

Fleeing to Focus
Mark 3:7-19

And I hope that is true of all of us, that we are that soul that has chosen to cling and run to Jesus and find refuge in Him, for God will never forsake us if that is so.

We're going to return to Mark chapter 3 today, and as you turn there, I'd just like you to consider the concept of a strategy - a strategy. If you've been on a team before or part of a business or organization maybe, something you do for your work, or beyond that even for raising a family, the concept of a strategy a game plan, is that an important thing? We've all been in situations where we've seen strategies that have been well crafted and thought through and planned out and executed in a fine fashion. There's other times though where the strategy is the last thing that's thought about, and those people, those teams that tend to function in that way become like those who have failed to plan, and thus they have planned to fail from the start.

Strategies are important. Strategies are vital, you need to have a game plan of some sort. There are a lot of teams in our softball league, and there's four now that are left in our playoff tonight, and they've obviously had some success with a strategy throughout the season. If they were to come tonight and say, you know, I know what we have been doing is working. It's won us and got us here, but let's try something new tonight. Let's all bat opposite-handed. You know, and throw that way, too. Let's just give it a totally different strategy. I got some confidence. I think it might work. It might do even better. It's just silly. It's outright ridiculous after you've had a strategy that's apparently been tested and tried and got you this far to the final four teams; it's just absurd. It's a terrible idea to change it up like that at the end of the season.

Unfortunately, I'm a victim of one of those times, not in softball, but in soccer. Back when I was high-school age, my club soccer team was doing well throughout our season. We were winning several games and in first place, situated at the top of the table, playing against the second place team. The last game of season and all we needed to do was win or tie. Tie would've been fine too, but we just needed to win. Really, we needed to keep doing what we were doing. Our strategy had been set. It had been successful. It had gone well for us throughout the season; that's why we

were in first place. Well, we had two coaches, and one of our coaches, unfortunately, that season, was just very absent because of different responsibilities. He also coached other teams, and so he was gone for many of our practices and many of our games. So, we really had one coach coaching us that entire season. At this last game, the one coach that had been with us the whole season couldn't make it, and the other coach came, the one that had been absent. He showed up on the day of the game, morning of, right before the game, and said, all right, we're going to try something totally new. We're going to do a completely different system. We're going to play different players in different spots, and it was something we had never tried, never even practiced, and we went out there with this new strategy, and as you could guess it was amazing; we won. No, absolutely not. We lost. We lost, and we became the first loser which is great. We got second place, and it was terrible. Right? I was a victim and traumatized, and I've never entered an athletic contest since. It's not the case. Strategies are important though. Strategies are vital for any team, organization, or business that might be operating.

Today, we get the opportunity to see the strategy that Jesus implemented, and it's our joy to see that this strategy that is implemented today is the strategy that we have. Hopefully, we'll find consistency; that this is what we are doing already as a church. But we'll also be reminded and challenged and brought back to the foundation, hopefully, of our church and what we're doing and as individuals in our church. Join with me. We'll read Mark 3:7-19; "Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' And he strictly ordered them not to make him known. And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew,

and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.”

We encounter a shift today in Jesus’ ministry. As you recall, a lot of what we have been covering, since chapter 2 began, has been controversial. It’s been Jesus going toe-to-toe with the religious leaders, the Pharisees, the scribes, the experts of the Law, those that were currently in the driver’s seat when it came to leading the nation of Israel. So, we’ve seen controversy, and controversy just kind of escalates and come to a climax in our last time when we saw Jesus debating with them, correcting them, on the topic of the Sabbath the very thing which the Pharisees viewed as their marker, their authentic display of their Jewishness, how they held fast to the Sabbath, and not just what God’s word said, but what they had elevated as what is work and what is rest. Jesus had constantly had this controversy with them, and no doubt people were watching and observing this. We saw how it ended in verse 6 of chapter 3; “The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.” It’s possible that you could read through just chapter 2 and into chapter 3, and start to think uh-oh Jesus’s in some... you know. a tough situation here. Yeah, there’s been controversy, and He’s been responding, so that’s good, but how’s everyone else responding, and what’s everyone else thinking?

Mark tells us right here in the beginning of our passage, verses 7 through 12. We find this massive crowd - the massive crowd. As it is abundantly clear and very obvious just from these few verses, even though Jesus was in the midst of this controversy with these Pharisees and religious leaders, everyone else was still enamored. They were amazed at what Jesus was doing. There were still crowds gathering, and it was only growing in number. His fame, His popularity, was not diminishing. It was increasing. It was very clear that this is taking place just from our verses here, so despite all the controversy, Jesus was still gathering all this attention and popularity. We see this very clear just not in the nature of the fact that Mark tells us “...a great crowd followed...” Him, but also when we look at the diversity of the crowd. Look at the diversity of this crowd that is following Him. We see that there are people from Galilee; that’s pretty normal. Jesus has done a lot of His ministry in Galilee. But what else? We see that there’s people from “...Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon.” These are certain locations we haven’t even seen yet in our gospel account.

So, in order to help expand and understand where these people are coming from, this type of crowd we have, it's helpful to be reminded of how the nation of Israel was essentially divided at the time. You had the main region we have been focusing on which is in the north, the region of Galilee, right around the Sea of Galilee, and then you had the region of Samaria in the middle, and at the bottom, the southern portion, the region of Judea which is where Jerusalem was located and the temple. So, we've seen people from Galilee, which is where Jesus has been, obviously crowding there. We've seen people even coming up from Judea, but now we have not just those locations, we have also people from Idumea. And Idumea is a little bit south and below Judea and Jerusalem in that desert region. The Idumeans were people that came from the nation of Edom, the descendants of Esau. If you go all way back to the Old Testament, they were the nation of Edom and, they were on the other side of the Jordan, and the other side of the Dead Sea. Well, in the intertestamental time between the Old and New Testament, these people started to come on over and convert and kind of become half-breeds, so to speak, with the Jewish people. In fact, that's where Herod the Great and some of the Herods came from. They were Idumeans. They come from Edom (kind of sounds like Eden). So, Idumea is that southern region. So, you had people from even beyond Judea and Jerusalem, the Idumeans, coming, and then we also have this mention here of people beyond the Jordan. And we see the Jordan River which connects the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea there in the middle, and that green region beyond the Jordan, that's what is being talked about, the region that's known as Pieria, as well, so, people from beyond these typical locations. And then we encounter people from around Tyre and Sidon - Tyre and Sidon which is beyond that top region we have on our map, and it goes along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. You have these Phoenician cities, Tyre and Sidon, which weren't even really Jewish populated cities. These cities were actually known to be more Gentile in nature.

You start to recognize as you put this all together, this is clearly growing and increasing beyond just even your average Jew that is hearing this. This is a massive crowd, and it's a diverse crowd from all over several locations. Well, why? Why are they coming out to follow Him? The answer's pretty obvious. Why not? This is insane. No one had seen anything like this. No one had heard anything like this - doesn't take long before the news starts to spread as the people in Galilee tell their friends and family, and before you

realize, people from everywhere, even beyond Galilee, are coming to really see if this is true - if this is true; not just that there's someone with this power, but that someone that could actually do something for them, might heal them, heal a family member, all right, bring them what they need, do for them what they want.

Notice, not just how diverse and massive this crowd is, we see also the determination of this crowd. This crowd is a determined crowd. They're already determined based on the geographical fact that they're traveling from so far. They're coming from all over just to come into this region of Galilee to see this miracle worker, the supposed Messiah with all the authority. But in verses 9-12; "...we see and he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd lest they crush him..." So, He was actually fearing for His life. There was such a determination on the part of the crowd to come to Jesus, that He actually had to ask for this boat, and it wasn't like a getaway speed boat by any means. Right? This was just a boat to draw some separation between Him and all the people that were surrounding Him and pressing in against Him. He would do this again in chapter 4, when He actually wants to teach to a large crowd. He'll go out in a boat, so that way, He can separate Himself from this crowd, and actually speak to them over the acoustics of the water; so that He has this kind of danger of His own physical life because of this potential threat of being crushed by this crowd.

Why? Why are they pressing in so tightly? Why can't they stay from afar and take their pictures and ask their questions? Right? Why are they pressing in so tight, like more intense than our modern-day paparazzi? Verse 10; "...for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him." Kind of start to think about this crowd; you start to realize what kind of crowd it is. Yes, it's very diverse. You got people from all over, and they're very determined, and they're diseased. This isn't nice people that are wanting to get the inside scoop. These aren't even just kind of aggressive journalists. These are people that are diseased and sick, and they're the ones pressing in on Him and just trying to touch Him with the hope of touching Him might actually heal them or do something for them. And notice this, not just diseased people in this determined crowd, but verses 11-12; "And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' " There's demon-possessed people in this crowd, too. This is quite the scene. I mean you talk

about chaotic and mayhem, I mean, this is a massive crowd, people from all walks of life at this point, diseased and demon-possessed. This is quite a scene. No wonder there is a fear for His life in some sense because of how really hectic things had become.

This is pretty intense, and you start to realize that Jesus's intent when you look back at verse 7; "Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea..." wasn't very successful. This attempt to withdraw, so to speak, you recognize becomes almost a crushing of this crowd as people are surrounding Him. Then we see again how these unclean spirits or demon-possessed people are responding. They're not necessarily saying something that's false. They're actually uttering and yelling that which is true. If you recall back in Mark 1, we already saw Jesus interact with the man that was demon-possessed in the synagogue, and when Jesus cast the demon out of this man, we heard some of what this demon was saying through this man before that in 1:24; "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." As we've seen, these demon-possessed people aren't necessarily saying false things and they're not uttering lies they're actually saying that which is true, yet Jesus exercises His authority once again in verse 12; "And he strictly ordered them not to make him known." Not because they're saying things that were wrong, but because this was Jesus' time. This was Jesus' message. He has the authority to declare the message about His identity and who He is. He doesn't want demons to be His kind of cheerleaders, in this case. He wants to be the One - He is the One - that will make this message known in His time, in His way, not through demons. This is the hectic scene that we see taking place as this massive crowd is just closing in on Jesus, and He's trying to deal with all this; and all in His attempt to withdraw in the first place, seeing things haven't gone that well. There hasn't really been a successful withdrawal that has taken place at this point.

Thus Jesus doesn't stop there. He continues, and that's what we find taking place in verses 13-19. We see the ministry changes - the ministry changes. Jesus does withdraw this time, up to a mountain, but it's in this that we see the importance of our passage this morning, the ministry, the focus, the shift, the strategy, the game plan changes of what Jesus has done, and we can recognize and make some obvious, you know, inferences. As we've gone through the gospel of Mark, has Jesus come to work with the Jewish leadership? Has He come to become one of the Pharisees and a rabbi with

them and memorize the Law like they did and go about leading Israel the way they did? Obviously not. He's made that very clear. He's not one of them. He is not come to be one of them or into involve Himself on their team as one of the Pharisees. Also, we notice this passage tells us that Jesus didn't come to just do it all by Himself, which He totally could've done. He had the power. All right? He was able. He had supernatural abilities this wasn't beyond Him, even with this crowd crushing Him. There's other times in His ministry where people were even attempting to want to kill Him, and He can disappear through the crowd. He's fine. He can survive even if people are crowding Him. He could do this all by Himself if He really wanted to. Even when they come to arrest Him at the end of His life, all right, He says that He could easily call and have legions - He could have thousands, thousands of angels - coming to His aid.

So, that's not Jesus' game plan either. His game plan isn't to work with the establish system because it was so awry and wrong. He needed to expose that, and His game plan wasn't to do it all by Himself. He'd introduced a new strategy here. This is a change, a change in the game plan that we see taking place, and it is a strategy of discipleship. Let me read for us again our verses 13-19; "And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him." What we see in these verses, first, is the purpose of discipleship. We see the new game plan is discipleship. It's this concept of a teacher and a learner, a mentor and an intern of some sort. This is the game plan. This is the change. Jesus wants to bring people in underneath Him who will then learn in this discipleship relationship. This is the strategy that He takes.

We notice in verse 13 that there's a successful getaway, a successful withdrawal, at this point. He'd been crowded in His initial attempt to withdraw, but now, He goes "up on the mountain and called to him..." as it says in our text, "...those whom he desired, and they came to him." There was an intent here, an intent to draw and bring to Himself those who were

serious about following Jesus and listening to Him. There is a line that is drawn at this point between the crowd of enthusiasts, those that were there to be entertained and excited to see what new thing Jesus might do, versus those that were actually intent on following Him, those that actually cared and wanted to learn from Jesus. This is the dividing line that is made here. So, as He makes this withdrawal up to the mountain, He actually gets "...those whom he desired..." those that actually wish to follow Him and learn from Him. And we have no understanding of exactly how many people that was. We don't know if it was hundreds or how much, but of those that came, verse 14 tells us "...he appointed twelve..." He chooses twelve. Up until this point, we've seen Him call certain disciples. We've seen Him talk to Matthew, Levi, the tax collector. We've seen Him talk to the brothers that were out fishing, and James and John and some of these men, but at this point, we have the official understanding of what we have seen and know, the twelve disciples, or apostles as we know even from the rest of Scripture. He appoints twelve. He gets specific. Of those that are intent on following Him, He gets specifically twelve men.

Twelve men to enter into this discipleship relationship, the school of Jesus if you will, as they would learn from Him the Master. In the ESV, the English Standard Version, in verse 14, you'll notice it says, "And he appointed twelve..." and then there's this parenthetical phrase, "(whom he also named apostles)." In other versions, it's not there. Some versions have it; some versions got rid of it, and they don't have it, or they might have a footnote letting you know. The facts are, some manuscripts of the ancient New Testament texts do have that little phrase and some do not. So, people start to wonder and conjecture as to why that is, and certain people have said it came later from some scribes that were just trying to add in this little phrase to make it match Luke's account so it looks the same. So, that's a possibility. Whereas others say, no, this is original to Mark, and even later on in Mark chapter 6, they'll be named the apostles again. So, that's not... it's not uncertain. That's not a different thing for Mark to do. So, either way, we kind of have an okay thing there, whether or not we understand the twelve as not just disciples, but also apostles. They would be sent, and we'll see that in Mark 6. They are sent, and again, they're sent at the end of Jesus' life and ministry. All right. This is the understanding of the apostles who are the sent ones, sent out by Jesus with a message and for a task.

Our question is why twelve in verse 14? Why does He choose twelve? Couldn't it have been five, seven - seven's a good number. Right? I mean, all these options, right? ...a hundred, why not go big? Why twelve? We learn later on some significance as to the twelve from different accounts that we find in Matthew and Luke. They both describe and give us a little bit more of the situation as Jesus talks about the future with His disciples. So, talking about the future with these twelve disciples in Matthew 19:28, we see, "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' " And a similar thing is what we find in Luke 22. And this will help us connect here what Jesus meant as He spoke the words we saw in Mark chapter 2, and you'll remember this analogy He gave in Mark 2:21-22 when He said, "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made." And verse 22; "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins." When Jesus was teaching that in Mark 2 as we saw, He was letting them know, letting the Jewish leadership know that what He came to bring was something totally new that would not fit in their box. It would not fit their mode of thinking and their understanding. He was bringing something totally new. These Pharisees were so attached to what they believed and how it ought to be lived out, that He called them the old wineskins. But Jesus came to bring new wine, and for new wine you need fresh wine skins.

So, here in our text, when He comes up to this mountain and appoints these twelve men who would be kind of symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel, this is the new wine for the new wineskins. These are the new that will actually fulfill this role of carrying out what Jesus is ushering in, which is not just a new movement or a kind of a flash-in-the-pan kind of thing, it's the church. It's the establishment of the church on earth, the body of Christ, thus the necessity for these new wineskins to fill this new wine, and that's what these men are. These are the twelve that will become that symbolic substitute of what had gone so off the path, of old Judaism, of the corrupt understanding of the Jewish system and the Law at this time. And Jesus brought something new in these twelve men, in these twelve that He had appointed.

What was the strategy, exactly? What was the strategy? He didn't just choose these men, but He had a purpose behind it, and that's what we find in verse 14 half way through; "...he appointed twelve so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons." This was the purpose of discipleship. These men that He had called to Himself, they would now enroll as students. They would become the students of Jesus. They would work underneath Him. He would allow them to have all these opportunities to watch the way He lives. Jesus would invite them into His life, and they would see everything, not just the way He teaches to people, but the way He interacts, and the way He interacts with everyone. Not just how He interacts with Pharisees and religious people, but how He interacts with a woman, how He interacts with children. They would get to see everything. How does Jesus eat? What does He do? You know, how does He actually make a living? What does He do? How does He go about from city to city, and how does He interact with people? What does it look like? And Jesus invited these men to see all of that. They could observe first hand and be eyewitnesses of everything and learn in every aspect of it and not only just the learning and watching and observing, but also the on-the-job training. Jesus, too, would give them opportunity. He would give them chances to do ministry. He'd give them the opportunity to, actually, live these things out themselves in His time and help them and correct them when necessary and continue to teach them over the greater part of His three-year ministry at the end of His life; this was Jesus inviting them into His life. It was not a casual thing. All right? It wasn't a formal thing of, you know, two times a week or only at this hour, or one time when we gather for the Sabbath, but this was just to be with Him, to live in a life-on-life type of way, side-by-side. Jesus would be the mentor, and they would learn from Him.

This is, actually, an important thing, not just because the disciples need to learn and they have much to learn from Jesus the Son of God, but also because to have authority to lead in the church and to be the apostles that Jesus had set apart, this became one of the qualifications. One of the qualifications for those that would be apostles in the early church was this very thing of, actually, observing and seeing and being with Jesus and His followers in this ministry. You'll recall in Acts 1, when the disciples have this dilemma with Judas hanging himself, and now they're down to eleven, and they say we need to replace this one man, and in their replacement, their desire to find a replacement, this is one of the qualifications; "So one of the

men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us...” This is an important thing, not just because of how much they would learn in this time with Jesus, but it, really, served to be one of their qualifications. Right? One of their abilities and what gives them the opportunity, and, actually, gives them the authority to lead in the early church as an apostle sent by Jesus because they were involved in His very life and saw all this.

It wasn't just to be with Jesus and to see how He lived His life and learn from Him in the way that He taught and what He did, but also for the purpose of being sent out as we see. The end of verse 14; “...be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.” We haven't seen this. This is a new game plan. This is a change in strategy. Up until this point, Jesus has been doing it. He's been the one going throughout Galilee preaching this message. He's been the one healing people and exorcising demons, casting them out. He's been the one, and now He has His people come close to Him so that they, too, can now multiply and increase the ministry that Jesus started. This is the strategy. This is the game plan, to exponentially ramp these things up with these twelve men who would do what Jesus was already doing in the Galilean ministry. Notice that you have them not just preaching, but also casting out demons in a very similar fashion to what Jesus had been doing to demonstrate and to show the authority He has.

Can you trust the apostles? Can you listen to them and what they have to say? They're not Jesus, so can we trust these men? Well, Jesus gives them the same authority He has. He gives them the authority to cast out demons, to prove and to show and even vindicate the very message that they're bringing. This is the strategy. This is the game plan. This is the shift that Jesus brings. No longer would He do it all by Himself. And, obviously, He's not going to work with the Jewish leadership. He brings these men in to multiply the ministry that He's doing. Should we adopt that strategy? Is that a good strategy? Is that what we're to do two thousand years later? Is this the way we're supposed to go about ministry in our mission to the world? Some people would argue, well, we're not Jesus, and that was two thousand years ago, and we don't live in Palestine. We live in America, and it's just a different time, and if it's a different time, I think it demands a different approach and a different plan, a different strategy, of how to reach people.

The unfortunate, just kind of wrong, thinking with that is the fact that, well, Jesus did implement it, but on top of that, the rest of the New Testament supports Jesus' strategy. So, if you want to ask what the church is commanded to do, you look at the rest of the New Testament and what the apostles commanded the church to do, and they continued to uphold this strategy. They continued to support, and it's not just a suggestion that the church will do well if they do what Jesus did, but it's a command that the church must carry out what Jesus did. There's no option. There's no other strategy. Every other strategy is misguided and wrong.

This is what we learn just simply at a glance from some of the New Testament familiar with Jesus' last words there in the Great Commission as He speaks to His disciples. And when He told them, "...make disciples..." it was clear in their mind what He was saying. To them, they didn't have to go, "...make disciples...?" Now, can You just explain that to us a little bit? We just, you know, were not really up with Your lingo, Jesus. We're not sure what you mean when You say these words. They had been on the receiving end of this for the last three years. They knew when Jesus said, "...make disciples..." He was saying everything that I've done with you, now, it's your turn. You try. You turn around, and you go. You become the very ones that go out and make disciples. You find learners. You find pupils. You find people that you will instruct and teach and guide as I have taught and instructed you. Also, Paul says this very clearly to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:1, follow me as I follow Christ; "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." Continues - there's more in the New Testament here. Philippians 3:17; "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us." So, it even goes beyond. All right. It goes beyond just Jesus and the apostles, but Paul includes others that are walking according to that example.

Look for those people. Find those people that're walking according to the example of Christ and the apostles. Find those people and imitate them. Join in imitating them. That's discipleship. That's the plan. That's the strategy. I really appreciate 2 Timothy 2. It gives us this kind of almost filled out in a multi-generational facet, in a kind of links on a chain, in how it works when Paul tells Timothy, "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." There's four generations involved. You have Paul instructing Timothy, but

what is Timothy to do? Take it all to himself and say, aw, thanks, Paul, I'm really special? No, he turns around, and he gives it to other people with the hope that they will give it to others. This is the chain of discipleship. This is the expectation of the New Testament.

This is what the church should be doing. This is the game plan. This is the strategy. It's right there. There's no change or abrogation of it. This is it. This is what needs to be taking place as Jesus has established in our text in Mark. How are we doing as a church in this? This is the strategy. Is our church committed to this? Sure hope so. I think that's one of the ideas behind the concept of growth groups, something like growth groups that we have is this very hope that we provide that avenue, that outlet, for you to be in a discipleship relationship, for you to be involved in this process of joining with others and following after Christ. That's what, hopefully, these growth groups provide. On a Sunday morning, it's difficult. There's so many of us here, and we can only interact with so many people, but in a growth group, you get in a smaller setting, and you get a more regular time to attend and meet together, and that's just one formal aspect. There's so many other informal aspects that can take place as you think about this concept of discipleship.

What about you personally? Are you invested in this game plan? Is this your strategy? Are you invested in people? Because this strategy revolves around people; that's the whole point of it. It pours time and energy and effort and everything into souls, people. People are eternal, and that's what we're hoping with things like growth group. We're investing time in one another and people. This is what Jesus did, and this is the game plan. Are you seeking to help others in their effort to follow Christ? You know, Jesus could of kind of stood aloof from His disciples, and said I'm still over here doing it right. Let me know when you kind of make it My way, but no, He was willing to associate with them, and He was willing to help them, spend time with them, even in their slow learning and their inabilities and their sinfulness. Are you doing that? Are you seeking to help others in their effort to follow Christ? Are you learning from others? Are you yourself learning from others as they follow Christ and realize, yeah, that that's it? That's what I need to be doing. That's what it looks like to follow Christ? I need to be on that path. If not, I'd say be warned because that's a very arrogant approach. If you're not, if you're kind of elevating yourself on a pedestal saying, waah, it's lonely at the top. I'm the one that's following Jesus, and I

wish everyone else would get with the program here. That's the wrong approach. That's absolute arrogance.

You don't stop learning in the Christian life. It's not possible. You engage in this process of discipleship and learning. You are a lifelong learner. That's what you've signed up for. You continue to learn. The apostles continued to learn. They continued to instruct one another even after Jesus had left. They weren't fit for the task and perfect when Jesus left. They continued to learn, and that's what we need to do as well, individually and as a church corporately. Who are we to stop learning? We have so much to learn, and we need to be humble and embrace that. People are eternal; that's the beauty of this game plan. This strategy focuses on that which is eternal, people. Jesus' strategy centered upon people. The New Testament centers upon people and its strategy.

Unfortunately, a lot of Christians center on other strategies. They take their methods and they take their opportunities elsewhere. Some people resolve to only mass evangelism in their hopes to try and use these tactics to do a shock and approach and hit the whole masses and the crowd through social media or whatever it might be, thinking that this will work, when, really, those are so far from personal and not even involving ourselves with people. Others hope for this celebrity preaching, the celebrity, gospel preaching. If we only had that one person that was really popular, and they believed in Christ. Wow! What Christianity could do. It's a set-up for failure, and it's an absolute fantasy. Other people are convinced on this political invasion, a political arena, hoping for Christians to get in power, and then that will, really, turn things around and change everything. When, unfortunately, that's just misguided. Any hope to write laws that will now force people to act Christian when they're not is not the method, not the strategy, of Jesus or the New Testament; yet all these approaches are, kind of, approaches that Christians adopt, and they miss the most simple and Biblical, right here in the Bible over and over and over again, approach – people. Invest in people. That's what Jesus did. That's what we're called to do. This must be our commitment.

In the rest of our text, we find the people of discipleship - the people of discipleship. The people, specifically, that Jesus appointed that we can learn from, we find on our list; "He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of

James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder) ...” Just these three are listed first in many of the lists of the disciples, and there’s a reason for that. Often times, throughout Jesus’ ministry, these three, Peter, James, and John, got to be a part of what Jesus was doing in an intimate fashion. When Jesus went up on the mountain and transfigured Himself to show His glory, these three men were there, not all the twelve, just these three. When Jesus was in certain instances where He’s raising someone’s daughter from the dead, and there’s only a limited amount of people in the house, these three were there. All right. When Jesus is praying the night before He gets arrested in the garden, and He goes further in the garden, He takes these three men with Him. These are the inner three of the twelve that get even more exposure and intimacy with Jesus and learning. It’s not a partiality by any means because the Bible tells us nothing of these other men grumbling about it. They grumbled about things, but not about that. Jesus was obviously fair in the way that He conducted Himself with these men and taught them; but these three interacted heavily with Jesus on a regular basis.

We find other men involved in our list here. Some we know more of. Some we know less of. Two interesting ones is Matthew or Levi. As we saw already in chapter 2, he’s a tax collector, and he works for Rome. He’s a Jew working for Rome. Already, Jewish people don’t like that, but on top of that, we find one of the other twelve is “...Simon the Zealot...” And what was a Zealot? A Zealot was a Jewish nationalist that hated Rome more than your average Jew. Some of these Jewish nationalists would actually go so far as murdering Roman soldiers in crowds and things of that nature. They were like assassins. And so you have a Zealot (Simon) who hates Rome with a passion, and you have a person working for Rome, Matthew (Levi), and they’re in the twelve. You might think that there’s a little tension there, Jesus. Are you sure you want these guys together? But this is just the nature of what Jesus is doing. He’s calling these men together, and they’re your average Jewish men, eleven of them from Galilee (this Judas Iscariot probably being the only one from Judea), and these men are not your Jewish superstars. I mean, Jesus could’ve had His pick. He could’ve been observing throughout His whole life up until this moment and seen all the Pharisees and found the ones that were the most knowledgeable, who has the most memorized, who’s the most convicted in following every detail of the Law. Of these people, that’s the team you want. That’s not what Jesus does. He picks these average Jewish men in Galilee and chooses to invest in them.

These're the people that He will pour into, and it will be effective because all of them will turn around and become amazing and brilliant lights for Christ in their life.

So, why? Why pick these men? Why your average Joe? Why? Why would you go about that? Because that's how God works. Think about us here. We're the average Joe. I hate to break it to you, but that's us. This is what the New Testament teaches. Consider this passage from 1 Corinthians 1; "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." Jesus picks average men. Why? Because that's going to bring total and full glory to God. There's no other explanation for it. There's no other explanation for the way that these men are transformed into a completely new people. They are passionate in their evangelisms. They're passionate in their preaching of Christ and living it out. They're bold, and no one can stop them, and they don't even care about being imprisoned, persecuted, or killed; that's only something that God can get glory for. God deserves all the glory for that.

Think about all that Jesus would teach these men in His interactions with them. I mean, He would teach Peter to persevere despite his failure after denying Christ three times. He would teach John to love and care for Mary His mother. He would teach James to be bold as one of the first martyrs in the church, actually, going to death for Christ. He would teach Thomas the true definition of faith, believing without seeing, rather than the doubt he formally had. He would teach all of them to love to the end by washing all of their feet the night before He was arrested and then crucified, including Judas the traitor who would be in that room. He would teach all of them to fight the good fight as they all were martyred for Christ in their passionate testimony for Him.

How? How do you change a group of ordinary men to become like this, to become this passionate for Christ, to become new people? It took time. Jesus invited them into His life. He invested countless hours into each of these men. It took patience and grace. Jesus is perfect. He's the Son of God, and here they are slow to learn, and He has to continue to remind them. He

repeats Himself over and over again. He doesn't abandon them. He could give up on them at any moment, but He doesn't. He continues. He's patient with them. He teaches, and He teaches about anything and everything. He's not afraid to open His mouth about topics such as money or hell or children or whatever it might be as they walk and go through life. Jesus taught and did not hold back, and even more importantly, His life was in consistency with what He was teaching. His life, actually, matched the message He was bringing. He was not a hypocrite. He was constantly modeling this before them even when they didn't realize that's, actually, what He was doing. He was modeling more and more for them and teaching.

This is a game plan. This is a strategy. Is it easy? Absolutely not. Because we all know people, and we all interact with people in our family, in our growth group, at this church. We interact with people, and people are hard. It's not easy. We don't always see eye-to-eye. We need patience. We get tired. We want to give up, but we need to be convinced of investing in them, convinced that this is the game plan. This is the strategy. I don't know where you're at. I don't know if you're tired of this game plan, and you're looking for other game plans. I don't know if you're tired of this strategy, and you want to try something else, or you think you found something that's more effective. Let me encourage you to come back to the simple Christ-like example we have of discipleship. We have growth groups starting up, many of them for this fall. If you're not involved, I would encourage you - get involved. This is the opportunity there. We're trying to make it easy for more of us to interact and get into these meaningful relationships where discipleship takes place. This is the goal. This is the game plan. This is the strategy that we're taking as a church. Where are you at? Are you tired of investing in people? Are you not even convinced of it? Come back to Christ's example here, the perfect Son of God enduring twelve men for three years. It's not easy, though we must be committed to it. This is the charge that we get from Scripture, not just the example of Jesus, but the command of the New Testament that we need to follow.