

More than Nice
Matt. 9:35-11:1

Are you familiar with this quote, "Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words"? It is commonly ascribed to St. Francis of Assisi and means that proclaiming the gospel by the way we live is better than actually verbalizing it. There's some truth in that; we've all met Christians we wish would keep quiet about their faith because of the way they live; but over the past couple of decades a lot younger Christians have used this quote to let them off the hook of having to actually tell anybody about their faith. Just be nice and people will ask you why you are such a wonderful person – as if *that* ever happens. Well, it is doubtful that Francis ever said this. The earliest date we find this quote is in the 1990s. No biographer ever quotes Francis saying anything close to this nor do these words appear in any of his writings. Francis was actually a fiery preacher, regularly preaching the gospel as he stood on box or a bale of hay in the marketplace. According to the Bible it is impossible to preach the gospel without words. In Romans 10:13-14 Paul quotes Joel 2:32 about how people will be saved in the last days; "... *for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."* (Salvation comes to all those who ask Jesus to save them. So Paul asks) *How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?* (How can I call on Jesus unless I believe in Him?) *How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?* (And how can I believe in Jesus if I haven't heard about Him?) *And how will they hear without a preacher?* (How can I hear about Jesus unless someone tells me about Him?) So who is supposed to do that? Pastors? Professional evangelists? According to the New Testament, every Christian is called to share the good news about Jesus. We're all ambassadors of Christ. Jesus said, "As the Father sent Me, I have sent you." That's where we get the word "missionary" from. A missionary is, someone sent on a mission. Charles Spurgeon, the great British preacher put it this way. "Every Christian is a missionary or an imposter." We're all on a mission from God and we hear about that mission for the first time in the 10th chapter of Matthew as Jesus sends His 12 disciples out to do what He's been doing. They've been watching Him as He pursues God's mission and now it's their turn to get into the game. I entitled this passage, "More than Nice," because God's mission for every believer is more than just being a nice person and hoping somebody might ask you how they can be like you. As we look at Jesus' instructions to these first-time missionaries, I want you to see how Jesus answers four questions we all have about the mission Jesus has sent us on.

1. What do I see? (Matt. 9:35-10:4)

2. What do I do? (Matt. 10:5-15)

3. What should I expect? (Matt. 10:16-23)

4. Why should I go? (Matt. 10:24-42)

If you are a Christian, Jesus lives in you and wants to work through you and the more we embrace His mission, the more of Him and His joy we experience. So let's look at our mission.

First, What Do I See? A mission always begins with a vision. Martin Luther King saw a nation where the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners could sit together at the table of brotherhood and where his own four children would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. His vision fueled the civil rights movement. Steve Jobs believed personal computers would change the world and that vision shaped Apple. Bill Bright believed the Great Commission could be fulfilled in our generation and that vision created Campus Crusade for Christ through which several billion have heard the gospel and 140 million people have come to know Christ. Leaders come in all shapes and personalities but every good leader has a vision. They see what does not yet exist but should and that vision gives them a mission to be accomplished. So as we consider God's mission for us, the first question I must ask is what do I see? What did Jesus see? Let's start at Matthew 10:35. "Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel

of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.” Jesus can’t do any more than what He’s doing. Yet as He looks at the crowds coming to hear Him and to be healed, He sees how troubled and discouraged they are - like sheep without a shepherd - and Jesus feels compassion for them. But they’ve got Jesus and He’s the Good Shepherd isn’t He? He is but He can’t be everybody’s shepherd. At this point, confined to a human body He is limited in time and space. And so as Jesus sees so many people with so many needs, He turns to His disciples and says, *“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”* Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of illness.” (Matt. 9:35-10:1) What did Jesus see? Two things: He sees the needs of people and He sees that even He can’t meet all of those needs; which tells me that mission is motivated by compassion and that it is only possible through reproduction. What do you see when you look at people? I don’t see people the way Jesus sees people; as loved by God as much as He loves me; yet needy, discouraged or worried because they don’t have Jesus to guide them. I forget their plight, that people who do not obey Christ forfeit eternal life and I don’t ask myself daily what I will say at the judgment day if my unbelieving friend turns to me and asks why I didn’t speak to him with more seriousness about this matter of eternal life; or why I neglected to pray for him. I don’t think often enough about the complete sufficiency of the death of Christ to cover the sins of absolutely anyone who repents and believes in him no matter how many sins they’ve committed. I forget the power of the Holy Spirit to draw people to the Savior the same way as He drew me. And I forget that we are God’s only plan for bringing people to Himself and the joy I would have over one sinner who repents and turns to Christ through my prayer and witness. I ignore the people around me, or see them only in terms of my own self-interest. Mission begins with seeing people through Jesus’ eyes so lately I’ve been trying to remind myself whenever I come in contact with anyone that Jesus loves him or her as much as He loves me and wants to save them and bless them - perhaps through me.

Jesus saw the needs of people and that God’s mission is only possible with more workers. So instead of trying to work harder, Jesus gets help. That’s why Jesus made disciples. That’s why He told them, “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” Jesus made it clear from the beginning that if they followed Him, He was going to use them in His mission. Yet by far the most common mistake I see in people engaged in God’s mission is trying to do it by themselves and failing to make disciples who make more disciples. God’s mission is only possible through reproduction. Just as we are only on earth for a short time and if we don’t reproduce ourselves physically, our family line will die; if we don’t reproduce ourselves spiritually, the mission will die. That’s why the mission always done by a team. I’m not going to read vs. 2-4 where Matthew lists the names of the 12 Jesus sends out but it’s interesting that Matthew lists them in pairs; Peter and Andrew, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew because Jesus sent them out in pairs. We go on mission together and one of the new developments we’re working on right now at Creekside is the next version of a community group where people join together for a specific mission as well as for fellowship and Bible study. You’ll hear more about that in the months to come. Mission always begins with a vision – by answering the question, “What do I see?” I don’t know what God’s plan is for your life but I do know it’s bigger than your plan; and that it will involve new Christians and new workers; making disciples who make more disciples. That was Jesus’ mission and the mission of everyone who follows Jesus – and it begins by seeing as Jesus sees.

2. What do I do? (Matt. 10:5-15) The second question we have as we follow Jesus on His mission is what do I do? Jesus gives His disciples very specific instructions about what they are to do and since Matthew, Mark and Luke all record these instructions, they aren’t just meant for these disciples but are the pattern for everybody who follows Jesus in His mission. First Jesus tells the disciples where to go. *“These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them, ‘Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of*

the house of Israel." Then Jesus tells them what to do. *"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."* Jesus says, "Do everything you've seen Me do: preach and heal; declare and display; show and tell the kingdom of heaven. Jesus knows His disciples can't heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers or cast out demons, but God can; and Jesus is depending on God to work through His disciples just like He's depended on God to work through Him. Jesus tells His disciples where to go, what to do and then what to take on the mission *"Freely you received, freely give.* (Don't charge people for your services.) *Do not acquire gold or silver or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two coats or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support.*" (Matthew 10:5-10) Travel light; trust God to supply what you need when you need it. Go, declare, display; good words and good works; that's the mission; and there's no declaring or displaying without first going which means we make the first move in declaring and displaying Jesus. I've waited for years for somebody to ask me to tell them about Jesus because of the wonderful example I set and I'm still waiting. Jesus says, "Go. Don't wait for people to come to you because they won't. You reach out, you ask questions, you take an interest in them and look for ways to do them good. And you bring up Christ in conversation. Going is the key that unlocks God's power and grace through you to others because God responds to our faith and going demonstrates faith. So ask yourself, "How many of my non-believing friends know I'm a follower of Jesus? How many know they can come to me with their doubts and questions about life and spiritual matters?" It all starts with go. You don't have to tell everything you know about Jesus in the first conversation you have with someone. But the sooner in the relationship you let them know you follow Jesus, the more likely you'll have those kinds of discussions later.

Now Jesus adds one more instruction about what to do which may sound foreign to us but is essential for missionaries in every culture. *"And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city."* (Matt. 10:11) In every city or village the disciples go, they are not to camp out or stay at the local Holiday Inn. Instead they are to find someone Jesus describes as "worthy" and stay with him or her as long as they remain in that village. Jesus repeats this strategy when He sends out 70 other disciples later in Luke 10, calling the worthy individual "a man of peace," and saying, *"Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you. Do not move around from house to house."* (Luke 10:5-9) The man or woman of peace is a person who is friendly to Christ's messenger and who has the kind of reputation to open doors for the gospel into his family or community. I read about two missionaries in Asia who entered an unreached and potentially hostile village and prayed for a man of peace who would take care of them until they could know whether the village was safe or unsafe. One started his stopwatch as they walked to the village well. A man approached them and asked if they had eaten and invited them to eat at his home. His name was Li and he was the person of peace they had asked God for. The missionary looked at his watch: 3 minutes and 21 seconds. Li fed them and introduced them to the village's hard-faced leader -- who might otherwise have ordered the strangers killed. Li told the village leader, who was ill, that the newcomers' God "is a great God, and they will pray for you." They prayed; the leader got better. He became a second man of peace in that village, opening his heart and the whole village to the Gospel. So Jesus tells His disciples that when they come to a village, they aren't to just start preaching in the streets but rather to look for people who open to a friendship with them and who can open doors into the relational network of the village. Those door openers are so important that if no person of peace is found, the disciples are to move on to the next village. Why does Jesus tell His disciples to find the man of peace? The gospel spreads through relationships. If you were to chart how each of your current friendships began, you would see a chain of people. This friend introduced me to this friend through whom I met this friend through whom I met this friend. There is always somebody who opens a door or introduces you to somebody else. The gospel spreads the same way. When Jesus says, "Stay in that house. Don't keep moving from house to house." I think He is telling us to build friendships with those who don't know Him at work or in our neighborhood or with those we share common interests with who are open to a friendship because you never know how God may use that friendship to

bring not only that person to Himself but others through that person. When I first got involved with Campus Crusade at Cal, we were taught to share the gospel with as many strangers as we could. We'd walk up to somebody sitting on campus and ask them if we could talk to them about Christ and if they agreed, we'd discuss the gospel with them. People heard about Jesus but those relationships usually ended after that one conversation because we were still strangers. One day I read 1 Thessalonians 1:5 where Paul reminds the Thessalonians about how they came to believe the gospel. *"For our gospel did not come to you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know the kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."* I noticed that the truth and power of the gospel was seen in the lives of Paul and his fellow missionaries, *the kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake* - which told me that Paul and his friends had a deeper relationship with the Thessalonians than strangers preaching a message to them. In fact, later in this letter Paul writes, *"For we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives because you had become very dear to us."* (1 Thess. 2:8). People can't see the difference that knowing Christ makes unless they get to know people in whom Christ lives. Building friendships is essential for mission. That truth permanently changed the way I did evangelism. I continued to talk with strangers about Jesus but I looked for ways to continue the connection. I joined a rugby team. I became part of life on campus. I regularly got together for lunch with people I had met who didn't know Jesus; friendships developed; and we began to see the people who came to Christ stick around because they already felt part of our group. Mission is more than friendship but never less. So think like a missionary. If you lived in a foreign country, how would you meet the nationals there? First you would learn the language and the customs and then you would live as they live and meet people through the normal activities of life in your neighborhood or through common interests or at work. Christ has sent you to be a missionary here and you're ready to go. You already know the language and the customs. So where do you spend most of your time? That's your mission field. You carry the kingdom of God in you because Jesus lives in you and mission is simply giving Him the opportunity to work through you in other people's lives; to declare and to display the gospel as we love our neighbor as our self.

The third question we have as we follow Jesus on His mission is "What should I expect?" and Jesus doesn't pull any punches here. *"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. But beware of men, for they will hand you over to {the} courts and scourge you in their synagogues; and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but {it is} the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father {his} child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish {going through} the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes. (Matt. 10:16-23)* What should I expect as I follow Jesus in mission? People will treat me the same way as they treated Him. Jesus tells His disciples they will be like sheep at a wolf convention; they can expect to be arrested and tried and even their own families will turn on them. Since none of these things happened to the disciples on their first trip, Jesus is previewing what will happen throughout the disciples' and their disciples' lives – indeed throughout the history of the church. Mission is hard and requires us to be both shrewd and innocent; people of high intelligence and high character. The call to mission is a call to come and die. We are in enemy territory and the bullets are live. There is great joy and great rewards; but there is also great suffering and that brings us to the fourth question we have as we follow Jesus on His mission: why should I go? And Jesus gives us four reasons.

First, mission is the only way we become like Jesus. *"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he become like his teacher and the slave like his master. If they called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of the household."* (Matt. 10:24-25) A disciple follows a teacher to become like that teacher and we follow Jesus into mission to become like Him; and we can expect people to treat us the same way they treated Him. If people called the only perfect human to ever walk

on this planet Beelzebul or Satan, what do they think they will call you? God sent His Son to suffer and Jesus sends me to suffer because Jesus said that if a seed doesn't fall into the ground and die, it remains alone but if it dies, it bears much fruit. That was true for Him and it is true for His disciples as well. Risk, suffering and danger are the key to a fruitful ministry – not ease and safety. So why should I go? "It is enough for a disciple that he become like his teacher." If I'm truly Jesus' disciple only becoming like Him will be enough for me and that's the motive for mission. It is only as I experience His sufferings, shame, rejection and death as I follow Him into mission that I experience the power of His resurrection. I used to look at ministry in terms of my happiness and success and so I was surprised and discouraged when I was betrayed, slandered or opposed. I realized I was aiming at the wrong target. Jesus hadn't called me to succeed, He had called me to become like Him and this was the path to that transformation.

Here's the second reason we should go: God will protect you. *"Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear {whispered} in {your} ear, proclaim upon the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And {yet} not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows."* (Matt. 10:26-31) The greatest enemy of mission is fear and that's why Jesus says, "do not fear" three times and gives us three reasons to not be afraid. First, don't be afraid of what people think or say about you because the truth will be revealed in the end. Don't you love it when somebody is attacked publically and then the real story comes out and they end up looking great and their attackers look like idiots? That's what Jesus says will happen to us because God who sees everything will reveal everything in the end. And don't be afraid of those who can kill you because you are eternal. If we lose our life in the mission, we haven't lost anything we weren't going to lose anyway; and since we cannot die, death is not a loss but simply a necessary transition. So don't be afraid because the God who sends us on this mission loves us and controls our circumstances. Neither a sparrow nor even a hair falls to the ground apart from Him and Jesus assures us that we are very valuable to Him. We could not be safer, so live with abandon for God's interests rather than your own.

The third reason to join Jesus on His mission is to prove we're true disciples. *"Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."* (Matt. 10:32-33) Confessing Christ before people is a proof that our faith is real because it shows that I care more about what God thinks than what people think. *"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."* I'll never forget the night I told my parents I had decided to go into the ministry rather than become the high school music teacher they were expecting. My mom cried and my dad just looked at the wall; but as Jesus says, we have to decide whom we love more: Jesus or family? Even our allegiance to ourselves will have to take second place to our allegiance to Him; *"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."* (Matt. 10:34-39) The easiest person in the world for me to fool is myself. I can imagine that I love Jesus and that I am His true disciple but mission separates the true disciples from the imaginary ones. If I am unwilling to follow Jesus wherever He leads and stand with Him publically, I have no reason to believe that I am His disciple or that He comes first in my heart.

The fourth reason to join Jesus in His mission is to bless others. *"He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in {the} name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to*

drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward." (Matt. 10:40-42) I expected Jesus to conclude these instructions with the rewards of following Him into mission but instead, He talks about the rewards of those to whom we minister. In contrast with those who reject us because we represent Jesus, those who welcome us are rewarded because whoever receives us receives Jesus and His Father; we are the way people experience the presence of God in this world and therefore how people treat us is the way they treat Him and they will be rewarded accordingly. Mission is not about what I can get but about what I can give. What is the greatest thing that ever happened to you? If you know Jesus, you will immediately say, "Coming to know Christ." Then what's the greatest thing you can do for someone else - introduce them to Christ. Jesus came to bless, lived to bless, suffered and died to bless, rose to bless and now reigns to bless and He blesses people through His disciples. If He lived and died to bless me and I follow Him, then I will live to bless others.

Mission - new Christians and new workers for the harvest - is the reason Creekside exists. Our goal is not to produce nice people but disciples who will make disciples. A Christian who is not on mission with Jesus is an unhappy Christian because the more I join Jesus in His mission, the more of His joy I experience and the more my joy is made full and I want you to know His joy. There are extremely few things in life more satisfying than watching Jesus work through you in another person's life.

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