

LET JESUS DISCIPLE YOU

Make Disciples

One command, three marks, and a job you cannot do alone

SPEAKER	Keith Atkinson
DATE	Sunday, August 23, 2026
PASSAGES	Matthew 28; Mark 3; John 15; Ephesians 2; Ephesians 4; Acts 8
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:13:30 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

In the Great Commission there is one imperative — *make disciples*. Everything else hangs off it. And a disciple, on Jesus' own terms, is someone who **is with him, is becoming like him, and does the things he did**. It is a response to grace, powered by grace, and it cannot be done alone.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ “Go” in Matthew 28:19 is a participle — “as you go.” The single command is *make disciples*.
- ◆ Jesus called “little faiths.” If you feel unqualified, you are in exactly the right company.
- ◆ Discipleship is never earning, but there is always effort. Grace supplies the effort.
- ◆ Being “disciple adjacent” is the common failure — lots of good activity, few actual disciples.
- ◆ A disciple is with Jesus, becomes like Jesus, does the works of Jesus. All three, in that order.
- ◆ Most of discipleship happens in ordinary life. Jesus spent thirty anonymous years before three public ones.
- ◆ You cannot become like Jesus by yourself. The body of Christ is not a metaphor.

► 1:13:30

Keith began not with an outline but with three stories, because he wanted the room to understand that everything he was about to say was something he had needed himself.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.”

PSALM 19:14 ↗

Three stories

► 1:15:11

He came to faith at six years old at a David Wilkerson meeting at Hyde Park Baptist. Wanting to take it seriously, he got a Big Chief tablet and set out to copy the entire King James Bible by hand. He made it to Genesis 1:30.

► 1:16:22

At fifteen, in a moment he still can't explain away, he heard the Lord say his name: *“Keith, come home.”* And six months later, reading before Sunday school, he ran into the verses that decided the rest of his life:

► 1:19:07

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

MATTHEW 16:24–26 ↗

His reaction was Peter's in the boat — “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” He felt entirely unqualified. Which, he pointed out, is precisely the qualification.

Jesus calls “little faiths”

► 1:20:54

Keith reached for the Groucho Marx line about never wanting to join a club that would have him as a member — and then noted that Jesus' club is exactly that club. Jesus nicknamed the twelve *oligopistoi*, “little faiths” (Matthew 8:26). He called a tax collector off his booth. The scandal of the gospel is who gets invited.

Grace-filled discipleship

► 1:22:42

Keith used Spurgeon's picture of a broken-down steamship being towed into harbour. The ship is *safe* the moment the tow line is attached — but it is not yet *sound*. Salvation and repair are two different things, and the second one takes the rest of your life.

“Discipleship is both a response to grace and empowered by grace. There is never any earning, but there is always effort.”

He backed that with Peter's closing exhortation to

“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” and Paul's careful self-description:

“I worked harder than any of them — though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me”, and “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Dallas Willard's line landed the point: *disciples burn grace like a 747 burns fuel at takeoff*.

The text — and the one command in it

► 1:25:19

Keith noted how fast Matthew moves. The resurrection appearances get a handful of verses — the two Marys, the angel, “tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee” — and then the gospel ends here, because this is what Matthew has been driving at the whole time. He had the congregation stand and read it aloud together:

► 1:26:30

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:18-20 ↗

► 1:27:54

The grammar matters. “Go” is a participle — *as you are going*. So are “baptizing” and “teaching.” There is one imperative verb in the sentence: **make disciples**, of all the *ethnē*, all the peoples. Everything else describes how.

“Disciple adjacent”

► 1:28:30

This was the phrase Keith wanted people to leave with. He told the story of friends — Robin and Steve Smith — who spent years on the mission field in India, and quoted from Robin’s book *Dear Mom and Dad: An Adventure in Obedience*. Her own summary of their work was devastating and honest: *Sure, we’d obeyed the command to go — but how many disciples had we made? Had we taught people to obey Jesus, or had we only taught them about him?*

Disciple-making, he said, is intentional. It is not what happens by accident in the wake of a busy ministry. If you don’t decide to do it, you will not do it.

All authority — spent on twelve people

► 1:32:01

Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, and what he does with it is invest three years in a dozen ordinary men. Keith recalled asking Dan Davis, in Hope’s early days, what the most important thing he did was. The answer wasn’t preaching. It was: *I invest in Jason Knox and Jack Dorman*.

He also pushed on “baptizing.” The word means immersion — being plunged into the life of the Father, Son and Spirit. The goal was never, in his words, just getting people wet.

So what is a disciple? Three marks

► 1:36:54

1. A disciple is *with* Jesus

► 1:39:25

“And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach.”

MARK 3:14 ↗

Before sending, being with. That is the order, and Keith said we reverse it constantly. Eternal life is defined the same way — “that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” — knowing a person, not possessing a fact.

► 1:43:11

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

JOHN 15:4-5 ↗

Keith joked that Jesus is “the true oxygen mask” — put yours on first, not out of selfishness but because you have nothing to give from an empty tank. He read on through John 15:7-11, where abiding produces answered prayer, obedience, and joy made full — and noted that the fruit test in Matthew 7:16-20 is a diagnostic, not a threat. Everything, he said, flows out of relationship:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 ↗ (NIV)

2. A disciple *becomes like* Jesus

► 1:43:49

“Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

1 JOHN 2:6 ↗

Peter says the same: Christ left us an example, that we might follow in his steps. And Paul names the destination explicitly — the “good” that all things work toward is a person:

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

ROMANS 8:28–29 ↗

Keith read C.S. Lewis from *Mere Christianity*: the Church exists for nothing else but to draw people into Christ, to make them little Christs — and if it isn’t doing that, then all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. He added a line from Lee Adams that he keeps returning to: “*I want to be so transformed by Jesus that obedience seems like relief.*” That is the new covenant working as advertised — the law written on the heart.

3. A disciple *does the works of Jesus*

► 1:49:13

“For by grace you have been saved through faith... For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

EPHESIANS 2:8–10 ↗

Keith’s emphasis: *we are the workmanship*. We are the work first, before we ever do any work. And then, staggeringly:

“Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”

JOHN 14:12 ↗

He was careful with that one: the “he” is a plural “whoever” — it is the body of Christ across two thousand years, not a promise that you individually will outdo Jesus. His picture for it: being a fan of the Astros is one thing; with Jesus, you actually get to play.

Where discipleship actually happens

► 1:51:46

Mostly, Keith said, in ordinary life. Jesus spent about thirty anonymous years to three public ones — “and Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” covers roughly two

decades in a single sentence. Your marriage is discipleship. Your job is discipleship. Your neighbours are discipleship. “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

You cannot do this alone

► 1:53:46

Keith told the last story quietly. In his late thirties he had a dream: he was climbing a mountain, exhausted, saying to himself *I want to be like Jesus, but I will never be like him*. And then people began stepping out of the shadows along the path, saying: we’ll be like Jesus *with* you. We’re here for you, Keith.

“From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

EPHESIANS 4:16 ↗ — HIS FAVOURITE VERSE ON THIS

“*The body of Christ is not a metaphor. It’s a reality.*”

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

How the gospel actually spread

► 1:56:59

Keith closed at the martyrdom of Stephen and the scattering that followed:

“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.”

ACTS 8:4 ↗; SEE ALSO ACTS 8:1–4 ↗

Not the apostles — the ordinary believers running for their lives. He cited historian Michael Green’s estimate that something like eighty percent of the early church’s growth came through unnamed, unofficial people, then asked for a show of hands: who came to faith through a friend or family member rather than a preacher? Most of the room.

His last word was Jesus’ own assignment, and a caution about where we look for rescue:

“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”

MATTHEW 5:13-14 ↗

► 1:59:27

“The answer to the deep needs of our society is not going to come from Washington, D.C.”

And a closing instruction, in the old wording he prefers: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Psalm 19:14
- Matthew 16:24–26
- Luke 5:8
- Matthew 8:26
- Matthew 9:9
- 2 Peter 3:18
- 1 Corinthians 15:10
- Galatians 2:20
- Matthew 28:1–10
- Matthew 28:18–20
- Colossians 3:3
- Colossians 1:13
- Matthew 4:17
- Matthew 13:44–46
- Mark 3:14
- John 17:3
- John 15:4–5
- John 15:7–11
- Matthew 7:16–20
- Philippians 4:6–7 (NIV)
- 1 John 2:6
- 1 Peter 2:21
- Romans 8:28–29
- Jeremiah 31:33–34
- Ephesians 2:8–10
- John 14:12
- Luke 2:52
- 1 Corinthians 10:31
- Ephesians 4:16
- 1 Corinthians 12:27
- Acts 8:1–4
- Matthew 5:13–14
- 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (KJV)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Where in your life are you “disciple adjacent” — busy with good things, but not actually making disciples?
2. Of the three marks — with Jesus, like Jesus, doing what Jesus did — which is strongest in you right now, and which is thinnest?
3. Keith said discipleship is never earning but always effort. Which half do you tend to lose?
4. Who came out of the shadows for you? Whose path could you step onto?
5. Name one person you could be intentional with this autumn — not a programme, a person.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Keith Atkinson came to Christ at six years old, at a David Wilkerson meeting in Austin that his father took him to at Hyde Park Baptist Church; he ran forward at the invitation and was baptised, then went home and tried to copy out the whole King James Bible on a Big Chief tablet. He got as far as Genesis 1:30. At fifteen, having drifted, he heard the Lord say “Keith, come home,” and came back for good. He began this message by insisting that the Holy Spirit, not the preacher, is the teacher in the room.

THE SERIES

Let Jesus Disciple You — working through the commands of Jesus.

- Aug 9 — Repent and Believe
- Aug 16 — Fasting
- Aug 23 — Make Disciples (you are here)
- Aug 30 — Follow Me

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1NMmnMEjds&t=4410s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.