

NOTE FROM PASTOR JONATHAN

Confessions of Faith, Baptisms, Memberships, Discovery, and Making Disciples

A lot goes on in Life Groups that the rest of the church doesn't always see, like when people first confess their faith in Jesus. We want to know when that happens so we can all celebrate with you (Luke 15:3-7)! We also want to know when people in our Life Groups want to pursue next steps in their relationship with Jesus by pursuing baptism or membership, growing through Discovery, or serving through making disciples.

Please let me know by June 15 how many people have made a confession of faith in Jesus, pursued baptism or membership, decided to take Discovery classes, or are working toward making disciples during this ministry year (September 2024 to June 2025) so we can rejoice with you!

Connect and Explore – Alpha

Do you know anyone looking for a place to bring all their questions about Christianity? They can be people in your Life Group, family members, neighbors, co-workers, or friends. They can also be non-Christians or new believers. If you do, we have the perfect place for them! We will have a four-week course called Connect & Explore – Alpha. They'll watch a 30-minute video, introducing big questions to set up the discussion. Then attendees will have a chance to talk about life, faith, and God in a safe setting where everyone's there to connect and explore Christianity together.

Check the link for more information and registration information: <https://willingdon.org/explore/>. The registration deadline is May 19, but try to sign up as soon as possible! If you have any questions, please email our Connect Pastor, Nicole (nyang@willingdon.org).

Matthew 28:16 - 20

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Willingdon's Statement on Mission

Jesus' followers are invited into God's mission, empowered by the Spirit to make disciples who make disciples, proclaiming the gospel in word and deed so that disciples from all peoples may worship him forever.

Let's Warm Up: Questions to break the ice.

1. Who has lived the furthest away from the Vancouver area? Who has grown up closest to Willingdon?

Part of being at Willingdon is meeting people from all over the world. I've met people who were born and raised in Burnaby, while others have come from Africa (e.g., Congo, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Nigeria), Asia (e.g., India, Iran, Korea, Philippines), Europe (e.g., Romania, Russia, Ukraine, UK), the Americas (e.g., Bahamas, Brazil, Colombia, Peru), and Australia.

I was born 3,000 km away in Carbondale, Illinois, and grew up over 4,000 km away near Tampa Bay, Florida. How about you?

In this week's passage, Jesus sends His disciples to go make disciples across the world.

2. Find something all of your group shares (besides Christianity!), such as favorite cuisine, hobby, or habit.

Your group may find a similarity quickly. Or it may take a while. Hopefully, you find a commonality that's fun or interesting. Don't pick something lame like, "we all have more than 10 teeth" or "we prefer weather that's cooler than 50 degrees."

In this week's passage, all of Jesus' disciples share in common the same mission of making disciples.

3. Growing up, what was the hardest command from your parents to follow?

Did you struggle to do your homework or chores every day? If you have siblings, did your parents have to constantly remind you to be nice to them? Perhaps you come from a culture that requires special customs to show respect, like bowing, blessing, or giving titles based on age, and it was hard to comply. Or maybe *everything* your parents told you to do was an uphill battle.

In this week's passage, Jesus tells His disciples to teach all He's commanded, even the hard stuff.

Let's Get Started: Questions to start thinking about the main themes.

4. When you think of Jesus' commands, what first comes to mind?

Is it something your parents had to tell you over and over again? You've heard your mom yell a million times, "Love your brother or sister as yourself!" (Matthew 22:34-40). Perhaps you benefited from a particular teaching, such as when you were a "least of these" (Matthew 25:31-40). You were struggling financially or with loneliness, and someone provided some food/shelter or a listening ear. Maybe you love to follow Jesus' example of serving others because God humbled you in your pride (Matthew 23:8-11).

Don't worry about giving the "right" answer. As long as it's something Jesus commanded us to do, it's right!

5. Which of Jesus' teachings does the world consider "outmoded, superseded, or proven to be untrue"?

How can we demonstrate the beauty and truth of those teachings when they conflict with the world?

Jesus taught His disciples 2,000 years ago. Times have changed! Most of the world has moved from riding donkeys and camels to planes, trains, and automobiles. We've been to outer space and seen the bottom of the ocean. We found the sources of many diseases and split the atom. (We as in humanity, not Willingdon Church, just in case anyone's confused.) The world is nothing like what it was before.

Social and cultural norms have also dramatically shifted. Most of the world doesn't wear robes and tunics. Slavery has been rightfully denounced. Although we have a king, we hold democratic elections to choose our leaders.

An area of conflict is that Jesus teaches that God designed marriage as between one man and one woman for life (Matthew 19:3-9). But our country (and a lot of the world) views marriage and sex as very flexible.¹

We rightly want to promote the biblical view of marriage, but the divorce rate among self-professing Christians is just as abysmal as that of non-Christians.² "Active conservative protestants who attend church regularly" have a lower chance of divorce, but it's still way too high. And we constantly hear about high-profile pastors' affairs coming to light. It's crazy how many Christian leaders make a platform of being pro-biblical marriage but end up betraying their spouses. Can we blame the world when they see that Jesus' idea of marriage isn't any more "successful" than theirs? They ask, "How can Christians say that their idea of marriage is right when their marriages fail as much as ours?"

We should deal with the plank in our eyes before we worry about the speck in theirs (Luke 6:39-42) and deal with the issues within the church first (1 Corinthians 5:9-13). Thankfully, Willingdon has a lot of marriage-related ministries to strengthen our marriages to help them align with God's design and seek His strength (<https://willingdon.org/marriage>). We have Marriage Preparation for couples pursuing marriage, Marriage Enrichment for those already married, and Christian Dating & Marriage for everyone on the spectrum from single to already married. We also have Marriage Counseling with Pastor Isaac for those couples needing help (and we all need help). We even have support for those who have already gone through or are going through a divorce so they can find hope and healing (<https://willingdon.org/divorce-care>).

As parents, let's also demonstrate what a Godly marriage looks like to our kids.

And for those who are single, let's teach them that joy in Jesus can be found in marriage or singleness (<https://www.instagram.com/p/DJAEzvlTAWx/>). Jesus' goal isn't heterosexuality, but holy sexuality (https://youtu.be/mGYr9P_k1qU). There are over a million people who identify as LGBTQ in Canada.³ Have you ever considered what would happen if they came to believe in Jesus? Yes, God may change their sexual orientation so they can have a God-honoring marriage, but chances are that most will have to be single. Can we show them they can find contentment in Christ? Or will they just suffer alone?

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/free-to-be-me/federal-2slgbtqi-plus-action-plan/federal-2slgbtqi-plus-action-plan-2022.html>

² <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-divorce-rate.html>

³ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/12-581-x/2022001/sec6-eng.htm>

Let's Dig In: Questions to discuss the passage and how we can respond.

6. Why did Jesus want His disciples to teach all He "commanded"?

What happens if we don't teach them as commands?

Jesus wants His disciples to teach new disciples to "observe" all His "commands". In today's usage, to observe usually means to watch or commemorate something. When my wife had a C-section, the doctor wanted her to stay in the hospital so they could observe her to make sure she was healthy. We're about to observe Victoria Day, "a celebration of the Sovereign's birthday in Canada, a tradition unique to our country",⁴ by taking a day off for fireworks, picnics, road trips, and sleeping in.

The Greek word for observe is "τηρέω" (tay-reh-o), meaning "to persist in obedience, keep, observe, fulfill, pay attention to, esp. of law and teaching" (BDAG). In a way, it's similar to our common usage. Jesus wants us to look at/watch/pay attention to His commands, but He also wants us to fulfill them through obedience.

He also didn't tell His disciples to observe His "teachings", but "commands". The word for command is "ἐντέλλω" (en-tel-low), meaning "to give or leave instructions, command, order, give orders" (BDAG). Jesus isn't telling them to teach His suggestions, but His instructions/commands/orders. These were not optional. Love God above everything, even your family (Matthew 10:37; 22:37-40)? Not optional. Love your enemies (Matthew 5:34)? Not optional. Forgive people (Matthew 18:21-22)? Not optional.

And since all of Scripture is God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17), that includes husbands sacrificially loving their wives and wives submitting and respecting their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-33). And meeting regularly as the church to encourage each other to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25). And training up for godliness (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Even working enthusiastically at a crummy job with a crummy boss as if you were working for Jesus (Colossians 3:23-25).

Shockingly, around half of Canadian Christians reflect or meditate on the Bible less than once a month.⁵ Over 25% think the Bible is "an important and wise book of fables, history, and moral stories." Around 60% believe that "the scriptures of all major world religions teach essentially the same things." How can people obey Jesus' commands if they never learn them or don't take them seriously?

As Pastor Ray noted, the goal isn't just to know things, but to be transformed into the likeness of Christ (Matthew 10:24-25; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18). And Jesus didn't say that His family are just those who know facts, but people who "do the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 12:49-50).

7. How can it be helpful to let other Christians know which commands you're struggling with?

Share one or two with the group.

If we want to teach Jesus' commands, we have to strive to follow them. Too often, Christians pretend to have it all together. When we do that, we negate Jesus' uniqueness. Only He is perfect. We also negate Jesus' work. If we're able to perfectly follow Jesus' commands, we don't need His help.

⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/important-commemorative-days/victoria-day.html>

⁵ https://biblesociety.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/CBS_Cardus_Report_2023_The_Bible_and_Us.pdf

You go to the hospital because you've got a serious physical issue and you need a doctor's help. You go to the auto shop because your car is busted and you need a mechanic to fix it. You go to Jesus because you have sin and you need His help to cleanse you (1 John 1:9). All of us Christians gather together because we believe we need Jesus' help. And we gather as Life Groups because Jesus often helps us through His followers (1 Peter 4:8-10).

Get Help. When you admit you're not doing well, it opens up ways for you to get help.

Encouragement for Others. When I was a kid, I saw "mature" Christians as *seemingly* perfect. We learned about giants of the faith who *seemed* to always be brave, courageous, faithful, and holy. The pastors and deacons *seemed* to always know what to do or say. So, when I started to pursue ministry, I thought I had to be like that, too.

That mindset led to lots of problems. When I struggled, I had to keep it to myself because I had to *seem* perfect. I didn't know who to talk to. I didn't know how people got from where I was (imperfect) to where they *seemed* to be (perfect).

But by admitting struggles and imperfection, it proclaims the truth that we all fall short of God's standards (Romans 3:23) and only Jesus is perfect (Hebrews 4:15). And we are all on the same journey of imitating Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:1).

One of the ways I serve people here at Willingdon is to share how Jesus has moved me towards Christlikeness. So, by sharing my struggles, I'm able to encourage others going through similar struggles. The wrong mindsets God's fixed, the failures God's forgiven, the ways out that God's provided. As we struggle together, we can do the same for each other.

8. Pastor Ray said, Jesus' question for you and I is not: "What is your past?" It is not: "How much have you studied?" It is not: "How long have you been my disciple?" His question is: "Are you passing on what you have received?"

How does being stuck on the wrong question prevent making disciples?

How does the right question help us make disciples?

Often, we're stuck thinking that our pasts disqualify us from making disciples. We've rebelled against God. We have a rap sheet. We're goners. But our pasts, if anything, should qualify us. The Apostle Paul proudly called himself #1 Sinner, because it demonstrated how merciful Jesus is (1 Timothy 1:15-16). Pastor Vinh isn't ashamed of his past with drugs and prison, because it points to how vast God's grace is. I also share about my many ministry failures, because it points to God's grace to continue loving and growing me.

We also get stuck thinking we don't know enough, as if we must first get the equivalent of a master's degree. Or think that they have to be a disciple for X years, as if there's a probationary period before they can make disciples. Indeed, we are always learning, but we can make disciples as we are being disciplined. The Samaritan woman ran and told her village to come and see Jesus, even though she didn't know His name (John 4:4-42).

By focusing on whether we're passing on what we've received, we're able to take inventory of what Jesus has given us. What He's taught us, how we've experienced Him, and how we've grown in Him. And we can also take inventory of who God's put in our lives to pass it on to.

9. Pastor Ray shared the discipleship cycle: “We make disciples who follow Jesus, who are then baptized into the church family (where we grow together), where we together embrace the mission to multiply disciples. And then the cycle begins all over again.”

Why is it vital to keep the circle going?

If we don’t keep the cycle going, we’re disobeying Jesus’ command. And there’s good reason why Jesus commanded this. Tony Evans describes two types of Christians. Cul-de-sac Christians, where God’s blessings hit a dead end. Conduit Christians, where God’s blessings flow through them onto others. It’s a joy and privilege to pass on what Jesus has passed on to us.

What would happen to our church if we didn’t continue to make disciples?

Imagine if our adults didn’t make disciples of our children (biological/legal children or not). The children wouldn’t become disciples of Jesus. They’d get disciplined by their classmates or social media. I’ve seen and been a part of many churches where that’s happened. As a result, they’ve lost generations.

Imagine if we didn’t go out to make disciples in our neighborhoods or workplaces. Our church wouldn’t expand unless we poached people from other churches.⁶ We’d just be a clique, slowly atrophying.

Imagine if only the pastors made disciples. That would be incredibly slow and wouldn’t scale up. It would also limit Christianity’s reach, because we can’t reach other workplaces, schools, or neighborhoods. We’d be limited to making a few disciples at a time here at Willingdon.

Of course, Jesus can always make disciples without us. But He chooses to allow us to be a part of His plan so we can celebrate and reap the rewards together (John 4:31-38).

10. One of the persecuted pastors wrote:

“Faith in Canada may seem easier. You have freedom. Churches are open. Bibles sit on shelves. Sermons are recorded and shared online. But my brothers and sisters; do you know where the real danger lies? In comfort. In indifference. In a spiritual slumber wrapped in the soft pillow of convenience, quietly stealing away our faith. Let us wake up! Let us awaken to the truth that Christianity is not just a lifestyle or a collection of teachings. Faith is warfare. Faith is shining light into darkness. Faith is lifting the banner of God’s Kingdom in a world that opposes Him.”

How can Jesus’ presence help us overcome the dangers of comfort so we can make disciples?

Comfort is a huge enemy. When the Israelites were in danger, they cried out to God. But when they got comfortable, they forgot about Him (Deuteronomy 8:11-20). The rich young ruler preferred the comfort of His wealth over Jesus (Matthew 19:16-22). The Christians in Laodicea were blinded by their material wealth, so they didn’t see their spiritual poverty (Revelation 3:14-22).

Here are some suggestions.

⁶ <https://churchanswers.com/podcasts/rainer-on-leadership/the-four-ways-almost-every-growing-church-does-it/>

Let's practice contentment in Jesus. Read, study, and learn about how Jesus can satisfy us (Hebrews 13:5-6). Let's spend time with other Christians who don't have much, but still rejoice because they have Him. Let's look at our own hearts to see what we really yearn for. If it's not God, let's confess our sin and ask Him to redirect us.

Let's remember others' needs. We aren't sharing something that "would be nice." Jesus isn't a life hack to make your life 15% easier. Wouldn't we want to share a cure for cancer? Sin is even worse than that. Cancer leads to physical death, which is already a tragedy. But sin leads to the eternal wrath of a just God. So, let's remember that these people desperately need Jesus' presence.

Let's adopt the identity of disciple makers. As of this writing, the Roman Catholic Church has just picked a new pope. In the Catholic system, the primary role of catechesis (teaching the basics of Christianity) falls to the clergy.

This work is intended primarily for those responsible for catechesis: first of all the bishops, as teachers of the faith and pastors of the Church. It is offered to them as an instrument in fulfilling their responsibility of teaching the People of God. Through the bishops, it is addressed to redactors of catechisms, to priests, and to catechists. It will also be useful reading for all other Christian faithful. (CCC III.11)

To them, the fundamentals of the faith are useful reading, not necessary tools everyone needs to have. But Jesus commanded all believers to make disciples. It's not just pastors or leaders.

Let's ask Jesus to show us disciple-making opportunities. Jesus is with us and eager to direct us. We just have to be sensitive to His promptings. We don't need to send Him form #281820: REQUEST FOR DISCIPLES. We can ask Him to show us throughout our day who we can make disciples.