

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH**  
**SUNDAY, JUNE 1, 2025**  
**SERMON: RELEVANT**  
**SERMON SERIES PART 2: WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?**  
**SCRIPTURE: JOHN 17:20-26**  
**REV. IRENE WILLIS HASSAN**

**John 17:20-26**

**20** “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, **21** that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **22** I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— **23** I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

**24** “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

**25** “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. **26** I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

**1. Sermon: What Are We Supposed to Talk About?**

Last week, we began a sermon series called “What is Discipleship?” The purpose of this series is to equip you for the ministries we’re starting this summer—namely, the Discipleship Groups and Alpha programs.

I shared last week that church—or really anything we do in life—should be about more than just the “nuts and bolts” like arranging volunteer schedules, allocating resources, completing to-do lists. Often we feel most useful or relevant when we’ve accomplished something, like preparing the rooms for our five interns or getting a loved one to their weekly medical appointments.

And yes, those things matter. A huge thank you again to Reggie, Dennis, Myra, Aaron, Debbie, and everyone else who worked so hard to check all the boxes for our summer programs.

But as I said last week, life can start to feel like an endless list of boxes to check—important things, yes, even life-giving ones. But still, they can begin to feel purposeless if they're disconnected from a deeper sense of calling, community, or spiritual renewal. If we forget why we do them, or for whom.

So maybe you saw the upcoming discipleship and Alpha sessions and thought with a sense of dread: “Oh no, one more thing.” Or, as some of you asked me more directly: “What are we supposed to talk about? Who’s leading it?”

That’s the question I want to take up today: **What are we supposed to talk about?**

In John 17, Jesus is having a similar conversation with his disciples. He’s about to leave them to be arrested and crucified. Up until now, the disciples have often misunderstood him, stumbling their way through following him, sometimes trying to check the boxes without knowing why. But here, Jesus offers something more than instruction: he offers a prayer. A prayer not for more doing, but for deeper *being*—that they would be drawn into the life he shares with the Father. A life of love, unity, truth, and purpose.

Jesus knows this whole mission will fall on their shoulders—imperfect as they are. And yet, he’s confident—or at least prayerfully hopeful—that they can carry it forward.

So again, how do we move beyond the “nuts and bolts”? How do we enter into that kind of transformative relationship with God and each other?

Last week I mentioned that in social institutions like IHS, refugee offices, and churches, we all want to be useful. It’s tempting to value ourselves by how many people we place in jobs or housing, how many meetings we attend, how much we donate. Those are easier metrics to track than whether we’re embodying Jesus’ glory and love in the world. Easier than loving someone deeply or inviting them into the kind of wholeness that Jesus makes possible.

And yet, Jesus doesn’t give us a checklist. He offers a prayer—trusting that the Father can do in us what we cannot do for ourselves, since from the first disciples until us sitting here today, we’re not quite sure *how* to live our Jesus’ prayer in John 17. *What are we supposed to be talking about?*

I used to run biannual retreats for IHS. Oddly enough, it was hard to convince people living in the dirty, chaotic, bed-bug-ridden shelters to spend a weekend with me at a

serene oceanfront retreat center in Mokuleia or Kaaawa. I thought a clean room and good food would be enough motivation, but I was apparently wrong.

Instead of enthusiastic “yesses” to my invitation, I was often met with apprehensive faces and questions about risk, including:

“Am I going to lose my bed at the shelter?”

“Does this help my Social Security case?”

“What if my case manager can’t find me?”

“What if my stuff gets stolen while I’m gone?”

They wanted to know what they were getting into. What would it cost them? What’s the practical outcome?

Just like us—just like our anxiety about one more church meeting—they wanted the “nuts and bolts” before they said yes to something spiritual.

It took hours of convincing, and letters from social workers assuring them that they would not lose their benefits by going on a spiritual retreat, to get people on that bus. But a curious thing happened when they did.

**Eighty percent** of those who went on the retreat transitioned into permanent housing within a month. That’s a dramatically higher rate than the usual six-month to one-year average.

Now, you could say that the type of person who has the stability and presence of mind to attend and actively participate in a spiritual retreat is also the type of person who is already mentally on track to housing stabilization. This could be true, and we did include this factor in the data when we reported outcomes to funders and researchers.

Yet, when these 80% of spiritual retreat participants were conducting their exit interviews for IHS, they almost always cited the retreat as the place where their perspective changed and gave them the mental edge to get from homelessness to stability. With these statistics in mind, my retreats kept getting funding and providing great data about the positive impact of spiritual programming.

And sure, I organized programming on those retreats. I provided workshops on stuff like we did at our own retreat here at the church a few months ago, like the Enneagram or teambuilding games or narrative timelines. But I’m not sure that any of the people who attended the retreats could probably tell you in retrospect about the “nuts and bolts” programming I provided in those spaces. What they do remember—what they talked about in their exit interviews and what they bring up in conversation when I run into them at the bus stop or at Longs—is how they felt. They remember that, for the first time

in a long time, they were not treated like a case file or a burden, but like a whole, beloved person. They remember laughing together over shared meals, crying in small groups, falling asleep to the sound of the ocean, and waking up with a renewed sense that maybe—just maybe—God had not forgotten them.

What they experienced wasn't just a well-planned weekend. It was communion. It was the kind of unity and presence that Jesus prays for in John 17 when He says, "that they may all be one... I in them and you in me... so that the world may know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

That's what we're aiming for in our discipleship groups and Alpha sessions this summer. Not just more meetings. Not just more content. But real spaces of belonging, spiritual depth, and transformation. Places where you don't need to have the answers. You just need to show up and let the Holy Spirit do what only God can do.

So, what are we supposed to talk about?

The same things Jesus prayed about: love, glory, unity, the hope of being made one with God and one another. We talk about our lives—our doubts, our stories, our hopes. We talk about how God is showing up in our overcommitted, tired lives. We talk about how Jesus might be glorified in us, even when we don't feel very glorious.

And don't worry—our interns and I will help guide the conversations. It'll be simple: a conversation about the sermon, or if the sermon didn't speak to you, a reflection on the Scripture. But it won't be the structure you remember. It'll be the wonder. What you learn about each other. What you discover about yourself, about God, and about the world.

So here's my invitation: Don't be afraid to go beyond the checklist. Don't be afraid to show up to something that doesn't seem immediately "useful." That's often where the deepest growth happens.

If you've been wondering whether you belong in a discipleship group or whether Alpha is "for someone like you"—you do, and it is. You don't need to have the answers. You just need to come. Bring your questions. Sit in the company of others. Let Jesus make us one.

Because that's what discipleship is: not just doing the work of God, but being drawn into the very life of God. Not just checking the boxes, but becoming a living witness to God's love in the world.

Amen.