

## **ACTS**

Disciple Making: Share the Word  
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## **DISCIPLE-MAKING: SHARE THE WORD** **Acts**

If you have the Word of this God, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open to Matthew 4. We're going to get to Acts in just a minute, but I want us to start tonight in Matthew, Matthew 4, and while you're turning there, I just want to say how thankful I am to God, how grateful I am to God for you. My heart was full in Northern India, and in a sense, it's even more full now back together with you, just overflowing, just proud, in Christ, of the affect of your faith on the spread of the gospel in Northern India.

We've gone through a variety of changes around here over the last four or five years, and you have made a variety of different sacrifices, and for this reason, I wish each of you could have seen the faces of people who a year ago had never heard of Jesus; they hadn't even heard of Him, and now have trusted in Jesus for salvation. I wish each of you could have walked into rural villages and urban slums that a year ago had no churches, and now there are multiple churches meeting in different homes in these villages, slums. I wish you could hear a pastor talk, see him with tears in his eyes, talking about how his village that he's pastured in for 20 years has water, clean water, for the first time ever. I wish you could have seen women holding their children, healthy children in areas where children have been dying.

I don't know if you were able to follow on the blog. If you weren't, I think it's still up. I think you can still link there from our homepage, just to see...I would encourage you, maybe to spend some time with it tonight or tomorrow, just a few minutes, just kind of browse through there. I want you to see pictures, video, descriptions of the fruit of your faith on the spread of the gospel in northern India. Over a thousand women and children who are living and thriving in areas where children were dying. A hundred different villages that now have water, clean water, for the first time. That's over 30,000 people who have clean water, whose children aren't dying of things like diarrhea.

To see two million people who have access to the New Testament in audio form for the first time; seven million people who have access to Bible stories in their language for the first time; literally, hundreds of villages in India that have been engaged with the gospel for the very first time and thousands of our Indian brothers and sisters that have been trained to make disciples and multiply churches. Praise God for His grace in you. Thank you for your generosity and your patience and your perseverance and just for the privilege of being your pastor.

So, as your pastor, I want to let you in on why we have been studying the book of Acts over the last three months. It's not just random, I didn't come to the end of last year thinking, "Oh, what are we going to do? Let's just kind of see...Acts, we'll go with Acts." So, there's a reason...there's a reason why the last three weeks we have been studying Acts, and the reason why we've been studying the way we've been studying it.

Here's the reason: God is glorious, and He does deserve the praise of every people group on the planet. People are sinful; all people everywhere...people in the United States of America, people in India and everywhere in between are all sinful. It looks different in different places, and in India it's gods of gold and silver and stone. Here, it's gods of money and pleasure and pride, but it's false gods everywhere that we have given our affections to, our devotion to, ourselves to, and the payment for sin is eternal death. The payment for sin before an infinitely holy God is infinitely eternal punishment in hell.

However, God, in His mercy, has made a way of salvation. He has sent His Son to pay the price for our sin, to stand in our place, so that anyone anywhere who trusts in Christ can be reconciled to God forever and ever, delivered from the horrors of hell to the hope of heaven based solely on what He has done by His mercy. That's good news. That's why it's called gospel, because it's good news for everyone everywhere.

So, here's the deal, we who know this gospel, we have billions and trillions of years ahead of us to enjoy this great God. Because of His salvation, we know, billions and trillions of years...oh, we are just getting started enjoying this great God, and forever we will. So, we're here for just a little bit...just a tiny bit...just a mere 70, 80 years. So, it's not that long...just a little bit...compared to billions and trillions of years; for a small bit we're here. While we're here for a little while, we've got a charge from God and the charge is to tell everyone everywhere about this salvation. That's why we're still here.

Why hasn't He just taken us to be with Him? Why still, in a land and a world of suffering and tsunamis and earthquakes and sin, why are we still here? We're still here because we've got a job that He has entrusted to us, to make this gospel known in the whole world, and that means this job is for all of us, not just some of us. If this gospel is going to be known in the whole world, then that's going to take all of us. So, this is the essence of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

I want to show this to you, Matthew 4:18. From the very beginning of Jesus calling people to follow Him, I want you to see the emphasis on this charge, this task, this job to do. Look at Matthew 4:18. This is the very beginning Gospel of Matthew, Jesus' initial call to His disciples, to His followers. Matthew 4:18 says, *"While walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them..."* This was His initial call, follow it. Verse 19, if it's not underlined in your Bible, maybe underline it. Jesus says, initially, to them, *"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."* So, get this. When you follow Him, you become a fisher of men. It's that simple.

When you follow Christ, you become a fisher for Christ. Now, this is, obviously, a word picture for these fishermen. Jesus saying to them, "You have a new vocation when you follow me. Instead of trying to draw fish into a net, you're going to draw people into a kingdom...men and women into a kingdom...and all who follow me, I will make you...I will make you a fisher of men. You're going to focus your life on bringing men and women into a kingdom. That's going to be the priority of your life; that's what you're going to live to do."

So, that was His initial call. Now, go to the very end of Matthew, Matthew 28, and look at verse 19. I want you to see bookends here. At the very beginning, Jesus says, "You follow me, you fish for men. Every follower is a fisher." When you get to Matthew 28:19, and these are His last words to His disciples. So, those were His initial words, now His final words. Matthew 28:19, Jesus gathers these same disciples who have responded to His initial call, gathers them around Himself, and He says, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit,*

*teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Same thing: "Go fish for men. Go make disciples among men and women in all nations; bring men and women into the kingdom, baptizing them, in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to obey me. This is what you are to be about." He says to every follower of His, "Go and make disciples." So, we see this from the very beginning to the very end, Jesus' focus for His disciples on fishing for men, making disciples among men and women.

## **A Core Conviction ...**

### **Every disciple is a disciple-maker.**

So, this is our core conviction...one of the driving convictions that we have as a faith family called...this is a core conviction for us: every follower of Christ is a fisher of men and women. Every disciple is a disciple-maker. We believe...we believe the fundamental purpose of every single one of our lives in this church...every single follower of Christ in this church...we believe the fundamental purpose of our lives without exception is to make disciples. We have been called to Christ to make disciples of Christ; not some of us, but all of us. Every single follower a fisher, and every single disciple a disciple-maker.

### **The Great Commission is not a call for a few of us, but a command for all of us.**

We believe that the Great Commission, which is what Matthew 28:18-20 here is called, the Great Commission is not a call for a few of us, but a command for all of us. No Christian in this room has been called to make disciples of all nations, right? No one Christian has been called to make disciples of all nations; every Christian is commanded to make disciples all nations. The Great Commission is not an option for us to consider, to weigh among other options. The Great Commission is a command for us to obey, which changes everything about how we do church. It changes everything about how we act as a church. It changes everything, even, about how we understand what is going on in this room at this moment.

### **We are not an audience of spectators; we are a fellowship of disciple-makers.**

We are not an audience of spectators; we are a fellowship of disciple-makers; that's who we are. We never, never, ever come into this room thinking, "Hmm, I hope that they have planned a good service for us." We are not American Idol. We are never here to judge the sermon, okay? The goal is not for you to walk away, "Ah, I'd give it a 6. He talked about disciple-making before; it's just the same thing." No, you don't walk away saying, "Oh, the music, oh, 8. I enjoyed most of the songs, but one song I didn't like; down from a 10 to an 8." That's not what we do.

Now, this is what our consumeristic culture would have us think we are here to do, and this is what creeps into every single church in our culture. It's what people are tempted, and you will be tempted to walk away thinking, tonight. "Oh, how did I like this? How did I like that? How did that suit me?" This is the whole point.

Bill Hull, a pastor who has written much on disciple-making, said American churches are filled with "pew-filling, sermon-tasting, spiritual schizophrenics, whose belief and behavior are not congruent." That's it; that's what we've been wrestling with over the last few years, right? That's what I've been wrestling with as a pastor for the last couple of years; what we have been wrestling with as a faith family for the last couple of years. Do we really believe what we're reading every week? Do we really believe what we're saying? Do we really

believe what we're singing? If this God is who He says He is, and if this salvation is as great as we say it is, and there are masses of people, billions of people, who have never heard it or haven't received it and who are headed to an eternal hell...if we really believe this, then our behavior would look very different in this world.

We don't have time to play games with our lives, not if this book is true. We don't have time to entertain ourselves, organize stuff that revolves around us, that makes us comfortable. No, it makes no sense if we believe this; it just doesn't add up. It's incongruent. No, if this is true, then we're not spectators here, we're disciple-makers; all of us...all of us with this job to do. Not just some of us; it's driving all of us.

Robert Coleman wrote a classic on disciple-making, probably one of the books that has most influenced my life outside of the Bible...top three for sure...called *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. I would highly recommend it, and he wrote it 30-plus years ago, but it is an incredible book. In *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Coleman wrote this,

Discipling men and women is the priority around which our lives should be oriented. The Great Commission is not a special calling or a gift of the Spirit; it is a command - an obligation incumbent upon the whole community of faith. There are no exceptions. Bank presidents and automobile mechanics, physicians and schoolteachers, theologians and homemakers - everyone who believes on Christ has a part in His work (John 14:12). The Great Commission is a lifestyle encompassing the total resources of every child of God. Here the ministry of Christ comes alive in the day-by-day activity of discipling. Whether we have a "secular" job or an ecclesiastical position [meaning a church position], a Christ-like commitment to bring the nations into the eternal Kingdom should be a part of it. If making disciples of all nations is not the heartbeat of our life, something is wrong, either their understanding of Christ's church or our willingness to walk in His way.

Disciple-making, the heartbeat of every one of our lives; that core conviction spread throughout the world, that every disciple of Christ here is a disciple-maker. Now, that conviction begs the question: if this is the heartbeat of our lives, making disciples, the priority around which our lives should be oriented, then how do you do it? How do you make disciples? Because if this is the priority around which our lives revolve, we need to know how to carry it out, and this is where about four years ago in the first year after I had gotten here, I came to a point where I realized, "We're talking about disciple-making all the time," but if you were to survey or poll the people sitting in seats on a Sunday, whether here or at another church, and you were to ask the question, "What does it mean...how do you make disciples of all nations? How do you do that? What does that look like practically?" I realize that you, probably, would get all kinds of different answers. Probably a lot of ambiguity, likely many blank stares. If we were to poll now, "Okay, how do you make disciples? How do you make disciples? How do you make disciples?" The answers would be all over the map, probably, and that's not good.

If we're going to be good at anything as followers of Christ, we need to be good at this thing; this command that He has left us here to carry out. We need to know how to do that. So, four years ago, we set aside just a simple six weeks, and we went through a series called *Follow Me*, where we spent time in Matthew 4 and Matthew 28 and John 17 in the middle, and we looked at what Jesus did with His disciples that would help inform us when it comes to this command to make disciples, and we just walked through, "What does disciple-making look like?" It was key, foundational really.

So, as we were coming to the end of last year, and I was spending concentrated time in prayer, praying through what the Lord desired for us to walk through in His Word this year, there were a lot of things that hopefully, Lord willing, we will dive into as this year goes on, but this was first and foremost. As I mentioned, we've gone through a lot of changes over the last four or five years. There's a lot of people who are here now that were not here when we walked through that series back in 2007, I guess it was. Even those who were here, the reality is that this is the priority around which our lives revolve, the heartbeat of our lives, we continually need to go back to what it means to make disciples.

So, I realized, we need to dive in, and we're talking about disciple-making a lot around here, and I want to make sure we know what we mean by that; what does Scripture mean by that? Now, instead of going back and just doing that exact same study we did in 2007, what I decided to do is that we would dive into the book of Acts. So, Jesus says, "Go and make disciples of all nations," what happened after that in the book of Acts is the answer to that question. The book of Acts is the picture of how disciple-making played out in the early church. What we have read over the last three months and studied is a picture of disciple-making in action. It's a picture of the gospel.

Get this, starting with a group of 120 people...just picture it...that's 3 percent the size of this church. 120 people, a small group of people, and by the end of Acts 28, the gospel has multiplied and the church is, some estimate, 400 times the size of when it started. That's good. If you experience 400-fold growth, it's been a good day. The church is multiplying; the gospel is going to the uttermost parts of the earth. How? How does that happen? How does the gospel go forward like that? We want to be a part of the gospel going forward like that, right? We want the kingdom to 400-fold growth. That would be good; that would be a good starting place. We want to see that, but how does that happen?

Some would say, "Well, it's leaders; it's people like Peter and Paul," and no question, the book of Acts focuses on key leaders like Peter and Paul, but what I want you to see is that this spread of the gospel and this multiplication and growth of the church was not, ultimately, about a couple of leaders, but it was about an entire people realizing that all of them were disciple-makers...all the people of God, not just some but all of the people. That's how the church multiplied.

Let me show it to you. Go to Acts with me; go to Acts 4. Let me take you on just a quick tour, a real quick tour, and I want you to see, and I want to show you that this book that we have been reading in the last three months is not just about a few people making disciples, but all the people making disciples...all of them. I want you to look, and we'll start in Acts 4:13. I just want to show you this verse. Now, this is actually about two of the apostles, Peter and John, but I want to show you that this book that we've been reading is not about superheroes taking the gospel to the ends of the earth; super Christians that are kind of out of our league.

Look at this, Acts 4:13 says...and remember, Peter and John have been preaching the gospel, and the crowd saw them. When the crowd "*saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*" I mean, literal translation here. When it says "*they were uneducated, common men,*" that literally says...and that was originally in the New Testament, that says they were...they realized that they were "illiterate ignoramuses." Now, that's great. I just love that Luke wrote that about Peter and John. This is how they were. "You guys were perceived as illiterate ignoramuses."

So, be encouraged; we're at least that much, right? I think we're at least there. I can encourage you and say you're at least an illiterate ignoramus. So, we're not starting behind these guys. If anything, we're ahead of these guys because we just read this, right? So, we're ahead...we're ahead of the game. So, they've thrown superheroes out of our league. No, we're ahead of them, we're out of their league, okay?

Then, you say, "Well, that's still just apostles, Peter and John." Go with me to Acts 8. Some of this is review, but it's a good review and key review. Look at Acts 8:1. Remember, this is right after Stephen was stoned, and Saul was standing there approving of his execution. Acts 8:1 says...and then listen to this...follow this: *"And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and..."* follow this, *"...they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."* *"They were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."* Then, it says, *"Devout men buried Stephen...Saul ravaging the church."* Verse 4 says, *"Those who were scattered went about preaching the word."*

Did you catch that? Were the apostles the ones who were advancing the gospel into Judea and Samaria? No, they were staying in Jerusalem. The people who were going to Judea and Samaria with the gospel were everyone but the apostles...just normal people, not apostles, followers of Christ, and all of them were preaching the Word...scattered, preaching the Word. The word there literally says, "They were evangelizing; they were telling people the good news."

Look at what they did. Keep going to Acts 11:19. These people...these unnamed people that were scattered were not apostles, but normal followers of Christ. Look to Acts 11:19. *"Those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene..."* Then, verse 20, *"...who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists [the Greeks] also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord."*

The gospel is advancing, and people are coming to Christ, not because of the apostles, but because the people are scattering, and they're preaching; all of them, they're all preaching. This is the founding of the Church at Antioch. Who founded the Church at Antioch? Peter? Paul? James? No, just people...just followers of Christ, all preaching the Word, sharing the gospel wherever they went, and the Church at Antioch was founded; the mission base for ministry to the nations founded by a bunch of unnamed Christians; just average, ordinary Christians.

I want to show you one more place, Acts 19. You remember this, Acts 19:10, when Paul was in Ephesus, and Paul stayed in Ephesus for a couple of years preaching. He's staying in Ephesus...not traveling around...he's staying in Ephesus. In the hall of Tyrannus, he's preaching, but listen to verse 10. It says, *"This continued for two years..."* Paul preaching, *"...so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."* All the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord. Did Paul go into all of Asia? No. Paul stayed in Ephesus the whole time preaching the Word there, and what happened is people heard the Word, and then they went out into all of Asia. The reason everybody in Asia heard the Word of the Lord was not because of Paul, but because of the people. They were all going out. That's how everybody in Asia...and what a statement...everybody in Asia heard the Word of the Lord, heard the gospel, because the people were going everywhere in Asia.

This is not just the book of Acts. You look in Christian history, and you see times when the gospel has advanced, the mission of the churches, spread like wildfire. I was reading this

last week when I was in India. I was reading again about the Moravians, 18th Century Moravians, a small band of believers. Their whole motto was, "Every Christian is a missionary." "Every Christian is a missionary." That's what they believed, the core of who they were; they believed. That was their core conviction. That didn't mean that every believer traveled to other lands taking the gospel, but what it meant was, and how they lived was, they said, "Wherever we work, wherever we live, we are there to share the gospel and to spread the gospel. That's the reason we have jobs; that's the reason we have positions in society; that's the reason we are businessmen or bankers or this or that. It's for the spread of the gospel."

Then, what happened is, as they began to realize that the gospel needed to be heard in other places, they didn't have the resources and the money to send out missionaries like we would think of today, and so, what they did is they just sent businessmen and people who were working in jobs here, sharing the gospel here, that said, "We can do the same jobs in this country over here, this country over here." So, they go, and they do their jobs there and they evangelize; they share the gospel while they're there. They share the good news.

One historian said, "The most important contribution of the Moravians was their emphasis that every Christian is a missionary and should witness through his daily vocation. In this, they became one of the most remarkable missionary churches in all of Christian history." That's it; all they did was believe, really believe that every disciple was a disciple-maker. That is the secret. That was the key. It's the spread of the gospel in Acts, the spread of the gospel through the Moravians, and I'm convinced, it's what happens when a people in Birmingham refuse to see themselves in the church as spectators, and there are no spectators here. We are all disciple-makers. We're all living, working, breathing to bring men and women into the kingdom; that's the whole purpose for why we're on the planet, and when we realize this, there is no lid, no ceiling on how we can be a part of the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth; when that's our core conviction.

## Four Components ...

So, hence the reason why I want us to go through Acts. I want to see this in Acts and now. We have four weeks counting this Sunday...four more weeks, and then we have Easter. So, in these four weeks what I want us to do is I want us to think about...together consider...look back now that we've read through 28 chapters of Acts, and I want us to look back, and I want us to think about disciple-making that we have seen in action, four components of disciple-making. This is what we did that series back in 2007. We identified, straight from the Great Commission, four components of disciple-making that we see in Jesus' life, that He's commanding us to do, and I want us to think about, over the next four weeks, how this played out in the book of Acts.

### **Going: We share the Word.**

First component...going, so this is going and making disciples...Jesus said we share the Word. Disciple-making involves introducing people to Jesus. This is the fundamental part of making disciples; leading people to faith in Christ, the salvation of Jesus. If we are not leading people to faith in Christ, then we are not making disciples. So, this is where it starts, not where it stops; this is where disciple-making starts. We share the Word.

### **Baptizing: We show the Word.**

Then, baptizing: we show the Word. "*Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*" Matthew 28:19. Showing the life of Christ and identification with

Christ and His body in the church; showing what the life of Christ looks like in action, showing the Word.

### **Teaching: We teach the Word.**

Third, we teach the Word. *"Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* Disciple-making clearly involves teaching people to obey Christ, follow after Him, which...here, now, I want you to see it come full circle. You lead people to Christ, see them identify with Christ and His church, and then teach them to obey Christ. What does Christ command us to do? Make disciples. So, teach them to make disciples, and so make disciples who make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples, until everybody on the planet knows that this God is glorious.

### **In All Nations: We serve the world.**

Finally, in all nations: we serve the world. We don't stop until every people group on the planet has been reached with the gospel.

So, that's it. Straight from Matthew 28: going, baptizing, teaching in all nations, sharing the Word, showing the Word, teaching the Word, serving the world. This is what we all do, we all share the Word, and we all show the Word, and we all teach the Word and we all serve the world, and so, my hope is that after the next four weeks, in our midst, that if you were to poll members of this faith family, and say, "What does it mean to make disciples," that not only would we say, "Yeah, this is what it means." Clearly, we know what it means, but this is what this looks like in our lives. This is how we're applying this in our lives. When that's happening, then by the grace of God and the Spirit of God in us, there is no stopping the spread of the gospel through the church.

So, what we're going to do is a little different than what we normally do. Instead of taking one passage of Scripture each week, over these next four weeks, we're going to look at the whole book, and we're going to see how they are sharing the Word here, and how they are showing the Word here, and how they are teaching the Word here, and what does that mean for our lives. How were they serving the world? That's going to all lead to the last week, where we're going to think about how they would advance the gospel to the ends of the earth. Then, we're going to consider some ways that would look for us as a faith family.

## **We Share the Word**

So, I have share the Word, and I am already way behind time, so we have to get going. We're going to go through here, we're going to fly through this, but we have to see this is where disciple-making starts, with sharing the gospel with others. Bart talked about it last week: we preach the gospel to ourselves that overflows in preaching the gospel to others. So, we don't just preach the gospel to ourselves, we preach the gospel to others. So, what does that look like?

This is an area...sharing the Word, sharing the gospel...it's an area where I am...maybe, my heart...best way to put it...my heart is most heavy when it comes to our faith family. I think there are a lot of things that, by God's grace, that we are doing well, and there are things that we certainly need to work on that we are working on. When it comes to one of the things we're going to dive into right after Easter, is next generation...passing the gospel on to the next generation. We'll dive into how we can do that better and more effectively as a faith family.

However, one of the areas where I think we are weakest is when it comes to sharing the gospel with people right next to us. As we're doing things around the world, and as we're doing other facets of disciple-making that we're going to talk about, I think one of the areas where we struggle, and where I struggle in my own life...just to be totally vulnerable, my own schedule...is intentionally sharing the gospel with people who don't know Christ. If we're not doing that, then we can talk about it all day long, about making disciples and this and that, but if we're not doing this, we're missing the whole point. So, I want us to think together about what it means to share the Word. These are not earth-shattering things that we're going to talk about here, but some very important things.

You know, this is key. There's a whole belief out there...people think that, in order to share the gospel, that you need to first go through some very intensive training in how to share the gospel. You've got to go through an intensive training course in and about sharing the gospel in order to be able to share the gospel. If I could just debunk that totally, it's not true. You don't have to go through an intensive training course to be able to share Christ with others.

Now, let me ask you a question: how many of you are grandparents in this room? Raise your hand if you're a grandparent. Okay, keep your hand raised high, raise it high. Okay, all right, grandparents in this room. Okay. How many of you grandparents...keep your hands raised if you talk about your children. Okay, yeah, that's all, okay. You enjoy talking about your grandchildren. Okay. Keep them raised. Now, keep them raised if you have been to intensive training on how to talk about your grandchildren. Anybody been to an intensive course? Seminars? No. Why not? Because what is on your mind comes out of your mouth, out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. Grandchildren on their heart, on their mind, and it's just constantly coming out.

So, I pray that Christ would be so near, so dear, so central in our hearts, so prevalent in our minds that we can't hardly have a conversation without Christ-speak just flowing from us. That's the goal here. Evangelism is not a program, laws or rules; evangelism is a conversation on a daily basis that Christ overflows from our hearts through our mouths.

This the beauty of Punja. Punja is a lady we met in India this last week. Punja and her husband had been invited to a worship gathering at Christmas in a house church, and they came, and they didn't come back for a few weeks, then they came back. This one morning, in a worship gathering, Punja and her husband come. They sit through the worship gathering and at the end, in the afternoon, the churches, the members in the church, are going to have time, a four-hour block of time, where they're going to be talking about how they can best spread the gospel in their community and kind of strategizing. They are asking, "What can we do to spread the gospel?"

So, the pastor goes to Punja and says, "You know, we've got this afterwards that we're going to be hanging around for, but you're probably not interested in that." I mean Punja wasn't even a believer in Christ. Punja says, "Well, I'd like to stay and listen." So, Punja sits there and listens. Now, as they were talking about sharing the gospel in their community, obviously, they say, "Well, we need to know the gospel." So, as they're talking about the gospel, Punja is overhearing, and she decides to trust in Christ for salvation. She gets saved in this strategy session. She comes to Christ.

Well, now Punja, after she gets saved, she actually believes she's supposed to do what they've been talking about for those four hours, and so, she goes back to her home, she gathers together over 20 people...24 to be exact...24 friends and family members together in her house, and she shares the gospel with all of them. Seven of her friends and family

come to Christ. This is one week later; seven of her friends and family come to Christ, and then the next week, a new believer and now a new group of believers, start meeting in her home. Wow. From coming to Christ to planting a church in two weeks. Could you be a part of something like that? Why not? It's the same Spirit in Punja, same gospel. She's not ahead of us. All she knew was the gospel. That's all it took to lead people to Christ and see a church begin to form. In a couple of weeks.

What happens when that's taking place all across the church? That's the picture, right? That's what we're seeing in the book of Acts. It's playing out in a context like that. God, may it play out in this context. So, all we need is the gospel, which leads to sharing the Word.

### **We receive the gospel of Christ.**

There are four simple basics informing our sharing of the Word, this fundamental part of disciple-making. We receive the gospel of Christ. In order to share the gospel, we've got to have the gospel. We believe and embrace the gospel, which is key. When you look in the book of Acts, a quarter of this book is filled with messages and speeches of apostles and other people explaining the gospel, and you survey those messages and speeches and, over and over again, you see one essential gospel coming to the forefront, and five non-negotiable components or elements of that gospel. We've talked about this before, but you see it in Acts. The character of God. You look at Peter's sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2. Look at Paul's sermon in Antioch in Pisidia in Acts 13. God-natured, God-centered messages. The gospel starts with God, with the character of God, the mercy of God, the justice of God, the holiness of God, the work of God, the initiative of God. Obviously, in order to share the Word, in order to share the gospel, we've got to communicate who God is. If we go wrong here, we miss the gospel. So, the character of God.

Then, the sinfulness of man. Again, you look at Peter in Acts 2. He says, "You crucified Jesus. You killed the Son of God." Acts 7, Stephen looks at the people and said, "You're stiff-necked people." Look at Paul in Acts 17. He says, "You're idolatrous people, worshipping all these different gods." He is addressing the sinfulness of man, which is obviously key. How will anyone listen to you explain how they can be saved until they know they need to be saved?

Francis Schaeffer was once asked, "What would you do if you met a man on a train, and you had one hour to talk with him about the gospel?" This is what Shaffer replied...if he had one hour, Schaeffer said,

I would spend 45 to 50 minutes on the negative, to really show him his dilemma, that he is morally dead, then I'd take 10 to 15 minutes to preach the good news. I believe that much of our evangelistic work today is not clear simply because we are too anxious to get to the answer without having a man first realize the real cause of his sickness, which is true moral guilt, not just psychological guilt feelings in the presence of God.

We see this in Acts, the sinfulness of man.

Then, of course, the sufficiency of Christ. The crux of the gospel that's being preached in Acts is Acts 2:36, when Peter said, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, there is no other name under heaven given to man by which we must be saved." It's the name of Christ. He is the crucified Messiah. When Acts says that He is the Christ, it's a reference to the fact that He is

the promised Messiah who would come, the one who died and was crucified for the sins of men. Not just crucified, He's a resurrected Savior.

You get to 1 Corinthians 15, and Paul recounts the gospel. He says, "This is the gospel I received, Christ died for sins, he was buried and he was raised on the third day." Acts 3:15 says, "Jesus is the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead." The gospel we preach, we share, is that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, He has risen from the grave, and He is the reigning Lord. He is Lord, period. All throughout Acts, Jesus is referenced as the sovereign Lord who reigns on high. He is the judge of all men. Acts 10:42 and Acts 17:24 says, "He's Lord over all heaven and earth." This is the Jesus we preach.

When we share the gospel, we share about the character of God, sinfulness of man, who Christ is, what Christ has done, and the necessity of faith. That begs the question: what did they ask at Pentecost? "What shall we do, Peter?" Peter tells them, "You have crucified the Son of God." They say, "What shall we do?" Peter responds. He doesn't say, "Invite Christ into your life, or accept Jesus into your heart." He does not say, "Bow your heads, close your eyes and lift your hands." He says, "Repent." He says, "Repent."

You look throughout the rest of the book of Acts, you'll see two words that are always mentioned when it comes to response to the gospel: repent and believe. Repent and believe. Repent, to turn from sin. Five different times in the book of Acts, we see "repent," and that's how they respond to the gospel. Then, you see "believe;" trust in Christ. Acts 16:31, the Philippian jailer asks, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul responds, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."

Then, there's two times, Acts 20:21 and Acts 26:20, when repent and belief are both mentioned together. This is the proper biblical response to this gospel: repent and believe, turn from sin, trust in Christ. So, when you and I share the gospel, we're not just sharing information...we're not just sharing information, we're extending an invitation. We're inviting people, we're urging people, encouraging people, "Will you turn from sin? Will you trust in Christ as Savior and Lord?" Everyone's eternity is dependent on how they respond.

Which leads to the last: urgency of eternity. Preachers in the book of Acts are calling people to be saved from destruction, from a wicked and rebellious generation. Brothers and sisters, we share the gospel because people's eternity is dependent on hearing it and responding to it. There's nothing more important that we could do, nothing. So, pause. Would you just look at that gospel, this message that is being proclaimed in the first century. You think about it. Disciples going around in the first century saying, "This convicted criminal that was crucified on a cross, He is the eternal God and Savior and Judge of your life."

One historian, one scholar said, "How could learned and sophisticated people show anything but disdain for that message," and it's true; many people did respond in that way. Mark it down: you share this gospel, many people will respond to you in that way, with disdain for that message. To say 2,000 years ago, there was a man, God in the flesh, who died on the cross for your sins, He rose from the grave, He ascended into heaven, and one day, you will stand before Him as Judge, so repent of all your sin and turn and trust in Him, submit your life to Him.

Many people will scoff, but...and this is where many Christians say, "Okay, well, then how can I change this message to make it more palatable for people? How could I adjust it so that more people will respond?" Brothers and sisters, we have no need to adjust this message. For 2,000 years this gospel has been the power of God for salvation. This gospel was the power of God for your salvation. Praise God no one made it more palatable for you.

They trusted in a real gospel from a real Savior from real wrath and real salvation. So, share this gospel and proclaim this gospel and see what happens. This Punja story, she had the gospel, she shares the gospel, and yeah, okay, seven people responded, seventeen didn't, but trust in Christ.

### **We possess the Spirit of Christ.**

This leads to the second part: we possess the Spirit of Christ. This is what the book of Acts is all about, right? Some have called this the Acts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is mentioned 50 times in this book; 50 times; more than any other book in the Bible. What's happening here is people are full of the Spirit, they're being filled with the Spirit, they're being empowered by the Spirit, and they're being gifted by the Spirit. The Spirit is equipping them for ministry. The Spirit is advancing the gospel. Now, that doesn't mean we just sit back passive and do nothing...follow this...this is where it gets really good.

Our responsibility in evangelism: we speak with our mouths. All right, all throughout this book people are speaking to crowds, to individuals. The gospel doesn't advance without somebody saying something. In order to share the Word, we have to speak the Word. Disciple-making, at the start, is a spoken activity. We speak the gospel with our mouths, and the beauty is God's sovereignty and evangelism: He opens their hearts. We speak this gospel, and there is supernatural power. There is nothing in the book of Acts that is natural; everything here is supernatural.

Speak this gospel. It's Acts 16:14; Paul is speaking by the riverside, and as he speaks the gospel, the Lord opened Lydia's heart to respond. This is Acts 13:48, "*All who were appointed for eternal life believed.*" It's Acts 2:47, "*The Lord added to their number.*" He added. God's sovereignty over the whole picture. It doesn't mean we're sitting back doing nothing. No, we're speaking, but as we're speaking, this Spirit is working.

Okay, another pastor, Rajesh, a disheartened pastor in Northern India...a disheartened pastor ready to hang it up, give up, ready to quit, and he goes to this training for pastors that we have helped make possible, and in this training, they're talking about making disciples and multiplying churches. The challenge at this training is for each one of these pastors to find a village where there is no church, and kind of in the vein of Luke 10, go in, looking for a man of peace, a person of peace. So, the challenge is for them to go into a village, and the first person they see, to say to them, "I come in the name of Jesus Christ, and I want to pray for the homes in this community, in this village. I want to pray to the one true God on behalf of these homes." That's what they challenged Rajesh and the other pastors to do, and Rajesh doesn't buy it. He says, "This is not going to work. You just don't go into a village and do that." However, he said...he's at the end of his rope, ready to quit... "Why not try it?"

So, he goes into the village, a village with no church. He walks in. The first person that comes up to him, he pulls out his line, and he says, "I am here in the name of Jesus," and before he could get any further, the guy stops him and says, "Jesus? I have been thinking about Him." Rajesh says, "You have?" And he says, "Yes, will you come to my home?" So, Rajesh says, "Yes." So, Rajesh comes to the guy's home, and he shares the gospel with him. The man responds, trusts in Christ for salvation, calls his friends and family and says, "You need to hear about this," and a church is birthed in this man's home. All he did was share the name of Jesus, and the Spirit of God opened hearts there, and a church was started. What did Rajesh do? He just said "Jesus," and the Spirit does the work.

Could it be that the same Spirit who was working in that village in advance of Rajesh is the same Spirit who is working in the lives of people that you work with and you live around?

We're going to have to start something here. Spirit of God is working all over Birmingham. We're just going to speak...speak the gospel...just talk about Jesus and see happens. Why can't the same thing happen? Acts, India, Birmingham.

### **We reflect the character of Christ.**

We possess the Spirit of Christ, and we reflect the character of Christ. All right, reflect the character of Christ. I'm looking through Acts, and I'm seeing how they are sharing the Word. I couldn't help but stop in Acts 5, when Ananias and Sapphira are struck dead, struck down by God for their deception. Acts 5:11 says the whole church was afraid, and two verses later, it says people outside the church were afraid. Then, listen to Acts 5:14. It says, "*More than ever believers were added to the Lord...*" "*More than ever believers were added to the Lord...*" Multitudes of both men and women, and we see, I think we see in here a direct relationship between the purity of the church and the growth of the church. The sanctity of the people and the spread of the gospel.

I am reminded of this any time I go overseas, especially, into Eastern contexts. I was reminded of it this last time. There are many people in an Eastern context who view Christianity as a Western religion, a religion of Westerners, and they associate the West with loose living, immorality, and as a result, there are many people who view Christianity through that lens, especially, in some at least outwardly conservative, moral places like Hindu...many Hindu places...Muslim places that see looseness in the West and say, "We don't want a part of it; that's Christianity."

I just can't help but think about Romans 2 when Paul says, "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the Jews," and the name of Christ is being blasphemed among many nations because of professing Christians. This is not just outside of us, but there is this resistance inside of us. Flee immorality and pursue holiness, purity in your life, in your marriage, in your home and your private life and your public life. Flee immorality, pursue holiness, yes, for the sake of ourselves. It's good to be holy. God has given us these commands for purity and holiness for our good; it is good to be like Christ, but not just for the sake of ourselves. Pursue holiness and flee immorality for the sake of others, so that they will look at us and take note that we have been with Jesus. I want us to feel, in a sense, feel this responsibility. Our holiness, our growth in Christ, will have a direct affect on our witness for Christ and our ability to lead others to Christ.

There is a sense in which, if we compromise as bearers to the name of Christ, if we compromise and give in to immorality...if we're a pornography watching church, if we're gossip-speaking church, immorality fills our lives, then we are undercutting our ability to share the gospel with people whose eternity is dependent on hearing the gospel and seeing the gospel clearly in us.

Turn the computer off for your own sake and for the sake of people who need to see the gospel in you; the people whose eternity is dependent on seeing the gospel in you. So that, when they see it in you, they'll listen to it from you. In your marriages, pursue Christ and honor Christ. If Christ is not evident in our marriages, then what gospel are we speaking? That's the whole design of marriage, to show Christ in the church. So, let's reflect the character of Christ, so they'll take note that we've been with Jesus. They'll hear, and they'll listen.

### **We advance the kingdom of Christ.**

When we do these things...we receive the gospel, we possess the Spirit, and we reflect the character of Christ...we will advance the kingdom of Christ. That's what the whole book is about. You look at the bookends of the book of Acts. Acts 1:3 starts with Jesus talking about

things concerning the kingdom, and then Acts 28 talks about Paul in the middle of Rome preaching the kingdom, and what the whole picture is about is a kingdom that is advancing.

I want to be careful...and quickly...just to go back to reflecting the character of Christ. I want to be careful not to put any kind of unsustainable burden upon you, even encouraging you to purity and holiness, and the reality that, in a sense, people's lives for eternity are based on seeing the gospel, but know this: Christ has taken responsibility for our holiness, and He will make us pure, and He will enable us to flee immorality. He will make this a reality in us. So, abide in Him, rest in Him, let Him do that in us, and in the process, display the gospel through us. So, I just want to go back to that.

All right, advancing the kingdom of Christ. Evangelism is a spiritual ministry. We've talked about this. Sharing the Word directed by the Spirit, led by the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit. It's a spiritual ministry with physical results. Physical results. Here is what I mean by that. Acts 1:15, there are 120 people in Acts 1. By the end of Acts 2, 3,000 people...3,000 plus. *"The Lord is adding to their number daily those who were being saved."* Acts 4, you're up to 5,000. Acts 5, *"many more were added to their number."* Acts 6, *"the number of disciples increased."*

Listen to the superlatives that Luke uses: *"the number of disciples increased rapidly."* Acts 9:31, *"it was multiplying."* Acts 11:21, *"a great number of people believed."* Acts 11:24, *"a great number of people were brought to the Lord."* Acts 14:1, *"a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed."* Acts 14:21, *"a large number of disciples were won over to Christ."* Acts 16:5 says, *"the church grew daily in numbers."* *"A large number of Greeks came to Christ"* in Acts 17. Acts 19:26, *"large numbers of people."*

This is the picture: Luke is just showing us all along the way masses, numbers, numbers, numbers of people. Not just numbers for the sake of numbers; numbers not just to report, but these are souls that are being saved for all of eternity as the gospel is going forward. This is spiritual ministry with physical results. Oh, to talk to pastors in India...well, I'll have to talk about it more later, but I mean one pastor of church...his church...one church has now multiplied into 60 different churches. Another church multiplied into 115 different churches. One church into 115.

It's not just the book of Acts. All right, it's happened here in Acts...great numbers, church multiplying. It's also happening in India, and I am jealous to see it happen here. We need to be jealous to see that happen here. Press in, pray and work. By the power of the Spirit of God, as the church moves...the church, all the people in the church, not just select ones; every disciple, all of us as the church...the whole church moves, the gospel multiplies; it spreads.

Coleman said, "The good news of salvation must be heralded to the ends of the earth. Jesus is Lord, He reigns on high and is coming again in majesty and power. Just the thought makes the heart almost miss a beat in wonder. We may not amount to much, but we have a great Savior and His kingdom is forever." So, here is a closing challenge. One of the things that almost all of the house churches we worked with in India...were around in India this last week...one of the things they do is, as soon as somebody comes to Christ...this is what Punja was doing...as soon as they come to Christ, they merely make a list of all the people they know who don't know Christ, and they identify the people on that list, a few people who they can most easily, accessibly share the gospel with. In some contexts, where there is persecution, they identify the three to five people who are least likely to kill them if they share the gospel with them.

## A Closing Challenge ...

What I want to invite you to do is I want to invite you, as we close out...it would make no sense for us to look at this and not walk away thinking about how we're going to do the Word here. I want you to think about and write down three, four, five people that you know who don't know Christ. Knowing that a sovereign God has ordained your relationships with those people, and He has put you in relationship with those people for a reason. I want to invite you to write their names down and then, right now, to begin praying that God would give you an opportunity this week to share the gospel, to speak the gospel to at least one of those people.

Now, as followers of Christ, you're thinking about that. I know that there are some who may not be followers of Christ, and maybe you're like Punja, maybe you're here and hearing us talking about sharing the Word, and you're saying, "I need the gospel. I need to trust Christ for salvation from my sins. I would encourage you to do that, urge you to do that, just as Punja did, right here. Some of you, I mean, maybe you're not ready for that; you're not a follower of Christ, not ready for that, and you might even be a little put off by a picture of, "Okay, write down some names."

Well, I want you to look at it this way, and I know you may not be a believer in Christ at this moment, but assume for a second that this is true; assume for a second that everyone needs Christ to save them from their sins, and if they don't believe in Christ, that they will go to an eternity in hell. So, just assume...you may not believe that at this point, but just assume that was true. If that was true, wouldn't you want some people being intentional about sharing that Good News with you, the Good News of what Christ has done?

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