

SERIES: While Going - Week 1

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Message Title: Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing Pt. 1

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What exactly are we doing here? Why are we here? We would say the mission here is to glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ, and we have hundreds of ways that we can help people in significant ways in their lives. But here's the deal. There's no way that this strategy works without you living on mission. You are the foot soldier out in the neighborhoods, out in the marketplace, out in your schools. It's each of us carrying the responsibility out into those places where we move and live, to share the message of this Jesus who has so changed our lives. Without each of us doing our part, there's just no way that the mission is accomplished. So we're going to talk about that. We're going to talk about outreach or evangelism, whatever you want to call it.

So here's my opening question. What do you feel when I say the word evangelism? Outreach. Sharing your faith. Because most people, it's not so much what you think. It's what you feel. And about this time you're feeling, oh boy, you start to get that knot in your stomach. You start to feel a level of anxiety. And some of you are thinking, really, four weeks on this. This would be right up there with four weeks on money, for sermons I most want to hear. I understand that. I really do. And I think we feel that way for lots of reasons. Maybe some preacher like me sought to motivate you to share your faith, with lots of shame and guilt. And if we just heap on enough shame and guilt, it will finally motivate you to do something.

Maybe we've created an image of the fires of Hell burning, and your work associate Bob is in the fires of Hell and don't you care about that? And what about Bob? And so, at work you finally have enough shame and guilt heaped upon you that you corner Bob in the breakroom, and out of your shame and your guilt, you finally lay it on Bob. And Bob's offended and it's a bad experience for you, but frankly that was more about you than Bob. You got some of the shame and guilt off your chest. You check off Bob, and you move on, and you think that really wasn't a very pleasant experience. Don't ask me to do that again.

Or maybe someone has convinced you that you need to be able to answer every single question, and so you're trying to talk to somebody. They raise a question. You don't know the answer, so you think in your mind, unless I'm Ravi Zacharias, the great apologist, I can't share my faith. What do I do if I can't answer the question? To that one, I would say, "Hey, join the club. Nobody knows all the answers." But here's the deal, isn't it supposed to be Good News? Hasn't this message just totally changed our lives? Isn't this what our soul has been longing for? What happens to us that somehow we turn the Good News into what feels like bad news, and it becomes such a duty to try to share it with somebody else? And what if it could be different from that? What if it doesn't have to be like that at all? What if we could actually honor and value and build the relationships around us, in the process of sharing what has so changed our lives?

So here's what I'm asking you to do. Would you be willing to just hit the delete button, and kind of delete whatever has bugged you in the past, or created the anxiety in the past, and allow us to think about this in a little different way? Now, if my starting point is a belief that you really don't want to do this, then I will use shame and guilt to somehow force it out of you. But I'm going to start in a completely different place, and I'm going to start in the place that I think is right. I think you genuinely do care. I think you genuinely do care about the people you go to school with, the people you work with, the people next door. You demonstrate that over and over and over again. So I think this is something you genuinely want to do because you genuinely care. All I'm asking is would you let me help you with that?

So as we start this discussion, I want to invite you to turn with me to Matthew 28. We looked at the Resurrection Story from Matthew 28. Shortly after that story is what's often referred to as the Great Commission - in essence, our marching orders. However a church words its mission statement, at the end of the day, it does come back to this; this is the mission.

Verse 16:

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (NASB, Mat.28:16-20)

I want to look at verses 19 and 20. Now oftentimes, when I hear people talking about the Great Commission, they refer to the commandment to *go*, but technically that's not correct. The verb, the imperative, the command is *make* disciples. The "go" isn't actually an imperative. We might say it's an assumption. It would be correct to translate this, "While going - here's the command - make disciples". In other words, the assumption is that we would go. If Jesus has risen from the dead, if Jesus has so dramatically changed our lives, the assumption is, we would go. And while going, here's the assignment.

Now let's start with this one because it's bound to come up. Often people will say, I just don't think it's right that you're trying to push your belief system onto other people. I've had that said to me many times. Well, let's think about that for a minute. First of all, people that make that statement are coming from a backdrop of relativism, meaning there's no moral absolutes, there's no absolute truth, or they're coming from a pluralistic background, meaning all roads ultimately lead to God; it doesn't matter so much what you believe. Now, I would agree if that is your belief system, to be consistent with your belief system, you should not try to push your beliefs on anybody else. That would be perfectly consistent with what you believe. But you have to understand, when they're asking me to abide by that, they are in essence pushing their belief system onto me. They're doing the very thing that they're saying shouldn't be done. And I often will say to people, I understand that, that's your belief system, I can respect that, but you need to understand that's not my belief system.

My belief system is I believe there is one God, and I believe there is one way to that God. And I believe that that way Jesus gave his life to provide Salvation freely is a gift. I believe this is the life that everyone is longing for and that Jesus has compelled me to share this news with people I care about. Therefore, in order to be consistent with my own belief system, I am compelled to

share this news. To choose not to would mean either I don't believe it, or I simply don't care. So, it's important to understand according to our belief system, and to operate consistent with that, we are compelled out of our integrity to share the message with others.

Now, this idea of *while going* is important, because our roots as fundamentalists really go back to a big problem, which was seeing basically our responsibility as Christians was to hide in a fortress. And we would define a good Christian as someone who is moral, somebody who has integrity, someone who attends some services, who gives of their money and maybe they serve somewhere. We might come out of the fortress on occasion to make a presentation, but then we run back to the fortress, because we fear being contaminated by the world. That is not a good Christian. If it's true that you have the very life of Jesus within you, our lives should look like Jesus. Jesus was not a fortress guy. He was a *going* guy. He constantly encountered the very people that often Christians are trying to hide from and avoid. So it's important to understand we need to *be going* where we work, where we go to school, in our neighborhoods. That's the assignment.

While going, what are we to do? The commandment is to *make disciples*. Now, it's very important to notice. The text does not say make converts. It's *make disciples*. That's a very important distinction. What you understand the mission to be will directly affect your methodology.

If you think the assignment is to make converts, then the Gospel becomes a presentation, not a conversation. It becomes something that you interact, you do, and then you go back to the fortress. It takes a few minutes. It's not very messy, and you check it off the list, and you go back to your safe place. If you think it's *make converts*, then it's about kind of packaging and presentation. It's about trying to close the deal. It's trying to get people to pray a prayer. It's trying to check something off a card, or to raise a hand, or to walk an aisle. At the end of the day, it's about just making sure somebody has their ticket to Heaven. Most of the bad methodology in reaching people around us flows out of this misunderstanding that the mission is to just make converts. It's about getting something said, rather than about getting something heard. If I corner Bob in the break room because I'm overwhelmed with shame and guilt, and I make my presentation, I dump the load on Bob, then I can go back and check Bob off the list. All that matters was that I got something said. I never really thought about getting something heard.

Early in my ministry, one of the things I observed that bothered me a great deal, was how a lot of our fundamentalist pastors conducted funerals. They would actually say in private, "I have a captive audience". Finally, Bob is somewhere where I can lay it on him, and so the mindset was, this is my one shot at these people, and so at the funeral itself, it would be three minutes about Bob, and 30 minutes with hellfire and brimstone, because it's just about this moment and making a convert. But there's a huge problem with that. Bob has died, and that room is filled with people that loved Bob, and they're in pain, and they're hurting, and they're struggling, and they have come today to try to find hope, to try to find some way to process their grief. They've actually come hoping for compassion and kindness and some measure of hope; what do I do now? They did not come to be abused.

I would say in my 30 years as a pastor, I've never done a wedding, I've never done a funeral, where I did not share the message of the Gospel, but it can be done in a way that respects the event, and done with the compassion and the kindness of Jesus. If you think the mission is converts, you'll do whatever you have to in order to get a convert in the moment, but all of that changes when you understand actually the mission, the command is to *make disciples*, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded. In other words, the assignment is to teach them and train them what it means to be a Christ follower. How do they enter into a deeply meaningful relationship with Jesus?

Now I understand I can't just corner Bob in the break room and lay it on him. This is not a one-shot deal. This is a long-term commitment. This is now not a presentation. It's a conversation. This is now not about just getting something said. It's about getting something heard. It's about saying, this is not just about a ticket to Heaven. This is about entering into a relationship with the risen Savior. This is about finding in Jesus what your soul longs for. This is about saying to people; I want you to know I genuinely care about you and we're going to take this walk together. As soon as you understand this is about discipleship, not just making converts, it begins to change everything.

When you understand it to be discipleship, you understand this is costly, this will cost me a lot. It will cost me emotion; it will cost me time. It may even cost me money; that I'm in it for the long walk. When it's a presentation, when it's making converts, it's in, out, presentation made, back to my comfortable life. Discipleship is we're going to walk this together and it's going to probably be pretty messy. Once we understand it to be discipleship, then **we have to make sure that the main thing is the main thing.**

The main thing is Jesus.

Arnie: So Bryan, why do you think so many Christians have so much fear about living out our mission in the world?

Bryan: Well, I think a couple of reasons. One is very personal. I'm telling people my deepest personal beliefs and there's risk that comes with that. Probably the fear of rejection, fear of people pushing it back. But I also think maybe some of that's poor methods that created experiences that were unpleasant and maybe hurtful. So, the results were poor. So, we think I'm just never going to do that again. You know, Paul says *the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing*. So part of what I accepted a long time ago is, people are going to laugh at me, they're going to make fun of me. They think what I say is foolish and that is part of my calling. And I think we all have that as Christians; if we're going to share the Gospel, that's a risk we take.

Cara: So I appreciate what you're saying in this message, that rather than make the sales pitch for Jesus, that we should concentrate on building relationships. And that takes time and it can get messy. I know it takes a lot of prayer though. So how do you pray for that, Bryan?

Bryan: Well, I think it does take a lot of prayer to be sensitive, to be aware, to be ready. The phrase I like to keep reminding myself; it's not about getting something said, it's about getting something heard. So, it's a little bit different way of framing the conversation. So we have to be careful; we have to be prayerful. We don't want to force conversation, but we also don't want to miss the moments when God opens the door. So, all that requires us to be sensitive to the Spirit's leading.

Arnie: Now, there's some really great, a lot of guys, that have done really a great job historically, and all of them would ask people to commit right there on the spot. Are you saying that that kind of thing is wrong?

Bryan: No, I would absolutely not say that. But I do think you have to think through the context. So let's take a Billy Graham Crusade. People are choosing to go to the crusade; they are expecting him to present a message from God. It's like when they come to a church service, they're choosing to come. That's what they're expecting to hear. So how I preach is different than how I talk to my neighbor. Those are two completely different contexts. You know, going to a Billy Graham Crusade is not the same as getting cornered in the break room and somebody laying the Gospel on you. But I also think, Billy Graham was the master of figuring out how the story of Jesus intersects with people's lives in a meaningful way. His message was simple, but it was not simplistic. He was very creative and skilled at opening up people's eyes to their need for a Savior. You know a presentation of the Gospel is a summary, and some people just have a gift. They can just share it with a stranger and they just have a gift and people listen to it. But most people don't do that. Most people aren't good at it. And sometimes what people need is not a summary - the one, two, three of the Gospel - but they need a discussion. You know, Paul takes eight chapters in Romans to really get through the Gospel. And so I think thinking of it more as a conversation than just like a one, two, three presentation is helpful.

Cara: I know one thing that people can't dispute is your own personal testimony. Can you give some tips on how people can get over that shame maybe, if they have a shady past, or just some tips on how to use your own story?

Bryan: Well, I think that's critical. I think your own story is the most compelling evidence for the truth of the Gospel. But I think thinking of it not just in the sense of, "When I was 12, I accepted Christ as Savior", but more the story of your experience with Jesus through the ups and downs of life, and the challenges, where Jesus intersects your life in a meaningful way. So trying to think of it a little bit more holistically. And part of that then is to try and intersect with somebody else's life, in a way that makes sense to them.