

## **Study 7. The Main Thing**

### **Becoming a Disciple Series**

Warm-up Question: Share one or two of the words of wisdom statements that either of your parents used to make.

I believe it was Steven Covey who first said that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. Over the many 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 we find that 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 they are only tools. A strategy or mission should support the Great Commission that the church has been given and not become the end in itself. I want to highlight this point with a story I came across.

### **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 various others in the surrounding areas, wanted to become associated with the station and give of 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 became 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 talked about, but most of the team were too busy or lacked the necessary commitment to take part in the lifesaving activities personally. 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 had a shower house built outside the club where shipwreck victims could be cleaned up before coming inside. 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. But some members insisted that lifesaving was their primary purpose and pointed out that 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!<sup>1</sup>

What is the main thing for the Church of Jesus Christ, and how do we keep the main thing being the main thing?

People come into a church with all different types of agendas and in various stages of their journey. We all have different needs, and every church can't meet the demand of each. Each pastor needs to know what the Holy Spirit has in store for each 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 the poor. When a pastor or group leader knows in his heart what the group is going for, then there should be train tracks that keep the train on the rails. The train tracks are purpose statements that communicate where you are going and why you exist. The purpose statement of each expression of the life of Christ is designed to keep the church on the track the Holy Spirit has given the group or church. With the needs of the people around us being so great, we must remain on track and target our resources wisely 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 He has given His Church.

### **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 for which our boat was not designed. Now that God has called me to work on His net, I don't want to end my life and find that I invested myself in doing things that wasted a lot of time, energy, and money. The main thing we are called to do must be the main thing! What is the main thrust of the church? Paul says that it is the gospel, "**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).

Every effort of the church is to preach the gospel to bring about this change in people's hearts worldwide. 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 important: You cannot become a Christian by living a Christian life. To live the Christian life, you must have the Spirit of Christ *in*

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Personal Evangelism 101, by Brent Hunter.

you. Christ is the only One that 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.<sup>2</sup>

You must have Christ in you, living and seated on 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).

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), all our efforts are for nothing. We must bring them to Christ to receive eternal life! The main thing is to help each person we meet to be born-again of the Spirit and to live the life of Christ. This calling is not the job of the professionals or the gifted leaders; it is the job of all that 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 next few weeks of this series, I plan to help us with practical things that will help all of us to be able to share the gospel. Remember what we said in the last session? The pastor is to equip the flock to shepherd one another, just as the evangelist is to equip the church to be prepared to reach the lost:

**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 and how the interested person can know peace with God through what Christ has done for them.

**In thinking of sharing the good news with a friend, what is your biggest fear?**

We should realize that these fears that come to mind are part of the spiritual battle that 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).

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, we go against the enemy's spirit, and the Holy Spirit of prophecy rests upon us to

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

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 stands in opposition to the way of this world.

### **Four Things That Interact in Witnessing to Christ**

Have you ever decided that you would share the gospel with a friend or family member and then become nervous as you anticipated their reaction and possible rejection? Even though we know that we bring good news, we assume that people will not want to hear it. This tactic is how Satan tries to silence and intimidate us. It will help us to overcome our fear when we realize that four things interact in a person turning to Christ. It does not depend on us alone!

**1) The Holy Spirit.** When we are open to the Spirit's leading, He will guide us in our sharing. Often, the Holy Spirit 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 in John 14:26 that the Holy Spirit would remind us of all things. Trust that He will give you the right words when you need them. At the Last Supper, when Jesus was telling the disciples that He was leaving, He reassured them by telling them that He would send the "Helper," the Holy Spirit. In the NIV translation, the Holy Spirit is called the Advocate:

*<sup>7</sup>But 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. <sup>8</sup>When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup>about sin, because people do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; <sup>11</sup>and 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 the message Peter preached to them. Sometimes I have seen the person I have been sharing the gospel with deeply convicted by the Spirit as He shows them something in their life that they need to change. 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 backs up His Word with His Spirit.

[Share a time when you came under conviction by the Spirit.](#)

When King David came under conviction by the Spirit after his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite, he could find no peace within his soul:

*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. <sup>4</sup>For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. <sup>5</sup>Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my*

transgressions to the Lord.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin (Psalm 32:3-5).

**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 Word of God, 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). How often have you heard a message that entertains but lacks any truth and fails to point to Christ? 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, can win many a lost person seeking inward peace.

**4) The Person Sharing.** 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. One of the most loving things you can do is to pray for the person. Trust that God will provide you with the right words and a heart of compassion as you share His message. One of the greatest encouragements to us as witnesses is that we have divine help from the invisible world around us:

<sup>18</sup>Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. 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). We can draw on His help as we rely on the Holy Spirit to give us insight and the right Scriptures to use. Without Him, we can do nothing. If our eyes were opened to the spiritual world around us, we would see all kinds of spiritual help, a truth that Gehazi, Elisha's servant, found out when he looked outside the city he was in and found that Israel's enemies surrounded it.

<sup>16</sup>So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." <sup>17</sup>Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:16-17).

When you read the words, "those who are with us are more than those who are with them, what do you think this means? Do you believe that these beings play a part in the battle for the souls of humankind? Explain.

One last thought: In our reaching out, there must be a heart of compassion and love for the one to whom you are appealing. Don't have a pushy attitude, but be gentle and kind to each person you

seek to share the good news about Jesus. 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. 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 on the inside of 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, love that is unfaltering 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, how could He ever love them? We must help others as if they are our own children. There is the story of an American family's son returning home from the Vietnam War:

The phone rang in a high society Boston home. On the other end of the line was a son who had just returned from Viet Nam and was calling from California. His folks were the cocktail-circuit, party kind—drinking, wife swapping, gambling, all the other things that go with it. The boy said to his mother, "I just called to tell you that I wanted to bring a buddy home with me." His mother said, "Bring him home for a few days." But, mother, there is something you need to know about this boy. One leg is gone, one arm and one eye is gone, and his face is quite disfigured. Is it all right if I bring him home?" His mother said, "Bring him home for a few days." The son said, "You didn't understand me, mother. I want to bring him home to live with us." The mother began making excuses about the embarrassment and what people would think, and the phone clicked. A few hours later, the police called from California to Boston. The mother picked up the phone again. The police sergeant at the other end said, "We just found a boy with one arm, one leg, one eye, and a mangled face, who has just killed himself with a shot in the head. The identification papers on the body say he is your son."<sup>3</sup>

Treat everyone you get to talk to as if he or she is your son or daughter. If the person is a stranger to you, they are someone's loved one that is more than likely being prayed for by someone in their family. **Cast your bread upon the waters, and after many days it will return to you (Ecclesiastes 11:1 KJV)**. What does that verse seem to be saying? 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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<sup>3</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations and Quotes*, Published by Thomas Nelson, Page 109.