

Title: WestPark Values: Part 5, Active Faith.

Speaker: Kevin Norcross (for Charles Stone)

Passage: Multiple

Big idea: Four activities indicate that a disciple of Jesus is living out an Active Faith.

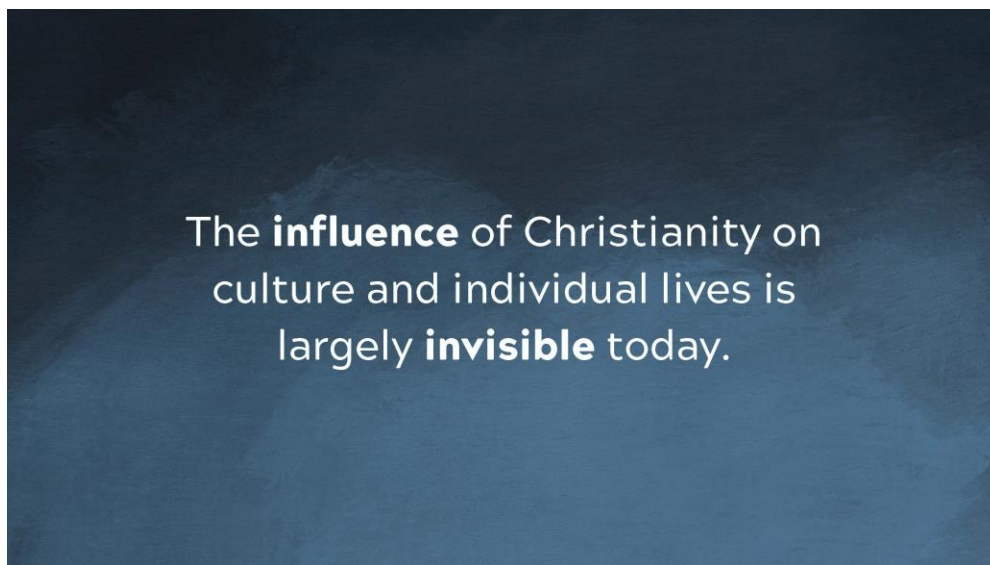
George Orwell was an English novelist who died over 60 years ago, yet we still feel his influence. He wrote a novel the year before he died, 1984, where he coined a metaphor still in use today, Big Brother, which we often use to mean that the government is watching you.

One quote from that novel segues into my message. “We now have sunk to such a depth that the restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men.”

What does that quote have to do with Christianity or being a follower of Jesus Christ? I believe it describes what has happened to many followers of Jesus and to the church today.

- We can forget the why behind it all.
- Our faith can become ho hum, blasé, and lukewarm.
- We’re not clear in our minds why we are here on earth, and why the church is here.
- As a result, we sometimes need to do what Orwell says, restate the obvious.

Barna Research is a Christian researcher organization that publishes findings every year about the state of the world and Christianity. In one published study they discovered 6 mega-themes in North America. They were all shocking and sad, but this one stood out the most to me.



Let that sink in.

What a contrast to what Jesus said in Matthew when he commanded us to let our light shine before men that they may see our good deeds and praise our father in heaven.

It appears that Christians are making less and less of an impact in our world because apparently, if Barna is right, little distinction exists between many professed followers of Jesus Christ and those who do not profess Jesus Christ.

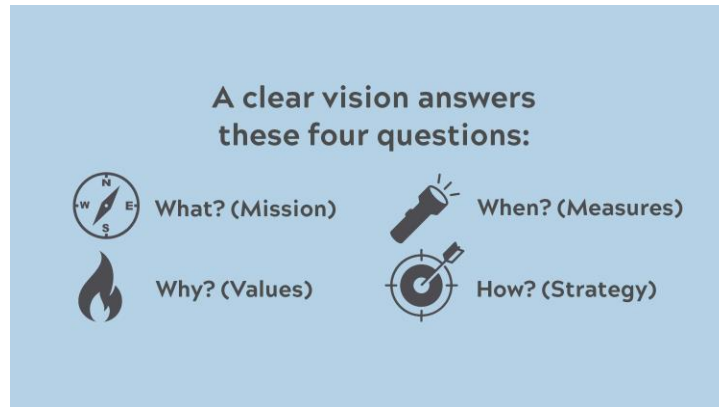
Maybe we have lost sight of the endgame, the why, the obvious (as Orwell said)—the kind of product that the church is developing.

Don’t press that product metaphor too far. By following Jesus, we are not mass producing anything akin to TVs or smart phones. But we are busy doing a lot of church stuff. The question is, what is all this spiritual activity producing in us, in me, in you?

I want to speak to that issue this morning.

We are in a series on WP Values and vision clarity because the clearer our vision, the more effective we will be.

I shared previously that a clear vision answers these four questions:



Our mission statement is Everyday people on a journey together pursuing Christ.

Our strategy called the P.A.T.H. It's akin to a flashlight, because it shows us the path we take, where we go, what we do to accomplish our mission, and how we should answer someone who is looking for their next steps.

Our values are like a flame, that empowers and energizes us. It's what people experience when they come to WestPark.

Our five values:

- Active faith
- Cultural diversity
- Servant leadership
- Next generation
- Missional engagement



Values reflect what we hope people will experience by being here, what they will see and feel, these things in action, what they will notice because they are really important to us.

Today I want to unpack Active Faith.

Each value is written as a short statement that explains how we know when it happens, prefaced by the phrase demonstrated by. Each value is not some abstract statement but is reflected in tangible action.

So, here is how we describe this value:



Active Faith is all about being a true disciple, understanding why we individually and the church corporately are here and then living that out in a consistent, faithful way.

It is avoiding what a guy realized after 22 years of knowing Christ.



You’ve heard the definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over and expecting to get a different result.

I believe that the Church (capital C) has inadvertently become satisfied with what we are doing over what we are truly becoming or producing.

The bible explains the purpose of the church corporately and our purpose individually through metaphors and word pictures. We are...

- salt
- light
- leaven
- army
- ambassadors

All these terms denote movement and penetration into the culture. In other words, our mission is to penetrate the world, win people to Jesus Christ, to glorify God as we become God’s tools as he populates heaven.

So, we must constantly remind ourselves and recommit ourselves to Christ’s clear commands about the why question. As Orwell said about intelligent people, restating the obvious.

Jesus’ last words before ascending to heaven, give us our marking orders. We call his words the Great Commission.

Acts 1.8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Matthew recorded Jesus’ similar words.

Matthew 28.18, “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’”

Because Jesus has all power, he charges us with this task, winning the world for Him.

Matthew 28.19, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,”

This work of making disciples is for every Christ follower, not just those in vocational ministry like a pastor.

He says it as a command: make disciples. It is interesting that the word Christian appears in the New Testament only 3 times, yet disciple appears over 250 times.

I’ll define the word disciple in a moment, but implied in the concept of a disciple is creating something of quality. It implies an effective work force to reach the world for Christ. Jesus then gives two qualifiers to this command-reaching and teaching: populating heaven and pursuing Christlikeness.

Matthew 28.19, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”

This is the reaching and populating heaven component.

Matthew 28.20, “and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

This is the teaching and pursuing Christlikeness component.

Matthew 28.20, “And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Here he promises to be with us and empower us to obey the Great Commission.

The way we fulfill Christ’s command to reach the world is by making disciples. So, we must define a disciple.

In Jesus’ day there were many Rabbis who set up shop and who had students who were called disciples. The word was also used then to describe an apprentice to a weaver, a student physician, or the disciple of a philosophical school. Disciples in schools of philosophy, after their teacher died, would keep as their point of unity the concerns of their teacher to fulfill his intentions and preserve his sayings.

In that time and earlier, discussions between sages and their disciples were often set within daily life. While sitting under a tree, in a marketplace, sharing a meal, or walking along a road.

It was about a century after Christ that rabbinic study became confined to study halls and synagogues. The gospel accounts firmly fit Jesus into the earlier tradition of training disciples through living and traveling together.

Unlike the other Rabbis’ schools, the big difference was their deep attachment to Jesus as a person. His teaching had force only when they truly committed to Him as a person. This personal commitment explains the deep depression of the disciples after the crucifixion (Luke 24.19). It was not enough that they had the legacy of his words. They had lost Jesus himself.

But Jesus then defeated death and was much more than just a teacher. He was the living Lord, Savior, Messiah who had come to save the people from their sins.

So, let’s unpack what Active Faith means, with four essential markers, indicators of a committed disciple, follower of Jesus.

# BIG IDEA

Four activities indicate that a disciple of Jesus is living out an Active Faith.



Activity One:

## Believe (thoughts)

Head represents what you believe.

When these rabbis would set up shop as teachers, potential students would seek out a teacher or rabbi to sit under. They would aspire to become a rabbi, and but would always have a higher commitment to the law over what the rabbi, the person taught.

There was no such thing as a student without a teacher, independent study did not qualify you as a disciple of a rabbi.

And the teaching was not so much like our schools. The teacher sits or stands up front behind the lectern and the students sit at their desks as the teacher pours information into their brains. I'm not being dismissive of instructive teaching. I'm doing it now. But true learning and change is so much more.

Their teaching was called peripatetic learning (learning by walking around). You would literally follow in the steps of your rabbi-you would walk the same dusty roads they walked, you would learn from them with close proximity and activity.

In the rabbinical literature there was a saying that went like this.

May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi.

So, a true disciple was so close to his rabbi, that he literally was covered with the same dust that covered him.

The disciples literally walked around with Jesus, walked in the same dust he walked in. And as he walked, he taught using what was around him, like nature.

In Matthew 6, he says, 'Oh birds', pointing to look at the birds of the air, 'Oh flowers', pointing to look at the flowers of the field, then making applications to both.



So, if you wanted to learn from Jesus, you would walk with him through everyday life. Jesus would use objects like birds and flowers and temples and experiences with people to teach His disciples. That is why he used so many word pictures.

Among the many differences between Jesus and other rabbis was this: students did not seek Jesus out. A true disciple of Jesus was first called by Jesus. Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men. That is what Jesus did.

Come follow me and learn from me. Interestingly, Jesus calls those who seem to lack the necessary ingredients, he called the B team, the ones who didn't make the grade for the other rabbis. That encourages me.

And Jesus did not and does not call us primarily to his teaching, but to himself. Jesus does not seek to simply impart information, but to awaken commitment to himself. Jesus called you and me, disciples, to a commitment to himself, a person, not just a philosophy, like the disciples of the other rabbi-teachers did. He wants us to be attached to him and we learn of him from his Word.

His teaching has force only when there is first this commitment to his person. Jesus himself wants to be more than simply a great teacher or philosopher to you. He wants to be the Living Lord in your life.

So, a true disciple, one with an Active Faith learns of the person of Jesus through His word: With our heads and minds we comprehend truth about the person of Jesus.

So, discipleship, Active Faith involves believing and learning from Jesus through His Word.

Our commitment to you here at WestPark is that we will teach well. After Charles last Sunday March 26, our executive team of Corey Brown, Neil Chotai, and Kevin Norcross who have all taught well, will rotate bringing the Sunday message.



Activity Two:  
**Do (actions)**

A disciple follows through on what they learn about Jesus. It is not just an information dump, but rather following through, doing what we learn. Truly learning from Jesus will change our actions, behavior, priorities, perceptions. It will change what we do.

A true disciple of a rabbi would begin to look like, sound like, and act like his teacher.

In Jesus' days, many believed in him at a cognitive level, but few truly followed Him. A true disciple of Jesus, however, will adjust their life to the master. You were known as a true follower of someone by your actions, by what you did.

Today, the same thing applies, we are known as a true follower of Jesus by our actions.

A true disciple accepts what Jesus says as true because he says it and submits to his requirements as right because he sets those requirements.

Many rabbis would give up a great deal to study the law, but later they enjoyed fame and authority because they taught it well.

Jesus, however, required that his disciples leave all things for his sake alone. In so doing, we are not merely to believe in him but to obey him. What a disciple of Jesus would do for Jesus far exceeded what other disciples of other rabbis would do.

A true disciple's commitment to Jesus is reflected by greater commitment, priority, and loyalty to Him over everything else. Including:

- self interests,
- possessions,
- relationships,
- hobbies,
- goals in life,
- even our very lives

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matthew 16.24)

People understood crosses in those days. It was a cruel method of execution used by the Romans. Criminals would carry the cross beam of their cross to their crucifixion place of execution. Everybody knew this person was saying goodbye to everything. No turning back.

It is a vivid illustration to show that a true disciple's intent to follow Jesus implies saying goodbye to our own will and self-centered desires.

James 1.22, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

So, a true disciple, one with an Active faith, believes and does.



Desire represents the level of motives, passion, fire, the why. The reason and motivation for our lives to believe and do is because we are attached to the person and word of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple of Jesus means that he has infused his values and convictions into your core beliefs.

He has planted new want to's in your heart.

When our desire to know Christ becomes more and more of the motivational core of our being, biblical behavior and our biblical thought patterns become more and more automatic,

innate, part of our lives seen through our everyday lifestyle and how we relate to others.

Jesus said that this was the greatest commandment.

Luke 10.27, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Being a true disciple of Jesus, having an Active Faith will impact every part of your being. How you think, what you do, and why you do what you do.

We have a responsibility to fuel this desire.

2 Timothy 1.6, "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

Commitment to Jesus is not a passive thing. It's an active thing when we fuel our desire and passion for him through activity four.



Activity Four:

## Develop (Habits)

Paul used a word picture that his readers readily identified with, an athlete training for something akin to the Olympics, the Isthmian games.

1 Timothy 4.7-8, “train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”

The word train is the word we get the English word gymnasium from.

Spiritual training refers to certain practices, called spiritual disciplines, which prepare our hearts and our minds to consistently live out our faith. These practices help cultivate a disposition to more consistency.

- believe what Jesus says
- do what he says
- desire Him greater

These habits include:

- bible reading
- study and meditation on His Word
- prayer
- serving
- generosity with your money
- silence and solitude
- fasting

They are not practices unto themselves but as we practice and do them, we become more predisposed to be more like Jesus.

Let’s review and repeat these Activities again.



So, which one needs your attention?



I want to read a letter written by a man who was a truly devoted follower of Jesus living an active faith.

*I am part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have the Holy Spirit's power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure.*

*I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, smooth knees, colourless dreams, chained visions, worldly talking, cheap living and warped goals.*

*I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean in His presence, walk by patience, am uplifted by prayer, and I labour with power.*

*My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is Heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions are few, my guide is reliable, my mission is clear.*

*I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the enemy, pander at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.*

*I won't give up, shut up or let up until I have prayed up and paid up for the cause of Jesus Christ.*

*I must go till he comes, give till I drop, preach till everyone knows, work till he stops me. And when He comes for His own, He will have no trouble recognizing me because my banner will have been clear!*

Who was this from?

This note was found many years ago in the office of a young Pastor in Zimbabwe, Africa, following his martyrdom for his faith in Jesus Christ. Found in 'the signature of Jesus' by Brennan Manning.

So, how would you describe your faith?

- Non-active
- Weak
- Blasé
- Lost
- Missing in action
- On life support
- Barely a heartbeat
- Dead
- Or active, vibrant, full of life, energy, focused, and intense, like this young pastor

My prayer for WestPark is that it would be filled with a people on fire for Jesus.