



February 22, 2015
Pastor Mark Toone
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

Disciple-making 101: A 90 Day Challenge
Going
Mark 15-Luke 5

Hola! Most of 117 of us returned last night from our annual high school mission trip to Tijuana. We are a little sore, a little sleep-deprived, very grateful for flushing toilets and hot showers and real beds... but we are also so grateful for the way the Lord worked. We built seven homes for seven Mexican families which is great, but more importantly, we built 117 stronger disciples of Jesus, young and old alike. You will hear more about it next week, but you would be so proud of your kids and of their great adult leaders... some of our finest people! They were awesome!

I'm proud of something else, too. Do you remember last year, I shared with you how I installed the door from hell? That door was demon-possessed. It took me something like seven hours, two rebuilds of a wall, lots of bucket-kicking and cursing in tongues to finally get it installed. It wasn't my finest hour of Christian witness. Well this year, on Wednesday we arrived on the site at 9:00am, and I had the door and the two windows installed by 10:05! So, too all you mockers I simply say, "HA!"

I've had a lot of travel lately. Two and ½ weeks ago, I returned from leading a pilgrimage to Israel. While there, we overnighted in Bethlehem. This is harder than it used to be because of the Security Wall. This is the separation wall that divides Bethlehem and nearly 400 miles of Palestinian territory from the state of Israel. It is very controversial. Israelis will tell you it is a matter of security; suicide bombings have dropped significantly since the wall construction began in 2000. But for those on the other side of the wall, it is a source of great frustration. We heard from Bethlehem Christians who spoke of feeling being trapped; of separation from family and land and services. They feel like they are in prison.

One village, for instance, Al-Walaja, will be completely encircled by a 25 foot concrete wall when the construction is complete. As you might imagine, this wall—built to keep them contained—is a source of great frustration for the residents of that village.

Now imagine something even more bizarre. Imagine a village that built such a wall around themselves... a wall that encircles their community and traps them inside, making it difficult for their own people to move into the world. Crazy, right?

That is exactly what most American Christian churches have done. They erect invisible separation barriers around their sanctuaries, around their Sunday school classes, and around their youth groups—not so much to keep people out but to keep themselves in—to confine their religious activities to their Christian ghetto. They are happy to worship and fellowship and learn about Jesus privately, but the idea of carrying the gospel of Jesus beyond those walls, beyond that barrier and into the rest of the world is frightening or intrusive or imperialistic... or something.

We are not that kind of a church. We encourage our people to see this building as a training camp... to equip and provision you to go back into the world and live out the faith in Jesus you claim to possess. Still, many of us get squeamish about the idea of actually mentioning Jesus by name at our home or school or our workplace. Many here would rather build a barrier around our Christian faith and keep it private. Isn't that so? Even though, the teaching and example of Jesus is about a lifetime of engagement with others.

So where are you? Honestly? If you think about your own Christian faith and witness—if you think about the way you live your Christian life—how much of it is confined within the walls of this beautiful ghetto?

As we continue our 90 Day Challenge, we are collecting principles from Jesus on how he made disciples. This week, as we came to the end of Mark's gospel, we were reintroduced to Jesus' parting shot to his disciples. The most famous version is in Matthew 28. We call that the Great Commission. Mark's version is shorter. Mark is a bullet point kind of guy; my kind of guy. So let's read it together.

¹⁵He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.
¹⁶Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

The very first word in Mark's Great Commission is the exact same word we find in Matthew's version. "Go!" But as I've told you before, that is not the best translation. The Greek word is a participle. The translation should be, "Having gone..." or "...as you are going." This may seem like another one of Pastor Mark's goofy grammatical obsessions, but it is significant. If "Go" is the command, that means that wherever we are, we have to be someplace else. "Go" means leaving everything I know and love and heading off to a foreign country. Or maybe "Go" means getting out on the street corner and preaching the gospel.

One summer Cyndi and Cooper and I went to Hoover Dam. On the way back, we stopped in Las Vegas to check it out. Honestly, I found it pretty awful. Walking along the sidewalk, you were constantly confronted by people trying to hand you advertising cards with pictures of naked women. (You should have seen Cyndi; she was like a momma panther on the prowl, stalking through that crowd, leading her two men to safety.)

At one point, we came upon a street corner preacher with a bullhorn, shouting out a message of hellfire and damnation with nobody listening. At first I was put off. But then I remember thinking, "At least he is doing something! What am I doing—other than feeling uncomfortable and disgusted? What am I doing to bring the light of Christ into this dark place?" It reminds me of what Dwight L. Moody once said. Moody was the 19th century version of Billy Graham and pretty controversial in some circles. When someone once criticized Moody's method of sharing the gospel he replied, "I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it!"

Still, if "Go" means leaving everything you know and sailing away or preaching on the street corners of Gig Harbor, that can be pretty terrifying, can't it? There are some here who have those gifts. Who here feels called to the mission field? Who here has no problem starting conversations with strangers about Jesus? I traveled to Israel with a guy named Gordy Wheeler. Gordy is one of the most natural evangelists I've ever seen. I listened as he started a conversation about Jesus with two guys while standing in line at the airport in Amsterdam. Amazing!

But most of us aren't gifted that way. Nevertheless, this word "Go" is part of Jesus' command to all of us to make disciples. So what do we do with it? Well first, we interpret it correctly. If the actual word means "as you are going" don't you see how that changes things? It makes it less terrifying! "As you are living your life—as you are traveling, working, vacationing, in the relationships you already have—as you are going along, look for ways to share what Jesus has done for you and what he can do for those you love."

That is exactly what we see in the early chapters of Luke from last week's 90 Day Challenge. In chapter 2, we discover the only story we have about Jesus as a boy. He and his family were on a religious vacation. They traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, the time when God led the people of Israel out of Egypt. When Passover was over, they got back into a caravan to make the 120 mile walk back to Nazareth.

In those days, men walked together and the women and children walked together. But Jesus was 12; he was a tween-ager. Joseph assumed Jesus was walking with his mother and Mary assumed Jesus was walking with Joseph. When they stopped the first night for camp they realized they had left him behind. How many of you parents ever lost your kid! Do you remember the terror? (How many ever wanted to lose your kid?) So, they retraced their one-day journey and, after another day of looking—that's three days now without their boy—they found Jesus in the temple, hanging out with the religious leaders, asking incredible questions and amazing everyone who listened. It is perhaps too much to say that Jesus was making disciples here, but notice that even as a teenager on his vacation, he was doing his "Father's business." As he was going...

We see it again in Luke 4 when Jesus returns as a man to his hometown of Nazareth after launching his ministry in Capernaum. He comes back on a Sabbath and goes to synagogue. Remember, these are the people he grew up with. His playmates were sitting there. The old women who once babysat him and changed his diapers were sitting there. Jesus has made a name for himself with his preaching and miracles and everyone in Nazareth is excited to see him in action. He is invited to read from the Old Testament. So he picks a passage in Isaiah that predicts the coming of the Jewish Messiah, and then he tells them, "I am that guy!" It wasn't easy sharing the gospel with his friends and family, but Jesus did it... as he was going.

In the very next chapter, Jesus is making disciples as he walks along the Sea of Galilee and in the marketplace of Capernaum. He calls his first four disciples away from their fishing boats and a fifth one from his tax booth... as he was going. And he heals people while he is hanging out at Simon's house... as he was going.

The point is Jesus' ministry took place in everyday life. This is actually rather remarkable. Jerusalem was the religious headquarters, but Jesus' ministry—his preaching and teaching and healing and exorcising of demons—took place mostly outside of Jerusalem. In fact, if we only had Matthew, Mark and Luke we would be left with the impression that Jesus only traveled to Jerusalem one time during his ministry, on his way to the cross! As far as the synoptic gospel-writers were concerned, Jesus did his disciple-making "as he was going" along the way of life in Galilee—with his friends and family, along the shores of Galilee, in the synagogue, yes... but also, outside the synagogue in Peter's house and on the streets and in the fields and on the hillsides.

Do you get my point? Jesus lived his life and faith and ministry in everyday life. And he commands us to do the same. This can still be intimidating, but when you understand that obeying Jesus' command to "Go" means living your ordinary life with intentionality—looking for opportunities in the course of your day to make disciples for Jesus—it changes the way you approach life. Or, to return to my original illustration, it's like you pull out a sledge hammer and begin to knock down the wall you've built up that separates your religion from your life.

Let me give some examples. Cyndi decided that part of her disciple-making means she needs to be more intentional in developing relationships with the people who serve her (e.g., checkers at the grocery store). So one time, she asked the young man at the cash register how he was doing and then really engaged him in that conversation. He was so surprised that someone actually cared and got so involved in the conversation that he started running items through twice. Cyndi was having trouble looking him in the eye and watching the display at the same time to make sure she wasn't getting overcharged! Disciple-making can be costly. 😊

One mother in our church invited her high school son to do the 90 Day Challenge with her. He replied, "Why should I read the Bible; you don't." Well, she did every day, but she realized that she read it in her bedroom. Her son never saw her reading the Word so he didn't understand why she would suddenly be interested in doing so with him. I remember Pastor Jeremy sharing how his mom quietly witnessed to him every morning when he got up and found her at the kitchen table, doing her Bible study.

Remember that real estate developer who started a Bible study with others in his profession? They have now been studying the gospel of Mark for six weeks. A young mom in our church uses her encounters with other young moms at the library story-time to develop relationships. Out of that, she invites women to coffee at her home. A young man joined the Y with the intention of developing non-Christian friendships and has lengthened his time after workout to allow for coffee conversations. A group of Christian firefighters formed a couples' dinner group. Soon, others from the station were asking if they could join and, as a result, two men gave their life to Christ.

Can you hear the chunks of concrete being knocked out of our separation walls? As they are going—on their way—in work and home and recreation they are looking for ways to share the best news they ever heard: that God loves them, has forgiven them and has launched them on an abundant, eternal life.

"As you are going, make disciples." This is one of the reasons I love the Mexico trip. Several folks asked me why I went this year since I don't have any kids in the group. I replied, "I have 80 kids in the group." The opportunity to work alongside them, tease them, sing and laugh and be boisterous together is precious to me. When we gathered in a circle at the end of the trip, several kids said the same thing: before, I only knew you as the formal guy up front giving sermons. I didn't know that pastors could be funny and normal."

The jury is still out on how normal I am, but on our last night in Mexico, I had kid after kid put their arms around me to pray together. One wept because he doesn't yet have the faith that he wants. One wept because she is afraid she will wander after she goes to college. One wept because he wants to stay sober. One wanted to tell me that he had given his life to Christ that night. And I wonder, how many of those prayers would have happened if we hadn't framed walls together and barked at dogs together and done a Chinese fire drill together... and if those little urchins hadn't attacked their innocent pastor in a hail of wet stucco?

Their best disciple-making you will do—if you are willing to obey Jesus—is as you are going along in life. It's still not easy and it can be risky, but it is much more real and it is so rewarding. So what would it look like for you to make disciples "as you are going?"