

**The Great Life**  
**3. Responding to the Great Commission**  
**October 3, 2021**

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Text: Matthew 28:18-20

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Welcome to our series "The Great Life!" We're looking at what the scriptures say about how God measures a life -- which is different than how popular culture views greatness. Each of us are born to live a life that is great in God's sight. We do it by fulfilling the Great Commandment to love God and to love others, and the Great Commission to make disciples.

Every once in a while, I think about what my life would be like if I didn't become a Christ-follower -- if I had stayed on the path I was on in high school instead. Now, don't get me wrong. It wasn't a bad path. I was attending a very good school and doing well. I was involved in sports and music, and I had some good friends. You could say that I was living comfortably without God. I was going with the flow. Yet, I didn't have a real purpose. I was just doing what was expected of me. I figured that after graduating from high school, I'd go to college, and that eventually, I'd find some meaningful work that would meet my financial needs and give me a chance to do some good. Barring any major surprises, that was my plan. But I know what I'm like. I often ask the "why" questions. And without Jesus, I wouldn't have had answers. I wouldn't have a decent answer to the question, "So, what?" -- as in: I'm supposed to get good grades so that I can get into a good college. So, what? So that I can get a good job. So that I can buy a house. So that I can have a family. So, *what?* Then I die? Is that it? What's the point? Isn't there something more to life?

I know now that if I hadn't come to know Christ, I would have had a gnawing emptiness from not having an answer. So I'm grateful that by the time I was asking those questions, I had discovered the answer. And his name is Jesus Christ. And the reason I discovered that was that my best friend was a follower of Christ, and he invited me to a meeting with people who shared the good news of Jesus with me. That changed my life for the better in so many ways that I can't count them all.

Knowing Jesus influenced my decision to marry Linda and gave us a foundation to build a life together. Knowing Jesus gave us values that were strong enough to raise three boys. Jesus has given me strength and guidance when I was not sure what to do. [He] has given me joy and ultimate purpose. I have had the thrill of seeing God work in truly miraculous ways -- seeing healed and transformed people receive hope. I have the confidence of eternal life with him after this life is done.

I didn't realize all this would happen when I said "Yes" to the invitation to follow Christ. And I don't think my friend thought it was a big deal to invite me to the gathering where I heard the Gospel. But it turned out that it was. He was fulfilling the command of Jesus that we call The Great Commission.

Each of us gets the chance to make an eternal difference in someone else's life by doing the same thing. We find the Great Commission in **Matthew 28:18-20**. Jesus had risen from the dead and [was] gathering his disciples together. *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore,*

*go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* Jesus gave his disciples the mission to “Go...make disciples.” And part of the reason those first followers are considered great in heaven’s eyes is that they fulfilled that Great Commission. They shared the good news of Jesus, and it changed the world.

Making disciples is our mission today, as well. Crossroads Church’s mission is to change the world by making disciples who make disciples. When it comes to sharing their faith, many believers feel conflicted. On the one hand, they feel it’s important. A survey revealed that 96% of Christian millennials agree that part of Christian faith is being a witness about Jesus. And 94% agree that coming to know Jesus is the best thing that could happen to someone. Yet, at the same time, about half of Christian millennials – Christians 25 to 40 years old -- say that it is wrong to evangelize.<sup>1</sup>

It’s not that they don’t know how to do it. Almost 3 out of 4 say that they know how to share their faith and that they know how to respond when someone asks a question about faith. But they just don’t believe they *should* do it. They believe that sharing their faith is part of following Jesus, that coming to Christ is tremendous, and they know how to do it. But they think it’s wrong.

Perhaps one reason for this contradiction is that most Americans grew up in a culture that emphasized tolerance. Individual freedom and happiness are among the highest values in secular Western worldview. What matters most is not what is true. What matters most is the individual -- how I feel, what I think. We often hear the phrase, “I need to live my truth,” not “I need to live **THE** truth,” because our culture has rejected the concept of objective truth, especially moral truth.

How can we know if anything is right or wrong? At one point, most people would have pointed to the Bible or a sacred religious text. Today that has been replaced by personal preferences. I decide what’s morally right for me. And you can decide what’s morally right for you. To tell someone that they should change what they think or believe is viewed as violating their sacred autonomy.

So, some Christians think, “I’m certain that knowing Christ will help others, and that Jesus calls us to share the good news. But it doesn’t seem right to try.” But we need to ask the question, is every viewpoint truly equally valid? In verse 18, Jesus makes a bold claim: “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.”

We can acknowledge that non-Christian religions contain some worthwhile ethical concepts. And we need to be respectful of those who practice other religions. Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists should see Christians as those who show them more love and courtesy than anyone else. At the same time, Jesus claims the highest authority -- higher than Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, or anyone else. He claims higher authority than Ayn Rand, the government, or any philosopher. That means that Jesus is NOT just one of equally valid paths to salvation. He said he is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. Why should we take his words seriously? Only one reason: he rose from the dead. If he didn’t rise, then we don’t need to listen to him. But he did!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/>

And then he said, “Go, make disciples.” It isn’t about making everyone think like we do, or racking up points with God, or building the church’s membership. It’s about loving others enough to want the very best for them, and a natural outgrowth of our love for God. Notice that Jesus didn’t say make converts. He said go make **disciples**.

A convert may pray a prayer to accept Christ. But a disciple follows Jesus, adopting the *lifestyle* of a Jesus follower. A convert believes in Jesus. But a disciple loves and obeys Jesus. In verse 19, Jesus said making disciples means baptizing them and “teaching them to *obey* everything I have commanded you.” Of course, you and I don’t have the power to make a disciple. Only the Holy Spirit can transform a life. But we have a part to play in the process. Let’s talk about that in a natural, non-offensive way.

In the Making Disciples 1 equipping class, we teach how to fulfill the Great Commandment by living out the BLESS rhythms. BLESS is an acronym that stands for:

**B**egin with prayer

**L**isten

**E**at

**S**erve

**S**hare your story

We go into detail about that in Making Disciples 1. So, if you haven’t taken it, I encourage you to sign up on your Communicator Card.

Today, I’ll talk about how we can make disciples as part of a team.

### **To share our faith naturally:**

**1. Find your team.** Disciple-making is a team sport. Jesus sent his disciples out two by two, not alone. **Luke 10:1** *After this, the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.* If the disciples were sent out alone, it would be too easy to get intimidated and discouraged. By going in pairs, the disciples gave each other courage. And the Apostle Paul didn’t go on his mission trips alone. He had a team of anywhere from two to ten people. The pattern in the New Testament seems to be that deliberate evangelism was done in teams, and spontaneous faith-sharing was done by individuals. We can make disciples on our own. But most of us will be more effective and have more fun when we team with others to share the gospel. If you are in a Life Group, you have a team. Each Life Group is to be a family on mission.

Let me give you some examples of how groups can do the BLESS rhythms:

**Begin with a group prayer list.** Each person in the group can think of a few people they live, work, play, or learn with who might not yet be in a growing relationship with Jesus. Write their names down. Then the members put those names together in a master list. And now you have a group prayer list. That’s a list of people you are praying will become followers of Jesus. Each week in your Life Group meeting, pray for those people by name to come to Christ. When we do this, God is at work behind the scenes in people’s lives, preparing the way for the gospel.

**Make friendships.** We can’t make projects out of the people on our list. We want them to know that we care about them as people, even if they never come to Christ. So we make friends. In the BLESS rhythm, we talk about that as Listen and Eat together. One great way to do that as a group is to throw a party. Have a barbecue, do something fun together. Go to Top Golf. Whatever. It’s great if it involves food. Your

group can have dinner together and invite some of the people on your prayer list. Make having fun a regular part of your group and invite others.

**Serve together.** We help the people we care about, right? When we love others, we look for ways to serve them. And this advances the good news, too. Dave Ferguson writes about a study of two teams of missionaries who went to Thailand. Both teams wanted people to come to Christ, but they pursued two different strategies to make that reality. One group could be called “Blessers,” the other “Converters.” The Converters went to Thailand with the sole intention of converting people and evangelizing. Their goal was to “save souls.” The Blessers group also wanted to see people come to Christ. But they took a different approach. They explained, “We are here to bless whoever God sends our way.” After two years, the study showed two findings: the Blessers had resulted in tremendous amounts of “social good.” They contributed to the betterment of society and community life. In contrast, the presence of the Converters seemed to make no difference. The second finding was surprising. The Blessers saw 48 conversions, while the Converters saw only 1! The Blessers saw almost 50 times more conversions by being a blessing than the group that was only trying to convert people.<sup>2</sup> The point is that Jesus gives us a mission -- make disciples. And he gives us the way to fulfill it: Love people like he does. And that means blessing them.

As a group, decide to be blessers. If someone on your prayer list has a need, then meet that need as a group. That is demonstrating the love of God in practical ways. Or, when your group does a serving project in the community, invite someone from your list to serve with you. Many pre-Christians will say yes to an invitation to serve quicker than they will to attend worship with you. If you’re making sandwiches for the homeless, invite a pre-Christian friend along.

On November 6<sup>th</sup>, our church is going to pack 100,000 meals for the hungry. We will be one of ten churches in the Pittsburgh region that doing this, so all together, we’ll pack 1 million meals. Our church is responsible for mobilizing 120 volunteers for that day. Our goal is that half of them be pre-Christians who don’t attend Crossroads yet.

Finally, **Share your story.** Somewhere along the way, as you’ve been friends and serving, there will be natural time to share what Jesus has done in your life. It doesn’t have to be dramatic. Share your story of how God has helped you in your life. And you can invite that person to be part of your group and worship with you.

This is the BLESS approach. It’s not a task we check off and then we’re done until next year. It’s a lifestyle. It’s a rhythm of life -- what we’re always doing where we live, work, play, and learn. We’re a River of Blessing when we join together in rhythms of BLESS.

Our area was saddened recently by the death of Tunch Ilkin. [Photo shared on the big screens.] Tunch leaves a legacy of good works and good news. Tunch grew up as a Muslim, then became an atheist. He became a star football player, and he lived wildly. Then, in his mid-20s, he started feeling a real emptiness and shallowness in his life. He was selfish. And he was fueled by drugs and alcohol. Then he joined the Steelers and met Jon Kolb.

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<sup>2</sup> B.L.E.S.S. by Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson p. 17-18

Jon was a committed follower of Jesus, and he blew up Tunch's assumptions. Tunch had always thought of Christians as "weak." But Kolb was named the strongest man in the National Football League. That's strong! As teammates, they were not only side by side on the offensive line. They ate together and talked often. And Tunch noticed that Jon was gentle and humble and was carrying a Bible at training camp. On the field, he hit hard. And off it, he prayed and loved Jesus. Tunch had never met a man like that.

Tunch became a Christ-follower at age 24 and had a tremendous impact. But how would his life have been different if he had never come to Christ? If he hadn't been blessed by Jon Kolb? How would he have made it when Sharon, his wife of 20 years, got cancer? How would he have coped when she died? How would he have handled being diagnosed with A.L.S.? Even as his body slowly stopped working, he had a joyful attitude. What would his attitude have been if he did not have the conviction that God was with him and that he would live forever with him? Our executive pastor Damian knew Tunch well and co-authored a book with him. In their last conversation, Tunch told Damian, "Never lose focus on the lost." That sounds a lot like Jesus.