him humbly, boldly and persistently. Third, we are being filled with the Holy Spirit continually. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But every disciple of Jesus ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. That means our daily lives should be dominated, influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit every day all day long – not just occasionally, or here and there, or intermittently. All day long. Every day. Every day for the rest of your life.

Now, today, I want to identify four additional marks of a disciple. Last week I said I would talk about five more marks for a total of eight, but I reduced it by one. Again, I'm not trying to be comprehensive or exhaustive with this list, but I'd be interested to know if you think I've overlooked any important ones. Here's the thing to remember. None of these marks of a disciple make you right with God. That's all by grace and simply receiving God's gift of salvation freely. But they provide ways for you and me to be with Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to be disciplined by Jesus every day for the rest of our lives in genuine, authentic ways. And they, also, provide evidence that we are followers of Jesus. They mark or identify us as Jesus' disciples. So, here we go with a fourth mark:

#4. INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Paul was writing to the new followers of Jesus in the region of Galatia, he said, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." (Gal 4:19 NLT) Over the last twenty centuries – 2,000 years – followers of Jesus have discovered that it's beneficial to enter into certain spiritual practices until they become spiritual habits. These, then, become important ways to follow Jesus and grow as His disciple. Many times you hear

these practices or habits referred to as spiritual disciplines. Intentional spiritual formation is all about accessing these spiritual disciplines and inviting the Holy Spirit to use them to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

There's no universal list of these spiritual disciplines hanging up somewhere that everyone agrees upon. I only have time to identify some of them this morning. Some people split the disciplines into two groups. The first group might be called disciplines of abstinence because they're designed to break the power of stuff in your life that prevents you from being more fully involved in what God wants to do in the world and in you. These include disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, chastity, sacrifice, and simplicity. The second group might be called disciplines of engagement because they're designed to get you to enter more fully into what God is doing in the world and wants to do in your life. These include the disciplines of Bible meditation or study, prayer, worship, service, confession, fellowship, evangelism, and giving. Did Jesus practice any or all of these spiritual disciplines? Yes, if I had the time, I think I could show you how Jesus practiced or observed these spiritual disciplines. So, if Jesus did them, what's your excuse for not doing them? For example, if Jesus found personal benefit in practicing silence and solitude for 40 days and nights out in the desert, is it possible you might find spiritual help by being silent or alone with God for a day or two? When we practice these disciplines, they become ways to be with Jesus spiritually, to follow Him, and to be disciplined by Him. It's a way to follow Jesus today.

Most of us think of discipline as something negative. We discipline our kids when they misbehave. If you're disciplined at work, it means you're being punished in some way. That's why I prefer the word "formation." But why practice any of these spiritual disciplines? They don't make you more acceptable to God. God won't love you more if you do them or not. Here's two good reasons. First, spiritual disciplines help you hear and respond to God better. They've been compared to regular physical workouts. If walking, jogging or lifting weights can help your body get stronger and healthier, then spiritual exercise will help you to get stronger and healthier spiritually. Second, they can help to transform us spiritually over time. Nobody becomes spiritual mature overnight. And nobody becomes spiritual mature by accident. By all means, it requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in you. It also requires intentional, personal effort on your part. The Holy Spirit plus your perseverance equals spiritual transformation. These spiritual disciplines can help to change the composition of your soul. It's not about more information, but about the formation of your inner spirit – your attitudes and actions before and in God.

Why do some musicians excel while others remain mediocre? In 1997 Gary McPherson studied 157 randomly selected children as they picked out and learned a musical instrument. Some went on to become fine musicians and some faltered. McPherson searched for the traits that separated those who progressed from those who didn't. It wasn't the kid's IQ. It wasn't the family's income or an innate sense of rhythm. The best single predictor was a question McPherson asked the students before they even selected their instruments: "How long do you think you will play?" The students who planned to play for a short time never became very proficient. The children who planned

to play for a few years had modest success. But there were some kids who said, in effect: "I want to be a musician for my whole life." Those children soared. What leads to excellence in any arena of life? A long-term commitment to discipline and practice. A disciple of Jesus has the same attitude: "I want to follow Jesus my whole life." As a result, they are always into spiritual formation. A fifth mark of discipleship is:

#5. BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

You probably already know that a lot of people who don't come to church point fingers at us who do go to church and say, "I don't believe in Jesus because of you. You're a bunch of hypocrites. You say you believe this, but you do just the opposite." Now, is that a cop out? Sure, it is. You're really going to forfeit an eternal relationship with the living God and refuse His gift of love and forgiveness because some Christians have screwed up? But, let's admit it. Many times we make it harder for people to get to Jesus and to discover Him because they can't get past our poor witness. We say God is love, but we can treat others in unloving ways. We say we believe in honesty and truth, but our own lives lack integrity. We say we believe people are made in God's image, but then we despise people of other races or those who are poor. Like it or not, right or wrong, it really leaves a bad taste in people's mouths about Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are called "saints" or "holy ones" frequently in the Bible. "I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people." (Rom 1:7 NLT) "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus..." (1 Cor 1:2 NLT) "I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus..." (Ph 1:1 NLT) You get the idea. To be holy means to be set apart for God and His purposes. Now, in one sense, that happened the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's an accomplished fact. You were declared holy right by God. But holiness is a gradual process, too. You are made holy over time. The Bible uses the image of taking off and putting on clothing. Holiness means taking off sinful, negative attitudes and behavior, like you would take off filthy, soiled clothing, and then putting on godly, positive attitudes and behavior, like you would put on clean, spotless clothing after a good bath. For example, the Bible says, "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." (Col 3: 9-10 NLT)

When it comes to my behavior and attitudes, God demands and desires transformation. What does that word "transformation" mean? "Trans" means to move something from one place to another. "Formation" means to change. Spiritual transformation means I move from the person I am today and continue to change by degrees into the image of Jesus. The Bible says, "... And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor 3:18 NLT) It also says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12:2 NLT) But transformation of what? At the very least, God wants to transform my mind so that I believe what Jesus

believed. God wants to transform my character so that I live the way Jesus lived. OK, so how is that possible? I love how author, Dallas Willard, puts it: "... I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did." Jesus isn't asking you to live like a 1st century person. How do you think Jesus would act if He lived in the 21st century? Then, go and live like that. God wants to transform my relationships so that I love people the way Jesus loved people. That usually means a head on collision with our own pride and self-centeredness that is painful but transforming.

Best-selling author, Malcom Gladwell, recently shared that while writing his latest book, he went to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit a woman named Wilma Derksen. Thirty years ago, the Derksens experienced every parent's worst nightmare -- their daughter, Candace, was abducted and murdered. Gladwell was amazed by something that Wilma said at the time: "We would like to know who the person or persons (who murdered Candace) are so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." She continued, "I can't say at this point I forgive this person," Gladwell noticed that the stress was on the phrase "at this point." He wrote, "I wanted to know where the Derksens found the strength to say these things. Where do two people find the power to forgive in a moment like that?" The answer was their Christian faith. It's a power that Gladwell, who grew up in a Christian home, was familiar with but had gotten away from. As he put it, "I have always believed in God. I have grasped the logic of the Christian faith. What I have had a hard time seeing is God's power." Sitting in Wilma Derksen's garden, he saw that power. Seeing God's power in action led him to rediscover his Christian faith.

Disciples of Jesus aren't merely people who follow Jesus around because He said really cool stuff. A disciple of Jesus has entered into a new life that calls for and causes the most radical, profound, difficult and wonderful transformations possible. The world desperately needs to see the difference Jesus can and should make in our behavior and attitudes. How we can forgive the seemingly unforgiveable. How we can be gracious and kind in our words, but bold in our testimony about Jesus. How we can obey Jesus joyfully instead of out of obligation or duty. How we can demonstrate compassion for everyone everywhere all the time. How we can have purity in our motives when we help others. None of those are character traits learned out there in the world without Jesus. I love the Scripture that says, "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men.... They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13 NLT) The imprint of Jesus' character was on them. Could someone look at your life or mine – our behavior and attitudes - and say, "Wow, he/she has been with Jesus!" A sixth mark of a disciple is...

#6. BEARING FRUIT

Jesus is the One who made this connection. "When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:8 NLT) Do you

remember the context of that verse? Jesus compares Himself to a grapevine and you and me to branches on that vine. If you're attached to the vine – to Jesus – you will bear fruit. It's inevitable. If you're not attached to the vine – to Jesus – you can't produce the kind of spiritual fruit that Jesus has in mind here. It's impossible. What does the Bible mean by "fruit"? First, it means character qualities that only the Holy Spirit can produce in your life and mine. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal 5:22-23 NLT) Second, it means helping other people come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said to some of them, "... 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'" (Mt 4:19 NLT) It was Jesus, then, who made the connection between being His disciple and evangelism. Bringing people to Jesus is one way to bear fruit spiritually. And then, thirdly, fruit are good works of all kinds done in the name of Jesus. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Eph 2:10 NLT)

That points to something in the Christian experience we call serving or service. It's doing things for Jesus and – more often than not – for other people because we love Jesus. Jesus is our example, because He's the One who said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45 NLT) Serving covers so much. Yes, it can be preparing and preaching a message, but it can be just as much about giving someone a glass of cold water in Jesus' Name. Yes, it can be about giving a boatload of money to the Lord's work, but it can be just as much about giving someone a compassionate hug when they're defeated by life. It's whatever we do for Jesus and because of Jesus whether it's inside the church or outside of it. Jesus never said that a person becomes His disciple by bearing fruit or serving, but instead that when we bear fruit we give evidence that we're already His disciples.

Dear friends, because we are American Christians, I don't know if it's possible not to be infected by the disease of consumer Christianity. We live in a supremely consumer-driven culture. It's bound to color our view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consumer Christianity says that following Jesus and being a part of a local church is about getting what I need when I need it -- salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of my sins, good health, financial blessings, the worship music I prefer, or the trendiest kids' and youth ministries imaginable. Consumer Christianity implies that you can be a disciple of Jesus without having to be a servant at all. But a biblical understanding of being Jesus' disciple means you go to church to be God's hands and feet and contribute to the lives of others and, somehow along the way, your own needs get met.

It's not original with me, but this statement sure resonates in my soul. "The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one." Last year we started up a ministry we call Bed Brigade. Firefighters up in Liberty Township construct simple bed frames, we get good, used mattresses donated to us, and we give those beds with sheets, pillows, and a blanket to folk in our community who need one. It's serving pure and simple. It's a great ministry! Many of us have run into extremely grateful,

appreciative people. That feels really good. Occasionally, however, we've run into people who were un-cooperative, ungrateful, and unappreciative. That feels like a slap in the face. The test of whether you're truly a servant is when you're treated like one. Remember that when you serve the Lord outside the church and even inside the church. Serve others because you love Jesus. Period. A final mark of a disciple is...

#7. LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

Again, it was Jesus who made this connection. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13:34-35 MSG) Speaking from personal experience, this is often a whole lot harder to live out than we want to admit. We're very quick to agree with Jesus words, think warm, gooey thoughts about love, and then basically refuse to love when it gets tough or difficult to do so. Again, Jesus' example with his own disciples is our guide. He was the One who called Matthew, a miserable, low down, no good tax collector, to be one of His disciples and even went to his home and ate dinner with other losers. Jesus was the One who treated Thomas with kindness when he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was the One who forgave Peter after his cowardly three-time denial of Jesus, restored him, and then entrusted him to be a key leader in the early church.

When you are born again by the Spirit of God and first put your trust in Jesus, you are made capable of this kind of love. You're plugged into the endless source of all true love which is God Himself. None of us can love the way Jesus wants us to love in our own strength. It's impossible. By the same token, if you claim to be Jesus' disciple and yet refuse to love like this, the reality of your discipleship is up for debate. This kind of love is to be practiced and demonstrated by any and every person who considers himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. It's not just for superior Christians, or elite Christians, or mature Christians. And it's more than just being nice to and hugging other Christians a whole lot. Anyone can do that! No, I'm convinced Jesus is talking about a kind of love that shatters defenses, brings down strongholds, tear apart barriers, and even gets through and by the firewalls of culture. It's a kind of love and depth of love that requires sacrifice and will not be easy or painless. Notice what Jesus assumes there in John 13. When His kind of love is demonstrated, many unsaved people will recognize that they're incapable of this kind of love and will begin to seek the One who can give it. Love is the one criterion as to whether I have really stopped belonging to the old world and now belong to the new world of the Kingdom of God.

Disciple of Jesus, who in your life is really difficult right now? Who makes you grind your teeth? Whose messages do you want to ignore? Who do you avoid meeting? Has the Holy Spirit brought that person's face across the screen in your mind? How could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? When could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? Where could you love that person so he or she could experience your love? The Bible says, "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The

command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." (1 John 4:20-21MSG)

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