Mark 3:13–15 | "Discipleship is Relational"

Preached on November 8, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles this morning to Mark 3:13–15. *[pauseee]*

Last week, I began our new sermon series, which is about what we can learn from how Jesus discipled the disciples. *[pause]*

Last Sunday was a foundational week, showing what a disciple is, but this week, we are going to start looking specifically at how Jesus discipled the disciples. *[pauseeee]*

There's a big difference between book-learning and hands-on training. *[pause]*

They are both aspects of learning, but they are different. *[pause]*

Book learning is important, don't get me wrong—we need to learn things through sitting in a class and having knowledge conveyed to us.

But there's something about hands-on training that takes learning to a whole new level. *[pauseeee]*

In college, over the summer breaks, I worked at a factory as a machine operator. *[pause]*

When I first started, if they just gave me a book and said, "Read it and then go out there and run the machines," I definitely wouldn't have been prepared. *[pause]*

Book knowledge would have helped me in some regards, but I would still be lacking in many other regards. *[pausee]*

Thankfully, when I first started, I was trained by an older man, who had tons of experience. *[pause]*

For a couple weeks, he told me what to do, but also, showed me what to do. *[pausee]*

If my trainer would have refused to train me, what good would that have done? *[pause]*

If my trainer had simply thrown a book at me to read, I wouldn't have been ready.

But I was ready because my trainer spent time and effort with me, and it paid off. *[pause]*

Over time, I became a good, reliable machine operator, partly because of his investment in me. *[pauseeee]*

That's what you see Jesus do with his disciples: he invested in them. *[pause]*

Look at Mark 3:13–15. *[READ]*

Before this passage, Jesus began His ministry with lots of healing, teaching, and casting out demons. *[pause]*

Now in our passage, we see Jesus go up on a mountain and appoint the twelve disciples to be those who would go out. *[pause]*

Jesus was showing that His ministry wouldn't just end with Him, but He was preparing a people to go and continue His work in the world. *[pauseee]*

That's a very brief summary of this passage, but this morning I want to focus on an easily overlooked truth found in these verses…

In verse 14, we see that Jesus called and appointed the disciples, "so that they might be with him." *[pauseee]*

We see that…

Discipleship is relational.

During COVID, we experienced first-hand what it was like to be distanced from others.

It was very hard for most people, as loneliness prevailed. *[pausee]*

We weren't made to be alone, for we are relational beings, who thrive and grow when we are in relationship with others. *[pause]*

The New Testament is filled with "one another" passages, calling us to be in relationship with others as we live for Christ.

Well here, Jesus' actions show us that discipleship is relational, for he disciples the disciples by calling them to be with him. *[pauseee]*

To be with someone means that you are in close association with them.

You are able to listen, observe, participate, and learn from them in a hands-on way. *[pause]*

That's what the twelve disciples got to do with Jesus. *[pauseee]*

Jesus had his disciples with him all the time...

They would travel with him,[1] spend time with him, see His life, and hear His teachings.[2] *[pause]*

There were even times where he would take only a few of them, and they would get to see some amazing miracle or event.[3] *[pauseeee]*

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[1] See Luke 8:1–3.
[2] A reference to Mark 10:32–33.
[3] See the transfiguration in Mark 9:2 and the healing of Jairus' daughter in Mark 5:37.

Imagine being able to see how Jesus acted in moments when the crowds weren't around. *[pause]*

Imagine being able to see Jesus when he was tired or hungry. *[pause]*

The disciples got to see him in the ordinary moments, but also the extraordinary ones.

He taught them how to handle hard people and situations—they learned first-hand from the Master. *[pause]*

In fact, Jesus even got them to participate in some events, like the feeding of the 5,000, where Jesus had the disciples serve the food to the people.[4] *[pauseeee]*

There's a big difference between seeing a person once a week for an hour or two, and living with them everyday.

You get to see what they are really like, but you can also learn a lot more because so many circumstances become teachable moments. *[pauseee]*

This is the way that Paul conducted his ministry, too…

In Acts 20, Paul is talking about his ministry among the Ephesians, and he says, "You yourselves know how I lived *among you*."[5] *[pause]*

And in 1 Thessalonians, Paul says that he and his coworkers not only shared the gospel with them, "but also our own selves."[6] *[pause]*

Discipleship is relational. *[pauseeee]*

When some people hear the word 'discipleship' they think that it's complex or difficult, and others don't even know what it is. *[pause]*

Put simply: discipleship is the process by which we lead people to trust in Christ, and then help them to follow Christ faithfully. *[pause]*

Do you realize that each of us is called to this? *[pause]*

It doesn't have to be complex, but as simple as meeting up with someone and encouraging them with the truth. *[pause]*

It's to help each other along in the walk of faith. *[pauseee]*

As we do this, we need to be with people like Jesus spent time with the disciples, so understand that you can't avoid people and disciple them. *[pause]*

You can't keep people at arm's length and expect them to grow. *[pauseee]*

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[4] A reference to Mark 6:41.
[5] Acts 20:18 (Italics added by me).
[6] 1 Thessalonians 2:8.

This means that you should be spending time with others, talking with them and getting to know them.

Have them over at your house or take them out to dinner—be in each other's lives! *[pauseee]*

Some are trying to live their Christian life on their own, but Christians were made to be in relationship with other Christians. *[pause]*

Others are just coming and going to church services, but spend little time with fellow believers.

And that's no way to help others to grow, be encouraged, or be challenged. *[pauseee]*

Discipleship is relational, so you must invest in relationships. *[pauseee]*

Older folks, intentionally invest in a younger person, helping them to grow in their walk with the Lord. *[pause]*

Mature believers, take a newer Christian under your wing and help them...

Maybe you could invite someone along with you as you go to the store, or do a project together.

Let's do 'life together.' *[pauseeee]*

Discipleship is relational, and…

I. The relational nature of discipleship demonstrates love.

When we don't care for a person, usually we don't want them near us, but those we love, we want near. *[pause]*

Well Jesus' call of the disciples "so that they might be with him" shows the closeness and care of love.

It's to say, "I want you near." *[pauseee]*

Isn't that amazing?...

Even though Jesus is God, and is the high and mighty Lord of all, yet He called His disciples to come near. *[pause]*

He didn't act too high up for them to get close. *[pauseee]*

Some celebrities keep their distance from people, as they are roped off or kept at arm's length, but Jesus doesn't do that, rather, he says, "I want you near!" *[pauseee]*

He's the One who said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden,"[7] and the one who said, "Let the children come to me."[8] *[pause]*

Our Savior doesn't say, "Go away," but "Come to me." *[pauseee]*

You are wanted near, dear one…

Though everyone else may keep you at a distance, Jesus wants you near. *[pauseee]*

This desire for the disciples to be with him also shows that Jesus wanted the disciples to know him. *[pause]*

Put simply: Jesus opened up his life for others to see in. *[pauseee]*

Some people are like closed books, it's hard to break the shell and see in, but not Jesus—He wanted His disciples to know Him deeply. *[pauseee]*

Christian, Jesus wants you to know Him. *[pause]*

He is not guarded like a fortress that you can't break into. *[pause]*

And to be near Christ is to know Christ—you get to know His love, His grace, His power, His gentleness, His firmness, His mercy. *[pauseeee]*

In John 10:14, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me." *[pause]*

Do you know Jesus, the good shepherd? *[pause]*

You can't move away and expect to know Him, but you must draw near. *[pauseee]*

To call the disciples to be with him, Jesus also showed that He wanted to know the disciples. *[pause]*

Jesus wasn't the type of person who acts like, "You should get to know me, but I'm not going to get to know you." *[pause]*

Haven't you ever met someone who expected you to ask them a million questions, but never once asked you a question about yourself? *[pause]*

It can be hurtful because it makes it seem like they don't care to get to know you.

But not Jesus, for he showed care and concern for the disciples as people. *[pause]*

He drew out their desires, thoughts, and fears through pointed questions and conversations. *[pauseee]*

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[7] Matthew 11:28.
[8] Mark 10:14.

Now Jesus being the Son of God knew them deeply already, but by the way He interacted with them, he revealed that he cared about what their thoughts, desires, and fears were. *[pauseee]*

Fellow believer, Jesus values you—you aren't just a number to Him. *[pause]*

In John 10, Jesus says, "He calls his own sheep by name."[9] *[pause]*

He knows you by name—you are valuable to Him as His dear sheep.

You are not a product to be used and then discarded, but a sheep that He cares for, knows, and values. *[pauseee]*

You are not disgusting to Christ, you are not "too far gone" for Him to know and love, but He accepts you as one of His own, if you trust in Him. *[pauseee]*

Many other people may not value you, but know that Christ does. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus' method of having the disciples be with him shows love, and this is how we are to disciple others, too. *[pause]*

Let's relate to others with closeness and care.

Let's not think of people as numbers, but think, "How can I love this person, invest in them, and see them grow?" *[pausee]*

Draw near to others, showing them that you care.

Lower down your walls and let people in. *[pauseee]*

Some people have put up walls, so that no one gets to see the true them with all of their struggles, weaknesses, fears, and flaws.

But how can we get to know and help each other, if we all have walls up? *[pausee]*

Yes, it means being vulnerable, but that's not always bad, for it's in our vulnerability that we get to know each other deeply.

And when we know each other deeply, we can know best how to minister to each other. *[pauseee]*

If we don't lower our walls, we will end up with superficial relationships, and so superficial discipleship. *[pauseee]*

You could start out small: whenever you come to church, think, "Who could I encourage today?"

Think of a person, and then go encourage them in some way. *[pause]*

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[9] John 10:3.

Use the "Faith in Action" nights to go visit someone or call them up.

Begin regularly meeting with someone and reading the Bible together. *[pausee]*

Invite someone over to make a meal for someone else, and while you're doing it, ask them about their life.

Be intentional, and don't let yourself fall back into "default mode." *[pause]*

Our default is that we drift back to self-focus, but it takes a certain intentionality to focus on others. *[pausee]*

You can't *only* be concerned about your own life to disciple people well, for discipling is an others-oriented act. *[pauseee]*

I know that this takes sacrifice, but it's a good thing: it's the sacrifice of love. *[pause]*

It takes commitment and investment in another person, but consider how others have invested in you. *[pausee]*

Consider how *Christ* has sacrificed and committed to your good by dying for you.

It takes time, effort, and patience, but consider Christ's time, effort, and patience with you. *[pauseee]*

Some try to disciple by teaching people without getting to know them, but it eventually ends up flat. *[pause]*

Others try to share knowledge with others, but do not care about what character is being changed in the other person.

But you can't disciple others well without a commitment to a relationship of love. *[pauseeee]*

We can't merely throw information at people, while being detached from them.

We can't attempt to grow people through transactional, impersonal programs. *[pause]*

Discipleship happens through loving relationships, not merely information and programs. *[pausee]*

We grow best when someone who loves us and cares for us, invests in us. *[pauseee]*

The "PBS News Hour" shared a story about a man named John Cruitt. *[pause]*

In 1958, John Cruitt's mother died when he was in third grade. *[pause]*

When he went back to school, his teacher waited until the other students left the room, and shared with him that she was there if he needed anything. *[pause]*

Instead of ignoring him, his teacher reached out in love, and it made a big difference in John Cruitt's life…

He felt loved, cared about, and seen—and eventually, he even became a teacher himself. *[pause]*

Instead of drawing away, his teacher drew near in love, and it impacted him for the rest of his life.[10] *[pauseeee]*

The relational nature of discipleship demonstrates love, so are you discipling others how you should by personally investing in them? *[pause]*

Draw near to them, care, open up your heart, let them know you and you know them, and just see what God does. *[pausee]*

Like our Lord lovingly called the disciples to be with him, so we are called to lovingly be with others. *[pauseee]*

Not only does the relational nature of discipleship show love, but…

II. The relational nature of discipleship develops others for ministry.

Look once again at the second part of verse 14 into 15...

Jesus called the disciples "that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons." *[pauseee]*

A vital truth is found in those few words: relationship *precedes* mission, and they go together. *[pause]*

Jesus didn't just want to hang out with the disciples to have a good time, but he intentionally used his time to teach and train them. *[pauseee]*

I think we can easily get into the mode of relationships with <u>no</u> mission in mind. *[pause]*

We could get together and have some fun times.

We could talk about the weather and sports, but where's the mission part? *[pausee]*

I do think there's a place for getting together and having fun and laughing.

That *can be* an aspect of building our relationships with each other, but that can't be the *extent* of our relationships. *[pauseee]*

Lots of unbelievers can likewise get together and have fun with one another, so what's different from our gatherings?...

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[10] https://www.pbs.org/video/story-corps-1733692511/.

We have to intentionally be on mission with each other. *[pause]*

This means, yes, let's have a good time and laugh, but let's also encourage, challenge, grow, stretch, and impact each other in the faith. *[pauseee]*

So on the one side, people can be guilty of having relationships with no mission in mind, but we could also be guilty of having the mission in mind with no relationship. *[pause]*

Jesus didn't throw a textbook at the disciples and walk away.

He didn't teach them, and then ignore them after the teaching was over. *[pause]*

As we learned already: he invested deeply in them by being with them, and this relationship *preceded* mission. *[pauseeee]*

Christ spent time with the disciples *before* sending them out. *[pause]*

He didn't greet them on this mountain, and then say, "OK, so glad you came, now you're on your own." *[pausee]*

This is why Jesus says back in Mark 1:17, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." *[pauseee]*

The disciples would follow Jesus, but doing so, would lead them to reach others. *[pauseee]*

Also, I love what Acts 4:13 says…

After Peter and John are arrested for preaching Christ, it says that the religious leaders, "Recognized that they had been with Jesus." *[pause]*

The disciples became so like Jesus, familiar with Him, and trained by His teachings that people couldn't help but notice that "they had been with Jesus." *[pause]*

Can people tell that *you* have been with Jesus? *[pauseee]*

What does this mean for us?...

It means that when we disciple other people, we do so with the goal of leading them to disciple others. *[pause]*

Every discipling relationship should lead to multiplication, not stagnation. *[pauseee]*

Let's say that you're an older woman who is meeting regularly with a younger woman. *[pause]*

Doing so, you have fun, and build a relationship with that younger woman.

But that's not all, for you are teaching her and training her to love her husband and children well, mature in the faith, *and then* be able to go and help *another* woman. *[pauseee]*

Or think of my role as your pastor...

I'm not here simply to give you information so that you're all amazing at Bible trivia and that's it.

I'm here to teach, train, motivate, and equip you for the work of ministry,[11] so that you now can go out to reach and minister to others. *[pauseeee]*

I know of some people who have done a one-on-one Bible study with someone else and really invested in that person's life.

And now they have developed that person to teach others, too. *[pauseee]*

The relational nature that's built in discipling can lead to developing others for ministry.

And this happens when we spend time with people, training them for the mission that God has called us to. *[pauseeee]*

A man named Ben Folds told the story of how he was taught piano by a world-class pianist named Dr. Hsu (Shoo). *[pause]*

He said, "I will never forget my first lesson with him…

After only moments at the keys, [we talked and] as our discussion progressed, we moved from the piano bench to comfortable chairs. *[pause]*

He made tea [and] shared musical knowledge and godly counsel.

[And] as we sipped and spoke, a relationship was born that continues to impact me to this day. *[pausee]*

Over six weeks of teas and keys, I grew. *[pause]*

Time with Dr. Hsu formed more than my musical abilities; it also transformed my vision of who I wanted to be and how I wanted to spend my life. *[pause]*

This man of elite ability chose to serve me and help me develop—it was contagious, it was powerful. *[pausee]*

By inviting me to think, speak, pray, and question with him for one summer, Dr. Hsu's fingerprints have been on all the students that I have mentored since. *[pause]*

He took time to know me and invest in me, which prepared me to invest in others. *[pause]*

He graciously selected me for a season of focused attention, and God has faithfully multiplied the outcome. *[pausee]*

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[11] A reference to Ephesians 4:11–12.

Who would have thought that a summer of one-on-one piano lessons could have such a wide-ranging impact? *[pause]*

Though I didn't understand it at the time, Dr. Hsu was practicing God's plan of discipleship through apprenticeship."[12] *[pauseeee]*

Who could you impact by intentionally, relationally discipling them for the glory of God? *[pauseeee]*

Jesus calling His disciples to be with him shows us that…

Discipleship is relational. So are you being discipled, and who are you discipling?

Jesus called the disciples "so that they might be with him." *[pausee]*

His method of discipleship wasn't merely throwing information at people, but being with people.

It wasn't keeping people at a distance, but drawing near in love. *[pause]*

But this relational nature of discipleship also has a great purpose: it leads to people being developed to reach others. *[pauseee]*

So are *you* being discipled? *[pauseee]*

Who is it that you have been with regularly, or have you put the walls up too high? *[pause]*

Are you seeking out other people, who you can have a deep relationship with, or have you been focused on other things? *[pauseee]*

If you are a disciple of Christ, the next question is: who are *you* discipling? *[pauseee]*

If you are a brand new Christian, we don't expect you to disciple anyone, but if you have been a Christian for a bit, know that you can disciple another person.

So be intentional and seek out opportunities to meet with and invest in others. *[pause]*

Invite them over, encourage them, tell them what God has been doing in your life, and what you have learned in the school of grace. *[pauseee]*

Aren't you glad that Jesus didn't keep *us* at a distance? *[pause]*

Jesus came to be with us and it has made all the difference in the world! *[pause]*

He came to be with us in the Incarnation, as He "became flesh and dwelt among us."[13] *[pause]*

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[12] https://www.cejonline.com/article/selective-mentoring-the-case-for-apprenticeship-in-academic-discipleship/. (Slightly edited by me.)
[13] John 1:14.

He then showed that He cared and drew near, as He called the disciples to "be with him." *[pause]*

He trained them for mission, but even amidst that, he said something that applies to all those who follow Him, he said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."[14] *[pauseee]*

This Jesus, who came near, calls on people to come to Him.

For it's in Him, the one died on the cross for our sins, that we can have forgiveness and eternal life. *[pause]*

And now, for us who believe, we know that the One who came to be with us, is with us always even now, and someday we will be with Him for eternity.

[14] Matthew 28:20.