

“Win the Lost: Spiritual CPR”

Ephesians 2:1-5

September, 24, 2017

Last week we began a series on Disciple-Making. We talked about the 4 stages of making a disciple and we used the visual of 4 chairs. The 1st chair represents the 1st stage of making a disciple: Win the Lost. Next will come build the believers, then equip the workers, then multiply Disciple-Makers. Today, we'll focus on Chair #1. Ephesians 2:1-3 reminds us, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.” It reminds us of how we used to live when we sat in Chair #1, when we followed the ways of this world rather than following Christ. Can you remember what it was like to be spiritually lost?

All of us began in chair #1, lost. You were spiritually dead in your sins. You were trying to figure out life apart from God. You had no real hope, no access to God's strength and guidance. You were alone and your life had no lasting purpose. You were trapped in sin. Your focus was on yourself. You were living life on your own terms. You thought you were in control but it was actually your sin nature that controlled you. Your sin was actually a rebellion against God; you did not want to submit to your Creator. You had an enemy; his name is the devil. You didn't really know about him but he knew all about you. He was delighted that you were lost and spiritually blind.¹ He was glad to keep you on the path leading to destruction, to leave you under God's wrath. This is why witnesses to the gospel must pray. All our efforts and strategies are powerless apart from prayer that calls on the powerful work of God in someone's heart. Ephesians 5:4-5 goes on to say, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” Someone explained God's great love for you. Can you remember who won you over to Jesus? Aren't you thankful that they did?

As we think about the importance of winning the lost, let's consider the acronym CPR. Normally, CPR stands for cardiopulmonary resuscitation. It's one of the ways we try to save someone's physical life. But, today, we are talking about saving someone's spiritual life. Let's talk about Spiritual CPR. Disciple-Making begins with winning the lost. We win the lost...

1) ...by **Cultivating** authentic friendships with them.

There are so many people who will never walk through the doors of this church. The people at your work and school need to hear the Good News, somehow. The people in our neighborhoods and in our community may never hear a pastor's sermon or go to a SS class. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 reminds us that, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. **We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.** We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.” Every Christ-follower is called to win the lost.

There are particular barriers that keep lost people from trusting Jesus. Lost people have spiritual questions that need answers. People have personal hurts that need healing. People have pride and a focus on self that needs to be humbled. People have busy, distracted lives that need to be interrupted. All of these barriers can be easily remedied by one simple thing: **proximity to a Christ-follower.** We can help answer their spiritual questions. We can minister to people's hurts with the love of Christ. We can call them to set aside their willful pride. And, we can interrupt their busyness with intentional conversations about God.

Today, let's think about common table salt. You probably have some near you right now. The salt that we use every day is an amazing substance. It adds incredible flavor to so many of the foods we

¹ Consider 2 Corinthians 4:4, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

love, it creates thirst, and it can be used to preserve foods, like incredibly delicious venison jerky!² But, salt can't accomplish any of these things until it comes out of the packet, until it comes into close proximity with an item.³ The impact happens upon close contact.⁴ In a similar way, Christ-followers are amazing people; we are the salt of the earth. We bring a wonderful flavor into our world. We create a thirst for God. And, we are meant to be used for preserving lives. But, we can't accomplish any of these things, until we come into close proximity with lost people.

Check out the link to this video: <http://www.motionworship.com/5378/mini-movies/change-the-story/> As the salt of the earth, we have every day, amazing opportunities to change the story for the people around us. Do you have close friendships with people who are spiritually lost? We need to cultivate relationships with lost people because that is one of the ways that God cultivates the soil of their hearts and minds. Those hard and rocky places, need the work of God's Spirit and He often uses our words and actions. We need to get into close proximity and help break up the fallow ground and prepare it to receive seeds of God's truth.

This leads us right into the 2nd part of spiritual CPR. We win the lost...

2) ...by **Planting** genuine seeds of God's truth in their lives.

Planting makes me think of farming; farming isn't easy. Even if you do a really good job of cultivating the soil and getting it ready for the seeds, there are still some key decisions that need to be made. Like, when to plant the seed and how deep to plant it.⁵ When it comes to people, seed planting requires a genuine, long-term commitment. Lost people aren't interested in a bait/switch. Don't just be nice to me long enough to dump your religion on me. We need to care about the lost in genuine ways. They are people just like us who've been made in the image of God. To earn someone's trust and respect, we need to stay in relationship with them over a long period of time. We can't just give our spiritual "sales pitch" and then move on to the next person. When our family first moved to Bemidji, we bought a house from John and Patti Dean. They were not yet believers in Christ. I still remember walking the property line with John and gently bringing up the idea that God had done a great job with this beautiful piece of property along Grant Creek. John replied, "don't get me wrong Jerry, I believe there's a big guy up in the sky but He and I keep our distance from one another." In other words, back off preacher man! So, I backed off. It was too early to plant seeds. But, over time, I did get some other opportunities to cultivate a relationship with John and to plant some seeds of truth. But, I had to be patient and it took a long time to prove to him that I genuinely cared about him, and his family. It wasn't until many years later that Pastor Chris Hess from Calvary Chapel led John to the Lord.

Planting genuine seeds of God's truth includes simple integrity in everyday things. Like showing courtesy to our waiter at the restaurant. Like being honest and above board in our business deals around town and doing good work for people. Like being gracious when we're stuck in traffic. Now I'm meddling (and feeling a little personal conviction). But we have to walk the walk. Matthew 5:13 challenges us, "You are the salt of the earth. **But if the salt loses its saltiness**, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot." This verse confused me for many years. **How can salt lose its saltiness?** Then, I came to realize that 2,000 years ago they didn't have the nicely refined salt that we enjoy today. Their salt was pretty dirty when they dug it out of the ground and it often got contaminated with impurities that made it good for nothing. In much the same way, our Christian lives aren't much good for winning the lost if they're filled with impurities, if they don't reflect godly integrity at home, at work, at school, and at play. Living distinctly different lives is our first and primary witness.

² Salt is also the same substance we find in our tears. One of my prayers is that as a church we will have tears for the lost.

³ There's a classic book on evangelism called *Out of the Saltshaker & Into the World* by Rebecca Pippert.

⁴ Imagine a french-fry without any salt. So sad. When we supersize at McDonalds, how many of us are looking for just pure potato?

⁵ See Dann Spader, P. 62.

Once we've cultivated authentic friendships and planted genuine seeds of God's truth, we win the lost...

3) ...by **Reaping** a new spiritual life.

Once we sense that a friend of ours is ready to turn to God, we need to be ready to share the Good news about Jesus clearly/concisely. We need to invite them to respond in faith.⁶ St. Francis of Assisi is often quoted for saying we should preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words. But, I would suggest that, at some point, words are most certainly necessary. Romans 10:13-15 says, "for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? **And how can they hear without SOMEONE preaching to them?** 15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Notice the end of v. 14, "how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" We need beautiful feet. Each Christ-follower needs to be ready, in his/her personal relationships with lost people, to share the Good News. In other words, preaching is NOT just the pastor's job. All of us should be ready to do this directly, 1 to 1. 1 Peter 3:15 challenges each one of us, "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.** But do this with gentleness and respect."

Now, clearly there ARE times when we bring someone to hear the Good News as it is presented by someone else. The Billy Graham crusades are famous for this. Thousands of people who'd been cultivating friendships and planting seeds of God's truth, would then invite their lost friend to hear Billy Graham proclaim the gospel. There's nothing wrong with a tag-team effort. I still remember seeing my neighbor, Patti Dean, at an outreach event in Bemidji called Rise Up America. After the 9-11 terror incident, Patti came to hear the gospel presented in the old BSU hockey arena. My wife, Debbie, had been sharing Christ with her for years. Patti came down to the front to pray with someone. And who was standing there? Her neighbor, Jerry Johnson. I'd signed up to help that night. I had no idea God would providentially move on Patti's heart that evening. What an awesome privilege to watch God reap a new spiritual life that night. Our neighbor who had become a close friend was now our sister in Christ. She and her husband John are now both Christ-followers. It's amazing to watch them grow as disciples and raise their children to know Jesus.⁷⁸

If "we love people the way God loves us, we will be engaged in making disciples."⁹ We are called to be "fishers of people." Just imagine how great your week would be, if this was the week. The week when a dear friend began his/her new spiritual life! That would be awesome, right? Who is in your proximity? I urge you to write down the names of 1 or 2 lost people that you know. Every time you see salt this week, think about your witness. As you enter into the proximity of a lost person, ask yourself, "how can I cultivate an authentic friendship with them?" "What genuine seed of truth could I plant in their life today to help them see God's love and goodness?" And then pray, pray for their heart and your heart to be ready. Pray for the opportunity to share the good news with them clearly and concisely. Who knows, this could be their week!

Let me close with just one more story. A long time ago Debbie and I had the opportunity to buy an old gray 4-door car. We named it Shadow. It was a great car for us but we needed to get it from Indiana. In order to pick this car up, we made kind of a neat arrangement with a friend of Debbie's dad, Bob. Bob had a friend named, Dave. Dave was a pilot and he offered to fly us from Minnesota to Indiana in his little 4-seater plane. It was awesome. I'd never been on a long flight in that small of a

⁶ See Dann Spader, p. 62.

⁷ There's no room for any boasting when God reaps a new spiritual life. 1 Corinthians 3:5-7 says it well, "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."

⁸ **Reaping isn't about boasting. God did the work anyways. But, reaping does call for celebrating.** Luke 15:1-7 tells us, "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be **more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents** than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

⁹ Dann Spader, *4 Chair Discipling*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL, 2014, p. 39.

plane. Very cool. We got to Indiana, enjoyed lunch together and then parted ways. Dave in his plane and me in our new, used car, Shadow.

Some months later, I received a call from Debbie's dad. He told me that there had been a terrible accident. Dave had been driving his car and was killed in a head on collision with a semi. Apparently, the roads had been severely icy and a strong gust of wind had pushed him into the oncoming lane. The reason Bob called to tell me this, was so that he could ask me a question. Bob's question still haunts me, "Jerry, did you get a chance to tell Dave about Jesus?" ...no. I hadn't. In fact, what was most convicting was that, it hadn't even crossed my mind. Now, this doesn't necessarily mean that I'm to blame for Dave's eternal destiny. God is sovereign and any number of other people may have shared Jesus with Dave. But, ever since then, Bob's question has been a helpful reminder to me of why I am still on the planet. **My mission is to make disciples. The first part of that is winning the lost!**

Therefore, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let us not be ashamed to share the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

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