

Build the Believers

Colossians 1:28-2:7

October 1, 2017

We are now on our 3rd week of our Disciple-Making series. Last week we talked about how every person starts in Chair #1 as a lost sinner who needs to be won to faith in Christ. This morning, we'll focus on Chair #2 "Build the Believers." Disciple-Making is not simply a call to make converts. Getting ourselves or someone else into chair #2 does not mean that our mission is complete. Rather, this is where the "Build the Believers" begins. God is calling us to make disciples. A disciple can be defined as "a follower of Jesus Christ." Being a follower means that we engage in learning from Him; we are His students.¹

Last week I mentioned that Debbie and I had the privilege of watching our neighbors, John/Patti Dean be won to faith in Christ. We knew that the change was real, it was evident in so many ways. One of things that I recall in particular, is that it changed how they would argue as a couple. But, it might not be what you are thinking. Each morning they found themselves struggling over who would take care of the kids and get them ready for the day and who would get extended quiet time with the Lord. I specifically remember one of them saying they were jealous because the other one wanted to spend an hour or two in the Bible every morning! That's not fair, I want time to read my Bible! What a great thing for married couples to fight for! If we sit contentedly in Chair #2, resting on our heavenly guarantee, then we miss out on the joy and adventure of becoming mature in Christ. It is a sad state of affairs when God's children remain in a stage of arrested development.



This is a picture of me when I was younger. I'm not sure what happened but I used to be kind of cute. This week, I was reading through the October issue of the Beltrami Electric Co-op publication called, "Northern Lights." There was an ad in the back selling a toddler's bed. It said the TODDLER bed held up to 300#! Wow. Baby pictures are cute, but there's nothing cute about a 300# toddler! As believers, it's not good for us to get stuck in an early stage of discipleship. Hebrews 5:13-14 says it this way, "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." God's plan for us is maturity. We need to build the believers into mature, godly women and men. Once we become a believer in Christ, a wonderful building process begins in our lives.

Building the believers should happen in at least three areas:

1. First of all, Worship. At Efree Bemidji we use the phrase, "celebrating His love." Ephesians 5:19-20 explains that worship includes, "speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Every Sunday we set aside intentional time to corporately celebrate God's love. This happens not only through beautiful songs but also through prayer, through the giving of our tithes/offerings, through reading and studying Scripture together. Our desire is to foster greater intimacy w/ our Heavenly Father. From time to time we use artistic dramas or videos or times of silence to help us focus in on connecting with God in genuine worship. Together we participate in things like Child Dedications, welcoming new members, and celebrating the Lord's Supper. We are children of the King, and as His servants, we gather to recognize His majesty and His rule in every area of our lives.

Worship is not just for Sundays though. We worship God every day of the week. Much of that worship is similar to Sunday mornings. But instead of singing along with the organ or the guitar, we may play our worship music from a CD or an electronic device through our ear buds. Worship can be

¹ *disciple* = μαθητής = one who engages in learning from an instructor, a pupil, an apprentice. (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 609). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

defined as “giving honor to God.” It involves bowing our hearts to God and expressing an attitude of love and respect toward Him in our words and actions. Worship is responding to all that God has done, is doing, and will do in our daily lives. We worship God through working hard and doing our jobs well. By loving our families and caring for our neighbors. We worship as we enjoy His sunrise or sunset, or praise Him for the gorgeous fall colors. Ultimately, worship is recognizing the presence of our Creator and then responding by spending time with Jesus. One of my favorite verses in the entire Bible is Acts 4:13, “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” It wasn’t about their intellect; it was about their intimacy. There is something astonishing about men and women who spend time in worship; who spend consistent, intimate time with Jesus. Worship is a key way for us to be built up as believers.

2. A 2nd way to build the believers is Instruction. At Efree Bemidji we embrace the idea of “obeying His truth.” To properly obey God’s truth, we must first understand it. This happens through Sunday sermons, Sunday School, small groups, Bible studies, personal devotional times, listening to pod casts, and so on. Early on in our faith, it very helpful to major on the majors. This is why we promote our 10-point SOF. It lays out the core doctrines of the Christian faith in a simple and succinct way. Our church is providing a new resource called, “*Beginning with God*,” by James W. Sire. It’s a basic introduction to the Christian faith. These books are available in the Fellowship Hall for a suggested donation of \$10. If you can’t afford \$10 right now, just feel free to take one, as long as you agree that you’ll read it. Instruction is not just about academics though. This is a vital distinction for us to understand. Knowledge is great, but knowledge, in and of itself, has a tendency to puff us up rather than build us up.² I came across a really helpful article on this by Don Carson, one of our best thinkers and writers in the EFCA. Dr. Carson wrote an article called, “The Bible and Theology.”³ It’s available at the Gospel Coalition website at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-bible-and-theology-don-carson-nivzsb>

It’s a helpful discussion on the difference between studying God’s truth with our minds and applying God’s truth to how we live. Biblical instruction is not just meant for making brainy Christians, it’s meant for making disciples; followers of Christ who LIVE fully devoted lives.

It makes me think of the series by Kyle Idleman, Not a Fan. Being a disciple doesn’t just mean we cheer for Jesus on Sunday mornings and then live normal lives the rest of the week. We become fully devoted followers of Jesus by being built up in our faith each day. In his book, *4 Chair Discipling*, Dann Spader makes an interesting suggestion. He says, “Jesus knew that obedience was His Father’s love language.”⁴ That’s worth thinking about.⁵ God is good and His truth can be trusted. As we obey Him we show that we love him. Christian instruction is not just about book learning, it is also about practicing the life lessons of following God in the real world. Instruction is important as we build the believers, but we need to merge what we believe with how we live.⁶

3. A 3rd way to build the believers is Fellowship. In our church, we use the phrase, “enlarging His kingdom.” When we join the fellowship of God’s family we become part of His Kingdom People. We join what is sometimes referred to as the “Communion of the saints:”⁷ that spiritual union of the members of the Christian Church, those living now on the earth and those now departed and with the Lord in heaven.⁸ There is a deep fellowship connection among all of us who are part of the body of Christ. We embrace who we are as a Christian family of brothers/sisters in Christ and we rejoice in WHOSE we are. We share the same Heavenly Father. When Jesus was in the Upper Room eating

² Consider 1 Corinthians 8:1-3

³ Taken from the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, D.A. Carson, Gen. Ed., Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, pp. 2633-2636.

⁴ Dann Spader, *4 Chair Discipling*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL, 2014, p. 70.

⁵ See John 14:15-21.

⁶ Check out hip-hop artist Mark-J’s song “Merge” off the 2009 album *An Every Day World*.

⁷ Hebrews 11 reminds us that as believers we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses; past followers of God from the Old Testament who inspire us to greater obedience and devotion today. This phrase is mentioned in the Apostle’s Creed.

⁸ Learn more at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communion_of_saints

the Last supper with His disciples, He called them to a deeper level of fellowship than they had ever known before. In John 13:34-35 Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Christian fellowship is our opportunity to be intentional about rejoicing with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn.⁹ We can do this by connecting with 1 to 1 spiritual mentors, with a small group of believing friends, and in large group assemblies like the one we enjoy each Sunday morning. Hebrews 10:24-25 urges us, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Christianity is not for lone rangers. Each and every one of us needs to know and experience the nurture and care of a church family.

Pastor Albin and our youth and young adult ministry have done a fantastic job of modeling this for us, with the creation of “The 5-11 Lounge.” It’s based on 1 Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” We build each other up as believers through consistent, meaningful fellowship. Worship, instruction, and fellowship. These are three areas where we build believers.

It should bother us if we are not growing in our faith each day. It’s a dangerous thing for any believer in Christ to stall out or to be lulled into a posture of coasting along. If you feel that you’ve plateaued or begun to rest on your laurels, the fact is you may actually be going backwards in your faith. Romans 12:11 issues an interesting challenge to believers, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”¹⁰ It can be hard to keep our zeal. That phrase, “keep your spiritual fervor,” in Romans 12:11, can also be translated, “be set on fire by the Spirit.”¹¹ Once we become a believer in Jesus, the HS lives inside of us and he sets a fire in our heart and a hunger in our spirit.¹² So here’s a question for you: does your personal faith need more zeal and fervor today?¹³ What might help you with that? Perhaps a re-commitment of some kind? Maybe a renewal of your daily time in God’s Word? Finding someone to meet with you 1 to 1? Beginning a prayer journal? Joining a small group? If God is prompting you toward some action step, take it today. Get fired about your faith in Jesus!



Let me close with 2 specific invitations:

1. First of all, I invite you to get baptized. Baptism is one of the most natural and logical steps for believers. If you have not yet been baptized, let’s get that scheduled some time soon. Ephesians 4:4-6 teaches us, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Baptism is another way of celebrating that we are part of a new family. We make a public declaration that we are a believer in Christ. We declare in an outward way, that there has been an inner change in our lives.¹⁴

⁹ Spader, *4 Chair Discipling*, p. 73.

¹⁰ See Acts 18:25. The Greek for “fervor” is “ζέω” (lit. ‘boil, seethe’...) fig. of emotions, anger, love, eagerness to do good or evil, **to be stirred up emotionally, be enthusiastic/excited/on fire** (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 426). Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.)

¹¹ *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, D.A. Carson, Gen. Ed., Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2315.

¹² See 2 Timothy 1:6-7 “fan into flame.”

¹³ The Apostle Paul gives some interesting advice to a disciple named Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6-7, “For this reason I remind you to **fan into flame the gift of God**, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

2. 2nd of all, I invite you to become a church member. As mentioned earlier, committing to a local body of believers is a vital part of being built up as a believer. Now, that doesn't necessarily require official church membership. Many people are fully vested as regular attenders at E-free Bemidji without ever becoming members. But, that said, most people still find it very helpful to officially commit to a local church. A church where they can be fully involved by giving ministry direction, by voting on how the church spends money, who serves in leadership, and so on. If you are not a church member, please get one of the blue handouts from church called, "Why Should I Join a Church?" It lays out 3 really good reasons. We'll love you just as much whether you are a member or not. But, we'd love the chance to sing to you!

Consider this closing benediction from Ephesians 4:14-16, "Therefore, Bros/Sis in Christ, let us no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, let us speak the truth in love, **so that we will grow to become in every respect the mature body** of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From Jesus the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." Amen.

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on October 1, 2017 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson