



## *Practices for Becoming Mature Disciples* **SIGN #2 - YOU LOVE YOUR CHURCH**

### **Introducing** *The Nine Signs of Spiritual Maturity*

We have identified nine characteristics that define a transformed and mature follower of Christ. We hope to use these characteristics, or signs, as mile markers to help us pay attention to the path we're on. It is important to note that these are all broad simplifications. They're not meant to be a pass/fail test, but a gauge we check regularly and to know when and where to adjust as we go. Each week we will explore one of these nine signs in depth using a variety of exercises and spiritual disciplines designed to help you evaluate where you're at and how you can continue growing towards maturity in Christ.

### **This Week's Focus:** A Mature Disciple Loves Their Church

It is easy to think of "The Church" as a building or organization, the way we would a bank or a school. We can feel like it's something detached from us. But the bible describes it more like a network or society that is very much dependent on the people within it. The church isn't an institution separate and above the influence of its people, but the embodiment of an agreement between God and His people to love well. So the church is all of God's people living out His will - it's just as much you as it is the pastor. So we gather as a church to support, encourage, and learn from one another.

The second sign that we are walking in The Way of Jesus is that we chose to love our church. A mature follower recognizes that they are the church and that Jesus died not only to save us individually, but to form us as your family. Understanding the value of this family, they do their best to cherish, protect, and strengthen it in both their words and actions. We mature exponentially when we commit our to building relationships in the local church and are intentional to pursue spiritual growth, practical service, and personal accountability within those relationships. When we follow Jesus' example of loving the church, we strengthen not only ourselves, but those members closest to us and the church as a whole.

### **Quick Tip:** Set Your Prayer Time Up for Success

Prayer at its core is communicating with God. And while there are many different types of prayer, in these practices we're focusing on intentional prayer times. A prayer "time" refers to a time and place that you prepare proactively and typically includes prompts or rituals that help you focus on a specific subject. There is no "right" way to do your prayer time, but there are a handful of strategies that can set you up for success:

- Put it on your calendar
- Bring a treat - coffee, blanket, cookie
- Make a special spot - chair, room, outside
- Bring a journal or sketchbook
- Turn off your phone or set it to "do not disturb"
- Write down your to-do list first, then physically set it aside as an act of letting go
- Play some instrumental music or white noise
- Spend a few minutes of silence at the beginning or end of your time
- Take some deep breaths or do some grounding exercises before you begin
- Pray out loud
- Read scriptures as prayer

# TIME ALONE

## PRAY: Praying for the “Found”

One of the ways that we can love our church is by praying for both the institution and the people of the church. During your quiet time, start by asking God to increase your heart for the people around you within the church and show you how you can care well for them through prayer.

Then ask God to bring to mind two or three people in the church He wants you to pray for. They could be people you know and are close with, people you just met, or people you’ve only seen in passing. If God leads you to, share with them a verse or something encouraging he wants you to share with them.

*Go Deeper: It can be easy to forget those who walk with Jesus every day need just as much prayer as those who are far from Him. So next time a fellow Christian shares with you about a challenge they’re currently facing, ask them if they’d like prayer. And instead of just saying “I’ll pray for you” take a moment to pray with them right then and there.*

## READ: John 15:9 - 14

Read through this passage each day. It can be helpful to read in different translations, such as NIV, ESV, or The Message.

## WORSHIP: This Week’s New Songs

We now have a playlist made up of worship songs that are meaningful to our community; including our Sunday setlists and even a few originals! Each week, we’ll add new songs. Find the playlist using the links below. Here’s what we added this week:

- With a Thousand Hallelujahs by Brooke Ligertwood
- I Belong to Jesus by Bethel Music



# TIME ALONE

## REFLECT: What Does It Mean To Be A Part Of A Church Community?

### Acts 2:42-47

42 They **devoted** themselves to the apostles' **teaching** and to **fellowship**, to the **breaking of bread** and to **prayer**. 43 **Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles**. 44 **All the believers were together and had everything in common**. 45 They sold property and possessions to **give to anyone who had need**. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and **ate together with glad and sincere hearts**, 47 **praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people**. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

In bold are the practices and values that the early church displayed to one another and the world around them. As you examine these key practices and values of a church community, evaluate if and how you've experienced these within Vancouver Church. (Though we may have experience these things individually outside the church, for the purpose of this exercise evaluate these based on what you are currently experiencing at VC)

*DEVOTION TO TEACHING*

*DEVOTION TO TABLE FELLOWSHIP*

*DEVOTION TO PRAYER*

*POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*

*GENEROSITY*

*SINCERITY & AUTHENTICITY*

*CELEBRATION*

*EVANGELISM*

Consider your evaluation as you answer the following questions:

- Are there opportunities for you to engage and build these practices and values with the community of VC?
- What actions do you need to take in order for the Acts 2 experience to become your experience at VC?
- What do you need from Vancouver Church in order for this to become a reality in your life?

# TIME TOGETHER

## Welcome: *Getting to Know Eachother*

- Icebreaker (optional): What's something you either liked as a kid and don't now, or something you didn't like as a kid and do now?
- Share a favorite memory you have from church life (a gathering, serve experience, small group, camp/retreat, etc) and how it impacted your view of being part of something bigger than yourself. If you don't have one, share a memory from a different group experience (sports team, friend group, car club) and how that impacted your view.

## Scripture: *Acts 2:42 - 47*

Have someone read the passage out loud in any translation. Others can take notes below.

*42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

## Discussion: *The Bible*

- Share any words, phrases, or pictures that stood out to you while reading.
- What are the four essential actions that the early followers of Jesus "devoted" themselves to? How do you think these actions led to people being saved "daily"?
- This passage describes everyday life in the early church after Jesus' resurrection and is considered a template for us today. Which parts of this description feel most "realistic" to how church works in our time? What are specific examples you've seen at Vancouver Church?
- Which parts feel impossible to modern day life? What would have to change in order for them to feel possible?

# TIME TOGETHER

## Discussion: *The Practices*

- Discuss your experience of taking time alone.  
How hard/easy was it to find time? How did you feel before you started versus after? Do you have a go-to place or spot in the house? What adjustments can you make to help you make time?
- Share insights, questions, and challenges from the “Time Alone” Practices  
What has been encouraging to you this week? What questions do you have from your Time Alone? Where do you see God challenging you? What are 2-3 steps that you can take now to grow in loving your church?

## Discussion: *The Journey*

The church is filled with people - in fact, the church *is* people - without humans, there is no church. But anyone who has been around people, knows we don't always get it right.

- How have you been encouraged in your relationship with Jesus lately?
- What challenges have you experienced that seem to pull you away from trusting God and His people? (distractions, defeats, doubts)
- What actions do you need to take in order for the Acts 2 experience we read about to become your experience at VC?
- How can the group encourage you and pray for you as we each walk together?

## Prayer: *Increasing Your Love for Our Church*

In addition to prayer requests and anything else the group wants to pray about, ask God to help you see Vancouver Church in the same way He sees us. Then ask Him for opportunities to love and support your church.

*Go Deeper: Loving the church isn't always easy because it means being an imperfect person loving imperfect people. Our limits as humans can lead to disappointment, conflict, and even pain. And when left unaddressed, these things become a breeding ground for distrust and resentment. But when we acknowledge our pains and frustrations with other healthy believers and allow God to redeem them, we experience healing, which frees us to love with grace. Take some time to consider what might be making it harder for you to love the church right now. Then, if appropriate and without using names, share with the group (or partner up) and pray together for God's grace and guidance in these areas.*

*Note: when someone is sharing, it can be tempting to jump to solutions or defend someone/something they're talking about. Or you may have similar thoughts that you want to add on. But loving the church means being honoring in all situations. So do your best to give them space to share and allow God to do the talking.*

# FAMILY TIME

## **Learning to Love the Church Together**

Second only to teaching your children to love Jesus, teaching them to love and serve the church is one of the best ways to set them up for a lifetime of faithful living. We were not designed to walk out our relationship with Jesus alone, so it is vital to build meaningful relationships with other believers at every stage of life. Not only that, but when children understand that they are a part of something bigger than themselves, it increases their confidence in their faith and helps to build their self worth. This can help them form a healthy, christ-centered identity. Below are some ways to help your children and family grow in their love for the church.

### **1. Prioritize Sunday Church**

The habit of attending a Sunday church service can feel laborious at times with everything we have going on in our lives. But consistently attending a service allows your children and family to build the kind of relationships and connections that make that busy life worth living. And often, all you have to do is show up! So choose a Sunday service time that works for you, and commit to attending that gathering at least 3 out 4 weeks each month.

### **2. Find Ways to Serve Together**

The best thing we can do for our young ones is to lead by example. In many of our ministries, children can serve alongside their parents - whether it is helping with hospitality, greeting, or even in Sunday school classrooms. We have seen kids as young as 5 join their mom and dad in serving in the baby class! Talk to your ministry leader about how your kiddo can get involved, or fill out our serve form to let us know you're interested - [vchurch.org/serve](http://vchurch.org/serve)

### **3. Pray for Your Church Together as a Family**

On the way home from church, ask your kid about their time in class; did they make a new friend? Who was their teacher today? What did they learn about in class? Whatever they feel like sharing, use that as a jumping point to pray for their friends, leaders, and fellow classmates at church. Or if someone shared a prayer request with you in "big church," invite your child to join you in praying for them. You may want to stay away from names, but you can still pray for your "friend" who is feeling sad and ask Jesus to comfort them together.

### **4. Join a Group**

Invest in meaningful relationships with other believers outside of just Sundays. Whether it is a Life Group, a Bible Study, MOPS, ALPHA or some other intentional relationship, these are the kinds of relationships that walk with you through hard times. And it is much easier to love the church when we feel loved by the church.