

DISCIPLESHIP REVISITED**JOHN 15:12-17**

Our culture struggles to understand authentic friendship. Whoever said that you can't buy friends didn't know what the Internet can offer! Did you know several websites are dedicated to helping you find online friends? These companies will create fake users or pay real account holders to follow and like you on various social media sites. For instance, on the site Socialyup.com you can buy 500 likes for \$30 or 20,000 likes for \$699. For a mere \$10, FanMeNow will find you 1,000 Twitter followers and for \$1,750 you can buy a million followers. If you need to beef up views for your YouTube video, for \$150 you can buy 30,000 views from a site called 500views.com. For \$3,100 they'll make your video go "viral" by getting you a million views. Apparently, you can buy popularity. But what about authentic friendship? Jesus called us to be His disciples. He also called us to make other disciples. In at least one place in the Bible we're going to look at today, Jesus equated being His disciple with being His friend. For Jesus, discipleship and friendship with Him were two sides of the same coin.

We are a church that's making an intentional effort to create a strong, growing, and ongoing discipleship culture. We began that effort a few years ago with a three year consultation with the Navigators' ministry – an international Christian organization that has specialized in discipleship for probably some 60-70 years. What is "discipleship"? There's no definition of it in the Bible. Jesus never defined discipleship. Nevertheless, clearly the goal of discipleship is followers of Jesus becoming more like Jesus in every area of our lives. Here's one helpful definition: "We define Christian discipleship as a process that takes places within accountable relationships over a period of time for the purpose of bringing believers to spiritual maturity in Christ." (Eastbourne Consultation on Discipleship). Someone else put it like this: "Discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ." (Greg Ogden)

I think Jesus not giving us an explicit definition of discipleship was intentional and a stroke of genius. It allowed His followers to customize what being His follower might look like depending on when and where they live. There might well be an infinite number of specific pictures or definitions of what it means to be Jesus' disciple which can all have the same goal of becoming like Jesus. One result of our consultation with the Navigators was developing the KRBC picture of a disciple: we call it ROPES. Let's revisit what we mean by ROPES for a few minutes.

ROPES REVISITED.

ROPES is an acrostic – an easy way to remember five essential aspects of being Jesus' disciple. The word "ropes" is a play on the phrase or idiom "to know the ropes" about something. "To know the ropes" probably goes back to the need for sailors to know how to tie knots to secure rigging on sailing boats. Sailors certainly did have to learn which rope raised which sail and also what kind of knots to use for different purposes. To "know the ropes," then, is to understand how to do something or to be acquainted with all the methods required to do something. So, at KRBC any person wanting to

become more like Jesus can learn about the ROPES of discipleship and get acquainted with the methods required to be one. If you ever forget what ROPES stands for, just come into the sanctuary and look at those banners on the back wall!

The R in ROPES stands for Relationships. We become disciples of Jesus only through relationships. Obviously, the most important relationship is with God Himself. Anything and everything that enhances and builds a stronger, more authentic relationship with the God of the Universe will help you become more like Jesus. But, in addition, we believe following Jesus well can never be an individualistic, isolated experience. Following Jesus is profoundly personal, yes, but it should never become a “just me, Jesus, and no one else” experience. We need other followers of Jesus to help us become everything Jesus wants us to be. You will get much farther down the road of becoming like Jesus with others’ help than you will all by yourself.

One way we demonstrate the necessity of relationships for effective discipleship here at KRBC is by asking people to form triads – groups of three people. Three men or three women meet together about twice a month for a couple of hours for about two years and help each other grow to be more like Jesus. There’s a pretty well-defined curriculum we ask our triads to go through. At the end of it, we encourage each triad participant to start a new triad. Why? Because you’re not supposed to be the end result of discipleship! Being Jesus’ disciple is supposed to continue for the rest of your life. Jesus clearly expected His disciples to multiply and reproduce. Right now we have some 50 people involved in triads and we expect that number to grow every year. Interested? Great! Speak with me or Aimee Worley after the service or soon.

The O in ROPES stands for Obedience. While it’s very important to believe the right things about Jesus, it’s even more important to do what He says. This is where we might differ from some aspects of American Christianity. How so? An authentic disciple of Jesus is being transformed, not just being informed. Sometimes, in our eagerness to see people become Christians, we’ve reduced Christianity to simply believing certain truths. If you believe Jesus lived, died on a cross, and rose again – abracadabra – you’re a Christian now! No.... Yes, a Christian is someone who has put his or her trust in Jesus for this life and eternity. But the evidence of that new relationship is a willingness to experience spiritual transformation for the rest of your life.

Here’s the bottom line. If you’re perfectly content to do things like personal relationships, sexual intimacy, spending your money, anger management, or how you view people from another race the same old way you did before you became a Christian, there’s a likely explanation. You’re not really a Christian. We will run into issues that require change in our attitudes or lifestyle. To truly know Jesus is to change. God changes us through the Holy Spirit and our obedience. Gradually? Yes. Over time? Sure. Gently? Sometimes. I can’t just stay the same? Absolutely not.

The P in ROPES stands for Prayer. That simply recognizes prayer is a primary way we develop a relationship with God. That’s one way we communicate with God and He

communicates with us. Followers of Jesus pray regularly and often. They're interested in how to develop and enhance that means of communication. Prayer becomes more than just something we do occasionally when we come to church. It permeates and penetrates every area of our lives. We ask our triad participants to pray in their gatherings and to pray for each other during the entire triad experience.

The E in ROPES stands for Evangelism. Part and parcel of being Jesus' disciple is starting to care about what Jesus cares about. Jesus cares about spiritually lost people profoundly. That's precisely why the second Person of the Trinity – the Son - left Heaven and took on human skin and bone in the person of Jesus and why He died on the cross and rose again. It was all about bringing people far from God back into an eternal relationship with their Creator. We encourage our triad participants to identify their unique, personal Circle of Three. What's that? Three people – it could be a family member, a co-worker, a neighbor – who aren't following Jesus personally. We pray for them together. We look for opportunities to build a relationship with them and have faith conversations. Later this month – on Sunday, September 29 – we're going to offer an annual seminar we call Overcoming Evangeophobia to anyone who wants to attend. It's our take on some ways to make reaching people far from God front and center and less fearful for disciples of Jesus. We'd love for you to come and be a part of it.

Finally, the S in ROPES stands for Scripture. We believe the Bible is God's Word. We believe God has communicated truth there what can't be found anywhere else. If we take a relationship with God and obeying Him seriously, then an ever growing knowledge of Scripture and applying it to our daily lives is kind of a no brainer. Every Sunday we offer four adult Bible classes at 9:00. All of them are about understanding Scripture better so we can be more like Jesus. Every time one of our triads meet, they read and discuss Scripture together. They memorize Scripture verses together. They share what God has shown them in Scripture from their personal devotions. Another annual seminar we offer to anyone and everyone is how to develop a personal devotional life which means interacting with Scripture regularly. Yet another way we're emphasizing Scripture right now is through Bible Chat. More on that in a few minutes. But, speaking of Scripture, let's look at something Jesus said. In one place He spoke about being God's friend which is yet another way to be His disciple.

BEING JESUS' FRIEND REVISITED.

It's astonishing to think Jesus invited us to be His friend, but that's exactly what He says in John 15. The whole chapter is part of a much longer teaching section Jesus gave to His disciples on the night He was betrayed – the night before He died on the cross. Let's drill down on v. 12-17. Jesus identified several marks of an authentic friendship and then related it to developing an eternal friendship with Him.

Here's the first mark. Friends extend themselves for each other. Jesus said here, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." (Jo. 15:13 NLT) The extent to which you will extend yourself for another person measures pretty

effectively the depth of that relationship, yes? If you're willing to be inconvenienced or stretched for another person, you're probably his or her true friend. But if I am willing to die for you or you are willing to die for me – now, that might well be the deepest expression of friendship anywhere.

Pop music star Selena Gomez was shockingly quiet during the summer of 2017 especially for someone enjoying several chart topping hits. There were no tours, no television guest-spots, no radio interviews. And then in the fall of 2017, we found out why. Gomez was recovering from a kidney transplant. Her friend, Francia Raisa, had donated her own kidney for the lifesaving procedure. Raisa, known for her role on the TV series "The Secret Life of the American Teenager," kept the whole situation a secret. She quietly had herself tested, prepared for the operation, and told her family and friends that she was donating a kidney. All the while she never mentioned the recipient was Selena Gomez. She wasn't doing it for fame; she was doing it for friendship. You know real friendship when you see it in action. Selfless love draws the applause of all who see it. Probably because it's so rare.

Jesus revealed right here the extent to which He went to win your friendship some 2,000 years ago on the cross. The Bible makes it clear He died for us. He paid the penalty for our sin and guilt by taking our place on the cross. That's exactly what's symbolized in the Lord's Supper which we will observe at the end of today's service. When He died on the cross for us, Jesus made it clear how much He values you and wants to have an eternal relationship with you. Sometimes it works the other way, too. You probably know that Christians living in other parts of the world today – like in North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Pakistan – are routinely killed – martyred – for their allegiance to Jesus. Jesus was willing to be fully identified with and for you. Would you be willing to be identified with Jesus even if it meant being inconvenienced, being stretched, or even being killed for Jesus? Friends extend themselves for each other.

Friends practice open, honest communication with each other. A good friend is someone in whom you can confide. You can be yourself – transparent and unguarded. You can share the deepest secrets of your life with a friend with no fear they will be used against you. I love a quote attributed to George Eliot that says, "Oh, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person; having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but to pour them all out, just as they are, chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then, with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away." My best friend in life is my wife, Cheryl. I confide in her. I share my hopes and fears, my joys and sorrows, whatever makes me happy, sad, joyful or angry with her. She does the same with me.

Have you ever considered that Jesus desires to have open, honest communication with you? He said here, "I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me." (Jo 15:15 NLT) Jesus could be satisfied having a very remote relationship with you and me. Who could blame Him? He could easily say, "Look, I died for all those

people. Why do I need to know them and develop an intimate friendship with them?" But precisely because Jesus died on the cross, we see here His intense desire for open, honest communication with you and me. Like any relationship, learning how to have open, honest communication with Jesus is a learning process. It involves prayer and meditating on Scripture at the very least.

Friends ultimately love the same things. Friends usually have something in common, right? You enjoy the same hobbies, the same recreation, or hanging out with the same people. It's hard to maintain a friendship with someone with whom you have nothing in common. When you start a friendship, to some extent you value and enjoy the same things your friend enjoys and values. In the same way, the longer you are Jesus' friend, the more you will enjoy what He enjoys, value what He values, like what He likes, and love the same people He loves. "This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you." (Jo 15:12 NLT) One way you can know if your friendship with Jesus is deepening and growing is to see if you enjoy whatever Scripture reveals Jesus enjoyed and you love whatever and whoever Jesus loved.

Friends like to make each other happy. When you have a close friendship with someone, you find yourself wanting to do things to make that person happy. You want to bring joy or pleasure into that person's life. In fact, that becomes one way you experience personal joy and pleasure yourself - by bringing joy or pleasure to your friend. Often that entails fulfilling the requests of a friend. I believe Jesus touched on that very dynamic when He said here, "You are my friends if you do what I command." (Jo. 15:14 NLT) I know that sounds "out there" at first. We don't think of friends "commanding" each other. But while our relationship with Jesus is a friendship, it's also very different than any other kind of friendship. It's a genuine friendship, but it's not a friendship between two equals. Jesus is our Lord, our 24 hour a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year Boss. I think what Jesus was saying there is if you want to be His friend, it involves giving Him the joy and pleasure of bringing your attitudes and lifestyle into conformity with who He is and how He wants you to live. Friendship with Jesus and discipleship are both about the O in ROPES – obedience.

But it works the other way, too. That's what I hear in v. 16, "You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name." (Jo. 15:16 NLT) Some people think Jesus promised here that God will answer any prayer request whatsoever no matter how self-centered or ungodly it might be. We know God doesn't do that. Answered prayer needs to be understood as part of a healthy friendship with God. As you and I allow God to transform our desires, then more and more God is pleased, yes, to give you whatever you ask for in Jesus' Name. In other words, like any true friend, He is pleased to make you happy by giving you what will bring you true, lasting joy, and pleasure.

So, there you have it. Being Jesus' disciple means entering into intimate, eternal friendship with Jesus Himself. Jesus desired to be your friend long before you ever wanted to be His friend. God loved you long before you ever thought about loving God

back. God took the initiative to be your friend by sending Jesus into this world. That friendship begins the moment you trust Jesus as your Savior and Lord. It deepens, grows, and builds from there. Death will change that relationship, but it won't end there. In fact, death will allow your friendship with Jesus to enter a new and eternal phase. Jesus will never stop being your friend. So, one way to think about being Jesus' disciple is to see it as a growing and eternal friendship.

BIBLE CHAT REVISITED.

Our theme today is discipleship. I want to invite you to participate in yet another demonstration of discipleship this fall. We call it Bible Chat. We did it about four years ago for the first time, so that's why I refer to it as Bible Chat revisited. It's you and one other person having a 30 minute conversation – a chat - about the Bible once a week for 10 weeks. It's meant to be brief and not tie up your life forever! I'm going to be presenting messages on 1 John over that period of time starting next Sunday. You're encouraged to listen to the message, then meet with your Bible Chat partner sometime during the week, and discuss the same Scripture passage I spoke on. Starting today, we're handing out a simple guide you'll use that prompts some reflection and interaction on the Scripture you'll discuss. Please pick one up after the service today. Should even those people already in triads do Bible Chat with other people, too? Sure, if you want to! I plan to do so even though I'm in two triads at the moment.

What's the purpose of Bible Chat? One of our goals year in and year out here at KRBC is to develop a strong discipleship culture. Bible Chat combines at least two essential aspects of discipleship: developing personal relationships and, interaction with Scripture: the R and S in ROPES. We know whenever people get together to discuss the Bible, significant spiritual growth can happen. Why should you participate in Bible Chat? Because you want to be a better disciple of Jesus. Because you want to grow your friendship with Jesus. You definitely don't have to be a Bible scholar to participate. In fact, you don't have to know anything about the Bible to participate in Bible Chat. It will just encourage you to reflect on the Bible meaningfully, apply it personally, and grow in your comfort level of discussing spiritual matters with someone else. It has the potential to help you follow Jesus better and grow in your friendship with Him.

Who should you invite to join you for Bible Chat? Just about anyone inside or outside the church. Cheryl shared how God led her to invite a longtime friend outside the church and how He continues to bless something that started four years ago. So, pray and think about who to invite. It could even be someone who is not a believer in Jesus yet, but he or she is open to reading and talking about the Bible with you. Please invite someone of the same gender unless it's your spouse or a close relative. It probably should be someone you've not had significant conversations with yet about the Bible. You want this to be a fresh encounter with someone who's spiritual life is a little unknown to you. Face to face Bible Chats are the very best option, but even video or phone conversations can be useful if that's the only option you have. 30 minutes for 10 weeks. Accessible. Positive. Enjoyable. Spiritually healthy. Please do Bible Chat!

Why do some musicians or athletes excel while others remain mediocre? Back In 1997, a man by the name of 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 did not. IQ was not a good predictor. Neither were things like aural sensitivity, income, or a 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 students 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. I'm going to play my whole life." Those kids soared.

An authentic follower of Jesus is someone whose life, actions, and attitudes display a clear, simple message day in and day out, year after year: "I'm going to follow Jesus my whole life." Those Christians may fail and stumble often, but over the long haul of life they will also soar. So, are you going to follow Jesus your whole life? If so, what are you doing today to follow Jesus?