

Palisades Community Bible Church
Online Sunday School

What We Prepare for is What We Shall Get

September 20, 2020

“Hey, Mom! I made the team!”

As parents, how often did we hear this from our kids? Your child got on the sports team, or the cheerleading squad, the marching band, the drama club, etc. and the announcement came with tons of excitement.

Then, came the shopping. There were cleats and pads to buy, a mouth guard, a uniform, a new instrument, maybe, a couple of team T-shirts. OK, now that the kid is ON the squad, and is outfitted with the right stuff, what’s next?

PRACTICE!!

Yes, practice. So far, it’s been an idea. Now, the hard work begins. Most teams require after school practice, lots of individual practice, maybe some focused instruction, like music lessons, dance lessons, pitching camp, etc. It’s a commitment (for the kid AND for you!!). And, the commitment part is actually one of the very first things your kid must learn about being part of a team; “Everyone is counting on you.”

“Anything you’re willing to practice you can do.” Bob Ross.

As a former Navy SEAL, a husband, a business owner and a musician, I understand the importance of teamwork. Teamwork is far more than just cooperation. It’s far more than being with the same group and doing the same things. Being a part of a team means individual commitment, individual competence, and individual skill level. I hate the statement: “There is no ‘I’ in team.” Whoever came up with it must have been making the point that there’s no place on the team for a showboat, or a ball hog, or apathy. But, there certainly is an ‘I’ in team; it’s every individual on the team being fully capable, fully focused and fully committed. An

individual can enhance the team, or drag it down. A team is a group of individual contributors with a common goal.

A 'team' is not a group in which a laggard can hide.....slack off....rest on is laurels. That's a committee.

A team has a purpose. A team has goals. A team has a process for getting there, and every individual on the team must be willing to put forth the effort to make him/herself a capable, contributing team member. THAT'S what we teach our kids when they walk in the door and announce that they made the squad. We don't start out this way, but at some point, we must impress upon them; "Honey, it's not only about you. You are part of a team and you must keep working hard." (in our minds, we may also have been thinking; "Who do you think is driving you all over creation? Who is paying for all the gear and lessons? Who is packing your meals, helping you with your other commitments, pumping you up when you get discouraged?" Sometimes there are team members who don't wear the jersey!)

When I was going through my basic Navy SEAL training, I noticed that every student (including me) managed to attract the attention of one of the instructors. Maybe they weren't the fastest runner, or the best swimmer, or could not shoot accurately, or was nervous about explosives. The instructor would 'get all over him' by, first, making the student HATE his weakness (I won't go into detail). Then, the instructor would bear down on the student with very intensive remedial practice....and the pressure did not let up until.... "success!"

"The only time we fail is when we stop trying." Chuck Norris

Do you remember the point in your life when you accepted Jesus as your savior? There was a particular moment when you made the conscious choice to be 'born again' into a new life with Jesus in the forefront. OK, you're on the squad. For many new Christians it's an intense emotional experience. So, now what?

PRACTICE!!

Yes, we gradually start walking with Christ. We mess up, we stumble, and we try again. The disciples certainly did not get things right all the time! In fact, they were disciples FIRST, before they became Christians.

Did you ever think of that? Last year, I became acquainted with Duane Moyer, Bible Fellowship Church, Allentown, Board of Missions. Each week, I receive his inspiring letters. This one struck me, and it prompted the topic for this week:

Duane and Joetta Moyer:

There is no question that the thrust of the Great Commission is that we are to “make disciples.” But here’s the strange part. I have noticed in my conversations that people who have a church affiliation will readily acknowledge that they are “Christians,” but if I ask them “Are you a true disciple of Jesus?” they will hesitate. Why?

It’s interesting that Jesus’ followers in the Gospels are called “disciples” from the very beginning – even before they gave evidence of a clear understanding of who He was or what He had come to do. In fact, they rebelled against the very thought of what we consider to be the foundation of our salvation: Christ’s atoning death on the cross. By our definition, they were not yet Christians, and yet they were disciples. You could say, “pre-conversion disciples.”

Somehow, we have flipped that. In our minds, discipleship follows conversion and, in some ways, validates our salvation. It seems to imply a sort of achievement – a superior dedication, discipline, obedience and unshakeable faith. A disciple is a sort of second-level Christian.

It is true that a disciple of Jesus, if he continues on the path of discipleship, will over time, begin to exhibit those qualities. But it is also true that that is not the starting point. That certainly is not the picture we get of the disciples in the Gospels. Some of them even walked away from Jesus for a while.

Here’s what I see in those disciples: They were observers. They were listeners. To some extent they were helpers and colleagues. They were Jesus’ friends (John 15.13-15) and they were on a journey of discovery with him. All along the way they were thinking and questioning and wrestling with what they heard and saw in Jesus. As they hung around with him, his words and ways wove their way into their hearts. They were slowly putting two-and-two together and suddenly it all made sense. I personally believe it happened at Pentecost, but what happened that day had been building for a long time.

What does this mean for us? What does it mean for our envoys? We have assumed that evangelism or witnessing means “preaching for a decision,” persuasively arguing a person into surrendering their life to Christ. And I think a lot of us hesitate because we’re not sure we would know how to “close the deal.” Actually, what Jesus commands us to do is not “close the deal.” He commands us to “make disciples,” to consider Jesus ourselves, to see how his words fit with life, to imitate his attitudes, his compassion and his responses, to quote him in our conversations with others, to speak to him openly on their behalf, to let him weave himself into their hearts through ours, and to invite them to come along with us as we are going about our lives with him.

A person’s salvation is God’s business. It is not something we can deliver on demand. Our part in it is to simply devote meaningful time and commitment to making friends out there in the world and then making disciples – “Jesus fans” and eventually “Jesus-followers” - of whoever wants to share the journey with us – as we go.

God Bless,
Duane Moyer

Duane is a wise fellow, and I love how he put the focus on the modern-day Christian to “consider Jesus for ourselves and see how His words fit with life...” This is the PRACTICE part. Too often, the “make disciples” part is put forth as an outwardly focused effort; “...close the deal....” Rather, it should begin as an INDIVIDUAL effort on our part.

Think of it; how can I make a disciple if I, myself, am not a disciple? I cannot lead anyone to a place if I have not been there before. I cannot give away a gift I do not possess. I cannot teach a lesson I have not learned. Duane’s point; is clearly demonstrated in the following:

Mark 16: 16 Meanwhile, the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain Jesus had designated.

17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him, but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.

19 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,

20 and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

This passage is detailing “The Great Commission.” It’s one of the most well-known calls to action for Christians. But, look at where, in this Gospel account, this Great Commission is situated.

Jesus was foretold by John the Baptist, and then baptized. Jesus carried his ministry throughout the towns and countryside, and multitudes followed him. When He spoke of the ‘cost’ of discipleship, many turned away. He was hung on a criminal’s cross, gave up His spirit, and his body laid in a tomb. He arose from the grave and was seen by over 500 people....and, NOW, Jesus is ministering to his closest disciples and telling them what He is commissioning them to do as He finalizes His earthly ministry. Jesus assembled His ‘team’ and gave them their objective; make disciples.

To Duane’s and my point, there was a lot of PRACTICE going on before Jesus commissioned His disciples to go out and be fruitful. Most were disciples before they were, technically, Christians.

Hey, just for fun, let’s look at Webster’s definition of “commission.”

- a formal written warrant granting the power to perform various acts or duties
- an authorization or command to act in a prescribed manner or to perform prescribed acts: CHARGE
- authority to act for, in behalf of, or in place of another
- an act of entrusting or giving authority

Jesus was not only giving them a command, a charge, He was giving them the authority to act in His place! God had given Jesus all authority and Jesus gave His team the authority to make disciples. That authority was to be able to send Satan packing....though he crept back in when they moved on. This is why “making disciples” is so very critical. Too many immature believers were being seduced by false teachers. When a missionary establishes a group of believers in a new place, he MUST develop disciples (leaders) who can withstand the wiles of the devil and

continue to make disciples. (Having a Bible in their language is critical to that effort)

Realize the stage of the process at which we are in the book of Mark; the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. When He cried out "It is finished" on the cross, one of the things that had been completed was the preparation of a core of disciples sufficiently PRACTICED to fulfill this commission. They were ready to act on the authority of Jesus, who had received ALL authority from His Father. This charge is to make disciples. To Duane's point, it is not to 'close the deal.' It is to make disciples. And, to make a disciple, one must BE A DISCIPLE.

"What we prepare for is what we shall get." William Graham Sumner

The Marines don't just find "A Few Good Men" and that's it. They obtain them and then prepare them to serve their nation. We were saved by the Blood of Christ, but sitting in a pew is not the sum total of what we were saved to do. We are to be fruitful.

"A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for." John Shedd.

If you happen to be at the lake and see someone flailing in the water, in serious trouble, what would you do? Well, if you are a good swimmer, you surely would kick off your shoes and go save them! Once back on dry land, would the act of saving them prepare that person to go out and save a drowning victim? No, indeed! That person would have to learn to swim, lest he try it and become a mutual victim.

The lesson is clear; we MUST be disciples before we can carry out Jesus' Great Commission. Being a Christian is super important. It's the foundation. It's the starting point. It comes before discipleship in most cases. Once we're 'on the squad' we must begin the discipleship process so we can be a competent part of the team.

Let's go back to Duane's opening; **"...if I ask them "Are you a true disciple of Jesus?" they will hesitate."** Sadly, far too many Christians are under the impression that church attendance is the pinnacle of the Christian walk. There may have been an initial spurt of growth, but that should prepare us for the next level. In martial arts, there are degrees of accomplishment indicated by the color of the belt. The 'Black Belt,' many assume, is the highest level of achievement. In

actuality, it indicates that the student is now ready to learn!! There must be a constant growth pattern for Christians.

James 1: 22 “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

In other words, don't just listen to a sermon and think that you've arrived. Put it into practice.

I was helping to get rid of a dilapidated shed in Pastor's back yard and ventured back to that old barn in back. In it, were many old cans and other items Greg had used for target practice with his BB gun. I smiled at the thought of how much fun he must have had. What a transition he made when he joined the Marines! Now, he is using much more powerful weapons, with far greater skill, for a more important purpose. And, though he went in to be a musician, he was FIRST transitioned into a Marine, then he was DISCIPLINED as a soldier, and he continues that development. The Marines do not let their soldiers rust. Greg continues to “drill” as a Marine, because he is a Marine who happens to play a trumpet. See the order of progression?

Satan puts a great deal of work into making Christians really, really comfortable inside the church building. He wants us focusing on getting the color of the carpet right, keeping on schedule, and having the temperature in the sanctuary just right, so we can't focus on a lost and dying world outside. He wants us thinking that the building is where “church happens” when church really happens when the truth of God is applied.....however, wherever and whenever. Christians congregate as part of that never-ending development process. But that process is all about putting it into practice. We need to be disciples so we can make disciples.

I shall never forget helping a friend move many years ago. Several folks brought their pickups and we had made our first delivery to the new house when his wife showed up with sandwiches. We were sitting on whatever box or steps we could find, munching along and chatting. This old fellow said; “That makes me think of a situation...” and started quoting scripture. We all got quiet. It did not sound ‘preachy,’ it was just this fellow telling a story and quoting God's word. He did it in a way that made it fascinating. He went on for about five minutes, as we listened with great intent. Then, he said he hoped we'd all come to understand

how much God loves us. It made a huge impact on me. It was an amazing sermon. That's church, too!

On another occasion, before I was saved, I went with a friend to pick up a trailer he'd bought. It was in the seller's back yard, stuck deeply in the mud. We laid out planks to back the car on and, once hitched, that trailer would not budge. We were pushing, pulling, levering, and just about everything we could do to get that thing loose. Suddenly, the seller said; "Well, we've tried everything except prayer. Let's pray about this." I laughed at the idea, and he grabbed my hand, bowed his head and asked God to help us with our job of getting this trailer out and to protect each of us from injury. When he said "Amen!" he squeezed my hand extra hard. On the next try, the thing came out and he shouted; "Thank you, Lord!" What an impact that had on me. That was church, too!

As Christians, we need to develop as disciples so we can be fruitful. Those guys had clearly been working out in the spiritual training room. Well, what is that? Sunday morning services are really important! So is Sunday School. So is Bible Study in groups. So is alone time in devotion with Him and His WORD.

God uses His Word, mature believers and His Holy Spirit to shape our spiritual development. It's similar to being on a ball team, music team, drama team, etc. The team develops its members! We put what we learn into practice. When we read the Bible and pray on our own, the Holy Spirit leverages all these things together.

I once reached for the peanut butter in the pantry. The jar looked like it was almost full. However, there was almost NO peanut butter in there. From the outside, it looked full because of what was left clinging to the inside of the jar. It was pretty much empty. Let us NOT be like that in our Christian walk. Let's ask ourselves; "Are you a true disciple of Jesus?" Then, let's ask Jesus if we are!

**Heavenly Father, we want to serve you.
Put into our hearts the desire to be ever more
devoted disciples of Christ, and help us to
fulfill your commission to make disciples of ourselves, then others**

Amen