

Real Discipleship

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[0 : 00] You have to be a disciple in order to make disciples. You can't make disciples if you aren't a disciple. And the president just got all over that and I thought, man, this might make a good sermon, so I got a sermon about it.

Being is more important than doing. A lot of times we do things as Christians and yet we're not really Christian in our doing of the things we do.

Being has to precede doing. And a person has to be a disciple before we can make disciples. And at the core of our mission of this church, of all Southern Baptist Church, of all evangelical churches, the core of our mission is the Great Commission.

But the Great Commission is more than just evangelism. In fact, the theme of the Great Commission is discipleship. And a disciple is someone who follows a teacher and learns from that teacher.

Jesus gave us the mission to go and make disciples, which means we've got to be disciples. The word disciple, depending on what translation you use, disciple or disciples occurs 261 times in the New Testament.

[1 : 25] The word Christian occurs three times. And the first time it occurs in the book of Acts, it is a term of derision.

It says they were first called Christians at Antioch. Little Christ. It was a term to embarrass them.

A term of derision. Well, Western civilization, this civilization we've grown up in, was shaped and influenced by discipleship.

Well, not Christian discipleship, but the teaching of the Greek philosophers. Socrates had a disciple named Plato. Plato had a disciple named Aristotle.

And through their disciples, that Socratic method of teaching, where you ask questions in the teaching, that method of teaching invaded Western thinking.

[2 : 25] But because of the Greek philosophers who had disciples that disseminated their message, then it influenced the whole world. So when Rome became the power, then Rome, even though they had conquered the Greeks, Rome became Hellenized because of the influence of the Greek philosophers.

Discipleship is a powerful force, but it doesn't just sprout up automatically. It takes time. It takes moments. It takes days.

And it takes years. It's following the course and sticking with it. There are different kinds of discipleship in the world. Some good, some bad.

Some Christian, some not. But the only discipleship that will change the world for the good is Christian discipleship or following Jesus. Dr. Albert Mohler and Dr. Ed Stetzer has given us three words that describe church today.

What kind of people are in church today? And they say one group is called the cultural Christians. They're lost. Another group is called congregational Christians.

[3 : 38] They're lost. And another group are what they call convictional Christians. Those are the disciples. Those are the ones that are truly born again. Mark in chapter 4 describes four types of soils.

Three of them were false. One of them was good soil that produced many fold. Then you come to Luke chapter 9 and Luke has four responses too.

And three of those are false. I want you to look in Luke chapter 9 and beginning in verse 57. As they were going along the road, someone said to him, I will follow you wherever you go.

And Jesus said to him, The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. And he said to another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.

But he said to him, Allow the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God. Another also said, I will follow you, Lord, but first permit me to say goodbye to those at home.

[4 : 49] But Jesus said to him, No one after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom. The picture that's before us in these scriptures are Jesus on his way back to Jerusalem.

And as he's making his way back to Jerusalem, understand he's in transit. He's on the move. And as he goes along the way, there are crowds of people that gather. They'd heard about his teaching.

They'd heard about his miracles. They were curious. So they gather along the roadside. And as he's journeying along the way, he encounters these three people. And there are three responses to the gospel.

The fourth one coming in verse 62. Three responses to the gospel that's false discipleship. I want you to look at the first one. An impulsive promise, but personal comfort was more important than Christ.

This is like the seed that fell beside the road in Mark 4, 15, where it says when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.

[6 : 00] So here's a person. They hear, they see the word of Jesus. They immediately respond, but nothing else. So I want you to look at it.

Emotional and impulsive. Look in verse 57. As they were going along the road, someone said to him, I will follow you wherever you go. Notice something very important about that.

This person that responded to Jesus, Jesus did not call them. Jesus didn't say, follow me. Jesus didn't point them out.

This person volunteered. And one of the critical issues in the Christian faith is that we need people who are surrendered, not people who volunteer.

Because when you volunteer, you can volunteer for anything, but when you're surrendered, you're surrendered for all and all of you to the Lord Jesus Christ. So this person sees Jesus going by.

[7 : 00] He just says, just blurts out, Lord, I'll follow you wherever you go. Have you ever noticed that we have to be real careful about saying words like never and always?

Lord, I'll follow you wherever you go. Like the man that told his wife, he said, honey, I love you so much I'd cross the blazing desert, I'd swim the sea, I'd fight off lions just to come and see you.

She said, what time are you picking me up tonight? He said, I'll be there at 7 o'clock if it doesn't rain. We say a lot of things. This fellow says, Lord, I'll follow you wherever you go.

Now this guy was likely a scribe. Important, educated, probably a wealthy person. A parallel verse in Matthew 8 and verse 19 says, and a certain scribe came and said to him, teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.

Now for a lot of us in the Christian world today to get a celebrity, to get somebody that's rich, to get somebody that's powerful intellectually, then we won a trophy.

[8 : 07] We say, oh now, we've got somebody. But what we have, what we think we have, may be worse than having nothing.

And this guy comes and he has all of this power, but Jesus is not impressed with that. This man had not counted the cost. He just blurted out something.

It was impulsive. It was emotional. It was on the spot. He hadn't thought it through. He hadn't counted the cost. What does it cost to follow Jesus? Really? It cost everything. In fact, the Bible says, Jesus said, we've got to lose our lives in him in order to find our lives.

It's a transformative process that's conducted by the Spirit of God inside a person who has surrendered, who has yielded everything to God. And that's just being an ordinary Christian.

Well, Jesus gave a strong answer to this false discipleship. If you're looking at verse 58, Jesus said to him, the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

[9 : 17] Even though he looked like a prized convert, Jesus knew him like Jesus knows us all. And Jesus was saying something like this, have you really thought this through?

Do you understand what you're really saying? That you'll follow me wherever I go? our desire sometimes to have more proselytes, more converts, more numbers can lead to fewer real disciples and more hypocrites.

In Matthew 23 and verse 15, the Bible says, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! Understand, they were the top level. They were the educated, sophisticated leaders of the Jews.

Because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

Folks, the issue for the Southern Baptist Convention, the issue for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, the issue for the church of Jesus Christ is not numbers, it's people who are disciples.

[10 : 32] One of the things that's happened to us as Southern Baptists over a long trajectory of time is that we have counted so many noses that we've come to see our importance in our numbers.

And we're coming to find out that our numbers are more alive than we thought they were. On any given Sunday morning in any, just about any Southern Baptist church, there will be less than 50% of the members that actually attend that church.

That doesn't sound like New Testament Christianity. Oh, there are reasons why people may not be in church, but what if a person doesn't come? If at all, if Jesus calls us to be his disciples, that means we follow him, we learn from him, but if we vacate ourselves from the gathering of his saints, what are we going to learn?

How are we going to follow? How are we going to together make an impact in the world? A profession, a profession of faith without a connected relationship with Jesus Christ is false discipleship.

A person can be plugged into a church, plugged into a ministry, do all these kind of things and yet be lost, not be a real disciple. There was a time in the major metropolitan areas of our country, still is, people live out in the suburbs on the outskirts, would ride a train into town.

[12 : 03] There was these three gentlemen, businessmen, that lived in the city and they rode a train into town every day for their work, ride it back late in the evening. They did that for about 20 years.

One day they go to get on their car, they go in their same seat, they would sit there, drink their coffee, read their paper, chat on the way into work. This time they go in, they sit down, nobody else is on the car. The porter comes through and he says, gentlemen, you can't sit in this car today, you can't take this car.

They said, yes we can. Because some of us are geared in such a way when somebody says you can't do something, what do we do? We say, I'm going to do it. So that's what they did.

No, we're going, no I'm sorry sir, you can't ride this car today. And one of them just gave the fellow peace of his mind, which is always a bad thing because we probably need to keep as much as we can. So he said, sir, we've been riding this car, this seat, we've been doing this for 20 years and we're going to do it this morning.

Now go on your way. Porter said, okay, all right. I just thought you might want to be connected to something that's going somewhere. The car was in for servicing.

[13 : 16] That's the thing about the church, about Jesus Christ, about what we say is the relationship with Jesus Christ. We've got to be connected to him. If we're not connected to him, we're not going anywhere.

We're not making disciples because we aren't disciples if we're not connected to him. Well, the second response, traveling along the same road is a casual response that was second to the desire for personal riches.

If you look in verse 59, and he said to another, follow me. Notice the difference. This time Jesus spoke. This time Jesus took the initiative and he said, follow me.

But the man said to the Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father. So he made a special request. And we're always doing that, seems like, with the Lord.

Lord, I'll do this, but. You ever bargained with God? Anybody here ever bargained with God? Lord, you get me out of this spot, I'll do anything.

[14 : 23] I remember when I was a kid, when I was growing up, we didn't have a lot of money, so I didn't, Brian, I didn't go to the dentist very often except when I had a pain. And I had some pain, I went to the dentist and he said, you've got cavity.

I said, oh, that doesn't sound good. And we're going to need to fill it. He said, I'm going to drill it, you want a shot? And I said, I was so afraid of needles, I said, no, I don't want a shot. He said, what?

I said, no, I don't want a shot. You want me to drill it without a shot? I said, yeah. So he proceeded to drill. And I grabbed, I mean, my knuckles were white and back then you didn't even have Tylenol, you had extra strength et cetera.

And every time I'd leave the dentist, and I had about eight cavities over a period of a couple of years. And then I go in one day and I say, I'm going to have a cavity.

He said, okay, you ready? I said, I think I want a shot. And he said, he looked at, he said, what? I said, yeah, I think I want a shot. So he gave me a shot and then he started to drill.

[15 : 29] And I'm telling you the truth, I didn't feel hardly anything. It was a great experience. It wasn't as good as when I was in the recovery room recently and I heard somebody moaning.

I heard somebody go, oh, oh. Then I noticed, every time I heard somebody moaning, I could tell my lips were moving. It was me. And this beautiful, beautiful, intelligent Nigerian nurse came over and she said, Mr. Gray, do you want, are you having pain?

And I answered, oh. And she said, on a scale of one to ten, what did you say your pain is? And I said, oh. And then she gave the name of the drug.

Doug, I know you know what it is. Daladin. Daladin, yeah. I can't ever remember that. She said, I'm going to give you some Daladin. She said, it's five times more powerful than morphine.

I said, okay. And she gave it to me. And listen, the world changed. Didn't last long, but the world changed. But here's what I'm trying to get at.

[16 : 40] I didn't try to bargain with God this time around. I think I'd grown enough. But when I was a kid, I'd pray. I really would pray before I'd go in the dentist. I'd sit there and I'd pray, dear Lord, don't let me have a cavity.

If you won't let me have a cavity this time, I'll serve you. I'll do whatever you want to. And then sometimes I wouldn't have a cavity. And then I'd, of course, renege on my promise. And other times I would have a cavity.

And I'd feel like, well, you know, God let me down. Childish to bargain with God. Because God doesn't make deals with anybody.

That's why we are to call him. And that's why he is known as the Lord Jesus Christ. He is God. We don't make deals with God.

Well, this fellow had this special request. And it sounds like a good one. Let me bury my father first. Understand, that's a Middle Eastern expression. They would often say, I'll go this and I'll do that after I bury my father.

[17 : 43] What they meant was, especially if they were the oldest son, then they would make sure that they took care of the estate, they got the inheritance and all that stuff, and then they'd go on with that next phase.

See, the issue here, it sounds like this man's father is dead. But you have to remember something. Number one is, the Jews did not embalm bodies.

The Egyptians did. The Jews packed a body, wrapped it up with all those fragrances. You remember the resurrection of Jesus when the women are going to carry fragrances to put in the tomb where Jesus was.

So the Jews, after a death, had a burial immediately. Second thing is, if this man had just died, he wouldn't be out on the street for Jesus to pass by.

And the picture we have here is, this man's father had not died. He said, first let me go bury my father, meaning I'll follow you, Jesus, when I take care of this other stuff.

[18 : 48] And sometimes that's what we do, but disciples don't do that. They say, I'll follow Jesus when this happens, when this happens, when this happens. When I take care of this, then I'll follow Jesus.

But there's an urgency about his call to our lives that we follow him wholeheartedly now and in the present. This man had a special request.

He's like the seed that was thrown on the thorns in Mark 4, 18 and 19. He said, these are the ones who hear the word and the worries of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things enter in and choke the word and it becomes fruitful.

And then Jesus in verse 60 gave a shocking reply. He said to him, allow the dead to bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God everywhere.

What was he saying? Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead. He was saying that secular people, those without God, have different priorities and followers of Jesus and a follower of Jesus has the priority to follow and obey Jesus Christ because a disciple follows and learns from his teacher.

[20 : 07] So this man had a special request. Jesus said, let the dead bury the dead. The point is, the point Jesus made, there's nothing more important, nothing than our relationship with Jesus Christ.

I don't know if this is a true story. Am I allowed to tell it at First Baptist Church? It's not true. It might be true. It might be true. When I was a boy growing up in the country church I grew up in, there was an evangelist came and Brian remembers this.

We used to have meetings in the spring and in the fall. So this is one of those times that we had meetings. This evangelist came and, oh, he was powerful. And he told this story.

And he said, one time there was this man that owned a farm and he had a really good bird dog. And a forecast was coming that there was going to be a big snow event.

And this fellow decided, I think I'll go out this afternoon and I'll let my bird dog go and see if I can kill a quail or two. He takes this bird dog out and while he's out there, once he got deep in the field and all of a sudden it started to snow.

[21 : 15] And it snowed and snowed. And he said, I got to get out of here. He called his dog. His dog didn't come. Called his dog. His dog didn't come. And he's beginning to freeze. So he goes back and drives back to his house.

Comes back out that night with his flashlight. Calls his dog. His dog doesn't come. So he leaves him. Morning comes. There's a big blanket of snow. He goes out to look for his dog again. He starts walking over his field and finally found his dog.

Pointed. Frozen to death. So what's the point? To Jesus, to the church at Smyrna in Revelation 2.10.

He said, be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life. And I know it's radical. I know it's not modern. I know it's not even popular.

But what Jesus has taught us in the New Testament is there is nothing, nothing in this world more important than him in our lives. That's why he'll never disappoint us.

[22 : 18] Paul said in Romans, whoever believes in him will not be disappointed. When we give our life away to him and we find a new life, we will not be disappointed. Well, as we go on down the road, there's a third response.

If you look in verse 61. Another said to him, I will follow you, Lord, but first permit me to say goodbye to those at home. Now, this is a conditional statement that depended too much on family relationships.

I have spent over half, much over half of my ministry just doing marriage retreats and family life conferences and counseling.

And I believe in the family. It's important. It's so important. It's more important than the church. And God ordained the family before he did the church. And the order is God, family, church.

Here's the thing. If you and I have good, strong, godly families, we will have strong churches. But here you notice what he's saying is that the greatest relationship is with him.

[23 : 36] Not something that's temporary, but something that's eternal. Now, you'll notice this man said, I'll follow you, but first permit me to say goodbye to those at home.

He's like the seed that fell on the rocky soil, that layer of limestone that was just underneath the soil. And when they would plant the soil, it would prop, grow up, but it couldn't sustain life because it couldn't develop a good root system.

In Mark 4, 16 and 17, those who hear the word and immediately receive it with joy, and they who have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary.

Then when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. This man made a reluctant promise. I will follow you, but.

Lord, make an exception for me. I'll follow you, but. Jesus knew his heart. He knew his mind.

[24 : 43] And he knew he was not fully committed. And he knew if he let him go home, and by the way, understand the context. Jesus is on the road. He's moving to Jerusalem. He's not going to camp out there for a few days.

And this fellow said, let me go home and say goodbye. And back in the Middle East to do that, that might have taken him anywhere from a month to two months possibly. Let me go say goodbye.

Why did he want to go home anyway? Well, John MacArthur says, he thinks he wanted to go home so he could raise money. So he could raise money for his mission because he knew the disciples didn't have any money.

They had a small treasury bag. You knew who the treasurer was, right? Who was the treasurer of the disciples? Judas. So he's going home possibly to raise money so he can enjoy some kind of amenities when they're on the road.

Now, Luke chapter 14, verses 26. Jesus said, If anyone comes to me that does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life cannot be my disciple.

[25 : 56] Now, there's no command here that God's telling us to go hate our family. That's not what he's saying. It's relative. It's in the context of relativity. And what he's saying is this. Your love for Jesus Christ has to be so strong, so real, so much a priority in your life that anything else, even the most important people in your life, would seem like hate.

When the choice is to be made, the choice is made to follow Jesus. There are many parents that have been grieved and saddened, hurt, even though they were supportive, that their children said, I'm going halfway around the world to serve Jesus.

And of course, they would want their parents to stay here, but they have a sense of calling. So they listened to the voice of God and not the reason of their parents. I remember when I was in journalism school, and I know this is going to shock some of you, at the University of South Carolina, I saw the paw up here the other day, Fred put up.

But my mother used to tell people, I'd say, where's Rudy? And this is what she said, this is true. She said, oh, he's at the university.

Because in her opinion, there was just one. So I go down there, I've been working for the Anderson Independent as a sports writer. I had won an academic award in journalism at Anderson University. I've been the editor of the paper at Anderson University.

[27 : 30] It looked like my career was set in journalism. So I go down there, and lo and behold, God calls me to preach. In Columbia, Davey, of all places, God calls me to preach in Columbia.

I found, to this day, I don't know where it came from, I found a catalog from back then, Central Wesleyan College. Southern Wesleyan today. I scrounged up, and Brian, it was hard to come up with, I scrounged up \$15, which was the application fee back then.

Sent it in, got accepted. I come home, and I announce to my parents, God's called me in the ministry. I'm transferring to Central Wesleyan College and majoring in Bible.

My mother cried. And my daddy said, son, don't you do that. You go and make something out of yourself. Like be a journalist.

And today, if you look at Barnum and Pew and some of those things, two people that are at the very lowest in the level of trust by society are preachers and journalists. Wouldn't have made much difference, would it?

[28 : 43] I said, no, I'm going to do it. And so finally, he says to me, I'm not going to pay for it. They were paying for my college. He said, I'm not paying another penny if you leave there. I said, well, that's okay.

Because I was still working for the Independent while I was in Columbia covering sports. I said, I'll make it work. Well, a few weeks later, I came home one weekend, and they were gone somewhere, but there was a plate on the kitchen table, and there was a newspaper clipping.

And that newspaper clipping said, Central Wesleyan receives full accreditation. See, one of the things with her was, well, that school's not even accredited.

And I'm 99.9% sure she didn't have a clue what that meant. But she had that cut out, and I thought, wow, because that takes a process.

You know, accreditation takes time. I didn't know they were working on it. So then I go back and transfer and get all everything, and then I start in the summer because I had to have four semesters of Greek.

[29 : 44] So I got started in the summer. Anyway, to make a long story short, I had to make a decision over listening to my parents or listening to God.

And I thought, by listening to God, it was going to be a tremendous struggle. But my dad came around, and he paid for a lot of my college the last couple of years.

That's a miracle in itself. That's another story because this man was so tight, he would squeak when he walked. But I guess my point in all of this, and the point in this fellow, he's coming and he's saying, let me say goodbye to those at home.

Let me go back. And Jesus says, there's no relationship more important than your relationship with me. And then he gave this absolute truth in verse 62. Jesus said to him, no one after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.

No exceptions. And he goes back to a proverb that was very similar to this, Hesiod in 700 B.C. One of those ancient philosophers. And the proverb was something like this.

[30 : 52] You cannot plow a furrow looking backwards. Has anybody here ever plowed a mule or a horse or an oxen?

Anybody? Anybody? Okay. What is the thing that a plowman wants to do? What's the goal?

Straight. How do you plow a straight row? You look ahead. You can't plow a straight row looking backwards.

Proverbs. That's what the proverb said. That's what Jesus said. I remember growing up, my granddaddy had a farm. And he had a man that ran a farm for him.

And he had mules. He had a little tractor, but he had mules. And I watched this man year after year behind those mules. Be plowing up ground, planting something. Planting. Doing these furrows or these rows.

[31 : 51] And I noticed as he'd go along, he'd say, gee, gee, ha, ha, gee, gee, ha. And I thought, that's just something you say to mules to get them to go. But, you know, it was years later that I come to find out that gee meant turn right.

And ha meant turn left. And he was making sure that he was keeping that row straight. When they'd venture a little bit left, he'd say turn right, gee. Or when they'd venture right, he'd say turn ha.

He was keeping the row straight. The goal of a plowman is to plow a straight furrow. And Jesus used that illustration, that proverb. Nobody, nobody, no exceptions.

After putting his hand to the plow. Lord Jesus, I give you my life. And looking back, Jesus said, no one that does that is fit for the kingdom of God.

We keep on keeping on. Hebrews 12, 2 says, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

[32 : 59] Now, these are strong words from Jesus. To be a disciple means to follow him. To learn from him. To obey him.

Being a disciple means that he's the most important thing in our lives. And being a disciple means we will make disciples of other people.

And it's not just a matter of reading a verse, pray this prayer. Okay, you're good. See, we're famous for that in our churches.

We're famous for that. Pray this prayer. Say this verse. Okay, now if you were to die, would you go to heaven? I think so. Okay, you're good. I remember when I first started preaching, I went into this mobile home park.

And I went to this fellow. I was all gung-ho about soul winning. This fellow was in there. And I went through the Roman road with him. I said, now I want you to pray right now with me. You're ready to trust Christ. He said, okay.

[33 : 58] And I asked him to pray. And he didn't know how to pray. So I prayed. I said, just pray after me. And he prayed after me. And I thanked God for saving me. And I looked at him. I said, now if you were to die, where would you go? He said, I don't know. So I went through the whole thing again.

And I said, now if you were to die, right now would you go to heaven? He said, I don't know. I said, man, why did you pray to prayer? He said, I thought that's what you wanted me to do.

I think a lot of times we fill our roles of our churches with people making responses because they're under emotional distress.

Because they want to be accepted by somebody. Or because they think that's what we want them to do. I had a disagreement with a pastor not too long ago.

Good, good friend of mine. He said, you should always give an invitation. He said, there should always be the sawdust trail. You should always have an altar call. I said, I don't think so.

[35 : 05] He said, what are you talking about? I said, sure, give an invitation. But you don't have to ask. I always ask people to walk down like there's something magic from walking from that place to this spot. He said, no, I disagree.

I disagree. I said, well then answer me this question. How is it that the greatest Baptist preacher in the history of the English language never gave an altar call and won more people to Christ in that era than anybody else?

Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He said, I don't know. I said, did you know that they had a class and a woman led this class and she was strict? And they had to go through.

It was almost like a seminary class and they had to give. They had to show that they knew the stuff and their life reflected it. And if they didn't, she would not say to the pastor, okay, they're good to become members.

They're good to be baptized. Instead, she'd say, nope, they've got some more time. But then you had a church that was packed out all the time and you had fewer members than you had attenders.

[36 : 13] But today in the Southern Baptist Convention, we have a lot more members than we have attenders. We've just reversed it. But the answer to the dilemma, the cure for the problem is found in the Word.

It's watching what Jesus did on this road. It's recognizing that you can't make disciples unless you are a disciple.

And the whole thing, and I'm done, the whole thing is this. God does not need volunteers. This mission, this life, is not about volunteering.

It's about surrendering. And once you surrender to Christ, and that's what it means to give your life to Him so that you can lose it to find it. When you surrender, when I surrender, when we surrender to Christ, then all those other questions are answered.

So no church that's full of disciples, people surrendered to Christ, ever has to beg anybody to serve on any committee or in any capacity. It's always full.

[37 : 25] It's always a waiting list. How many churches do you know like that? The crying need of the hour for the church in America is to be disciples, to make disciples, to get back to the seriousness of what it means to follow and learn from Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you in closing this morning. Would you say, as you examine your life, would you ask yourself, am I a volunteer or have I surrendered?

Am I a volunteer or have I surrendered? Let's pray together. Let's pray together.