

## Gospel Rhythms

Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Matthew 28:18-20

This morning we'll conclude a short series for the month of January looking at what it will take for us to live out our vision as a congregation, to be a gospel-centered community living each day on mission for Christ. So far we've talked about why the gospel must be *central*, why the message of Jesus Christ, and how God establishes his kingdom and deals with our sin through his life, death, and resurrection, must be central to everything we are and everything we do as a church. It's all about Jesus.

And in Christ, we've seen how we are a family of worshipers, learners, servants, and missionaries—that is our gospel-shaped *identity* (from two weeks ago). Then last week we looked at our *mission* as a community centered on the gospel—the call to make disciples of all nations. To help those who don't know Jesus believe the gospel, to help new or young believers depend on and apply that good news to all of life, and to help growing believers be able to minister the gospel to others. Making disciples means *bringing the gospel to bear on all of life for all people*. Whether we don't yet believe in Jesus, or we've spent our life following him, we all still need the same thing to face what lies before us in life so as to give glory to God: the grace of God, the strength of his Spirit, which are available through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Living on mission to make disciples is central to who we are as a church and where we're going. As our vision statement discusses, every member is a missionary, and every sphere of life is part of our mission field—home, school, work, grocery stores, parks, theatres, everywhere.

But as we take this vision seriously, there's a stumbling block that I imagine every one of us is prone to trip over, if we haven't already. And that's the question of *capacity*. How realistic is it really, for us to give ourselves to God's mission to make disciples when so many of our lives are already stuffed to the gills with work, family, school, soccer practice, play practice, church activities, community service, weekend recreation, and so on? It feels beyond our capacity.

Whenever we try to travel to Nebraska to visit family, when we begin packing, it looks like we've got a ton of room to work with. Especially when you fly Southwest with two free checked bags per ticketed passenger—we're looking at ten suitcases coming up in a few weeks. But invariably, by nightfall before we leave, I'm unloading, rearranging, discarding, or otherwise sitting on the suitcase, trying to force the zipper to close, and praying that the TSA doesn't open it to check it, or it's going everywhere. So many of our lives already feel like an overstuffed suitcase. Just one more sock and it's all over. So how can I realistically orient life around a community living on mission together? Most of us don't have an extra 25 hours in the week setting around, begging us to do something with it. So what does this look like—to live on mission together for the gospel?

Now, there's the obvious reality that committing ourselves to live on mission will require us to say no to some things, even some good things, in order to say yes to our calling in Christ. There are likely sacrifices that all of us can (or perhaps should) make. But that's not what I want to talk about this morning. This morning I want us to see how living on mission together, living to make disciples of Christ, is not about adding to our already busy schedules, but *bringing a gospel-intentionality to what we're already doing*. In other words, making disciples means bringing the gospel to bear on all of life for all people amid life's normal rhythms. What do we mean by that?

### **Why Making Disciples Matters**

Before we dive into looking at how our mission to make disciples is something that we weave intentionally into all of life, I want to take a minute to talk about *why making disciples is important*, especially if you're here with us and you don't believe in Jesus, or you're exploring the faith and trying to decide what to make of this Christianity thing. Why do Christians go around always talking about Jesus or the Bible, telling others about their faith and trying to get others to believe in him too? If we're honest, some of us have probably had bad experiences with some of that. And so it's natural to ask the question, 'Why can't you all just live and let live? You've got your beliefs and that's fine, but why do you have to push them on me?'

Hopefully nobody's *pushing* anything in terms of belligerence or coercion. But it's important to understand that the reason that Christians are so committed to helping other people become Christians is *not* because we think we've got it all together, or that we're better. It's because we've found something, or rather been found by Someone, and it's too good to keep to ourselves.

The Christian message, what we call "the gospel," tells us that though God made all humans in his image to know and love and serve him, we rebelled against God and brought his judgment upon ourselves. We wanted to run life on our own terms as though we were god and he was not. That's called rebellion, and a holy God must judge rebellion, and that judgment is eternal death. But God, in his love, sent his eternal Son, Jesus, to rescue us from judgment and death by living a life of perfect holiness in our place, by taking the punishment we deserved on the cross, the full weight of God's holy anger against our sin, and by rising from the dead in order to establish God's kingdom on earth and give new life to all who put their faith in him. In other words, the goal of Christianity is that sinful, broken humans might be restored to relationship with the God who made them and find their life and significance and purpose in knowing and serving him.

So, if that message is true, then wouldn't we want to tell others about it? If there is a God, and he is holy and judges sin, and that is a very real threat under which humanity lives, and if that God has come down to us in love, in the person of Jesus, to rescue us from judgment, and reclaim our lives for what he intended them to be, and if we can know this God through faith in his Son, not by putting on a show for him or being good enough or religious enough, but by trusting Jesus, *then how unloving would it be to keep it to ourselves?* Outspoken atheist Penn Jillette (part of the magician duo, Penn and Teller) once said, "If you believe that there's a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life . . . how much do you have to hate somebody to *not* proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Penn Jillette, as cited here: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2009/11/17/how-much-do-you-have-to-hate-somebody-to-not-proselytize/>.

So we make disciples. We try to help people come to know Jesus and find life in him, not because we're better than anyone, but because it's the most loving thing we can do.

But how do we do that in such a way that we don't have to add 25 hours to our week, and get involved with 3 more programs, or 5 more meetings, and so on? By *bringing a gospel-intentionality to what we're already doing*. Making disciples involves working within the normal rhythms of life to bring the gospel to bear on all of life for all people, those who know Jesus and those who don't.

### **Gospel Rhythms**

Think about the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is, and he says, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:37-39). The passage that Jesus cites in talking about what it looks like to love God with all that we are is Deuteronomy 6:4-9. And as we read these verses again, notice how loving God and spending time in his Word and sharing his Word with others is not expressed primarily in special events or planned meetings, but in the course of life's normal rhythms:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Impress them on your children. Talk about them *when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.* <sup>8</sup> Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deut. 6:4-9)

Sitting, walking, coming, going—all of life is a classroom for the gospel, for making disciples.

Think about the Great Commission from Matthew 28: "Go, therefore, and make disciples . . ." Now, we hear "Go" and we think almost exclusively, "Go to the ends of the earth." And that is certainly the central thrust here—we are to make disciples of *all nations*, all people groups, which requires that many will physically *go*, even as we send. But the way the word "go" is used here can also give the sense of, "as you go."<sup>2</sup> *As you go about life, set yourself to the task of making disciples of all people.* Whatever you're doing, wherever you're at, bring the gospel of Jesus to bear on all of life for people all, helping those who don't know Jesus to believe in him, and helping those who do to depend upon him and apply the gospel to all of life, and to learn how to minister that gospel to others. Bring an intentionality to what you're already doing in life and walk with certain gospel rhythms.

So what does that look like? What are some examples? I want us to look at seven life rhythms, seven parts of everyday living, and how with a little intentionality those rhythms can actually display the truth and beauty of the gospel as well as open doors for gospel conversations. Seven rhythms: celebrate, listen, eat, work, rest, bless, and suffer.

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., D.A. Carson, *Matthew* (EBC 4; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 595.

Nothing I'm going to say is original to me, by the way. I'm drawing heavily here from other pastors and church planters, particularly Soma Communities in Tacoma, Washington and Coram Deo Church in Omaha.<sup>3</sup> The first one is celebrate.

**1. Celebrate.** Celebration is a natural rhythm in life. The Bible is full of God's people celebrating the goodness of creation and the marvel of God's saving grace. When God finished making his creation in Genesis 1, his pronouncement was that it was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). He enjoyed what he had made. And he invites us to enjoy it. "He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart" (Ps. 104:14-15). We should celebrate God's goodness in creation. And we should celebrate his saving grace. What's the first thing Moses and Miriam did after Israel made it safely through the Red Sea (Exod. 15)? They broke into song! They celebrated God's saving work. What is it we do every time we sing to the Lord, or share in the Lord's Table together? We're celebrating God's salvation for us in Christ.

As one pastor notes, "celebration . . . isn't unique to Christians. The people around us are also celebrating—they are just rejoicing in a different god and a different story. The gospel frees us to enter redemptively into their celebrations, just as Jesus did [think of the wedding at Cana, John 2], looking for common ground from which to build relationships and bring the gospel to light."<sup>4</sup>

Parties are a great place to build relationships. It's not hard to invite people over to watch the Super Bowl. You're going to watch it anyway; you might as well be intentional and use it to get to know and serve others. Or maybe your home fellowship throws a party for the neighborhood, just to love and get to know them. How many birthday parties are your kids invited to each year?

Celebrations also open doors to deeper questions. Baptism and communion are celebrations among God's people intentionally designed to trigger conversation about what God has done and what matters in life. And parties have a way of revealing what we're really worshiping. It's interesting how we can become more animated about the outcome of a football game than we are when we gather with God's people to worship him and marvel at the grace of the cross. When we celebrate, we enter into one another's lives and stories.

So how can we be intentional about bringing the gospel to bear amid our celebrations? A few questions to ponder:

Think about the things the people around you celebrate: birthdays, holidays, political victories, sports teams, etc. What are they seeking/pursuing/looking for in these celebrations? How does the gospel complete the story – in other words, how does the gospel actually provide what they are looking for?<sup>5</sup>

I heard a pastor say one time that Christians should throw the best parties, because we have the most to celebrate. God has so lavished his grace on us, far beyond what we deserved; is it not fitting to reflect his lavish generosity to others? Celebration can both display the gospel and open

<sup>3</sup> See Soma Communities, "Soma School Notes;" available at: <http://somatacoma.org/mediafiles/soma-school-notes.pdf>. See also Corem Deo Church, "Living on Mission," Gospel Resource Network, 2012; and <http://www.redemptioncityboston.com/rhythms/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Living on Mission," 2.

<sup>5</sup> "Living on Mission," 5.

doors for the gospel as we build relationships and talk about what matters in life. And it's something we and those around us are already doing.

**2. Listen.** People are always listening to something, especially today. Think of how many different messages we hear in a day. News, media, commercials, friends, teachers, bosses, Facebook, Twitter, text messages. And listening is central to the Christian life—listening to God, and to one another. God tells us to be “quick to listen and slow to speak,” specifically, quick to listen to his Word (Jms. 1:19, cf. vv. 21-25). But we need to be quick to listen to others as well.

How often do we spend our conversations thinking of what we're going to say next instead of actively listening? But what happens in our relationships when we are more interested in *knowing someone* than in making our own thoughts known? Listening communicates love. Moreover, “listening to others helps us discern the stories and experiences that have shaped them, so that we can understand their point of view and help them discover where God's gospel story intersects their own.”<sup>6</sup>

Whether it's our own children, as we seek to disciple them, or our neighbors or colleagues, as they dump about their frustrations in life, what if instead of immediately speaking, we took the time to listen? How might that help us speak more wisely and directly into those messages with the truth of the gospel? To meet people with the questions they're actually asking?

I remember spending a week with a young man who was caught smoking pot, and shipped by his parents to come stay with Carissa and me. There was some upheaval at home and they wanted him to be in a somewhat stable environment with the hopes that we might be able to speak into his life. We spent time talking every day, went for a hike, hung out in my office, on campus, at home, read a book together. And as we talked and he told his story and complained about how stupid and unnecessarily restrictive the laws were that banned marijuana, it became clear that he saw God's law in the same way: irrelevant and restrictive. As the week went on, it dawned on me that what this man has heard about Christianity his whole life was not the life-changing, liberating truth of the gospel, but the oppressive, out of touch, and impossible life of *rules-based religion*. If you put it in terms of the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, what he heard was, “Stop living like the younger brother and rotting your brain on pot, and start acting like the older brother, nice and compliant, keeping all the rules, so that we can all pretend that everything's fine.” The only problem is that in that parable, both sons are lost, and without the Father. What he heard was not a call to the gospel of grace, but to religion. I'm not saying that's what he was taught, but that's what he heard. And he wanted nothing to do with it.

And so my goal that week became to help him see that the gospel is not, “Keep these rules, put on the show, and everyone will get off your back, including God,” but rather, “You can't keep these rules, but Jesus kept them for you, and took all your screw ups on himself on the cross, to free you from guilt and shame, and reunite you with the Father, who lavishes his grace on you and delights to call you, Son.” And when you know the love of the Father, obedience is no longer a pointless burden, but Spirit-empowered joy. An act of worship.

As we go through the day, are we listening with ears open to love people and hear their stories, and help connect their stories to the cross? Celebrate, Listen . . .

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<sup>6</sup> “Living on Mission,” 16.

**3. Eat.** Again, you can't get a more basic life rhythm than eating. We need food to live. And our need for food is a daily reminder of our need for the God who provides it, which is why we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). And yet the experience of a meal, when shared with others, is far more than just nourishing our bodies. It's communion, fellowship. That's why breaking bread was such a normal pattern of the early church (cf. Acts 2:46-47). That's why half of my appointments are over coffee or a meal. And like everything, Scripture tells us, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

Every one of us eats about 21 meals a week. How do we make the most of those for bringing the gospel to bear on the lives of others? Are we sharing meals as a family in our homes? Are we inviting others to eat with us, opening our homes and our lives? I've mentioned this in the past, but what if everyone here ate at least one meal a week with a non-believer? Think of what God might do to forge relationships. Or maybe we bring a meal to a neighbor who just had a baby. Think of the tangible opportunity to express our gratefulness to God for his provision, and to point out that just as bodies hunger and thirst for food and drink, there is a hunger in our souls that no food can satisfy; instead we need the Bread of Life, Jesus, who satisfies all our longings and who feeds us with the food that will last (cf. John 4:13-15; 6:22-59).

So celebrate, listen, eat; next up is . . .

**4. Work.** Part of God's creational design for humanity was work. God placed the first man, Adam, in the garden "to work and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Work is what we spend most of our time doing, next to sleeping. Whether you go somewhere else for your place of employment, or you labor at home keeping house and raising kids, or whether your work is your studies at school—work is what we do. And we have this in common with all people in all cultures.

So how might we make the most of our work, both to display the gospel, and to open doors to communicate the gospel? Sometimes we think that living as a missionary means the only *spiritual* value my job has is when I hijack a conversation to talk about Jesus. That is one of the most unfortunate misconceptions Christians have. Our work is an avenue for our worship, because everything is to be done to the glory of God. Paul says in Colossians 3:22-24:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, *as working for the Lord*, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Col. 3:22-24)

Do we see our work not as a distraction to our mission, but as a mission field, to bring honor to God and to help people know Christ and apply the gospel to their work and relationships? How might the finished work of Christ on the cross satisfy our hearts when our work never seems to be finished? The stack of tax returns, the pile of laundry. How might our union with Jesus free us from finding our identity in our work? How might the promise of the resurrection, that our work in the Lord is not in vain, give significance even to the most menial tasks (1 Cor. 15:58)?

We bring the gospel to bear amid our work. But after work follows rest. That's number 5.

**5. Rest and Recreate.** When God finished creating the universe he rested. And though cultures differ on which day to set aside, much of the world follows God's pattern of work hard and then

rest. God wove rest into the pattern of creation as a regular reminder that he is God and we are not—that we can take a day off and the business won't tank, the world won't stop spinning. And part of rest is recreation—sports, vacations, going for a walk, stepping aside from your normal pattern of work and changing gears, again, because God is God and the world doesn't depend on us.

Including others in our rest and recreation is a simple way to spend time with others in order to bring the gospel to bear on all of life. When I did campus ministry, I used to do several of my meetings on disc golf course—it's fun, it's great relational time, and it lends itself to good conversation. One of my friends who was a mentor to me did most of his mentoring in the weight room. Think of how you might include others in what you're already doing in terms of rest and recreation. Maybe it's the single mom who needs just two hours to herself on Saturdays to restore sanity. If you're already taking your kids to the park, how about picking up her kids as well? And think about how rest itself again displays the beauty of the gospel—that because God's saving work in Jesus is finished, he invites us to enter his rest by faith—to enjoy the fruit of Christ's labor in an inheritance in heaven that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

Celebrate, listen, eat, work, rest, and now . . .

**6. Bless.** One pastor writes, “One way to tangibly express the gospel is to bless and serve others in practical, tangible ways. After all, this is how God has treated us: though we are entirely undeserving, He has chosen to ‘bless us with every spiritual blessing’ (Ephesians 1:3). He does this,” the author continues, “not for our own private good, but in order that we might freely give to others . . . The gospel frees us to pour out our lives and our possessions so that others might be blessed through our generosity and see the gospel in action.”<sup>7</sup>

Think about the ways God has blessed you personally, or your family or small group community. What gifts and resources do you have that you can intentionally use to love and serve others? Is your home fellowship rich in *time*, such that you might partner together to visit the sick and pray with them, and open God's Word? Are you rich in *wisdom*, that you might work together to mentor young people, or offer counsel to people in difficult situations? Or are you simply rich in *money*, that you might bring relief to a brother or sister in need? How might you organize yourselves so that your fellowship is not only aimed inward at helping each other grow, but aimed outward at blessing the city or neighborhood you meet in? “If we became known in our city as a community that consistently searches out and finds ways to bless others, how would that be received? How might it make the gospel tangible to others?”<sup>8</sup>

But in displaying the gospel through loving and serving others, we must also look and pray for opportunities to share Jesus verbally. The old saying, wrongly attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel all the time. If necessary use words,” is completely unbiblical. No one is ever going to look at your life and say, “Wow, this person helped watch my kids for me, they picked up trash at the park, they gave my daughter a birthday gift. I'll bet Jesus died for my sins and rose again that I might know God and go to heaven.” It doesn't work that way. The gospel is news, and it must be communicated. “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Rom. 10:14).

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<sup>7</sup> “Living on Mission,” 30.

<sup>8</sup> “Living on Mission,” 38.

So blessing is a natural rhythm of life, that if we approach with intentionality, can be a beautiful display of the gospel and opportunity to speak that gospel into the lives of others.

Celebrate, listen, eat, work, rest, bless. Now finally . . .

**7. Suffer.** Because we live in a fallen world, a world that doesn't work the way it's supposed to, having been stained by human sin and rebellion, suffering is also a normal pattern of life. We lose jobs, we lose money, we lose loved ones. We miss out on opportunities. People take advantage of us. We take advantage of others. And as followers of Christ, we will find ourselves opposed and even persecuted by the world, just as the world treated Jesus.

Suffering is an unfortunately common mark of life in this world. What would it look like for us to share in the sufferings of others? To go beyond the obligatory condolence and actually weep with those who weep? To help them give voice to their pain? Think of the laments in the Psalms: "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Ps. 13:1). And how might we help lift their eyes above the pain to see the hope we have in Jesus, who carried our griefs and bore our pains and suffered in our place on the cross? As Hebrews tells us, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16).

Those who are in Christ do not suffer the way the world does; we grieve with hope. Because we know that through the cross and resurrection of Christ, that sin, pain, and death, are not the final words. There is hope of the resurrection to come, hope of new creation, hope of this terrible story called my life being redeemed and rewritten into God's story of life, love, and eternal joy in him.

What if the church looked more like what we see in Hebrews 10:32-34: "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions." What kind of testimony might we give to what really matters in life? And how might we be better equipped to walk with those who are hurting?

Living on mission doesn't have to be complicated. That doesn't mean it won't cost us. In fact it costs us everything. It is the complete surrender of our lives, giving everything we have and all we do to the Lord for his glory and purposes. Jesus said in Mark 8, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:34-36).

But it doesn't mean we have to change occupations or add a whole other job to our already busy lives. God may call some of you to do that. But for most of us, making disciples means bringing the gospel to bear on all of life for all people amid life's normal rhythms. Bringing a gospel-intentionality to everything we're already doing.

May God give us the grace to live all of life for him and his calling, as we partner together as a gospel-centered community living each day on mission for Christ.