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Love, Grow, Serve, Go - What we do around here. 11.8.9

Today I want to share with all of you a concept we have recently begun teaching to the What We Believe class. The lesson is on discipleship and discipleship means following Jesus, growing in Christ, beginning with the day you accept him as Savior and Lord and going forward till the day you go to meet him face to face.

Simply put, the path of discipleship is described in four words: **Love. Grow. Serve. Go.**

Back in the early 90s, Rick Warren wrote a book for preachers called The Purpose-Driven Church (this was before he made millions with The Purpose-Driven Life and 40 Days of Purpose). It was in this book that I first saw the path of discipleship presented as a baseball diamond, but I didn't like everything about the way Rick Warren identified the base path so we adapted it for our own church and made it a little different than his.

Before we get into it, how many of you hate baseball? How many of you just hate the Yankees? And how many of you really like baseball?

If you hate it, my apologies. We'll cover this today and move along, and maybe you can think of a way to describe discipleship through bowling or NASCAR. But to make sure we all stay together today, let's review some baseball basics...

What do we all know about baseball?

- No crying in baseball - no whining in church!
- You start at home plate - and in discipleship, following Jesus, everyone starts at the beginning (even if that was when you were three). No one is born at third.
- You take the bases one at a time (even if you hit a triple). One thing I DON'T like about softball is the rule, enforced in many leagues, that if you hit one out, you don't get to jog the bases (not that I ever hit one out). In baseball, you touch 'em all, and in following Jesus, you can't skip any of the bases either.
- Though there is individual benefit in getting to second or third, there are no runs awarded for runners left on base. You want everyone to cross the plate, and if the story the next day says that the Braves stranded nine runners, it means that they got some hits but missed the most important opportunities. That's going to be very important when we apply it to discipleship.

Now when Jesus began calling men to follow him, to be his disciples, that initial invitation was often a very non-threatening one, expressed by three simple words: "Come and see". When people first encountered Jesus and began to understand that he had something divine about him, they invited others with the same three simple and non-threatening words: "Come and see".

The Gospel according to John isn't a book of poetry, but one of the poetic things about it is the strategic repetition of the invitation "Come and see". A couple of guys were following Jesus around in **John 1**. ³⁸**Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"** ³⁹**"Come," he replied, "and you will see." John 1:38-40**

A bit later, Philip, who had become convinced that Jesus was more than even a prophet, went and found Nathanael and told him, **"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."** ⁴⁶**"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. John 1:45-47**

Later still, Jesus sat at a well and talked to a woman from Samaria, and based on that encounter, she went back and said to the people in her town: ²⁹**"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" John 4:29**

Somewhere along the line, someone said the same to us. "Come and see". And when we share Jesus with others, it isn't so much a matter of proving him to them as it is an invitation to "Come and see". We call that "evangelism" which means to share good news with people, and it's what helps us get to first base.

At first base, you see the word LOVE. One of the most basic definitions of a Christian is that he or she is someone who loves God, and because of that, loves other people. What are the greatest commandments of Scripture? Jesus said in **Mark 12** - ²⁹**"The most important (commandment) ...is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'** ³¹**The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."**

Love for God begins when I understand that he rescued me. He paid the price for my sins so I might be free. He took our punishment upon himself.

Love is so very basic, and yet sometimes people skip over it or they forget it, and they become highly religious but they have no love. The Pharisees were crazy about religion, about keeping the law and going to the temple - but they had fallen out of love with God and they certainly did not love people.

Love is fundamental. It is THE starting place for following Jesus. Paul said in **1 Corinthians 13** - ¹**If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging**

cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Then, since we tend to misunderstand love, he defines it by behavior: **⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.**

Discipleship begins with love, and if you love God and are learning to love those he loves - which is everyone - maybe you've made it to first base. But don't get stranded there.

Whenever we speak about living for Christ, we almost always use the term "follow". A disciple is a follower of Jesus. When Jesus wanted someone to get serious about discipleship, he invited them to follow him - literally to walk behind him from one town to another, learning from his example how a person ought to live.

You remember him walking down by the lake, calling out to Peter and the other fisherman: **"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." Matthew 4:19** With a little more urgency, he said to one religious young man who was in love with his money: **"One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" Mark 10:21.** And with still more gravity, he told us all: **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" Matthew 16:24.** When we make the commitment to follow him wherever he leads us, we're on the path to second base.

When you get to second, you see the word GROW. Listen to how **2 Peter** ends (**2 Peter 3:17-18**) - **¹⁷Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.** Growth means growth in knowledge and understanding of Scripture, growth in maturity so that your life and attitudes come to resemble those of Christ, growth in grace and of course, growth in the love that you picked up at first base.

I can't won't say that our church is exceptionally good at teaching people to grow, but I will say that, like many churches, it's the one thing we try to do more than any other thing, maybe even to the neglect of other things. Look at our schedule: Sunday School classes, Bible studies, a Beth Moore study for women, home Bible fellowships, youth groups - the main emphasis of 90% of our programs is growth.

When I was a kid we used to play a game at recess that we called Polish Softball (sorry!) or Polish Kickball. It was like baseball except there were only two bases (home plate and second base) and when you got a hit, you ran to

second. Now in baseball, you can have only one person on base at a time, but in this version, you can have as many people on second as you want, and you can stay there until someone really hits it or kicks it a long way and everyone has a chance to run home at once. You might have almost everyone on your team standing at second waiting to come home.

Maybe that's what our church looks like. Everyone is going to one Bible study and prayer meeting after another, learning and trying to grow, but for what? A lot of churches let Christians get stranded at second, but that's no good. You can see this tendency in the way we measure success. How do we know we are doing well? Attendance! We had 350 people last month! It's not even an accurate measure of growth; it's just a measure of the presence of your body at an event we HOPE will help you grow. It's kind of like measuring your health by how many times you come to supper! (I don't know about his blood pressure, but he had perfect attendance at breakfast last year!)

But discipleship is growth toward something, and if we grow in Bible knowledge and never use it, we fail at discipleship, so let's move on.

In **Mark 3:13-15**, I like the way it describes Jesus' method of training: **¹³Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴He appointed twelve—designating them apostles - that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵and to have authority to drive out demons.** That they might be with him...as commitment grows, so does the closeness of the relationship: Come and see. Come follow me. Come, be with me.

But notice it is for a purpose: **"...that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵and to have authority to drive out demons."** He had a ministry for them, and so he does for us. That's why...

...when you get to third base, you see the word SERVE. No Christian exists for him/herself. We are not fully formed in Christ unless we begin to minister or serve in God's Kingdom with the gifts he has given us. Following the method of Jesus, we learn to be servants or ministers by being with Jesus. Being equipped for service goes beyond learning the content of Scripture to include learning to use your gifts from God in service to God's Kingdom.

One place that lays out our responsibility to serve is **Romans 12:5-8** - **"...in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.** I think that, at any point in our Christian journey, we ought to be able to say: THIS is what I do to actively serve in the Kingdom of God.

Understand that ministry goes beyond church work. It includes intentional service in the community where we can be salt and light. It's a lifestyle more than it is an activity. Your ministry might be primarily in your neighborhood, or in your daughter's school, or in serving people you meet

through work. And naturally, for the church to be healthy, we who have gifts for working with kids or teaching need to use those gifts for God's glory. But remember that Christians serve, and there is something lacking in a church where everyone is stranded at second base.

And listen: You don't have to spend months or years in preparation before you begin to serve. Any Christian can minister to others in the name of Christ. In fact, we must. The baseball diamond breaks down as an illustration here. Often, the most effective servants and witnesses are those who (like the woman at the well) serve cold water and then go and tell their friends: "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did". Obviously some service depends on growth in knowledge (teaching, for example). But with many ministries, you can start right away. Do so!

Now listen to **John 15:1-5**: **¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.**

⁵"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

There is a sense in which the fruit of Jesus Christ grows naturally from us when we abide in Him. It's only natural for a healthy pumpkin vine to produce a pumpkin. The odd thing is for it to NOT produce anything. And a Christian who abides closely in Christ begins to see and feel and understand what it means that people are LOST, and cannot remain silent or passive. And that brings us to home plate, and...

At home plate, you'll find the word GO. That comes straight out of the Great Commission: **Matthew 28:18-20** - **¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** That is the church's mission in this present age, and it is based on two simple but all-important truths:

1. People without God are lost.
2. Jesus Christ is the way and the only way to God.

Because these are true, every follower of Christ needs to ask: "What am I doing to help fulfill the Great Commission?" According to the gifts God has given you, it may be teaching or preaching or otherwise directly sharing your faith in a larger way. But it may not. Maybe it's intentional friendships, being

with other people who don't know the Lord, loving them as they are, inviting them when you can to "Come and see".

During the week, we have a steady stream of people who come here for help with an electric bill or food, and of those, a small number express an openness to hearing more about Jesus by way of having folks from the church visit in their home. Many of these people are women, which means that even if one of the ministers goes to visit, one or two women are always needed to go also, and in some cases it would work best for a couple of women to go without one of the ministers. This is one place among many where this church needs people who will take part in GOING, directly taking Christ to those who are lost, or praying for those who go. "What am I doing...what are YOU doing... to help fulfill the great commission?"

In baseball, you don't get any reward for leaving runners on base. In fact, it's a negative, a sign of lost opportunity. Likewise, we need to focus on bringing all of our runners home. Discipleship isn't just LOVE. Or LOVE and GROW. Or even LOVE and GROW and SERVE. It's LOVE, GROW, SERVE, GO.

Now we pull back to the perspective of the Goodyear blimp and see the broad perspective of the game we're in. At first, Rick Warren covered only the four bases, and then he realized he forgot worship. So he put it on the pitcher's mound. The problem is, base runners never go out to the pitcher's mound, unless it's to start a fight! I don't want to imply that the final destination of the disciple is to charge the mound and start a church fight!

As I see it, worship is the name of the whole "game" we're in, the whole enterprise. If the angels rejoice when a person repents and accepts Christ, then worship begins right there. The fact is, worship isn't just 20 minutes of singing and sharing of the Lord's Supper once a week, although our participation in that is vital. Rather, we properly worship God when we do everything in praise and honor of him.

LOVE, GROW, SERVE, GO. I'd make these mandatory if I could, because this is what the Bible says that disciples do. But it doesn't work like that. We can't force someone to serve or grow or love. But we can teach it, encourage it, admonish it, expect it, and pray for it. And we do.

And it begins with love... **"not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).**