

4. A Disciple's Main Purpose.

Becoming a Disciple Series

I believe it was Steven Covey who first said, "The main thing must be to keep the main thing the main thing!" Over the years I have walked with Christ, I have seen that the Body of Christ (The Church) is multi-faceted. Like a diamond with many cuts glimmering with different colors, the Body of Christ emphasizes different goals and priorities in ministry, reaching beyond each local area to the world. Sometimes, though, the main thing ceases to be the main thing. What should be the main thing in each local body of Christ? Plans and strategies are good but only tools to support the Great Commission that the Lord has commanded His disciples to fulfill. I want to highlight this point with a story I came across. I see it as a modern-day parable.

The Parable of the Lifesaving Station

There was once a crude little lifesaving station on a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur. The building was just a hut with only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves, they went out day or night tirelessly searching for the lost. This wonderful little station saved many lives to the point it became famous. Some of those saved and others in the surrounding areas wanted to become associated with the station and give their time, money, and effort to support its work. They bought new boats and trained new crews. The little lifesaving station grew. Some of the new members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge for those saved from the sea.

They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in an enlarged building. Now, the lifesaving station has become a favorite gathering place for its members, and they redecorated it beautifully and furnished it as a club. Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The purpose of lifesaving was still discussed, but most of the team were too busy or lacked the commitment to participate in the activities. About this time, a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet, and half-drowned people.

They were dirty and sick; some had a different skin color, some spoke a strange language, and the beautiful new club was considerably messed up. So, the property committee immediately built a shower house outside the club where shipwreck victims could be cleaned up before entering. At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities, as it was unpleasant and a hindrance to the regular pattern of the club. However, some members insisted that lifesaving was their primary purpose and pointed out they were still called a lifesaving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of various kinds of people shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin another lifesaving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. They evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station began. If you visit the seacoast today,

you will find many exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but now most people drown!¹

People come into a church with different agendas and various life journey stages. We all have different needs, and every church can't meet the demands of each. Each leader of a group or pastor of a church is responsible before God to know what the Holy Spirit wants to accomplish in their church, congregation, house church, or group. Like the colors coming from a diamond, there are particular facets of expression of the life of Christ. Some leaders feel their emphasis should be focused more on worship. Others sense the Holy Spirit emphasizing discipleship, teaching, or helping people experiencing poverty. When a pastor or group leader knows the vision God has given, purposeful values should keep the train on the rails for God's vision. The train tracks are purpose statements communicating where the local church is going and why they exist. With the needs of the people around us being so great, we must remain on track and target our resources as we point people toward Jesus. We know God is abundantly able to meet every need, but each expression of Christ's life needs to stay true to the mission God has given His Church. So what is the main mission? In Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus spoke these words to His disciples before He left them.

¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Looking at the above passage of Scripture, known as the Great Commission, Christ promises to be with us as we go out with His mission in our hearts. Does this give you courage and reassurance? How do you feel when you read these words? What thoughts come to mind?

The Main Thing

I spent much time at sea as a commercial fisherman in my younger years. When you are in one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world, the Dover Straits of England, you get to see all kinds of boats and ships designed for all sorts of jobs. But for us fishermen, our purpose was to catch fish. It would have been easy to waste time on things our boat was not designed for. Now that God has called me to work as a fisher of men and women, pulling up His nets, I want to stay true to the main mission. When speaking about the gospel, Paul the apostle wrote: "**For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile**" (Romans 1:16). The gospel of Jesus Christ, when it is presented correctly and believed, brings about a radical change in the very core being of the believer. Paul, in the passage above, called it the power of God. Without this encounter with Christ, there is no change inside a person:

And he said: "Truly I tell you, **unless you change** and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

¹ Taken from Personal Evangelism 101, by Brent Hunter.

Every effort of the church is to preach the gospel to bring about this change in people's hearts. Some people believe that if they work hard at reforming their lives and live by the Ten Commandments, that is being a Christian. Let me say something that may surprise you: You cannot become a Christian by trying to live by the Ten Commandments alone. The Ten Commandments are essential to show us the way God wants us to live, but He gives us something more! To live the Christian life, you must have the Spirit of Christ *in* you. Christ is the only One who can live the Christian life. Here is how Merrill Tenney put it,

Christianity is not a system of philosophy, nor a ritual, nor a code of laws; it is the impartation of divine vitality. Without the way, there is no going; without the truth, there is no knowing; without the life, there is no living.²

You must have Christ in you, living and seated in the throne room of the temple of your life. “**God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**” (Colossians 1:27, Emphasis mine).

We can help feed people, we can teach them to have better marriages, and we can bring them into a community with others, but if we do not help them to see that they need the main thing—to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20), we will fall short of seeing the salvation of God come to people's lives. God wants to bring salvation and wholeness to the individual, and most importantly, He wants to bring them into the Family of God! We must bring them to Christ to receive eternal life! This calling is not the job of the professionals or the gifted leaders; it is the job of all who call on the name of Christ. I am convinced that if we can help each Christian learn how to share the gospel, a revival will break out worldwide. Over the following studies in this series, I plan to give practical advice to encourage us all to share the good news of the gospel.

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have (1 Peter 3:15).

As Christians, we should be ready and prepared at any time to share the essence of the gospel. People all around us are seeking the peace that comes from knowing God.

What is your biggest fear when sharing the good news with a friend? Do you find sharing your faith with a family member easier or more challenging?

We should realize that these fears are part of the spiritual battle we have entered into when we desire to communicate the gospel of Christ.

At this I fell at his feet to worship him [An Angel, v.9]. But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus" (Revelation 19:10 NIV, Emphasis mine).

² Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948) Pages 215-216.

What is the above verse saying? Here's how it is translated in the ESV, the KJV, and the NASB, three English translations of the Bible: **"For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."** Here's what I think the Scripture means: When we enter into a situation and decide to testify to the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross, we are not on our own; the prophetic Spirit of God will help us communicate. We choose to go against the flow of this world with an opposing spirit. The spirit of this world wants to shut down the gospel's message, but when we choose to testify to the grace of God, the Holy Spirit of prophecy rests upon us to communicate the Word of God. The Scriptures tell us that the Word of God is the Sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). The Spirit of prophecy always opposes the way of this world.

Four Elements Are Present in Sharing Christ:

Have you ever decided to share the gospel with a friend or family member and found that you became nervous as you anticipated their reaction and possible rejection? Even though we know we bring good news, we assume people will not want to hear it. This tactic is how Satan tries to silence and intimidate us. It will help us overcome our fear when we realize that four things interact when a person turns to Christ. Thank God, It does not depend on us alone! Let's look at the four elements that interact when we share our faith:

1) The Holy Spirit. When we are open to the Spirit's leading, He will guide us in sharing. Often, He will give you a window of insight into the life of the person you are speaking with. You may sense the pain of things crowding into the person's life as the Spirit gives you compassion for them. Remember that our Father wants to draw men to Himself. Understand that He will not "leave you hanging" as you endeavor to reach out to another person with the Good News. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would remind us of all things (John 14:26). Trust that He will give you the right words when needed. That is why it helps us to store up His words so that we are ready when there is an opportunity. At the Last Supper, when Jesus told the disciples that He was leaving, He reassured them that He would send the "Helper," the Holy Spirit. In the NIV translation, the Holy Spirit is called the Advocate (v. 7):

⁷But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned (John 16:7-11).

2) The Person's Conscience. On the Day of Pentecost, when Peter shared the gospel with more than 3000 Jews drawn to the sound of the wind, they were "cut to the heart" by Peter's message. Sometimes, I have seen the person I have been sharing the gospel with deeply convicted by the Spirit as He shows them something they need to change in their life. The Word of God is called the Sword of the Spirit for a reason (Ephesians 6:17). The Sword of the Spirit cuts straight to the heart of the one listening, bringing truth and confirming that truth to their heart. God's Spirit backs up His Word, so don't underestimate His ability to shine His light and convince people of their sin. You may sense the person being challenged and even encounter opposition from them, but do not take this resistance personally. You are likely witnessing the spiritual battle going on in their

heart. Be gentle, be persistent in prayer, and non-judgmental. It may take several conversations with some individuals, and God may use another person to come along when they are ready.

3) The Body of Truth in the Word of God. There are specific truths that need communicating if we want people to believe and trust in the finished work of Christ. The more we convey the truth of the Scriptures, the higher the chance that the person will come through to a powerful life-changing experience of being born again (John 3:3). Our own words can come up short, but Scripture tells us that God's Word never returns to Him empty, without effect or void. (Isaiah 55:11). To be relevant, we must not shrink from sharing the truth of God's Word with love, an unbeatable combination that will reach people's hearts. A gospel message spoken by a willing servant of God, sharing truths from the Word of God, is living and powerful and cuts through to the heart of those hiding behind excuses (Hebrews 4:12).

4) The Person Sharing... (you!) If possible, prepare your heart before you share the message of Christ. Pray for the person, and maybe even fast a meal or two while you plan what you will say and how you will bring up spiritual things. Spend time listening to God and be open to sharing things the Holy Spirit will give you. Trust that God will provide you with the right words and a heart of compassion as you share His message. You may even start by praying for their needs or seeking to bless them in some way. One of the greatest encouragements to us as witnesses is that we have divine help from God Himself:

“...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

In the passage of Scripture above, Jesus tells the disciples that as they go with the gospel, they are not alone; the Lord Himself will be with them as they go. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), so trust the Holy Spirit to give insight into their lives and the Scriptures to share. Without Christ, we can do nothing. The Spirit of Jesus is the Great Helper.

We have looked at the spiritual elements involved when we witness the truth of the Gospel, but we should not forget the practical elements. I want to highlight seven principles that come into play which we can put in place. These principles can set our faith in motion as we seek to reach others.

Seven Principles to Put Your Faith into Motion

1. **Be Available** – You may think that this first one goes without saying, but for some of us, our lives can become so routine and closed off that we rarely have an opportunity to speak with those who do not yet know Christ. If this is you, seek new opportunities to meet others. Contact others socially and be deliberate. Let's look at an example from the life of Jesus.

¹“Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ²(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his

journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷A woman from Samaria came to draw water.” (John 4:1-7).

When Jesus taught the disciples to “fish for men,” He did not stay in the temple. He went to where the people were. To use this analogy, waiting for people to come to us would be like staying in the boat when you are fishing and waiting for the fish to jump in your boat. As a fisherman, I can tell you that this is highly unlikely. If you fish, you have to go to where the fish are. We can invite others to church, but often, they are not ready; we have to start by meeting people where they are.

2. Connect on Common Ground – You may be surprised how much you can have in common with someone you’ve just met, for we all share the same needs, and many of us share the same hopes and goals for life. Seek to establish common ground with others you meet. This can be a bridge for communication. Again, let us look at how Jesus did this.

⁷A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸(For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) (John 4: 7-8)

In the Middle Eastern climate, water was and is a common need. Jesus did not start the conversation with, “Do you know who I am?” He began by connecting through a simple drink of water. Gradually, He directed the conversation away from this natural need for water to her spiritual thirst that she knew nothing about. As God's agents, we can work deliberately and responsibly, finding a starting point that makes sense to people. In his famous book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie reminds us that the voice any person likes to hear best is their own. We will find a common ground to provide a communication bridge if we listen long enough, with genuine interest.

3. Spark Interest—In John 4, we read how Jesus sparked interest and curiosity.

⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” ¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” ¹⁵The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water” (John 4: 9-15).

First, we see that Jesus was available by coming to where the woman was. Next, He connected with her through a common need: water. Now, He asks her a question that will point her to the answer to her spiritual need. At this point, we also need to see how Jesus crossed barriers to speak to this woman. For a Jew to talk to a Samaritan, Jesus was already breaking down social norms and expectations. For Him, a teacher, to speak to a woman, He went even further by breaking down

walls. She was intrigued that He would even want to talk to her! Then He asked her a question and made a statement that aroused her interest.

[What statement did Jesus make that aroused her interest? How did He use this to point to her need?](#)

We also may make a statement or ask a question that arouses interest. We will speak more about this in the following study as we consider possible questions that we can ask. Jesus anticipated the woman's response. He was ready for her reactions and was prepared to give an answer. Her questions did not catch Him off guard. To take full advantage of every opportunity, we need to anticipate the response and ask God to help us present the truth in answer to the response. He desires to help us. His love for the individual and His power to draw them to Himself is far greater than our abilities, so take encouragement in this as you share.

4. Know When to Stop- The next part of our Lord's conversation with the woman at the well demonstrates the next two principles- Do not give a person more than they are ready for, and do not condemn them. When we detect a glimmer of interest, that does not mean we should begin to rattle off everything we know about the Gospel. We need to discern where a person is spiritually; you can tell by social cues a person will give you, and again, be sensitive to the Holy Spirit to know when to leave the conversation. If they are not ready to decide for Christ, it is best to leave a person wanting more. The next encounter may even be through another believer! Whenever we speak with someone, we do not know what work the Lord has already done to prepare the ground of their hearts to receive more revelation of His Word. Where does Jesus take the conversation, and where did He leave it?

¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." ¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet (John 4:13-19).

Despite her obvious interest, Jesus did not give her the whole story at once. Gradually, as she was ready to hear more, He revealed more about Himself.

5. Don't Condemn – The next principle we see is that the Lord did not condemn her. As she answered the question about her husband, her sin itself had already convicted her. We often believe that if we do not condemn a sin, we are condoning it. But this was not our Lord's opinion. If we start by pointing out a person's shortcomings, it can keep them away from God's throne of Grace, which they so desperately need. It may confirm what they fear: "I'm just not good enough."

A genuine compliment touches many people. Criticism often comes easier than praise, but praise can make people more receptive. Seek to point out something positive about the person genuinely. Ask God to let you see them as He sees them. In one of his books, author Charles Turnbull asserts

that we can discover at least one thing as a basis for an honest compliment in any person. He describes one of his experiences on a train to prove his point. A drunken man, using profanity, staggered into a car. After lurching into the seat beside Mr. Turnbull, he offered him a swallow from a flask. Mr. Turnbull inwardly recoiled, but instead of commenting on the man's condition, he replied, "No, thank you, but I can see that you are a very generous man!" Despite his condition, the man's eyes lit up, and they enjoyed a conversation. Eventually, it led to this man hearing the Gospel, being deeply touched, and coming to know the Savior.

6. Stick with the Main Issue - In observing the conversation between our Lord and the woman at the well, we see two more final principles that apply to our conversations.

²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he" (John 4: 20-26).

The Lord did not let any secondary questions sidetrack the conversation away from the main issue. The woman asked where she should worship, for the Samaritans did not worship in Jerusalem. Jesus brought the conversation to the most critical issue: not where but who should be worshipped. He left no doubt about the main issue: Himself.

7. Invitation – Invite Them to Decide or Take a Step Closer- Finally, in declaring Himself to be The Messiah, our Lord reached the crucial part of His message, the invitation. Whether we spend one encounter or many sessions with a person, we must eventually cross this bridge and offer the person an invitation or ask for a response. This causes a person to come face to face with the knowledge that this truth demands a response. Maybe you want to give them a parting thought to consider or ask them to read or watch something they may find interesting. After this kind of conversation, a person will move toward or away from the Gospel. It is a risk, but if they are not ready, we can continue to pray for them and seek to love them into God's kingdom. They may have a time of struggle as they consider what this means for their life. This is not a bad thing! During this time, we can also trust that the Holy Spirit will be working in their conscience.

These, then, are our seven principles- seek to contact and know unbelievers personally, establish a common interest in conversation, spark a person's interest by life and word, target our conversation and questions to the person's receptivity and readiness to hear more, accept and even compliment rather than condemn, stay on track with the message, and persevere to the destination; inviting others to share the journey of Life in Christ.

One last thought: In our reaching out, there must be a heart of compassion and love for the one you are appealing to. An old Christian song says, "You're the only Jesus some will ever see." Earlier in this study, I referred to the Body of Christ as a many-faceted diamond. The thing that

makes the diamond shine and makes it beautiful is the light shining on it. We are like vessels to be filled or diamonds through which God wants to shine His light. We trust in the power of His truth, His light, and His love.

Even if you feel that your words are faltering and you feel inadequate, people will sense the love of God in you and respond to His words one way or another. Also, remember that even if someone does not respond positively, you do not know what God is doing inside the person. Many of us experienced a battle in our souls before we finally decided to come to Christ. In the face of any response, unfaltering love will wear down a person's self-protective defenses. Some people find it hard to accept that God loves them because they feel a sense of guilt or they feel unworthy. Satan has convinced many people to believe that if there is a God, they are unworthy of His love.

As you share your faith, in whatever measure you can, pray that God will take the seed of His Word and water it. You may start by sharing your story or even a part of it. If you can bring a person one step closer in their faith journey, that is beautiful. You may decide to start with a kind deed or by praying for a person's situation or even their health. Many people are open to prayer, even those who don't believe God exists. If nothing else, your genuine desire to bless and pray for them may be the very thing that softens their heart and causes them to consider spiritual things.

Cast your bread upon the waters, and after many days, it will return to you (Ecclesiastes 11:1 KJV). What does the above verse say? When we give out of our spiritual abundance, do not be surprised when it comes back to you— **“Give and it shall be given to you, pressed down, packed together, running over, shall be heaped back to you” (Luke 6:38).** When we share the Word of God with others, somehow, it seems to come back to us in some way to touch our lives. You cannot out-give God.

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Some ideas were taken from the book “How to Give Away Your Faith” by Paul E. Little.