

Sharing the Love of God: Discipling

When someone asked theologian Francis Schaeffer
What he would do
If he had one hour with a non-Christian

He replied by saying he would listen for fifty-five
minutes.

Then in those last five minutes,
He might have something to say.

Schaeffer's words sum up for me
The whole point of my sermon series.

We do an injustice to Christ
When we spend more time with our mouths
open
Then our ears . . .

When we spend more time speaking than listening.

Because at the heart of sharing the love of God
Is the well-being of the other person's wholeness
And not just a converted soul.

You can't do that without entering into
Some kind of relationship
Through listening, learning,
And ultimately loving the other
person.

Sharing the Love of God: Discipling

For this is the way of Jesus.

Today, we will look at the third and last sermon

In this series “Sharing the Love of God”.

Our passage is Matthew 28:18-20

Otherwise known as the Great Commission.

It is here we receive our instructions

To be witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Evangelism is the word we use to describe this process.

Evangelism comes from the Greek word euangelian.

And it means good news or gospel.

The primary goal of the evangelist

Is to share the good news or gospel of Jesus

Christ

In both word and deed.

The problem as I see it in all of this

And the reason I’ve spent so much time on this

Is that many are reluctant to share the love of God

Because it feels presumptuous, arrogant, and intrusive.

I get that!

Some people don’t want to hear it.

Sharing the Love of God: Discipling

But maybe the reason some people don't want to hear it
Is because of how it's been presented.

No one likes to be proselytized.
But there's a difference between proselytism and
evangelism.
As I said evangelism means good news.

And so the evangelist is someone who brings good news
Of what God has done and is doing in Jesus
Christ.

Proselytism, however, simply means
The attempt to convert someone to a set of
beliefs.

To me, proselytism is what gives Christianity a bad rap.

It is those who by hook or crook
Seek to argue, sway, or persuade
Or otherwise convince someone
Their way is wrong and our way is
right.

~~

But if we get our instructions for evangelism
From the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20
And if you read it really closely . . .

Sharing the Love of God: Discipling

Jesus is actually telling us to do something quite different!

There is a difference in trying to convert someone
And doing what the Great Commission
Is actually telling us to do!

~~

At the close of the Gospel of Matthew
Jesus gives his final words of instruction
To his beloved disciples.

Three sentences in all.
His instructions are wedged
Between two Christological statements.

Now you won't find me using theological terms often.

But when I do,
It's because I think what's there is pretty
important.

Christology defines the nature and role of Christ.

And so when Jesus himself declares . . .

That all authority in heaven and on earth
Is given to him by God . . .
And he will be with us to the ends of the
earth

Sharing the Love of God: Discipling

We need to sit up and take notice!

In Christological terms

Jesus has been given the Lordship of all things.

Christ is not only my Lord . . .

He is Lord of all!

The magnitude of these statements are quite profound.

And then between these two proclamations

Jesus instructs his followers, then and now

And throughout all time with these words

This time using Eugene Peterson's *The Message*

19 Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you.

~~

The instructions here are three-fold

Make disciples, baptize them, and teach them.

Go into the world, to all nations, to all corners of the earth,

And do what?

Sharing the Love of God: Discipling

Save souls? No! Make disciples!

~~

A disciple is someone who FOLLOWS Jesus,
As Peterson translates the passage,
In the particular way of life
That Jesus calls us to live.

The Greek word for disciple is *mathetis*.

Its definition is student, pupil, adherent, or apprentice.

Mathetis is someone who learns
By watching, following, and doing.

A disciple is an apprentice to Jesus.

The ultimate goal in the Great Commission,
Is not winning souls for Christ
But teaching people to follow Jesus.

In his blog,
Mike Rose, pastor of the First Federated Church,
In Des Moines, Iowa,

Discusses these differences:

A convert is one who has come to faith in Jesus as Savior. They've opened their heart to receive the grace He purchased on the cross at Calvary. But for many, that's where it begins and ends. Secure in the love of Christ, a convert may or may not mature. They may or may not be a

Sharing the Love of God: Discipling

public witness for Jesus and they may or may not reproduce another spiritual life. A convert is happy to have eternal life and the forgiveness of sin, but may never actually follow in the Savior's footsteps.

I've heard someone call this the Evacuation Plan.

Its main interest and goal in life is getting to heaven.

The Great Commission, though
Is actually teaching us something else.

You might call it the Transformation Plan.

Its main interest and goal in life IS this life
The building of God's kingdom on earth.

This is discipleship!

Quoting again from Mike Rose:

A disciple on the other hand is one who follows after Christ . . . Of course, a disciple is a convert. One cannot follow after Jesus until they have opened their life to Him. But a disciple moves beyond the benefits of salvation to learn how they can live like the One they are following.

I'm all for making converts. This is the first step in disciple making. But we can't settle for conversion alone. Jesus

Sharing the Love of God: Discipling

commanded that we make disciples and that means investing what God has invested in us in others.

In all, the Great Commission's instruction is simply this:
To go into the world and help others to live like Jesus.

This kind of work demands a bigger commitment.

It is relational . . .

An involvement in people's lives
That goes much deeper than seeking converts.

In other words, discipling is walking alongside of others
On this journey called life
Seeking to learn, to live, and to love like Jesus.

Evangelism's ultimate goal is to build relationships
So that all of us might be made more and more
Into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

~~

Ok, so how does all this stuff relate to you and me?

What are we to do with all this information?

God calls us to be open to opportunities
To engage and enter into relationships with people

Sharing the Love of God: Discipling

Strangers and friends alike.

I believe God places people in our lives for specific purposes.

I list five steps that will help us be more effective
In sharing the love of God.

I have borrowed a few from the website FOCUS
From an article by Kerry Floyd.

They are:

1. Pray
2. Go out
3. Be bold
4. Listen to their story
5. Share your story.

Pray for God to open opportunities for you
To share the love of God.

Pray that you might become aware of the opportunities
God has given you!

Pray for those people that you have engaged with
That God might open their hearts and minds.

Pray for the specific people in your lives
That you hope might come to know the love of
God.

Sharing the Love of God: Discipling

Don't underestimate this type of prayer.
God is going to give you plenty of chances to engage others.

~

Secondly, go out.

Today's passage informs us to go out into the world.

You are not going to be given many opportunities
To share the love of God
Within your own home
Or for that matter
Even in your own church!

If you live in a nursing home
You can still find opportunities to share the love
of God

In the dining room
In the various activities
In engaging with the driver of the bus
Or the person sitting next to you
In the doctor's office.

Yes, your world has diminished a bit
But God will still give you opportunities
If you'll only go out of your way a bit.

~

Thirdly, be bold.

Sharing the Love of God: Discipling

Yes, it does take a bit of courage
 To speak to a complete stranger
 At the grocery store's check-out line
 Or at the playground
 Or on the street.

It does takes a certain amount of risk
 That can be challenging for some.

But take that risk.

Your ensuing relationship
 Has the possibility of being extremely rewarding.

~

Number 4, listen to their story.

Be quick to listen,
 Slow to speak
 Slow to get angry.

You may be engaging in conversation with others
 Who do not look like
 Think like you
 Or live like you.

That's okay.

It will make for a more interesting relationship.

~

And finally, share you story.

Sharing the Love of God: Discipling

Share the hope within you
That not only helps you get through life
But makes you and others around you
better.

Kerry Floyd from the website Focus writes:

You can fulfill your call to evangelize by developing deep friendships, inviting people to follow Jesus, and teaching others to do the same.

God has placed people in my own life
With the expressed purpose
Of sharing the love of God to them.

Some to this day are following Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Some are not.

I've done what I could.

God will place people in your lives as well.

Do what you can
For in this way
You have fulfilled the purposes
Jesus has called you to

To God be the Glory.