The Disciple Challenge
The Fruit

- We are in the final part of this short series called The Disciple Challenge! Remember when I say disciple I am not talking about the twelve men that Jesus called to follow Him during His earthly ministry but I'm talking about you! Each one of you are a Disciple of Jesus! We were all called to this challenge! And not by me as your pastor but by Jesus as your Rabbi and savior!

- And the thing about disciples is they don't just believe the right things, disciples follow close enough to Jesus that they begin to look like Him! Have you ever heard the longer you are married to someone the more you start to look like them? I've experienced it. I don't think Autumn and I physically look like each other but knowing her from when we first started dating to now she sure speaks like me! I've rubbed off on her a lot, she makes a lot of jokes now that are goofy things I would say. It's awesome! And that's what we need with Christ! The more time spent with Jesus, the more we sound like Him!

- I believe this has been a great discipleship journey we've been on the last few weeks! I mean a challenging one but a good one! ***Week 1:*** was about ***following*** Jesus, it was the invitation to being a disciple. But not only that, it was a command of God. It was a command to step out of the crowd and lay down your life, pick up your cross. ***Week 2:*** was about building a ***foundation*** on Jesus. If you want your faith to stand firm in life's storms you can't build your spiritual house on shifting opinions but the firm Word of God!

- Last week, ***Week 3:*** we talked about allowing God to mold us and maneuver us with Spiritual ***Formation***. Discipleship is not just about information it is about transformation! The Holy Spirit doesn't want to just fill your mind with facts and trivia He wants to mold and shape your heart! And today we are going to round out this series with the fourth concept and that is: ***Fruitfulness***! But let me tell you these are not steps you graduate from. This isn't levels of disciple or stair steps getting higher.

- You never stop following Jesus, you never move on from these things. You always need to continue building and strengthening your foundation, growing deeper in formation, daily lay down your cross and follow Jesus. These are lifelong things! As a disciple of Christ your life will always need all 4 of these things! Following, Foundation, Formation, and Fruitfulness! Those are imperative to your everyday walk with Jesus as a Disciple.

And this is so important to know: The true measure of a disciple is not about what you know, what you feel, it is all about what your life produces! What fruit are you producing, or not producing?

- Fruitfulness is the true measure of a disciple! And today that is what we are going to inspect. We are going to be fruit inspectors all together today. The fruit is vital! In fact Jesus said this Himself:

Matthew 7:15-20: "Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. 16 You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. 18 A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. 19 So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. 20 Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions." NLT

- The Fruit is what identifies us as disciples. Your fruit will prove who you are. Are you producing bad fruit? Well than that is saying something about who you are even if you don't see it yourself. Only good trees produce good fruit. And let me remind you what fruit I am talking about. The fruit of the spirit are so important! And they are found in Galatians chapter 5…

Galatians 5:22-23: "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control…" NLT

- The Holy Spirit produces these fruit, not us by performing well enough. It's nothing to do with our spiritual performance and everything to do with our surrender to The Holy Spirit's Work in our lives. The Holy Spirit produces good fruit in us and the fruit has these 9 characteristics. One type of fruit from one seed: The Holy Spirit, and it's a good fruit! The Holy Spirit produces one good fruit and these expressions explain that fruit. Just like I would describe an orange in different ways: it's sweet, juicy, tangy, those are different characteristics or expressions of one fruit: the orange.

- And I saw all this to emphasize the fact that this is not a spiritual fruit salad that you can pick out the fruit you don't want. Whenever I get a fruit salad I never want the cantaloupe, that doesn't belong but for some reason it is always there! Well that's not how this works. You don't get to say today I want some goodness and gentleness but I don't want to have self control or

kindness. If you want the fruit of The Holy Spirit to be coming from you it's all of these!

- You can think you aren't a joyful person and well that's just too bad. A disciple bears all these fruits! Sarcasm and negativity are not fruit of the spirit! We always seem to desire all the gifts of the spirit and seek after them with all we have but in doing so we forget about bearing the fruit! And honestly the fruit are even more important than the gifts. The gifts are amazing but without love, you know the verse right? It's all a banging gong, well love is a fruit so the same is true of all the fruit we need to bear it and have a new new focus on pursuing the fruit, the fruit is the very product of our identity!

- We cannot and should not confuse Fruit of the Spirit with personality traits. I've met so many people who say I'm not soft so I can't be gentle, I'm just a blunt person. And what I say to that is stop excusing your flesh and confusing what the fruit are. If the Holy Spirit is the seed, these are the fruit. And they are the characteristics of Jesus!

So the question is: when people are around you what are they tasting? Good fruit or bad fruit? Do they taste the fruit of love or defensiveness? Joy or sarcasm and negativity? Peace or agitation? The fruit you bear is the story your life is telling about The God you claim to know.

- And fruitfulness in the life of a Disciple matters so much! It is not just decoration on the tree of our lives it is the very proof that our tree is alive in the first place! And Jesus refuses to let us settle for the appearance of life without the actual evidence of life! And there is a powerful account in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus actually teaches this exact lesson. I think it can confuse a lot of people because people so often assume Jesus to be angry or vengeful in this instance but that's not it at all. Jesus uses it as a really powerful object lesson on fruitfulness.

- In Mark chapter 11 this is when Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem, right before passover, right before Jesus is betrayed by Judas and crucified, and this happens right before Jesus confronts a big group of religious leaders for rejecting Him as the Messiah. So they are on their way into Jerusalem, Jesus is hungry and He sees a fig tree, that's where we are going to pick up.

Mark 11:13-14: "The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it

was not the season for figs. 14 Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it." NIV

- Let me just time out and say as if you didn't already know this about me: I know basically nothing about figs, or trees, or plants really. The only stuff I know about fig trees is from the bible or study of the bible, I am not a farmers or planters in any way at all. I one hundred percent prefer fake plants, it's very hard for me to ruin those! But when researching the bible and fig trees for that purpose, fig trees when they start to grow leaves they actually have early buds. And those early buds are edible, you can eat them.

- So when we read it wasn't the season for fruit but there were leaves on the tree the early buds come with those leaves. So Jesus as He was hungry saw the leaves and expected early buds that He could eat. But there were no early buds, nothing but leaves. So Jesus said to the tree: ***"No one will eat fruit from you again."*** And that may seem or feel harsh, until you realize this was a living parable Jesus was teaching. Israel at this time had tons of religion, traditions, rituals, all the things that made them look spiritually alive, their tree like this fig tree had leaves everywhere but no fruit anywhere. Israel had no fruit, just like their was no fruit on this fig tree to feed Jesus.

- So Jesus is making a connection here we need to see! We must bear fruit! We can have leaves, look spiritually alive from afar but we need to bear fruit! Not just appear alive but truly be alive and fruitful! It is possible to be a tree with just leaves and no fruit. It is possible too appear like a Christian and not bear fruit. You have your Christian t-shirt, your christian Spotify playlist, even church attendance, but do you have fruit? When Jesus comes He will be looking for fruit, that is what He inspects!

- This living parable isn't about literal trees it is about disciples, and the warning is clear! The waring is: ***don't settle for appearance when Jesus is looking for evidence in our lives! Don't settle for religion and tradition and practices, God is looking for relationship, intimacy, and transformation! We are called for fruit not just leaves!***

- Now we have to wonder, where does fruit come from? Fruit comes from seeds, a seed that is sown. When there is no seed sown fruit cannot come. I may not know much about gardening but I at least know that! So if we sow the right seeds we can produce the fruit of the spirit! And today I want to show you and go through some of the seeds we as Disciples of Christ need to be sowing in order to see fruit in our lives! ***Because we need more than leaves!***

- God has called each and every one of us to produce more than leaves! More than the appearance of life but true spiritual life that is bearing fruit! But before we talk about what seeds to plant so we are properly bearing fruit we need to invite Jesus in this morning for a heart examination. We need our leaves, our branches, our tree examined, and only Jesus can do that, we need to invite Him close to do that today. So this is going to be a time of inspection and looking inward.

- And as we exam our hearts I want to share some truths about Fruitfulness and why we need to bear fruit…

Fruitfulness Proves Our Identity

- Remember I've hit this a lot, being a Disciple is not about what you know, what you feel, and it's not even in what you do or achieve. It's in the fruit you bear! I'm not saying God doesn't care about what you do, or what you feel, or what you know.

But we need to know and realize there is a difference between the things we do and the fruit we produce!

- We have to learn the difference between things we do and the fruit we produce! I read this verse earlier but I want to touch on it again…

Matthew 7:16: "You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" ESV

- I don't need an apple tree in bloom to have a huge label around it's trunk to tell it is an apple tree. It's the apples growing from the tree that tell me exactly what it is! I have never needed someone to convince me I was eating from an apple tree when I picked apples from it. The fruit is the evidence of it's identity! And the same is true for us! Jesus is also implying here that fruit doesn't mix with thorns and thistles. So what is produced from us proves what is inside us! So you can call yourself a Christian, or a Disciple all day long but if you are producing thorns or thistles, the fruit isn't there then your identity is proven.

- Leaves can create an image or appearance but it's the fruit that proves your identity.

John 15:8: "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." ESV

- Our activity can look impressive, we can do things that make us look good but we need to fruit to have evidence of identity, and the fruit brings God glory! God isn't asking you to prove your discipleship by how busy you are for Him but purely from the fruit that comes from Him and grows in us. Anyone can memorize the lyrics to a worship song, well probably anyone but me. Anyone can volunteer once, but we need to inspect the spiritual fruit of our life. How do we love people? How much joy do we have, where is our peace, our goodness, our kindness? Those fruit or lack thereof tell the real story about our relationship with the God we serve or don't serve.

So when Jesus comes close is He seeing discipleship that is proven and formed or is He seeing religion that is weekly performed?

- Is there fruit? Or are we just a tree with leaves? Let me give another truth about fruitfulness

Fruitfulness Comes From Abiding

- This is a truth we've touched on so much in this series but it is so vital. Discipleship isn't about trying harder it is about stay closer! Please get this in your heart. The more we strive and hustle and bustle and try, try, try, we get so very exhausted, tired, empty, and burnt out. But guess what? Abiding in Jesus gives you rest and makes your life fruitful! I know we've read John 15 a couple times but it's so profound we need to come back to it this morning.

John 15:4-5: "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. 5 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." ESV

- For a second really picture this image Jesus is describing here: the vine and the branches. A vine does not sweat to squeeze out a branch and a branch does not strain or stress to produce grapes. It doesn't have to perform it simply does what it was created to do. And the branch is about to produce grape because it is connected to the vine, it's source. Fruit isn't forced it is simply formed through connection. And when disconnected it dies. Simple as that.

- So many people wear themselves right out trying to manufacture spiritual fruit and gifts. We strive to be good, try with all our might to have peace, be generous, show love, be kind. But Jesus says we can't produce absolutely anything apart from Him! We are branches and we cannot survive or even

function outside of the Vine! Our effort cannot produce fruit it is God's life flowing through us. That is why abiding is so so so important!

- Abiding to put it in simple terms, it is living with a moment by moment, second by second, connection to Jesus every single day of our lives. All the spiritual habits we have talked about this series: reading the bible, prayer, worship, community, fasting, sabbath, solitude, all these things aren't just good habits to form they are your lifelines that keep the connection to our source of life so fruit can just naturally be produced through us. So the question shouldn't be how are we trying to be holy, it's how close are we abiding to Christ.

- Here is another truth of fruitfulness…

Fruitfulness Is Sustained by The Right Environment

- Where you are planted determines what you produce. We know this but so often we forget it or act like it doesn't matter. You can have the right seed but when it is in the wrong soil it will not grow. You can have all the fruit growing potential ever but if you are in toxic environments that fruit potential withers.

- I am reminded of a teenager I've had a lot of run-ins with this week at the school. The first week of school I met him and he was such a kind guy. He got in a little bit of trouble because he found himself in the wrong crowd. But I had that talk with Him. We told his mother that. But he never left that environment, he stayed friends with this group and now less than a month later I am getting him for some really bad stuff. Your environment has a huge effect on your fruit!

- Look at how this Psalm says it…

Psalm 1:1-3: "Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. 2 But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. 3 They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do." NLT

- Your environment matters! The environment you choose impacts your fruitfulness greatly! If you are surrounding yourself with the wrong crowd, if you are constantly around the cynical and the mockers. Engulfed in an environment of unholiness your roots are feeding on the poison coming from that environment. That goes for friend groups, relationships, hobbies, whatever atmosphere you are created for your life if it is unholy it will wither your fruit.

- But when we are planted and delighted in God's Word, in holy environments linked up with encouraging, Godly people, rooted in God's presence, we are prosperous in our fruit! In season we will see that prosperous fruit. And that phrase is important, in season, in God's timing. It may not be immediate but in season it will come! And remember a tree doesn't constantly move from place to place, it must be planted!

- Sometimes we need to make the hard decision to clean up our environment. We need to reassess relationships, or pray for God to change the hearts of relationships, take away unholy habits and hobbies, clean up the environment so we can better grow and stay planted in a place that helps us bear fruit! And we have to be rooted in God's word not just visit occasionally. If we want fruitfulness that is. Plant yourself in God's Word! Fruit isn't sustained by good intentions but by the soil you plant yourself in!

- Let me give you one more truth about fruitfulness

Fruitfulness Multiplies Beyond You

- This is truly the purpose of the fruit. Fruit is never just for the tree! Apple trees don't eat their own apples. The fruit you produce is always for other people. Hidden inside of every fruit is a seed and every seed carries potential for more life and more trees, which means more harvest and exponential fruit growth for God's Kingdom! Jesus says this in John…

John 12:24: "Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." NIV

- Jesus here is talking about how He is about to lay down His life and through His death salvation came to all if we choose it. But the principal is true for us as well if we are willing to live a life surrendered. A disciple's life laid down, dying to our flesh, we produce fruit, we produce seeds that reach many others outside of ourselves. This is multiplication principle of God's Kingdom. One seed that dies in the right soil multiples. When we live surrendered bearing fruit we see multiplication.

- Real spiritual fruit is always carrying the seeds of someone else's future. This is where so many Christian's stop short even disciples. We can get content with personal growth but we are called to more! We fall into the trap of only wanting to taste our fruit. We want to taste peace, taste kindness, taste love, we are taking our fruit and never pouring into others. We fall into the trap of

just needing to consume. We produce this fruit to then share our seeds into others. That's when the multiplication comes in! And if we never plant seeds we will never see harvest! We must be planters of our fruit! Spreaders of our fruit! That's great commission!

- We are called to spread the seeds of spiritual fruit and the gospel and see others find Christ and become fruit bearers and spreaders! We all should want this to be fruit spreaders. But before we can spread the fruit we need to bear it. So let me give you 4 seeds we as Disciples all need to be planting in our hearts to bear lasting fruit that we can then spread to fulfill God's purpose for our lives as Disciples.

4 Seeds of Lasting Fruit

Seed 1: The Seed of Giving

- Fruitful Disciples live with open hands. They live out radical generosity and that is because we understand everything we have belongs to God anyway. And everything given is for the Glory of God! Let me just remind you of some important giving principals today:

2 Corinthians 9:6-7: "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." NIV

- You may be thinking you aren't seeing all this fruit in your life and maybe just maybe that is because you haven't first sown it. We don't get to just reap without sowing. So when we sow generously then we reap generously! Generosity all throughout scripture is described as a seed. When we plant the seed of generosity generously then we see a generous reaping that we can then sow even more! When we sow it isn't addition math we then jump to multiplication math. And we can even test God's math here. The math maths!

Malachi 3:10: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!" NLT

- It's not a one for one exchange. We can test God in these. Yes this is a finance thing but you can give so much more than finances. Give your time to pour into someone. Share your experience with someone, your gifts with someone,

generosity is so much more than finances it's living that life of open hands and open heart than we God wants us to give unto Him or others we do it and then we see harvest too! Be bold and generous with the gospel, spread that generously not a tiny bit. Disciples who bear fruit are generous and their hearts and hands are open! The next seed disciples sow is…

Seed 2: The Seed of Service

- If generosity opens our hands I'd say serving extends the hands outward. A fruitful disciple does not sit back and wait to be served. They step up and pour their life out! Jesus modeled this Himself.

Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." NIV

- The King of Kings, the King of Glory He didn't shy away from serving others! He didn't show up demanding a crown and royal treatment He came with a towel and washed feet! If anyone deserved to be served it was Jesus! But Jesus flips the whole script and shows us greatness in the Kingdom of God doesn't come from position it comes from you pouring yourself out for others. So if serving is beneath you then leadership will always be beyond you!

- God put His spirit in us to bear fruit but also used His spirit to give us gifts to use for service unto others. Let me show it to you in 1 Corinthians…

1 Corinthians 12:4-6: "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. 5 There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. 6 God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us." NLT

- There are no wasted gifts, no service that is insignificant, no role should be beneath anyone because all gifts while different are equally important! All from God for His glory! There is no sideline or bench in the Kingdom of God! Every disciple is called to be on the field! But the issue is like I said earlier so many Christians want to come and consume. Eat the fruit like a spiritual buffet and leave the work and cleanup for someone else.

Fruitfulness cannot grow in consumers, it only grows in servants!

- You won't produce the fruit of the spirit with a consumer mindset, I'm sorry I don't want to be harsh it's just the cold hard truth. If we aren't serving we aren't sowing. And I mean more than beyond here on a Sunday morning we

are to be servants in every area of life. How can fruit grow if you don't plant and deposit seed? Don't sit in the spiritual stands, get in the game!

Seed 3: The Seed of Sharing

- We are all called to be witnesses of the Good News to the world around us! Disciples do not keep the Good News of Christ to themselves! They just don't, they can't! If Jesus is Lord of your life then His name will be on your lips! The Gospel was never intended to be kept secret it was mean't to be shared! That's why the Holy Spirit came, to give us power to be witnesses and share! To embolden us! Jesus tells us this is Acts 1…

Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." NLT

- I want the power of The Holy Spirit and imagine you do too! And I know we always equate the power of The Holy Spirit only with miracles, signs, and wonders, prophecy, tongues, all that, but Jesus tells us right here the true meaning of the power. These miracles are great but the greatest miracle is someone coming to the saving knowledge and confession of Jesus in their life! So the power of the Holy Spirit is for us to be bold witnesses to our circles and world!

- God fills us with power to be witnesses that testify of His Gospel and Goodness not lawyers that argue His case, we don't need to argue with people for Jesus. And God didn't send His Holy Spirit for us to be His Judges that are condemning people for their sin. We are called to be witnesses that testify. We tell the account of Jesus! Witnesses have one job, they sit on the stand and tell their experience. We just need to tell our testimonies, tell others of Jesus! We don't need to argue, or judge, just share!

- And you don't have to witness like anyone else but you do have to witness! God gifted you your personality and you will resonate with certain people. You will resonate with people I can't reach, we all were uniquely created by God to witness our stories with Jesus our way and reach the people He has called us to reach! But we must witness! Some of us are wired for practical reasoning, others are super direct, some are really good storytellers, others are relational or inviters. You don't need to witness like someone else just witness like you and rely on The Holy Spirit! Last seed…

Seed 4: The Seed of Discipling

- This is the culmination of a disciple, this is baked into the Great Commission, we don't just see people saved, we multiply what we are, we make disciples. Fruitfulness that stops with you isn't real fruit! In God's Kingdom fruit carries seed and those are mean't for multiplication. Let me re-read the Great Commission because even if you can quote it to me it is still so important, this is vital! These are our forever marching orders, our job description!

Matthew 28:19-20: "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." NLT

- This doesn't say make converts, or make church members, this is make disciples! The Challenge of a Disciple is more than being a disciple it is making disciples. We are to replicate and multiply! And this isn't a command to just Pastor's, teachers, or missionaries, this is a calling to every single disciple of Jesus! All of us! None of us are exempt! So if you are following Jesus you should also be discipling someone else along your discipleship journey. Who are you pouring into?

- When is the last time you told someone: follow me as I follow Jesus? If you can't answer that question it is a problem. But it is a problem we can fix! And should certainly fix! Discipleship doesn't end it's your journey to produce fruit daily and then the journey of the one you are pouring into and so forth and so forth. We should all be pouring into someone, discipling someone and so should they! We need to not just be disciples but disciple makers!

- Here is Paul talking to Timothy, a Disciple of Jesus, Paul, talking to his disciple, showing him the equation, calling him to this disciple making challenge.

2 Timothy 2:2: "You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others." NLT

- So we started this series with the challenge to be a disciple but I'm ending by shifting the challenge. The Challenge is twofold: grow into being a true and Disciple of Jesus and then make other disciples! Pour into others, and then they will pour into others. That's Kingdom Multiplication, thats the Great

Commission, this is what we are called to! This is how our communities are radically changed!

- But I want to end with one last verse from John 15 we have read from this chapter throughout the whole series but I want to not only end on this challenge of disciple making but also this last verse here…

John 15:16: "You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name." NLT

- Jesus chose you! This is not an accident and you are not overlooked by Jesus. He set you apart to bear lasting fruit that multiplies into eternity, to make disciples. We can't settle for leaves, for the appearance of fruit but true fruit! Fruit that lasts, disciples we need to be making disciples and bearing fruit that impacts the lives of our community!