Sermon Series: The Four Building Blocks of Our Faith
Sermon Title: The Making of a Disciple

Text: **Acts 17:10-15 -- As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away (from Thessalonica) to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. 12 Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. 13 When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. 14 The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. 15 The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible**. **Matthew 28:18-20 – 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."**

Opening: Some time ago we began a new preaching series called ***The Four Building Blocks of Our Faith***. We are now in our sixth message in discovering our strategy for making disciples of Christ – TO WORSHIP, GROW, SERVE, AND SHARE. **I'm very encouraged so far by your response and I want you to know that our staff are fully onboard and intentionally planning with these four ministry values in mind. Together, as we follow this plan, we will trust God to work powerfully among us along the way.** It pays to remember that THOSE WHO FAIL TO PLAN, PLAN TO FAIL.

According to pastor and author **John Ortberg**, a tongue-in-cheek manual for the **Peace Corps Volunteers head for South America** offers advice on planning for a chance encounter with an anaconda, the largest of all snakes. This is the list of instructions under the heading, "**What to Do If Attacked by an Anaconda**": (**1**) If you're attached by an anaconda, do not run; the snake is faster than you are; (**2**) Lie flat on the ground; (**3**) Put your arms tight at your sides and your legs tight against one another; (**4**) The snake will begin to climb over your body; (**5**) Do not panic; (**6**) The snake will begin to swallow you feet first; (**7**) Step will six will take a

long time; (**8**) After a while, slowly and with as little movement as possible, reach down, take your knife, and very gently slide it into the snake's mouth. Then suddenly sever the snake's head; (**9**) Be sure your knife is sharp; (**10**) Be sure you have your knife. **No doubt about it! It's always good to have a plan**!

In **Acts chapter sixteen and seventeen**, we read that the Apostle Paul had a plan for Timothy whom he enlisted to join him on his second missionary journey. Timothy signed on and the two, along with a man named Silas, eventually landed in **Philippi**. After some eventful ministry to a woman named **Lydia (a seller of purple fabric)**, **an unnamed slave girl** **a jailer** **and his family**, they proceeded to **Thessalonica** where the three men reaped some **spiritual fruit**, and some **increasing opposition from the Jews** who lived there. In fact, Paul's life was threatened, so the brothers sent them on to **Berea**. Luke describes the Jews living there as more noble than those in **Thessalonica** because they examined the Scriptures daily to see if the teachings of Paul, Timothy and Silas were true. **When many believed the Gospel -- after a diligent study of the Word -- the apostle instructed Timothy and Silas to remain there while he continued his second missionary journey, traveling to Athens**.

Now, let's stop there because this passage leads us to a couple of questions: (**1**) ***Why did Paul instruct them to remain in Berea?*** And (**2**) ***What were they tasked with that was so important?*** The Bible doesn't specifically say, but it is not hard to imagine WAHT they had been assigned to do. **Timothy and Silas were expected to ground these new believers in the Christian faith**. Perhaps Paul used similar words to those later written to Timothy as he ministered to believers in **Ephesus** in **2 Timothy 2:2 … And the things which you heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also**. **Let's think about these words for a few moments**. Paul was instructing his TRUE SON IN THE FAITH to discipline and train new believers so that they could be adequately equipped to advance the cause of Christ. This was no small endeavor! In the verses that follow **2 Timothy 2:2**, **Paul compares the kind of discipline needed by a disciple of Christ to a SOLDIER who is so committed to his commanding officer that he refuses to be involved in civilian affairs and an ATHLETE who observes very strict rules of training to compete against others in the Isthmian or Olympic games** (**2 Timothy 2:4-5**).

This same passage from **2 Timothy** is what has motivated me for nearly four decades to serve the Lord by making disciples of Christ. Perhaps you remember that before Jesus ascended to heaven, this is what He commissioned His followers to do. I'm sure you're familiar with His words as they're found in **Matthew 28:18-20 -- 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."**

Over the years and through the careful study of Scripture, the mentorship of other more mature believers, hundreds of spiritual conversations, and a lot of trial and error, God has led me to an understanding of the process involved in growing mature, multiplying believers in the local church. This morning, I want to share with you what I've learned with the hope that you will honestly evaluate where you're at in this process and what your next steps are so that you can multiply your faith into the lives of others. That is, after all, half of our vision as a church – to make multiplying disciples. **In my opinion, this kind of grand endeavor requires the disciple of Christ to address at least five priorities**. ***Here they are for your consideration***.

PRIORITY #1 – ADDRESSES WHO WE HANG WITH. *Believers mature when we're supported by a like-minded community*. As New Testament Christians, we are told to **love** one another, **be devoted** to one another, **live in harmony with** one another, **accept** one another, **instruct** one another, **agree with** one another, **serve** one another, **bear with** one another, **be kind and compassionate toward** one another, **submit to** one another, **admonish** one another, **encourage** one another, **show hospitality to** one another and **clothe ourselves with humility toward** one another. I probably missed a couple, but I think you get the idea. The question is, "**How can we do these things unless we're living in community with believers who are as committed to us as we are to them**?"

True fellowship with the body of Christ is one of God's greatest gifts to the church. Sharing life together, ministering to one another, and inspiring a brother or sister in Christ to step out in faith is about as good it gets. Unfortunately, there are some who would prefer for reasons of their own to isolate themselves from the rest of the body. If you're one of them, I beg you to reconsider**. When Satan led Adam**

and Eve to rebel against God and eat the forbidden fruit, the result was isolation – they hid from each other and God. This is what the Devil wanted, not God. **Christ has come to DESTROY the works of the Devil** (**1 John 3:8 --The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work**) **and to bring us together in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace** (**Ephesians 4:3 - Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace**). ***This means that we need each other desperately***! (**Review: Disciples of Christ must address these five priorities: (1) who we hang with.)**

PRIORITY #2 – ADDRESSES WHAT WE'RE LEARNING. ***Believers mature when we're fed a consistent diet of God's Word*** (**1 Peter 2:2 – Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk (of the Word), that by it you may grow up to salvation**). **Maturity and the Bible go hand in hand**. That's why Paul told Timothy … **the things which you have heard from me, these entrust to faithful men**. What were THE THINGS He was talking about? The holy Scriptures, of course! The Bible is able to make us wise to salvation. It is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work**.** ***The Bible convicts*** (**it judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart – Hebrews 4:12**), ***guides*** (**it is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path – Psalm 119:105**), ***strengthens*** (**Psalm 119:28 -- My life dissolves and weeps itself away for heaviness; raise me up and strengthen me according to [the promises of] Your word – AMP) *and purifies us*** (**Thy word I have hid in my heart that I may not sin against Thee -- Psalm 119:11**). **We can ill afford to do without it for even a day**.

Imagine the inconvenience and even the awfulness of being declared dead by the United States Government though you're alive. Consider this true story. In August of 2010, communications specialist Judy Rivers went to her local bank to open a new account. As the clerk input Rivers' personal information, everything seemed to be going smoothly, but then the woman behind the desk stopped abruptly and frowned. "**That's odd**," she said. "**There seems to be an issue regarding your Social Security number**." With a skeptical glance, the employee rose and disappeared into the back room. Several minutes later, Rivers was greeted by the branch manager. "**Ma'am**," the woman said while brandishing a folded piece of paper, "**your Social Security number was deactivated in 2008 due to death**." Incredulous, Rivers rose from her chair. "**You're trying to tell me that I've been**

dead for two years," she stammered, "**and no one bothered to tell me**?" Unfortunately, Rivers is not alone in her plight. It is estimated that every year, some 12,200 U. S. citizens are declared dead by the Social Security Administration due to "**KEYSTROKE ERRORS**." Those affected become like the walking dead, unable to secure a job, make financial transactions, file taxes (yeah), or even visit the doctor. Sometimes, for months on end, these people must endure the nightmare of convincing a large bureaucracy that they haven't yet bit the dust.

It's not just people lost in the Social Security system who are the walking dead. Unfortunately, there are some Christians who, though spiritually alive, live like dead people because they have neglected **the Word of Life**. As a result, the quality of their lives is no different than those described in **Ephesians 2:1** as "**dead in their trespasses and sins**." (**Review: Disciples of Christ must address these five priorities: (1) who we hang with; (2) what we're learning**.)

PRIORITY #3 – ADDRESSES HOW WE'RE CHANGING: *Believers mature when we make ourselves accountable to others* (**Proverbs 27:17 -- Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another**). Here's how one commentator explains the meaning of this verse. **The (spiritual) intercourse of man with man operates in the way of SHARPENING THE MANNER AND FORMING THE HABITS AND CHARACTER OF BOTH.** This describes an accountable relationship between two people, the purpose of which, is to help someone reach a desired goal. ***Accountability is a form of encouragement***. When it comes to our spiritual lives, we need an infusion of courage from others if we're to grow in holiness. **And let's be clear … that is what God wants for us**. We are called to be conformed to the image of His Son (See **Romans 8:29**) … to bear Christ's likeness to others. **I have found that accountability works best when the person who wants to change in a specific area requests it**. This is how it works for my accountability partner and me. We identify areas of our lives that need to change, figure out how to phrase a question that will measure change, and then give permission to ask it weekly. For example, if we're struggling with a secret sin, a question we might want others to ask us is … ***are you concealing any sinful behavior because you don't want to give it up***? It takes some guts to ask that question AND answer it. But if you're battling an addiction to a specific sin, and you know it's destroying you from the inside out, you better come up with the courage necessary to address it. **THIS IS HOW WE GROW IN HOLINESS … BY INVITING OTHERS TO KNOW THE DARK SECRETS OF**

OUR LIVES AND HELP US TO OVERCOME THEM. (**Review: Disciples of Christ must address these five priorities: (1) who we hang with; (2) what we're learning; (3) how we're changing**.)

PRIORITY #4 – ADDRESSES WHERE WE'RE GOING. ***Believers mature when we're engaged in the ministry of multiplication***. This means two things: **(1)** developing our gifts and talents to effectively minister to the body of Christ for the common good, and **(2)** sharing our faith with those who are still separated from God and groping about trying to find meaning in life apart from Him. **We are called to minister both to believers and unbelievers.** For the former to happen we must discover our spiritual gifts and abilities and put them to good use doing everything we can to assist others in growing to maturity. As for outreach, we have to be **trained**, **equipped** and **encouraged** to build bridges (*not walls*) to outsiders. This is a race that we run together and that will not end until the Lord calls us home.

Any Christian who elects to sit it out and only wants to enjoy spiritual food for himself is a biblical departure from what is normal and expected. Sadly, these people remind me of a man-eating plant from the musical "**the Little Shop of Horrors**." It had no value or desire to bless others, but persistently cried out, "**Feed me. Feed me**." This is not how God intends for His children to live. Christ says, "**It is more blessed to give than receive**." I have noticed that believers who grasp this simple principle and set out on a course to give their lives away for the sake of Christ and others are the ones who find joy and satisfaction. (**Review: Disciples of Christ must address these five priorities: (1) who we hang with; (2) what we're learning; (3) how we're changing; (4) where we're going**.)

PRIORITY #5 – ADDRESSES HOW WE'RE GROWING. ***Believers mature when we're covered by one another's prayers*** (**James 5:16 – Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed**). The ministry of prayer unleashes the power of God to work in our lives and world. Check out some of the prayers that the Apostle Paul prayed for the churches to whom he wrote. He labored in prayer over the people because Paul knew that unless the Lord did something supernatural in their lives, his labor would be in vain. Jesus always assumed we would pray … three times in **Matthew 6** He says, "**And when you pray** … " and then, "**This then is how you should pray** …" The famous evangelist **John Wesley** spent two hours a day in prayer. He said, "**God does nothing except in**

response to believing prayer." We can work all we want, but until we ask the Lord to work on our behalf, little will come of it.

So, there you have it. Five priorities that every disciple of Christ must address if he wants to grow in his faith: (1) WHO we hang with; (2) WHAT we're learning; (3) HOW we're changing. (**4) WHERE we're going; and (5) WHY we're growing. *Here are three questions that might help you to zero in on which spiritual priority you need to pursue most at this time in your life*.**

- ***(THINK) How many of these five priorities are missing from your faith journey***? (COMMUNITY? THE WORD? ACCOUNTABILITY? MULTIPLICATION? PRAYER?) Maybe a better way to phrase this question is … **which ones are you content to live without?** My hope is that you want all five to play an important part in your life.
- ***(ASK) With whom will you personally connect to encourage each other in your faith journeys?*** Did you ever notice that the Lord almost always sent the disciples out in pairs to engage in ministry? He did this for a reason. He knows that two are better than one. The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us why: **When one falls down another is there to lift him up, but woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up -- Ecclesiastes 4:9-10**. **The survival rate of believers who are attempting to plunder Satan's domain increases dramatically when they're linked with other believers.** But be on notice: The secret here is to connect with others who share the same journey, the same vision, and mission.
- ***(DO) What changes must you embrace to grow in your faith journey***? Remember … fail to plan and you plan to fail. I suspect that some of us need to reprioritize how we're going to allocate our time. **God won't give you more of it. We all have the same amount (168 hours per week).** We must learn to be better stewards of our time, living wisely by making the most of it because we live in evil times, our world being under the control and dominion of the Evil One (**Ephesians 5:15-16; 1 John 5:19**).

Conclusion: The path that a disciple of Christ walks is not the easiest one to travel. It requires self-discipline, hard work, submission and considerable risk-taking. But don't be dissuaded from the journey. Because you'll be serving the Lord and working for an eternal cause, it will all be worth it. **Dr. John Stott preached at my**

former church on two occasions. In 2005 TIME magazine listed him as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. As one of the most important spokesmen for Christianity in the last fifty years his final bit of advice to his assistant before he died in 2011 must be given its deserved weight. Here's what he said: "***Do the hard thing***." John Stott believed that choosing the easy trail, the road most taken, and the path of least resistance can only end in mediocrity. **Today I ask you to do the hard (and great) thing**. As we close, I offer you a moment to evaluate your own spiritual journey and to figure out what your next step is in becoming a multiplying disciple of Christ. Are you disconnected from the body of Christ? **Get connected.** Are you living on a starvation diet when it comes to the Word of God? **Join a study**. Are you hiding from others and avoiding accountability? **Risk transparency**. Are you sitting on your gifts and talents, or worse yet, the good news of the Gospel and keeping it all for yourself? **Engage in ministry**. Are you stagnant in your faith and need some Holy Spirit power? **Start praying**. Please take a few moments now and ask the Lord to change your priorities.