

I. Introduction

- A. What are we trying to do? If Neighborhood Church were a factory, which we are not. We are an organic community of people, bound together by a common faith in Jesus Christ. But, indulge me for a moment, if we were a factory, what would our factory produce?
- B. Jesus, the Lord of the factory, was crystal clear on this:
1. *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.”* Matthew 28:19, 20, NKJV
- C. We call this statement the Great Commission. Jesus gave His followers many commissions; but, there’s only one Great Commission which is the command to make disciples of all the nations. The church should produce disciples.
- D. “What is a disciple?” you ask. How convenient that Jesus also left us with a crystal clear answer to that question.
1. *“A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.”* Luke 6:40, NKJV
- E. *A disciple is a Christian who lives, day by day, a lifestyle just like Jesus’.* You think like Jesus, speak like Jesus, act like Jesus, react like Jesus and you love like Jesus. A disciple is the kind of follower who radiates the life, character and spirit of Jesus Christ in every relationship, every encounter, every place you go. A disciple is a living replica of Christ.
- F. Are you a disciple? How are you doing at it?
- G. This is the task of the church, the commission Jesus handed off in his final words to the church, produce disciples. What the organic community of people, bound together by a common faith in Jesus, should produce is dynamic men, women and students who miraculously replicate the incredible life of Christ.
- H. Are you His disciple today? Were you His disciple yesterday? Will you be His disciple tomorrow?
- I. We are spending a couple of weeks talking about Neighborhood Church. Who we are and what we want to become for the glory of God and for the service of our community.
 - J. Today I thought it would be good to talk about the most important “output” of our collective efforts: mature disciples of Jesus Christ.
- K. Three stages. Three telltale signs. Three secrets of discipleship.

II. Three Stages

- A. Let me start by saying that the Bible uses the word disciple in two distinct ways. The first way is simply as a synonym for Christians. In this sense, if you have received Jesus, then you are a disciple of Jesus automatically (little “d” disciple).
- B. The problem is many people receive Jesus and never quite live up to the standard of being like the Master, being like Christ. Does that mean they’re not saved? No, not at all.
- C. It means that there’s a second sense in which disciple is used and that’s the one I’m focusing on today. A Disciple (big “D” disciple) is a Christian who is faithfully progressing in your life with Jesus.
- D. The Bible outlines three life-stages in your progress:
1. *“I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.”* 1 John 2:12-14, NKJV
- E. Three stages, right? Little children, young men, fathers. Let me talk about each one. We’ll rephrase them a little: spiritual infancy, adolescence and maturity.
1. *Spiritual infancy.* If you have received Jesus as your Savior, the Bible actually compares you to a newborn baby: *“as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,”* 1 Peter 2:2, NKJV. Most people, when first saved, are all fired up. You’re excited about God, Jesus, heaven and forgiveness. I love being with new Christians because you’re real, you’re honest, you’re fun to be around and you’re eager to learn and grow in your new life in Christ.
 - a) *Key feature:* Just starting out as a true follower of Jesus.
 - b) *Key quality:* Dependency. You know so little about Jesus that you have to depend on others to guide you.
 - c) *Key need:* The Bible, so that you can grow up and move to the next level of discipleship which is:
 2. *Spiritual adolescence.* I love our students. Junior high, senior high and college age (I had to look this up in the urban dictionary) are sick, the dope, sweet, awesome, excellent, and bad. The three stages I’m talking about have nothing to do with your physical age. You can be a spiritual adolescent at 70 years old or 20 years old.
 - a) *Key feature:* You’ve been a growing Christian for awhile and you have the basics of the faith nailed down: Who you are in Jesus and how to keep on doing the sit/walk/stand lifestyle.
 - b) *Key quality:* Independence. You can live faithfully for Jesus without somebody taking you by the hand and showing you how all the time.

- c) *Key need:* Consistency. A spiritual adolescent is flaky. You're on fire for Jesus on Wednesday and on Thursday, you're smoking pot, or having sex with your girlfriend or boyfriend, or being a control-freak with somebody you know. Why consistency? Because discipleship is all about Jesus flowing through EVERY PART OF YOUR LIFE.
- d) Remember when we talked about the paint can? In case you weren't here, we compared spiritual growth to the way paint is mixed at a hardware store. You start with a white, bland base. The can is opened and color is squirted in and the can is shaken for a very long time. Why? So the color gets mixed through every part of the can and isn't streaky.
- e) I've followed some of you around and you know what your problem is? You're streaky.
- f) When you got saved, God opened your lid and shot in Jesus. Now, He's shaking you and shaking you until Jesus gets mixed all through you. You can live for Jesus—you're just not consistent.
- (1) All through your financial life, Jesus needs to color your money.
 - (2) Your church life, the way you interact with fellow Christians and your leaders and pastors—Jesus needs to fully color you so others are not stuck dealing with YOU (which would be miserable) but with Christ in you, which would be awesome.
 - (3) Your sex life. Jesus needs to color your sex life so you are totally pure. So you're not flirting with disaster or messing with somebody else's son or daughter and not disrespecting your own wife or husband through pornography or affairs.
 - (4) Your job, your marriage, your parenting, your dating.
 - (5) Your integrity and character.
 - (6) Streaky in how you handle a crisis. Sometimes you shine for Jesus and other times you crash and burn. You need consistency.
 - (7) Your habits. If you're a Christian and you get drunk, you're streaky. If you're doing drugs or pot, you're streaky. You are inconsistent.
- g) You've shut Jesus out of parts of your life and, as long as you do, your spiritual growth will be totally STALLED. You will not become a faithful disciple. Actually, you'll start regressing and going backward, back to infancy.
- h) If God had hair to pull out, the spiritual adolescent would make him pull out big fistfuls. Spiritual adolescents drive pastors crazy too, because we can't count on you for the long haul. You're on fire for a while and then you fizzle out and we didn't see it coming.
- i) Your biggest need is consistency, so you will open up the doors to every part of your life to the influence, power and transforming grace of Jesus, who lives in you just waiting to make you unstreaky.
3. *Spiritual maturity.*
- a) The key verse is this: *"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect [mature] in Christ Jesus."* Colossians 1:27, 28, NKJV
 - b) This is the mission of the church: To present every person mature in Christ Jesus.
 - c) Again, this has nothing to do with your physical age. It doesn't matter if you are seventeen or seventy-seven, you can be in spiritual infancy, adolescence or maturity. In fact, Timothy was a very young adult when he was held up as an example of spiritual maturity in the Bible.
 - (1) *Key Feature:* You've walked with Jesus in good times and bad times and are settled in your love for Him and for others. You love the meat of the Word and you prove its reality in your everyday life. You're a veteran with the Bible, with prayer and with Jesus. You have the kind of wisdom that other people notice and respect. This is not about your age, but about your maturity in Christ. You are a velvet fist, a powerful force for God in the world, but with a tenderness that people can sense.
 - (2) *Key Quality:* Reproduction. You are the kind of person who mentors others in their life with Jesus. You're a spiritual father or mother. You have eyes to see the needs around you. You actually pray for people and encourage them toward Jesus.
 - (3) *Key Need:* Keeping on. Keep passing the tests of life. Keep loving Jesus. Keep displaying Jesus. Keep resting in Jesus.
4. Spiritual infancy, adolescence and maturity. How far has your journey brought you? What kind of disciple are you?
5. Now, before you answer that, let me toss in one monumental complication. There is one more category of disciple. The disciple of Jesus Christ, indwelt by the living God, born again, regenerate, sins forgiven, bound for heaven, who has left the continuum of discipleship and settled into:

III. Protracted Spiritual Infancy

- A. *Protracted Spiritual Infancy: P.S.I.* This is a HUGE problem in churches. The Bible talks about it in a couple of places. Now, listen up. There's this freaky thing that happens when I preach: *The people who really need to hear what I say don't get that I'm talking to you.* It's like what I say goes right over your head because you're sure I'm talking about the guy three rows up and two seats over. Now, I don't know if YOU personally are stuck in P.S.I. but, for the next four minutes, open your heart to the possibility that God wants to convict you on this today. Open your heart to the Holy Spirit. I don't care if you like me or don't like me, like our church or don't like our church. I do care immensely that you're not stuck in protracted spiritual infancy, because it is not pleasing to God and it will drag our church backward. So, do yourself a favor and do something pleasing to God. Assume this applies directly to you unless, after you hear me out, you have the sure witness of the Holy Spirit that it does not.
- B. What is P.S.I.? It is described in the Bible:
1. *"Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to mature Christians. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk and not with solid food, because you couldn't handle anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, for you are still controlled by your own sinful desires. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your own desires? You are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord."* 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, NLT
 2. *"You have been Christians a long time now, and you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things a beginner must learn about the Scriptures. You are like babies who drink only milk and cannot eat solid food. And a person who is living on milk isn't very far along in the Christian life and doesn't know much about doing what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who have trained themselves to recognize the difference between right and wrong and then do what is right."* Hebrews 5:12-14, NLT
- C. This is the Word of the Lord. It is a God-sent kick in the seat of the pants if you are stalled in your spiritual growth. Listen carefully. At this moment, I do not care how active you are in church. I do not care how long you have been a Christian. I do not care how much money you give our church or any other ministry. I do not care how much other people look up to you or how many friends you have in church that you've fooled. I do not care if you are a pastor, a Bible school graduate, a professor or a sweet, nice person. I do not care if you've been involved in church, in leadership, or an elder for the last sixty years. I don't care if you're young and just starting out.
- D. All I care about is this: *Are you a Christian who has refused to grow up in the Lord and has settled for playing the church-game?*
- E. You ask, how do I know if I have P.S.I.?
1. *Immature reactions when you're crossed.* Listen, if you really want to know a person don't look at their actions, look at their reactions. If you react like a baby, then you are a baby.
 2. *Emotionally unpredictable.* It's like you're a split personality and I can't tell if I'm going to meet with the nice you or the creepy you. Of all the e-mail, letters and phone calls I get, the vast majority (like 98%) is positive. Our church is really positive, totally on board with our vision and I feel so supported it's absolutely fantastic. But there's a handful of people, I mean like a dozen and I'm not naming names, I just don't know when I see your name if I'm getting the unadorned you or Christ in you. You are unpredictable and that makes you very, very creepy and immature.
 3. *You pick fights.* P.S.I. Christians are always fighting somebody over something. You polarize people and pull them apart. You won't speak to your mother and your kids are not speaking to you. You're ticked off at the Republicans or the Democrats. You're angry in traffic. Your poor family walks on eggshells around you.
 4. *Self-centered.* A P.S.I. Christian has a single mantra: What I like is good, what I don't like is bad, and if you disagree with me you're bad, too. You become controlling and imperative and you have never learned how to disagree agreeably. That is not a personality trait, it is a character defect and there is no excuse for it. It is a hallmark of protracted spiritual infancy.
 5. *Hypersensitive.* You cherish your right to be wounded and when you are wounded, you reserve your right to let everybody know who wounded you and how they wounded you and how we should all gang up on them for wounding you.
 6. *Insensitive to Evil.* You laugh at stuff that Jesus wouldn't laugh at. You do stuff that Jesus wouldn't do and make the excuse, we're under grace, right? It's okay.
 7. *A Critical Spirit.* Listen to the Word of God: *"for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?"* 1 Corinthians 3:3, NKJV. I'm begging you to consider this. You may be very active in missions, in small groups, in giving, in church activity; but, if you are causing strife of any kind, if you are a part of quarrels or gossip, if you display any kind of critical spirit, you have arrested spiritual development. You're going backward. You are a backslider. You are moved into protracted spiritual infancy.
 8. *No fruit.* By fruit, I mean a bunch of people who are interested in Jesus today because of your lifestyle, because you have incarnated Jesus and you have communicated Jesus and now you are investigating Jesus. Where's the fruit? Show me the fruit. Name the names.
- F. Open your heart to God's Word today. This is so important. Why? Because our church exists to make

disciples and a lot of you think you've already got it figured out. God sent me here, to this place in this time, to serve up the Word of God as lovingly and as directly as I can. To get into your face and tell you, **YOU DO NOT HAVE IT FIGURED OUT**. You are not living a holy life. You are not living a Christ-in you life. You are not living a sit/walk/stand life. You are streaky. You are immature.

- G. Unless you grow up, you will hold back our whole church.
- H. What do you need? You need to: a) Repent. Tell God you've blown it. Then you need to: b) Confess. Tell God specifically **HOW** you've blown it. Name names and name your sins to God and, c) Humble yourself and get back on a path toward growth. Get out of ministry if you have to and get back into the word, back into a prayer life, back into Christ living through you and let him guide your steps.

IV. How to Grow Up

- A. You may ask, "Bill, how do I grow up?" It's not complicated and we'll be giving you some amazing, practical tools on how to do this in a few weeks. It's simple:
 - 1. Time with your Bible, every day.
 - 2. Time in prayer, every day.
 - 3. Time with fellow disciples who lift you up, every week.
 - 4. Actively serving Jesus, by his strength, as he leads.
- B. But the biggest thing of all—**FAITH** in the power of Jesus to make it all happen every single moment of every single day.

V. Conclusion

- A. What kind of disciple are you today? Spiritual infancy, spiritual adolescence, spiritual maturity or the dreaded protracted spiritual infancy? Where do you find yourself? Between you and God. It's time for brutal honesty.
- B. The great thing is this, no matter where you find yourself, God loves you more than you can imagine today. All of the power of Jesus Christ is ready to bring you to the next level.
- C. Even if you're not on this chart, even if you don't belong to Jesus yet, God loves you, too. You can receive Him today.
- D. Jesus told us to go out and make disciples. You can't help us unless you're a growing disciple. We want you to be involved, we want you at Neighborhood Church. But, we have an agenda. We will not let you stay in protracted spiritual infancy. You have to grow or you'll drag us down. We won't let that happen. We love God too much. We love the people in Redding, in Weaverville, in Shasta County, in Trinity County and all over the world on the internet. We love you too much to let anybody hinder us from sharing the best news about the best person the world has ever known—the message of a Savior named Jesus who bled and died and rose again to redeem for himself a race of true-hearted, wholehearted disciples.
- E. We are embarking on some big steps that, unless our hearts are right, we're going to mess up big time.
- F. **BUT**, if our hearts are right with God, if we are true disciples, growing, maturing, serving, loving Jesus, if Jesus is living through us, then we can't lose. This next year, as tough and crazy as it might be, will be the most incredible time as we see hundreds of people come to Jesus and our church won't be able to hold the people who want what we have found in our precious Savior who loved us and gave Himself up for us.
- G. Our mission is to Mobilize an Army to Fulfill the Great Commission. We want you. Please. Lovingly, I say to you: Lead, follow or get out of the way.