

# HOW DO WE MAKE DISCIPLES IN OUR CULTURE?

Matthew 28:18-20

We are *evangelicals*. We believe we are called to *evangelize*, that is, preach the good news that forgiveness of sin and eternal life can be had through faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We take seriously the Great Commission:

**Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

I was trained to share the good news using *The Four Spiritual Laws* and *The Romans Road*. Each approach explains that man is separated from God by sin; Jesus, God's Son, died on the cross to pay the penalty of sin and rose again; we can be forgiven our sin by trusting Jesus' death, burial and resurrection to make us right with God. I am grateful for this training; it gave me a clearer understanding of my own salvation and a framework by which to explain salvation to others. But these previously effective evangelistic methods have been found to no longer be effective in bringing people to faith in Jesus.

## Previously Effective Evangelistic Methods Now Ineffective

A recent study of 1100 Christians over a 10 year period indicates people in our culture are no longer coming to faith in Jesus through these methods which were effective 30-50 years ago. In *Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today*, released in January 2016, author Dr. Gary McIntosh, professor of Christian ministry and leadership at Biola's Talbot School of Theology reports:

*Historically, people would often say that they were led to Christ through a methodology like the Four Spiritual Laws or the Romans Road or Evangelism Explosion. They would think in terms of some sort of rote presentation of Scripture that led people along to see that they were sinners and that they needed to pray in order to receive Christ. We found absolutely none of that, which was sort of a surprise — that there is no clear, single methodology in the sense of a process to lead people to faith in Christ like maybe there would have been 50 years ago or even 30 years ago.*

What has happened?

## Our Culture Has Undergone A Major Shift In Worldview.

Hampton Keathley IV explains:

*It used to be that most people believed there was a God, that the Bible was God's word. They believed in heaven and hell and unfortunately, most believed that good people went to heaven and bad people went to hell. If you showed them something in the Bible, they tended to believe it was true because the Bible was “the good book” and thought to be true. And so, you could walk them down the Romans Road or tell them of the Four Spiritual Laws. The usual hurdles to someone believing the gospel were apathy or ignorance.*

*That has all changed. Now, most don't believe in God. They don't believe the Bible is the Word of God. There is little agreement on issues of morality and sin. Now, if you try to present the gospel to someone, you're more likely to have them say, “That's just your opinion.” Or “That may be true for you but not for me.”*

So how are people in our culture coming to faith in Christ? 60% indicated they were helped to faith by family and friends. 17% said they were lead to Christ by a church staff member. This indicates a significant number of people are coming to church before coming to faith in Christ. All of us should keep this in mind when we come together Sundays; take time to meet and welcome the people around you and

make them feel at home. Invite them to your Home Group; help them navigate this new family they've become part of.

How did family, friends and church staff help these people to faith in Christ? Through conversation.

## **The Spirit Is Using *Conversation* To Draw People To Faith In Jesus.**

McIntosh explains:

*Instead, people said that it was simply conversation; they just had a spiritual conversation with a family member or friend or staff member. It seems as though people are coming to faith through natural conversations and discussions. People don't want to feel that they're being led through some sort of a rote presentation. They want to feel that it's more natural—that we're just talking among friends, about life and sports and spiritual things. And through that conversation they come to understand what Christianity is and what commitment to Christ is, and some people just all of a sudden say, "I believe." It's not that they necessarily pray a particular prayer or something. Some do, but at times they just say, "I've thought about this, we've talked about this, and I've come to believe it." So it is a process toward faith, but it happens more in just a normal conversation.*

Over the next five weeks I want to think about making disciples through conversation.

We still need to know the truths of the gospel so *The Romans Road* and *Evangelism Explosion* material is valuable. In conversations we'll encounter various objections to Christianity so we'll need to think about some of those.

But more importantly, I hope you come to understand that through conversation we express concern for people and that is very powerful. The saying is true, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Most human communication is people talking at each other, not with each other. Seldom does one person take a genuine interest in another person's thoughts and feelings; even in our own homes. It is incredibly impactful to take an interest in the other person's story and to use open ended questions to draw out their story. I believe through this means we gain a hearing for the gospel.

Here is my challenge to you for this week. I challenge you to get to know your co-worker better. Find out where they were born and raised. What were their parents' like? Do they have siblings? Is their family in the area? What were they involved with in high school? Just because you work together daily does not mean you know them. Here is a great opportunity to build your relationship with them.

I believe conversation can be a powerful expression of love. It is love for God and love for others that should drive our evangelism. I pray that through this brief series we will grow more confident in *using our words* to share Jesus.