

Just Do Something!

Light It Up

June 8, 2014

PRELUDE – Jesus I Come

Worship Songs – God’s Not Dead / We Are Intro Video

Video – The Skinny on Evangelism Feature – Everybody Hurts

Good morning everyone!

As Nathan said, today we are in week two of our three-week series “Just Do Something” ... and this morning we’re going to be talking about the *second* of the three things that God wants us to be doing – three things that are always God’s will for us – regardless of where we live, what we do for a living, who we’re married to, how much money we make, how smart we are, how pretty we are, etc. etc. etc.

And we’re doing this series because sometimes people get hung up trying to discern God’s will for their lives as it pertains to a specific situation such as where should I live, what should I do for a living, who should I marry. Or we get frustrated by trying to figure out our purpose in life – why am I here? What am I supposed to be doing?

Those questions about God’s specific will and purpose in our lives are tough questions and good questions. Trying to figure out what God wants you to do with your one and only life is certainly a worthy endeavor and not to be taken lightly.

Unfortunately, a lot of people – Christians, especially – think they have to wait until that becomes clear before they can begin fulfilling their purpose in life. But that’s misguided thinking because there are three things that God wants you to be doing – three things that are always His will for your life; things that are always part of your purpose on this earth – that are not dependent on circumstance or situation. You can do these three things in little ways or in big ways, even if you don’t have a clue about God’s specific intentions for your life.

In fact you *should* do these three things *especially* if you don’t know the specifics of God’s plan for your life because the more you do them the more God will give you specific direction. I say that because God’s revelation to us is often progressive. Typically, He reveals only a little bit to us at a time and as we respond to that bit of revelation, He gives us even more.

One day, Jesus was talking to his disciples and he said ...

“Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

Pay really close attention to whatever God is showing you right now.

And then He went on to explain why.

“Consider carefully what you hear” He continued, “for with the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”
Mark 4:23-25 (NIV)

It's kind of hard to understand what Jesus is saying here. But, I think what he is saying is that to the degree that you act on what you have heard from God already, that's the degree to which He will reveal even more to you.

- Act on a little, expect only a little more in the future
- Act on a lot, expect lots more – and then some.
- Act on nothing that God has told you and you can expect that bit of knowledge to just fade away.

A Quick Review

So, with that said, what did you do with what God revealed to you last Sunday when we talked about the first of the three things God wants you to do for the world? Remember what it was?

It was based on what we read in the first few chapters of Genesis when God has finally come to the pinnacle of His creative activity in the creation of this world.

After all else was made ...

*God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

And ...

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”
Genesis 1:27-28 (NIV)

And just to be clear (because this passage has sometimes been taken as justification for things God never intended to be done on this earth) the words “subdue” and “rule” in this context mean to organize and optimize – not to dominate and destroy ... which means that what God intended for every human being (including you and me) is that we reflect who He is by doing whatever we can to bring creation to its fullest potential.

It's as if God was saying, “I am a creator and I have created. And because you all are like me – made in my image; made to reflect who I am, made to represent Me – you have it within you to be creative as well. So, I hereby authorize you to take what I have made here on this earth and apply your wisdom and knowledge and insight and hard work and do whatever you can to cause every aspect of this world to flourish” ...

... which is why we phrased the first of those three things God always wants us to do for the world – no matter who we are or what our situation – as ...

“Leave it better.” Leave the world better than you found it.

I won't go back into all the implications of what that looks like because I spent a lot of time doing that last week (and if you weren't here last Sunday you can watch, read or listen to the message by going to the media section of our church website). But, if you *were* here ...

- How did you do with that over this past week?
- What did you do this past week to cause things in this world – including people – to flourish; to reach their fullest potential, or at least move in that direction?
- Did you do something that in some way left things better than you found them?

If you did, guess what? You did God's will last week. You fulfilled part of the purpose for which God created not only you but the whole human race. So, I say to you (and I think God says to you), way to go! Well done, good and faithful servant of the Lord.

“Something” Number Two

But let's move on to the second thing that God wants us to do no matter where we live, how much money we have, who we are ... well, that last one's not exactly accurate because this second task can only be done by a specific type of person (which, I think you'll soon see includes most of the people sitting in this room).

And to understand what I mean by that and why I say it, we need to advance a little further into the story of creation. And in the interest of time, I'll summarize what happens very briefly. In one word what happens is *sin* ... which literally means “missing the mark; falling short of the glorious purpose for which God created us.”

Not long after human beings appeared on the scene, they succumbed to the temptation of believing themselves to be wiser than the God who created them. So they made choices (as do we) which, instead of reflecting the glorious nature and character of that God, fell short of the mark. They made choices (as do we) which, instead of bringing creation to its fullest potential and causing what God had created to flourish, actually had the opposite effect. Death and destruction, disease and decay entered the world. And not just on a physical level but spiritually as well. Every human being (including you and me) was “born into sin” the Bible tells us – as both perpetrators and victims of its curse. “Everybody hurts” in this world, as the song put it, because of sin.

But because of God's love for His creation, He decided to take action that would redeem it from the effects of sin. He decided to rescue the world and redeem the world and reverse the curse. And He did it by “putting on flesh” (so to speak) and becoming a man himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

As the Apostle John puts it:

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17 (NIV)

And, in the interest of time, I won't go into a lot of detail about how God began the process of saving the world through Christ other than to put it the way the Apostle Paul once did to the first-century Christians at Corinth when he wrote ...

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them ... God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
2 Corinthians 5:19,21 (NIV)

On the cross, Jesus took the sin of the whole world into his flesh (“he became sin for us”) and paid the penalty for sin so that we would not have to stand (and fall) in judgment for missing the mark – of failing to completely (and 100% of the time) live up to the standard of the Divine Image placed in us. His death in our place made it possible for us to be seen as completely righteous before God – as if we never had sinned in the past and will never sin in the future.

And that *possibility*, the Bible says, becomes a *reality* when we come to the point of placing our faith in what Jesus has already done for us instead of anything we think we might need to do in order to prove ourselves worthy or justified before God.

Or, as Paul wrote to Titus:

When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:4-5 (NLT)

This is why we say so often around here that salvation is “by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.”

- “Christ alone” because He’s the only one who has ever completely lived up to the image of God in human beings 100% of the time and has the complete righteousness that could then be exchanged for our sin.
- “Faith alone” because, well, there is nothing else that those who are dead in sin can *do* to justify themselves other than to believe that Jesus is their only savior (and that’s all that God asks – that we believe in what Jesus has done for us).
- And “grace alone” because we do not deserve any of this, any of what God has done. But it’s freely offered with no strings attached and can be freely received.

And as I’ve said on many occasions, every time I think about this and how God has “solved” the problem of sin and the curse of death, I’m still amazed. God was so incredibly creative in bringing the world into being, but He was just as creative in making a way for the world to be saved. It’s incredible.

Now, I realize at this point, some of you are thinking, “well, that’s really cool, Rick. Thanks for reminding us again of the Big Story of God and the gospel and what He’s done and where we can fit into it ... but what does all of it have to do with *the second thing* that God always wants us to do for the world - the second thing that is always His will for us regardless of our situation or circumstance; regardless of whether we have answers to the questions we have about His specific purpose for us?

I’m glad you asked. So, I’ll tell you. The second thing God wants us to do, if we have heard this message of grace and faith and Christ and received it ourselves, is ... well, let me read it to you straight from the scripture. Actually, there are several scriptures.

After His resurrection, right before he returned to his Heavenly Father, the Bible says that Jesus gathered his followers

together just outside of Jerusalem and gave them a little speech ...

... in which he said:

“... you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8 (NLT)

... which was similar to what He told them a few weeks earlier in Galilee:

“I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.” Matthew 28:18-20 (NLT)

... which was similar to something He had told them a few years earlier in the Sermon on the Mount when he said:

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house.

“In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” Matthew 5:14-16 (NLT)

Those who heard Jesus say these things over this three and a half year period took Him seriously, which is how the good news about who He was and what He had done spread throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and then, quite literally, to the ends of the earth.

And, not only that, being a witness for Christ became a trademark of all Christians wherever Christianity spread ...

... which is why Peter wrote to the believers living in Ephesus – a town far removed from Jerusalem.

If someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. 1 Peter 3:15-16 (NLT)

It's why Paul wrote to the believers living in Corinth – another town far removed from Jerusalem where all this took place during the life of Jesus:

Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person (literally “a new creation”). The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 (NLT)

For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 (NLT)

That particular scripture is very interesting because it sounds a lot like what happened in the creation story. Remember, in the beginning God was saying to humanity, “Because you are made in my image, made to reflect who I am, and made to represent Me, I am authorizing you to take everything I have created and cause it to flourish.”

And now, God is saying to those who have received Christ, “because you have been *remade* as *new creations in Christ*, I am authorizing you to go and invite others to experience what you have experienced. I am authorizing you to go and be my representatives in a world that is hurting and needs reconciliation and redemption.”

Obviously, as I said a few minutes ago, this is something that can only be done by a specific type of person – a person who has actually believed in and received Christ; in other words, a Christian.

So, if you are a Christian (and most of the people in this room are), one of the three things that God wants you to be doing – one of the three things that are *always* God’s will and purpose for your life – regardless of where you live, what you do for a living, to whom you’re married (or not married), how much money you make (or don’t make), how smart you are, how pretty you are, etc. etc. etc. ...

One of the three things God wants you to be doing for the world if you are a Christian is to “light it up.”

If you’re a *human*, you’re to make it better. If you’re a *Christian* you’re to light it up with good deeds and good words prompted by the good news of what God has done in Christ *so that* others can see what you have seen. And that’s important to add because we’re not just talking about lighting some generic candle in some generic darkness, you know, to make everybody feel good. This is about you and me – if we’re Christians – we’re to be witnesses and lights, lighting up the experience of what it means to be loved by God and to experience the power of God that was shown to us in Jesus of Nazareth.

Dealing With Negative Thoughts

Now, having said all of that, I realize (and this is not only because I have been a pastor for many years and have heard the reaction of many Christians to this teaching, but also because I’ve been a Christian for many years longer than that) ... I realize that whenever the words “witnessing” or “evangelism” or “sharing your faith” become part of the conversation, most Christians are either wracked with fear over the thought that “oh my gosh, now I have to become a theologian or even worse a preacher like you” ... or they are repulsed by the idea that now they’ll have to become some kind of weirdo like we saw in the beginning of the video. Evangelism, witnessing, weirdo – they’re all in the same sentence.

In addition, we live in a culture that is increasingly anti-Christian; a culture where it’s considered arrogance to claim to have the definitive answer to anything (other than the definitive answer that there are absolutely, positively, *no* definitive answers – which is definitive ... which is a topic for another day).

Furthermore, the enemy of our souls would like nothing more than to discourage us in any way possible from turning on the light so that others can see and experience what we have come to see and experience in Christ.

And because of all those factors, the truth is that most Christians have very negative thoughts, ideas and apprehensions in their heads when it comes to the idea of sharing their faith with others. So, what I want to do in the time that remains is to address some of these thoughts because, these are thoughts that I’ve had and thoughts I’ve heard other people say, and I’ll offer, hopefully, some practical suggestions for dealing with them.

A lot of people, when they hear about this, think, “I’m supposed to be a light and a witness and all that, but there’s no

way I can do this because ...”

1. “I’m not good enough” ... remember that God has always used less-than-perfect people to represent Him.

A lot of people don’t believe God can use them because of their past sins or their present imperfections. “I did this or said that, so God can’t use me” or “I struggle with this or I’m not mature enough in that, so God can’t use me.”

Look, I don’t want to minimize the need for your walk to match your talk, but the reality is, no one’s walk matches their talk. *No one.*

- Look at Abraham ... who was the very first guy God revealed himself to in the Bible. This guy, out of fear, pretended that his wife was his sister because she was really good looking and he was afraid that they would kill him. So he pretended his wife was his sister and he offered her to the king to sleep with. And that guy was the “father of many nations” from whom the Messiah came.
- How about Moses ... who in anger kills a guy and then goes out to the desert for 40 years and becomes a hermit. And God said, “that’s the guy who will lead my people out of Egypt.”
- Or Peter ... who denied that he knew Jesus three times at the lowest point of Jesus’ life.
- Or Paul ... who knew himself well enough that he actually wrote in the scriptures that he was “the worst of all sinners.”

That’s the cream of the crop, folks, and God is using them! If he can use them, he can use you – and me. Because the gospel isn’t primarily about how good we are, even though our good works are to be on display; it’s about how good God is in spite of our weaknesses and failures. That any good is coming out of me, it’s coming from Him, because I know who I am in my character and you know who you are.

Another negative thing a lot of Christians think ...

2. “I’m not sure what kind of good deeds you’re talking about ... Am I helping old ladies across the street? What does this mean?” Here’s a suggestion: just look for ways to show grace (give people favor that they don’t deserve or cannot earn). That’s what God has done for you. That’s what the whole gospel is about.

And when you show grace to people in this culture it’s surprising because nobody gets anything for free. You have to earn it. And if you don’t cut it, bam, you’re out of here. So, you give people a taste of grace so that they kind of get a thirst for more of it, “wow, that was really cool.”

Practical examples ...

- My wife has started doing this – she’ll go to a fast food restaurant and she’ll pay for her meal and then she’ll give the cashier \$10.00 and say, “whatever the person behind me is getting, apply it to them.” Of course, she doesn’t know what happens, but the person drives up and the cashier says, “hey, that lady in front of you just paid for your meal.” Wow, why would somebody do that? It’s a taste of grace.
- Here’s another practical way to give grace to people. Just forgive somebody. Just flat out forgive someone. Who do you have a grudge against? Who has hurt you in some way? What if you just said, “You know, I’m going to

forgive you and I'm going to let that go. You don't deserve it, you can't earn your way back, but I'm going to forgive you and cancel the debt that you owe me."

That's grace. That's what you've received from Jesus and you turn around and give it to someone else.

How about this apprehension?

3. "I'm not sure when to speak up and give a word of testimony or witness or when I should do something. How do I know when it's the right time to do that because it's not very clear to me?" ... here's what I suggest: just pay attention to the promptings that come to you and act on them. Just do it.

And I know it's kind of weird and stressful but the truth is, if you're having an urge, if the thought is crossing your mind that "hey, I ought to shine the light right here," it's a pretty good chance that's coming from God.

I'll give you an example of this, it just happened to me recently. I was at the hardware store (which has become my second home as part of our remodel) and as I was pulling into the hardware store, another car pulled in right next to me and I saw that the license plate was from the state of Maryland. Well, I grew up in MD, and Bowie, MD is still what I consider my home town. I thought it was kind of odd that we're here in Missouri and there's this car with a MD tag. And this lady gets out and low and behold she is going into the same hardware store. So, I get out and I'm making conversation. Of course, I look like crap because I'm coming from all the junk and stuff in our house. So, I said, "Hey, somebody from the great state of MD." And she turned around and looked at me like, "what is that guy doing?" It was very odd, but I was kind of curious, why would someone be driving a MD car in MO? So, I struck up a conversation. I said, "Hey, I grew up in MD. What are you doing here?" She said her husband just took a job here and they had just moved here. "How long have you been here?" and she said, "five days." She was from Annapolis which was just 20 minutes from where I grew up, so we had this little conversation. Then she walks into the store and I don't see her anymore.

But, as I'm checking out, I remembered what that was like to be new here in KC and how lonely it felt to not know anyone. I remembered thinking that I wished someone would have invited us to do something. So, this thought came to my head, "take one of your NHCC business cards that says, 'no better way to spend an hour on Sunday' and write 'welcome to Missouri'" Then I thought, "There is *no way* I'm going to do that and put that on her windshield. It's weird and she might think I'm a stalker. And if somebody saw me they might think I'm hitting on this woman." All these crazy thoughts went through my head. But I did it anyway. I took that card and wrote "Welcome to Missouri. Rick McGinniss, Senior Pastor" and stuck it on her windshield. Now, I don't know what happened. It might have blown off. Or, that lady may have thought, "who is that guy?" I don't know. She might show up at church one of these days, she and her husband. I don't know. But, here's what I do know. In that moment, I was fulfilling part of God's purpose and will for my life. And you can have the same experience, sometimes you've just got to follow the promptings.

Here's another negative thought that people sometimes have:

4. "If I do these things you're talking about, I don't know what to say" ... here's a suggestion: learn the basics of the gospel (you need to be preaching it to yourself on a regular basis! If you're not preaching the gospel to yourself, you're not going to be living out of the gospel).

It's kind of like what the writer of the book of Hebrews once wrote ...

You are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen. You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. Hebrews 5:11-12 (NLT)

And the truth is, a lot of Christians are like babies. They're only going to take what the pastor puts out every couple of weeks when they show up at church because, they haven't learned how, or don't understand how, to preach the gospel to themselves. So, my suggestion is, if you don't know what to say, learn what to say. You need to because you need it for your own heart. So, what are the basics of the gospel? I've already just explained it in this message and it came down to two words, and if you were paying close attention you may have picked up on it: DO vs. DONE.

Most people think that in order to be justified before God "I have to do this. I have to do that. I have to go to confession. I have to do the sacraments. I have to do penance. I have to do, do, do. And hopefully my 'do do' is enough to outdo my 'don't do,' or whatever. And if my good stuff outweighs my bad, then I'm in." That's what people think the gospel is and that's garbage and not what the Bible says at all.

The Bible says that it's *done*. Everything that you need to be saved and justified before God has been done for you by Jesus. That's it, DO vs. DONE. Figure that out in your head and preach that to yourself and share that with other people.

Or ... sometimes you don't need to go into that with people. What you can do is to simply share an authentic word of hope when someone is hurting – and here's what an authentic word is *not*, "oh, it will be OK, I just know." No you don't! You don't know that things are going to be okay for people because, in this life there is no guarantee that things are going to turn out rosy like they do in the movies. It might not be OK in that person's life.

So, what do you have to offer them? What you have to offer them is the promise of the redemption that is coming because of what God has already done in history. Sometimes all you can say to a person is, "There's a day coming when God is going to set everything right in this world because of what Jesus did. Would you like to be part of that?" And that's how you open the door to the conversation.

5. "I feel inadequate to do this on my own" ... you don't have to do all this on your own – let the Body of Christ (the church) be your ally in this.

That's why God created the church and wants you to be part of it!

As Paul wrote:

You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. Ephesians 2:19 (NIV)

You're not on your own. You're not a lone ranger, so commit yourself to a church where the people see themselves – and the church (and it doesn't even have to be this church) – as there for a purpose beyond their own comfort and even their own spiritual growth. Be part of a church who understands that part of its reason for existing is to turn the light on so that others who are not now part of that congregation can see the light and become followers of Jesus.

That was the purpose of our church from the very beginning, to reach out to the people in our local area who are not believers. I've said it many times and I'm sure I'll say it again: if the people in our local community are not being drawn to us and to Christ, we should close this place down regardless of how wonderful the children's or youth programs are;

or how great the worship is or the small groups are. This church is here primarily for *them*, not us.

That's why we are constantly trying our best to be a church (to be a community) where believers can invite friends and family who are not believers to simply "come and see" for themselves. That's why we do the kinds of series we do; the kinds of music we do; the kind of set up we have. It's about being an ally for believers so that no one has to do evangelism on their own.

Here's another reason why people are sometimes negative about this whole evangelism thing.

6. "I'm discouraged at the lack of response" ... remember and rejoice over the longsuffering patience God shows you.

"Rick, you don't understand. I've been turning the light on for my brother (or my husband, or my friend) for years and years and there's no response." Or, "there was this time when they started coming to church and they started walking with God, but then they just fell away. I'm just sick of it. I'm discouraged."

Believe me, I understand this. I've been doing this for almost 20 years now and I get this. I get discouraged sometimes. But, you know what I do? I try to remember and rejoice over God's patience and long suffering with me. Here's the truth about me and you. I didn't get it on the first time. I don't get it on the 100th time sometimes when God is trying to do something with me. Or, I get fired up and then I fall away. Then God has to come along and kick me in the butt. That's how it works for me.

So, since I'm receiving that from God, I can now turn around and give that to other people in my life. And I think that's how you deal with this discouragement. What has God done for me? That's what I can do for someone else.

Okay, one more reaction that people can sometimes have to this.

7. "Everyone I know is already a Christian. I don't need to do this light thing. I don't even have to worry about this" The answer for you is: you need to make an effort to get out of your comfort zone!

Jesus told his followers to *go* into the world not to stay away from it. A lot of well-intentioned Christians are confused about that because what they think God wants for them is to isolate themselves, "The world is really dirty and a mess and it's sinful and I just need to not get any of that on me. So, I'm just going to pull away." And that's not what Jesus said at all. Jesus didn't say "pull out of the world," he said "be in the world but not of the world." So, if everybody you know is a Christian, guess what? You need to get out of your comfort zone so God can use you in this way.

Conclusion

Well, I'm sure there are other negative thoughts and ideas we could address if we had more time but I think that's a pretty good place to start.

- Remember that God has always used less-than-perfect people to represent Him.
- Look for ways to show to show grace (favor that people don't deserve or cannot earn).
- Pay attention to the promptings that come to you, and even if it feels goofy, act on them; you won't die (most

likely not).

- Learn the basics of the gospel (not only to share with others, you need to be preaching it to yourself!)
- Let the Body of Christ (the church, this church, any church God leads you to) be your ally.
- Remember the longsuffering patience of God towards you.
- Get out of your comfort zone

Friends, our God made this world. And He called us as humans – as those made in his image – to be part of continuing that process by leaving it better than we find it. And we will find fulfillment and contentment as we do that.

But, God is also remaking the world in Christ. He is redeeming it from the curse of sin. And He is calling those of us who are Christians to be part of that process as well, by lighting it up in some way so that others can see what we have seen and experience what we've experienced in Him. And as we do that, as we participate in that, we will find even more fulfillment and contentment. That's what I want for you ... and for me.

So, let's pray to that end.

<PRAYER>

Feature – This Life

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Next week ... the third and final thing God wants us to be doing in this world regardless of circumstance or situation.
2. Offering at the door

Endnotes