

Twelve Words Disciple Makers Love
Kenwood Baptist Church Summer Sermon Series
Pastor David Palmer
June 7, 2026

TEXT: Matthew 5:1-10



Good morning, Beloved. This Sunday starts our summer series called "12 Words Disciple Makers Love." As we grow in Christ, we will discover that the Bible is filled with words. Have you noticed that? Some Bibles have a few maps in the back, but most of God's Word to us is words. As we learn to follow Jesus, it requires us to acquire some new vocabulary. Just as when you start to learn anything and you find that there are new terms to discover, when you read God's Word, you will find that there are words in God's Word that seem familiar, and yet those words are used in ways that are new and different. So this summer, as we grow in our commitment to disciple making, we are going to dig into twelve words that disciple makers love. Words like "disciple," "faith," "salvation." What do we mean by those? Words like "gospel" or "grace." Words like "holy" or "humility."

Each week, we are going to explore one of these words in an important passage because, as my former teacher, Dr. Moisés Silva, taught me, words don't have meanings on their own. Words have meaning in a particular context. You can always tell a preacher who has had just enough Greek to be dangerous. He will stand up and say things like, "the Greek word means ..." and then have a whole theology based on one word. That is not how words work. That is not how

linguistics is practiced. Words don't carry an infinite number of meanings that are simply available. Words mean something in a sentence. Words mean something in a passage.

So, we will not be talking about the meaning of words or just going through the dictionary. We are going to be looking at a key passage each week and then we will offer a working definition of these words. The point of this is to support a culture of disciple making. A number of years ago our elders discerned that, as a congregation, our focus should be what Jesus told us to do: *"Go and make disciples of all nations."* Our greatest responsibility is to keep that focus in view. This shift into the priority of disciple making has brought such joy to my own life and has brought fruit in our church life, just going back to seeing what Jesus is really telling us to do. Disciple making is marked by a real conversion. It is celebrated with a public confession of faith in baptism. Disciple making grows as people learn to love Jesus over time.

The action of disciple making occurs only four times in the New Testament as a verb. But there are more than two hundred fifty passages that show the result of that. What do I mean? The action of disciple making, just four passages, but the fruit of disciple making is to see a recognizable group of people who are called disciples. And you see them.

When I was in seminary and I had met this godly, beautiful, attractive native Greek speaker named Christine, I thought, I have to risk it all. So I enrolled surreptitiously at the Greek Orthodox Seminary to learn modern Greek without telling her. While I was there, I met a man named Brian who wrote the *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*. I was in awe of this guy. He was the only other non-Greek in the room, and our names were nothing like Greek names: Nikos, Adonis, Georgios. All these men were training to become Greek Orthodox priests, and then there were David and Brian. But David and Brian were zealous for learning Greek because we had more motivation than the others. When we were going around the room saying what we did and Brian said, "I write the dictionary," I was so blown away. "Can I get your autograph?" I said to him, "You have so much power. You're more powerful than anyone I know. You write the dictionary. You tell us all what words mean." And Brian said, "I don't do that." Listen carefully to what he said. He said, "I just document how words are used." That is what the dictionary actually is. The dictionary is not telling us the meanings of words. It's just documenting what the words mean when they're used.

So for us, that means that we have got to look at how "disciples" is used in the gospel. What do we learn? In Matthew 5:1 we read:

"Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him."

When Jesus' ministry attracted a tremendous following of people and great crowds, He went up on the mountain and sat down, and His disciples came to Him. So one of the first things we learn about disciples is that they are in proximity to Jesus and they are attentive to Jesus' teaching.

In Matthew 8:23, when Jesus got into the boat to cross the Sea of Galilee, we read:

"And when He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him."

That is often the summons to discipleship in the words of Jesus. Jesus looks at us and says to us, "Come and follow Me." That is the invitation. And the disciples follow Him. I love that in the book of Revelation it says profoundly that they followed the Lamb wherever He goes.

In Matthew 10:1 something a little bit alarming happens. We read:

"And He called to Him His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction."

Now this is a little scary, because this means that discipleship doesn't mean Jesus does everything. This means that Jesus, because of the abundance of His authority and because He is actually making disciples before our very eyes in the Gospels, He entrusts responsibility to disciple makers to do the works that He is doing. That means that as I look out here at this congregation I am looking out at a room full of disciple makers. I am looking at evangelists and servant leaders. I am looking at a group of people who are meant to reflect the image of God and to speak an invitation on behalf of Jesus, to minister to people's lives around us. That's you. That's me.

In Matthew 14:19, Jesus orders the crowds to sit down and He takes five loaves and two fish and He blesses them. He breaks the loaves, gives them to the disciples, and—look at this; this is another semi-scary but actually wonderful passage—and the disciples gave them to the crowds:

"Then He ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds."

That means that disciples are in proximity to Jesus and they listen to His teaching. It means that they watch what Jesus does, and then at some point Jesus is going to say to us, "Now I want you to go do that." And then, when we look at the poverty of our own resources and we think, "I can never do that," we look at Jesus and Jesus multiplies the resources available. Then Jesus says to us, "I want you to give away to people what I've given to you."

Disciples know who Jesus is. In the Synoptic Gospels, there is a decisive moment in Cesaria Philippi when Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They report the testimony of the crowds. But then Jesus speaks to the disciples and says, "Who do *you* say that I am?"

It's Peter who confesses for the first time, "You are the Christ. You are the Messiah, Son of the Living God." It is on this confession that Jesus tells the disciples, in Matthew 14:24:

"If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."

Jesus begins to instruct His committed followers about the central task that He has been given from the Father, which is His death and resurrection. Disciples need to learn this truth and what it means, and that following Jesus in this way is central.

Disciples learn over time. It never ceases to amaze me that the incarnate Son of God spent the most of His time with a small group of people. That is just mind blowing. We live in a culture that believes, rightly or wrongly—I think wrongly—that mass superficial communication shapes people's lives. It doesn't, actually. You just turn to the next communication piece without being impacted or changed.

Disciples learn over time. This is encouraging because it means that there is plenty of room for failure. I remember as a young pastor reaching the conclusion that a ministry idea I had had and tried and worked really hard at was not succeeding. I didn't know what to do because I thought, "Well am I just a failure or what?" I didn't know what to do. "Do I just try harder?" Then a wise, godly, older pastor listened to my lament over the lunch table. He started writing on a napkin. I thought, "Jesus did this with the woman caught in adultery. What's on that paper? Where are we going with this?" We don't get to read what Jesus wrote in the sand, but at some point, this older, wiser, godly pastor took that piece of paper, turned it around, and slid it over to me. It had just three words on it: "Grace, Grace, Grace."

I felt the lifegiving consequence of knowing that we do ministry, we grow in disciples, under the grace of God. That means that we are going to have some flops. That means that some things are going to go poorly. It also means that sometimes we are going to ask the totally wrong question. That's okay, because discipleship means learning to obey over time.

How about this for a bomb question from the disciples? Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to give His life as a ransom for the sin of the world, and the disciples pull Jesus aside and ask Him, "Who's the greatest?" That is just an absolute bomb question at the wrong time. It's misdirected. Yet, Jesus, in His love and kindness and commitment to disciple making, hears the

question, and He doesn't say, "What a dumb question." He doesn't get frustrated, blow a gasket. He just looks and He says, "Bring some children over here." He says in Matthew 18:14:

"Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

He says, "That is greatness." So, Jesus uses even our bad questions.

When I am teaching my classes at the seminary, sometimes I hear students say just the most off-the-wall things. I think I am being so clear and offering this compelling teaching, and then I hear this bonkers response. For years I used to get discouraged by that, but now I have a working theory: I imagine that the teaching is being so effective that what is actually happening is that that bonkers thought is being dislodged. That's how I interpret it. It's as if I can see it being dislodged. "There it goes." And I think they are never going to say anything like that again. That's my working theory. It keeps me encouraged. So I wonder if at times we come off like that to Jesus. It's okay to get it wrong. The great news of the gospel is that Jesus dies for people who get it wrong.

At the Last Supper, Jesus celebrates the Passover with His disciples and interprets His death as the blood of the New Covenant poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus dies; Jesus rises again. And on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary rush to see the tomb. (That is why Christians still gather on Sunday.) And the angel says to the women, *"Don't be afraid. You seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen. Come and see where He lay."* Then these women are told, *"Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead."* So these women are the first ever missionary evangelists of the resurrection of the dead. These two women. And Matthew says in Matthew 28:8:

"So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell His disciples."

They departed quickly from the tomb with fear, reverential awe, and great joy, and they ran to tell His disciples.

It's putting all these things that we see in the Gospels together that gives us our working definition. We are starting our summer series with this word because we have a leg up on it. Each week this summer, we are going to get a working definition of another word. So let's say our working definition of "disciples":

*Disciples are committed followers of Jesus,
who learn to obey Him over time
and joyfully share Him with others.*

The cadence of that phrase guides us. These definitions, in case anyone is wondering, did not come down from Sinai in a separate book. These are working definitions that help us know what we mean by these key words.

Let's go a little deeper. "Disciple" is a Latinism in the English Bible. Jerome translated the Bible into Latin directly from the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek text of the New Testament. He revised a number of Old Latin translations into what became known as the *Vulgate*. *Vulgate*, if you listen closely to that word, sounds like the word "vulgar," which it is. But "vulgar" in 4th century AD Latin does not mean vulgar as we think of it. Remember, words don't carry meanings on their own. They are discerned by their use in a sentence. So the *Vulgate* actually means "vulgar" in the sense of common, ordinary speech as opposed to high, flowery, poetic diction.

It's the same thing when we refer to the Greek New Testament as the *Koine*, or the common Greek language. The New Testament is not written in a philosophical discourse. It is not written in iambic pentameter. The New Testament is written in a voice and in a vocabulary that is accessible to everyone. That is part of its glory. Jesus' teaching is understandable. You don't need a Master's degree to understand the teachings of Jesus.

Jerome's translation of the Bible into Latin, known as the *Vulgate*, or the common Latin, was the best-selling Bible for a thousand years. That is a long time. And because the Bible was read in Latin by the western half of the church, the influence of the Latin language affects all subsequent translations. Let me give you a really obvious one. When we think of the cross of Jesus, we sometimes refer to the cross as the cross of Calvary. Why do we do that? Where does that name come from? That is a Latinism, because the Latin word for "skull" is *calvaria*. So the Latin translation of the Bible describes the place where Jesus is crucified as the hill of Calvary. There are some other obvious Latin technical words like *centurion*, the ruler of a hundred.

The word "disciple" is a Latin word. The Latin translation of the Gospels refers to the group that is around Jesus as filled with—the singular is *discipulus*; the plural is *discipuli*—or disciple. So the word "disciple" is really a transliteration of the Latin word. I am sharing all of this with you because I don't want you to miss the clear meaning of this word, which is that a disciple is a student, a learner, an apprentice, an adherent, a follower of someone. The Greek word is *mathetes*, which is also the word for "student." The Hebrew equivalent of this is *talmid*, a student. The *Talmud* is a collection of learning.

Disciple making is a very important idea in Judaism. It describes a person who is a follower of someone else. They are seeking to build up a belief structure on this person's teachings and

behavior. The most famous tractate in the *Mishna*, of which a chapter is read every week in the synagogue services to this day, is called the "Tractate of the Fathers," or the "Sentences of the Fathers," *Pirkei Avot*. *Ab* means father, *Avot* is the plural "fathers." At the Skirball Museum at Hebrew Union College, just down the street from us, there is one passage that is on the wall and it is this one. It starts like this: "Moses received the Torah at Sinai." That is a conviction of the community that God's Word is received; It doesn't originate with us. But then Moses transmitted It. He passed It down to Joshua. Joshua passed It down to the elders, the elders to the prophets, the prophets to the men of the Great Assembly, or the great synagogue at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. So what is being seen and described very concisely is that God's Word came down from God to us, and it has been faithfully handed down, tradition in the sense of a handing down of this Word. At the end of this great chain of transmission, it goes from here forward, and each generation is given the opportunity to voice the best insights of their own generation.

The men of the great synagogue at the close of the Old Testament period had three things to say. They said in *Mishnah, Abot* 1:1:

"Be deliberate, or moderate, in your judgment."

This means don't rush to make a judgment. Check the facts. Also, don't be harsh; don't be too lenient; be moderate.

Look at the second one:

"Raise up many disciples."

And the third is:

"Make a fence around the Torah."

The "fence around the Torah" is like a construction fence. It is a protective barrier, a little extra distance from breaking the Commandment. So, rather than break the Commandment, you run into the fence or the guardrail.

It's like when we were teaching our daughter to drive. I remember that vividly. The first time we went, we took her to a cemetery. It was just that there were paved roads and it was safe. Jonathan in the back seat said, "Dad, this is a perfect place for Salome to learn to drive because all the people in here are already dead!"

I said, "That's a great insight, son."

Finally, she got confident. We got out on the road, and we were coming down Reed Hartman. New drivers have that feeling that the other cars that are coming straight at them look like they're going to hit them. So, they think, "I'll be a little extra cautious and kind of hover to the right," and that's what we were doing. We were, to my eye, millimeters from the guard rail. I tried so hard to be calm. I said, "Salome, you've got a little room to the left." I'm just waiting for the sound of screeching metal. I'm trying so hard to be calm. "Oh, there's still a little bit more room to the left. There's a little bit more room." I thought, "We're going to scrape across this guardrail." Praise God we never did. Today, Salome has a perfect driving record. So good for her. But the guardrails are there for safety. That is what the *Mishna* is describing.

But, I want us to see that when Jesus says "Make disciples," that in and of itself is not the great innovation. Jesus is not totally unique in wanting us to make disciples. The reality is that every single one of us is being discipled. The reality is that every single one of us is making disciples. The question is, of whom? The question is not, "Will you be shaped by your environment? Will you take in the insights of teachers?" Some of us today listen to people we will never meet online in small segments. We have no idea of their qualifications, and we listen to them in short segments thinking that we are really getting something positive. They might be lunatics. Their lives, if you could see them in reality, you would distance yourself from. We have other ways of communicating and shaping one another. The challenge is that we are called to make disciples of Jesus. We are called to be committed followers of Jesus.

How does Jesus make disciples in the Gospels? It is His first action after His public ministry begins. After announcing that the Kingdom of Heaven is here, the next thing Jesus does is call a set of brothers to follow Him. In Matthew 4:19, Jesus said:

"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

They left their nets and followed Him. He saw two other brothers, James, son of Zebedee, and John, and He called them. Discipleship begins there. It begins with seeing enough of Jesus to say, "I want to follow Him. I want to build my life around His teaching and be in proximity to Him."

The Sermon on the Mount begins with this cascade of blessings that remakes our perception of the world. Jesus' authoritative Word is in Matthew 5:3:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Blessed are those who are desperate for God. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them. If you are desperate for God, Jesus says, "My Father's Kingdom is yours."

In Matthew 5:4 He says:

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

If you are sad, grieving the state of the world or grieving the grip of indwelling sin in your own life and you're sad about it, Jesus says, "I'm going to comfort you."

In Matthew 5:5 Jesus says:

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Blessed are the meek, the humble. He is giving them the world.

In Matthew 5:6 He says:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

That means, brothers and sisters, that you will not be satisfied if you try to eat anything else. It is righteousness that is soulfully satisfying.

These first blessings pour into us, but then look what happens, according to Jesus. Then these blessings start to flow out of us. In Matthew 5:7:

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

When we show mercy in relationship to other people, we will receive mercy from the Lord.

In Matthew 5:8:

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

When you see another human being made in the image of God, what goes through your mind? The pure in heart, seeing God's will and purposes in the lives of other people are promised they will see God. This should block us from any inappropriate looking at other people because we are going to trade out that glance for seeing God. I'd rather see God.

In Matthew 5:9:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

That is a hard job. We prefer, in our fallen state, war against one another. Peacemaking is tough work, but Jesus says they are going to be called the children of God.

In Matthew 5:10:

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Commitment to follow Jesus starts in this way. It progresses through an apprenticeship, if you will, a learning to do what Jesus does.

At our men's retreat this year, there were so many great conversations. In one of those conversations, one of the men was talking about learning to follow Jesus. He said something to me that I had never heard before. He said that one of his mentors had told him this: "It's sort of like this: Jesus says, 'I do, you watch. I do, you help. You do and I help. You do and I watch.'"

That is so helpful and so clear. I'm going to say it to you again. Just picture this: Jesus says, "I do, you watch. I do, you help. You do, I help. You do and I watch." Disciple making is a lot like that.

I have been blessed with a lot of great teachers and mentors in my life. One of them was Dr. Robert Coleman. He wrote this little book, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. It's a short book. It's pretty easy to read. Three and a half million copies of this book have been sold. I knew him at Gordon Conwell and then I heard him speak at a disciple making conference. He was in his nineties. He gave the final blessing for this conference. He spoke with such conviction and humility. They showed a picture on the screen of the back of his Bible that showed all of the names of people that he had discipled over decades. He prayed a blessing filled with hope and anticipation of seeing Jesus. Dr. Coleman writes this:

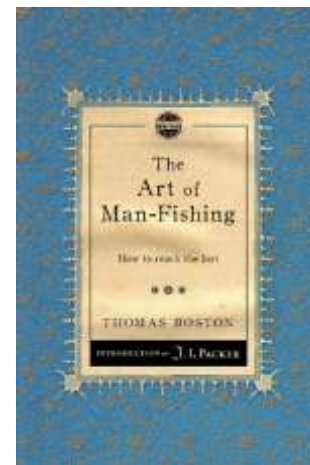
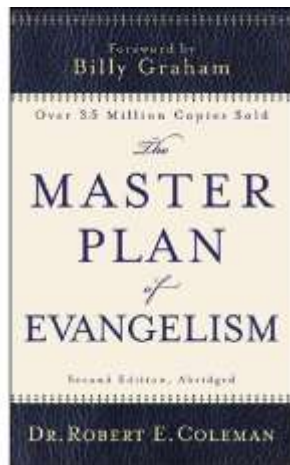
"The Great Commission to make disciples is not only for church leaders. It's not just for me or the pastoral staff. It's a command for all Christians. It was the last command of Christ to all of us."

Then he asks:

"Do I have a strategy of discipleship for my own life? If not, am I willing to put one in place?"

This short book describes in a concise and understandable way how we see Jesus making disciples through the Gospels, so that when He tells the disciples, "Go make disciples ..." we understand. For years I thought Jesus was just springing this on the disciples at the end. Then I realized, no, Jesus is just inviting us to do what He has done with us: prioritizing people; starting with a few; opening up our lives; sharing our lives of following Jesus, life on life; entrusting real responsibility to others; encouraging and supporting them; and then expecting them to go and do the same.

Every new series at Kenwood starts with a book recommendation or two. So, these are my three for summer reads. These are all fantastic summer reads.



The first is this one: *Master Plan of Evangelism*. It is so excellent and so clear. The second is Brandon Guindon's book, *Disciple Making Culture*. The elders and the staff at Kenwood read this. This is a really helpful book, talking about how to keep disciple making in the heartbeat of the local church and how we all contribute to that together.

C.S. Lewis said, "Always read books outside of your own century." So this last book is written by a man named Thomas Boston, a pastor in Scotland until 1707. So it's a few hundred years ago. When Pastor Boston was twenty-two years old, he read in the Gospels Jesus' line, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," and his heart burst with the prayer, "Lord Jesus, would you teach me how to do that?" And at age twenty-two, he wrote down this reflection. It's fantastic. Twenty-two years old. It wasn't until after his death, when his family was going through his journals and papers, that they found this and read it. So this was published after he died. J. I. Packer wrote the introduction to it. It's called *The Art of Man Fishing* and it's fantastic. It encourages us to see that discipleship happens over time.

We often imagine that people learn to follow Jesus by coming to a big event: they get convicted of their sin, they make a decision for Christ, and the whole thing starts and ends in an hour, maybe an hour-and-a-half. But you know, real transformation doesn't happen like that. A moment like that can play a role, but the real transformation happens over time. And it is fantastic to be involved in that as a congregation. Just as any teacher will tell you, over time teachers end up learning from their students. So discipleship isn't just a one-way street. It is the way that we all grow stronger in following Jesus.

Three summer reads, enjoy them.

So let's learn to love our first word. Let's just say it one more time together.

*Disciples are committed followers of Jesus,
who learn to obey Him over time
and joyfully share Him with others.*

And finally, I want to challenge us all: Be intentional in your disciple making. Learn from Jesus. Start with one, a few. Share life with people you're discipling. Invite them around your table. Train others to follow Jesus the way you are learning to do so. Support and encourage them. Celebrate the highs and the lows, successes and failures. Stay in community. Go through the open door that Jesus puts in front of you. Evaluate honestly where your time really goes. We all say we're busy, but if you do a real reckoning of where your time goes, you realize, "I'm wasting a chunk of it." Don't waste your time on triviality or things that don't contribute to eternity. And pray for us as a community for faithful following to Jesus' final earthly command, "Make disciples."

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we honor You this morning and we celebrate You. Thank You, Lord, for speaking to us with clarity and conviction. Forgive us, Lord, for neglecting disciple making. Forgive us where we thought that was someone else's job. Forgive us, Lord, for not being willing to fail in our own journey of growth. Lord, keep disciple making central at Kenwood and bring forth a great fruit of changed lives.

We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.