

More—Core Mission

- I. How many tennis players do we have here this morning? How many people here have an illusion of being a tennis player? Growing up my dad played tennis every Saturday morning. He had the prerequisite two or three tennis rackets, a slew of tennis balls, tennis shoes, shorts and the cool tennis headband I think left over from the 70's. I don't think he was a great tennis player but he was probably better than average. As most parents he hoped to pass along the tennis legacy to his sons. It didn't take on my older brother so he tried on me. He passed along some of his gear...except the shoes. I let him keep those. But got the racket. I played enough with him that I could have a respectful volley as long as no one paid any attention to the fault lines, or if the ball touched the net or essentially any other rule. Then in my senior year at Furman since I had AP classes in High School I had, I believe, the best spring schedule in the history of the academic world. Archery, Canoeing, self-defense, outdoor education, and my most challenging, tennis. And I am not kidding. My tennis "professor"/coach hated me, this I don't doubt. For many reasons, one being that I thought it great fun to treat the game more like baseball and try to hit the tennis ball out of the court and onto the soccer field where cheerleaders were practicing. But the other reason is that I ignored his help over and over again...fundamentally, in the way I held the racket and hit the ball with said racket. I had been gripping it for years like this and he wanted me to contort my hands to something like this. I would have none of it. I liked my hold just fine, thank you for very much. The result? I never got any better. And eventually stopped playing all together.

- II. Well we have been talking in our *More* series about finding our personal calling in life. To discover, in a sense, our "sweet spot" in life, as we talked about last time. Just like this racket has a sweet spot, the place where if you hit the ball there it will go exactly where you want it, we have a sweet spot too as people. According to Todd Wilson, the author of the book, it is where we are experiencing God's presence in our life on a regular basis. He uses the metaphor of being poured into, like a glass of water, by God's Spirit and then we are pouring into other people. Sharing God's love and presence with the world in the way we were designed. But here is the thing as we go through this. Just like me with tennis, we might have some resistance to this...because if we embrace some of these principles, it will lead to change. And who wants that, right? I certainly didn't want that coach changing my grip ... even if my technique really wasn't working for me. I was comfortable being a bad tennis player. Let me give you an example of what I mean by all this. One of the ways we are challenged in this series is to change our metrics, the scorecard we tend to use in life to determine if we are "winning" or "losing." What Wilson, and really Jesus, says is that humanity has it in the inverse or I might even say twisted. What society tells us is most important is our possessions, our position (job, title) or our personal fulfillment (my happiness at the cost of everyone else's) when in reality it is not in the getting but the giving and the serving. And that change of mindset, and even more so change of behavior, can be uncomfortable. But here is the thing. Giving up our time and money to serve someone else is far more difficult than changing the way you grip a tennis racquet. But it can transform our whole game....our whole life...and lead to lives of truly *more* than less.

- III. Okay and that gets us to today...as we are pushed even further to our “discomfort zone” we examine what Todd calls core mission in life. But let me back up one step and look at the **Be Go Do** that is the frame work for this series (**image**) Be- Who are we? Last week we said that from a biblical understanding we are first and foremost sons and daughters of God and followers of Jesus Christ if you have made that decision. That is where we need to find our identity and not in what we do, or what will make people happy, or how we think people see us. And once we claim this as our fundamental or core identity, everything else flows from understanding who we really are. Once I claim and embrace this Identity it will make me a better father, husband, friend, pastor, etc. Once we get this settled in our mind, we can move to the **Do** or, as Todd Wilson puts it, our core mission. To find that let’s look at some of Jesus’ final words in the gospel of Matthew. **Mathew 28:16-20 NIV.**
- IV. Listen to a few last words. (**images**) In Matthew’s gospel we read some of Jesus’ final words to his disciples, or followers. Unlike the others who were likely experiencing fear, dread or wonder, Jesus, having already conquered death, had a firm handle on His final words. In other words, He was very intentional in His last instructions. This is why Christians throughout generations have considered these words as some of Jesus’ most important, and our marching orders...our core mission...if we too are serious about following Him. But before I say any more about that, three quick but critical observations about this passage.
- 1) **Jesus is making it clear that He has power and right to give His disciples such a charge.** I don’t know about you, but I would tend to listen to anyone who died and came back again. He would have my full attention. 2) It’s important to see **Jesus is not talking about simply making disciples with only His fellow Jews but the entire human population. This new way of living is for all people not for some select people.** Like “Jesus is only for Western Europeans and some people groups living in the Middle East.” No. The path of Jesus is for every person from every culture for all time. Please understand, this is not being arrogant or culturally insensitive. It’s just that living like Jesus, which is in short learning to love God and love our neighbor, is how we were designed. It doesn’t matter if you are Chinese, Afghani, Aboriginal or Norwegian. Serving, forgiving, loving, turning your cheek, seeking justice for the marginalized, sharing with the poor is simply the best way to live period. So we shouldn’t feel bad about carrying this Jesus mission out. In fact, it is the most loving thing we can do. Just imagine how different our world would be if we all strived to live this out. 3) **We are not alone.** Jesus goes with us. Anyone ever have to sell stuff to raise money for your school, band, sports team, chess club or whatever? Have to do it solo? Scary, right? Especially when you had to knock on that neighbor’s door who lived all alone with cats with the *Do No Trespass* sign out front. But what a relief when we discover that our best friend volunteered to go with us! Even if they didn’t say anything but just stood there while we gave the spiel...their presence gave us courage. Same goes with Jesus. We don’t go on this mission alone. He goes with us. And remembering that should give us tremendous courage.
- V. So here is the deal. If our identity is found in following Jesus, our core mission, according to none other than Jesus himself, is in making disciples, or other Jesus followers. That is what our life should ultimately be about. Let me explain it this way. Soon we will be baptizing Noah, Stephanie and Brian’s beautiful young boy. And what will we be doing? Pouring

water on his head. Water signifies many things including washing away our sins. But it also points to new life. Re-birth. Being born again into a new family, the church. Not a structure, but the people of God. So now Noah has his biological family but he will have his spiritual family, brothers and sisters in Christ. And as he grows up it's up to us as his older siblings to help him learn to walk the Jesus path. This is discipleship. And this is what we are called to as Christians. Not only to share about Jesus' life, death and resurrection, but to help other people learn to walk this path. Both people who are already here like Noah and those who are not here yet. But how?

- VI. First, we need to remember what the word "disciple" means. The way I would define it when it comes to our faith is **"a disciple is a student who conforms to the pattern of living as taught by his/her teacher."** So for us to make disciples this means we will need to assume the role of an instructor. That may weird some of us out....and lead to several objections...probably the biggest one being "I can't instruct other people about Jesus, I am just learning it myself!" When I was in ROTC in college, one of the things we had to do was teach classes to the younger cadets. This was part of our training. So on a regular basis one of our training officers would order us to teach a subject even though we might not have a clue about the topic ourselves. This is how I found myself one afternoon at the ropes course teaching a class on rappelling. I had just learned to rappel the year before. And I promise you, I was no expert. So I was sweating it because remembering details has never been my forte and rappelling, including tying a Swiss seat (**image**), was what I would call "detail critical." You tie the knot right, you find yourself on a pleasant trip down a side of a cliff. You tie it wrong, and you find yourself falling at 9.8 meters per second, ending up (if you're lucky!) on a trip to the ER. So what did I do? I became a more serious student myself...studying the manuals, talking to and watching the experts, and studying even more. Yet I kept a degree of humility because my students' lives were at stake. Likewise, we are called to instruct disciples on living the path of Jesus while still learning it ourselves. And we too should feel a high degree of responsibility that should turn us towards studying the Scriptures all the more and being in constant communion with our brothers and sisters who have been following Jesus longer than ourselves. So our spiritual ignorance, immaturity or youth is not an excuse not to disciple. We have to remember James and John, some of the first disciples, who not long before Jesus gave them this mission were asking Jesus to torch a Samaritan village, which undoubtedly included women and children, just because they felt snubbed. So they were no experts, to say the least, but it was these guys that changed the world.
- VII. But I know what you are thinking... "This is easy for you to say. You went to school for this Jesus-discipling business. But you don't ask someone to teach surgery if they didn't go to medical school. You don't ask someone to teach flying a plane if they didn't go to flight school, etc. This is all true. But here is the thing. If you are a school teacher you know there are all sorts of ways to teach. For those who are more attuned to auditory listening, you may lecture using analogies and metaphors. For those who are more visual you might use videos, PowerPoint or even M & M depending on your crowd. If your listeners are more hands-on types, you might use an exercise or lab. The point is there are all sorts of ways we

can teach or disciple, and most don't require us having eight years of higher education or having memorized the bible cover to cover. Here are a few ways.

- VIII.** First, **model**. This is the most obvious, right? We want to teach someone how to live like Jesus? Our children, Noah, our neighbors? Then we, with God's help, live like Jesus. But we might say, "Yeah, but I stumble and fall all the time." Well, join the club my friend. I do, too. But guess what? That is what grace is about. We ask for forgiveness and we get back up and we keep following. If we are honest and transparent about it, our mistakes and moral failures can teach as much as our moral victories. Second, we disciple by **investing time into people**. We don't have to have studied Hebrew or Greek to sit down with someone over coffee and talk to them about life, about their relationship with God and to pray for them at the end. All this type of discipleship entails is time and little money (or if you are at Starbucks, a lot of money for coffee.) But I promise you, for the person in whom you are investing time, it will be life changing. The third way we can disciple is by **inviting**. So you might say "Well, I am not a bible expert." Fine. Then invite people to growth group. To our Sunday morning bible study. To worship. To places where they will get sound biblical teaching. Maybe we are not at the place yet where we feel comfortable teaching the bible ourselves, but we can invite people to places where they will receive it. Peter, the best known Jesus disciple who became the pillar of the church, started out his discipleship path only because his brother Andrew invited him. G3, please don't forget the power of invitation. It might seem so small a thing, but it can change someone's life forever.
- IX.** Let me ask those who have decided to follow Jesus. How many of us would say, if our boss calls us tomorrow and gives us a directive, "Nope, sorry, I am not doing any of that." Or if we were in the military and our commander commands us to take a certain hill, "Sorry, sir or ma'am, just not feelin' it today." Then why do we think we can call in sick when it comes to Jesus' marching orders? The One who has ultimate authority on heaven and earth. Let me say this in the most loving way I can. Discipleship is not just my job as pastor. It's not just Steph's or Bob's or Cheryl's jobs as pastors. If you follow Jesus, it needs to be your core mission on this earth as well. Modeling, investing and inviting are all ways we can all disciple without a bible degree. And here is the thing. What we will discover, once we embrace this discipleship thing, is that it isn't a burden but an enormous blessing. Like in the case of Josh. **(image)** I met Josh in 1996. He was 15. I had just gotten out of the army and for some reason a church hired me to be a part time youth pastor. Had not gone to seminary yet, had no vocational experience, so I had no clue really what I was doing. But I knew God wanted me to invest time with kids like Josh. So we began meeting weekly. Honestly I don't think I did much of anything other than listen and read a few verses in the bible. I also invited him to help me from time to time with different ministry tasks. But no real intense teaching. Just spent time with him and was open about my own failings. Yet Josh just told me, all these years later, that the time we spent together was the foundation of his spiritual journey, which he now shares with his own children and the church he currently serves as a volunteer. I share that not to brag, because I honestly did so little, but to simply say we don't have to be an "expert" to live out our core mission to make disciples. And by doing so, we will discover our sweet spot. The reason we were made.