

Title: Go
Date: January 28, 2024
Subject: Seeing Life Clearly: Four Resolutions for Christian Living -- Go
Scripture:

Comic strips entertain and are creative ways for communicating truth. A prime example: Charles Schulz and the Peanuts characters. For Christmas I got a book of the first two years of Charlie Brown, Snoopy, etc. By the way, I noticed something different in my office. It came sometime after I'd taken down the Christmas decorations. There on the window...a gel window cling of Linus. Thanks to whoever put it there.

The Peanuts gang isn't the only truth teller. Another comic strip (Theophilus) pictured a small child looking up into the eyes of his father and asking, "Dad, what is a Christian?" The father replies, "A Christian is a person who loves and obeys God. He loves his friends and neighbors and even his enemies. He prays often, is kind, gentle, holy, and more interested in going to heaven than in all earthly riches. That, son, is a Christian!"

The boy reflects for a moment and then asks, "Have I ever seen one?"

Ouch! The dad likely was a Christian and thought he'd communicated that with his son but somehow there was a disconnect.

Jesus insists that his followers remain close to him. He uses the analogy of him being the vine, his followers are the branches. They're dependent on him - need to maintain a close connection with him, dwell in him, continue in him. At the same time, and not a contradiction, they're to go away and bear fruit (John 15:16) by telling other people the good news. The Christian life is staying and going. Our focus this morning is going.

The last words from Jesus before he returned to the Father addressed this responsibility.

Go READ Matthew 28:19 (also used) 2 Corinthians 5:20, 2 Kings 7:3 - 10

The little word "go" is better translated "having gone" or "as you are going." There's an expectation of movement, but the idea isn't to thoughtlessly wander around. Jesus has a specific intention -- make disciples of all nations. The inclusion of the final frontier has motivated people to go from their home areas to distant parts of the world to carry the good news. Most stay closer to home. Whether people travel great distances in the service of Jesus Christ or not, the mission is still the same - make disciples, followers, learners.

The ongoing process of making disciples begins when a person places their individual trust in Christ. At that point, they're spiritually baptized, placed into his body, the group of people who are Christians.

The teaching component enables people to learn, follow, and become mature disciples as they know Christ better and grow in their spiritual lives. It provides instruction about baptism is and means. Believer's baptism is an outward demonstration. The person is dipped into water to show their connection and commitment to Christ and give testimony to what has happened in their lives.

Going is the responsibility of every disciple. It's a privilege as seen in the word ambassador. "We therefore are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

An ambassador represents someone else and is to carry the message of the person or country they represent. Christians are ambassadors of Jesus Christ. He's entrusted us with his message of how people can be reconciled, be brought into right relationship with God, through him not counting their sins against them anymore and making them into new creations. We owe something to others because we've been reconciled.

One of the most fascinating Bible stories is from when Elisha was the prophet in Israel (2 Kings 7:3-10). The capital city was suffering a severe famine caused by an enemy army's siege. The king blamed the Lord and Elisha, but the villain was Israel who wasn't following the Lord. The king threatened to liberate Elisha's head from his shoulders. The Lord revealed to Elisha the famine would be broken the next day.

Four lepers weren't aware of what God had said. The men decided they'd die if they stayed at the city gates, so they decided to take their chances with the enemy. "If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die" (more quickly than by starvation). They went to the enemy camp, not knowing the Lord had caused the enemy to hear the sound of chariots, horses and a great army and hurriedly left, abandoning tents, horses, donkeys and food. The four lepers reached the edge of the camp and found nobody. They started eating and drinking and hiding the silver, gold and clothes they found. Then they moved to the next tent.

Then a light went off: "We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we're keeping it to ourselves." Back to the city to report what they'd found. The king sent out an investigation team who discovered miles and miles of food, clothing and equipment left behind. They reported to the king and the news spread like wildfire. People left the city and found food so they could stay alive. All because four guys felt they weren't doing right by keeping the good news to themselves and owed it to other people who were in desperate need.

That's position of Christians. We're ambassadors of Jesus Christ who do right by sharing the good news with people who are in desperate need. We owe it to them.

J.D. Greear was interviewed on Family Life Today radio about his new book "Essential Christianity: The Heart of The Gospel in Ten Words" based on Romans (familylife.com/podcast/familylife-today/is-your-marriage-too-far-gone-jd-veronica-greear). He said, "You don't have to be an expert on everything in the Christian life, but you should be an expert on the gospel, and the book of Romans is the book that is written to make you an expert on the gospel" (previous day's program).

When asked his favorite verse in Romans, he responded: "I *love* - I'm deeply moved by - Romans 1:14, where Paul says, "I'm a debtor to those who have never heard..." "debtor." It means you owe somebody; you're under obligation; you're no longer free. When you owe the credit card company tens of thousands of dollars, then you're not free to do what you want. Your money, in a sense, belongs to them. You know, Paul said, "When it comes to the gospel; when I think about the gift that God gave me and how much I didn't deserve it, I *owe it* to those who have never heard to have a chance to hear. I tell college students... "Your generation—Gen Z, and Millennials, also—is moved by justice issues." And they should be!

"We need to be involved in justice issues all over the world, of all kinds. But according to Paul, the greatest injustice that has ever taken place is for somebody to know the gospel and to not share it with those

who haven't. So, when Paul goes from verse 14 to saying, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, because it is the power of God unto salvation for everybody who believes" [Romans 1:16]—

"When I think about what the gospel has done in our marriage, when I think about how it saved our marriage—I think we can say that; I'm not sure where we'd be if it hadn't been for coming back to the gospel. We might be a statistic, divorced. When I think about the way I've seen it work in people's lives, there's just *nothing greater* to give your life to than to knowing the gospel, teaching it to your kids, and making sure everybody in this generation knows and has a chance to believe."

Jesus uses another word picture to describe what his followers are to do.

Flow John 7:38, 2 Corinthians 2:14 - 16

Read John 7:37, 38.

The word picture is water. At first, it's of the person who's thirsty. Jesus promises that the spiritually thirsty person who comes to him will have their thirst satisfied by him. He is the thirst quencher.

Jesus equates this with believing in him and says there's more. They'll have streams of living water flow from within. The person is like a lake that is no longer interested in keeping all the water within its shores. "Stay here. Don't go anywhere." Instead, it overflows in many directions. This is the intended purpose.

This would be accomplished by the Holy Spirit taking Christ's place. The Son of God returned to heaven and the Holy Spirit was given to live inside Christians to empower them to be able to let the water flow.

At this point, according to the sermon notes, you'd be turning to 2 Corinthians 7:18. That would be fine... but for one slight, miniscule problem. There isn't a 2 Corinthians 7:18. The chapter only has 16 verses. And I'm not interested in trying to come up with something..... The real verse isn't even in chapter 7 and it's actually three verses from 2 Corinthians 2. At least I got the book of the Bible correct.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14 - 16.

The picture is a victorious general's return to a huge welcome home celebration for the conquering heroes. The general leads the conquered and the conquering in a parade. People loudly cheer and burn spices. To the conquerors, the smell is the sweet fragrance of life. They can't get enough as they take deep breaths.

The same fragrance to the conquered is the stench of death. It represents servitude and separation from all they held dear. They try not to breathe it in.

Christians are victors in Christ's parade that isn't over until we get to heaven. Instead of throwing out candy like at a 4th of July parade, we emit the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ. To those who are being saved, we smell like the aroma of life. To others we stink. The same message is the smell of death because they're perishing. They reject, choose not to believe Christ and refuse to accept the gift of eternal life he offers.

Tom Stebbins was a missionary in Vietnam. He escaped on the third-to-last helicopter when Saigon fell. He then served in Guam and Hong Kong. During that time, he received training in Evangelism Explosion. He introduced EE in Hong Kong. It quickly spread throughout Asia. After 25 years of missionary service, he returned to the States and served as associate pastor at a large church in Omaha where he stressed Evangelism

Explosion. He became Global Ambassador for EE representing it around the world. He taught evangelism at colleges, seminaries, and the Billy Graham School of Evangelism. He was nicknamed “Mr. EE.” He would become Executive Vice President and COO of Evangelism Explosion International. He knew a thing or two about telling people about Jesus. He stated: “Evangelism is not a special activity to be undertaken at a prescribed time... but the constant, spontaneous overflow of our individual and corporate experience of Christ.”

Telling others about Jesus isn’t a special activity or program or ministry. It’s rivers of living water flowing from our relationship with Christ. It’s exuding the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ.

Glow and Show Matthew 5:14-16, John 13:35, 1 Corinthians 10:31

READ Matthew 5:14-16

Followers of Christ are to be like Marathon City, Wisconsin and not like Cheyenne, Wyoming. Several reasons might come up, but I’ll stick with one that fits the passage. The first time I went to Cheyenne, my brother and I approached from the north. Though road signs said we were getting close, it didn’t seem like it. We couldn’t see the lights...until we popped over the ridge because it was down below, hidden from view.

Marathon City is a little west of Wausau. I drove past it on my way to and from college. I could always see it because the city was built on the side of a hill facing highway 29.

The second word picture may make some think of the children's song “This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. Hide it under a bushel. No.” It doesn't make any sense to light a lamp, candle or flashlight and then put it underneath a bowl, bushel or box. The purpose is to let the light shine.

Jesus said we’re the light of the world. If we hide our light, the world, people around us won't have light but remain in darkness. We must keep our light out in the open. Jesus defined the light we shine as our good deeds done because we’ve placed our trust in him and desire to live in ways that please him. We show that Jesus is in our lives. The purpose of the good deeds is so the Father in heaven is praised, not us.

David Livingstone was a doctor, explorer and proclaimer of Jesus to the people of Africa. He immersed himself in the continent. There were times no one heard from him. Journalist Henry Stanley was charged by his paper to find Livingstone. When Stanley finally succeeded, he offered “perhaps the coldest greeting in history: “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?”

Stanley lived and traveled with Livingstone for a while. He wrote of the experience, “He never tried to convert me, but if I had been with him any longer, I would have become a Christian.” Livingstone didn't put pressure on Stanley. Livingstone glowed and showed Jesus through the way he lived as well as his words.

We also shine our light by loving one another. Jesus said, “A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34, 35). This is the second great command – loving our neighbors as ourselves. The greatest is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Matt 22:37, 39).

Our love for fellow believers indicates our connection to them but more importantly our connection with God. Our love for all people is a distinctive that will draw people to God.

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another” (Romans 13:8).

Sow Luke 8:4 - 15

Jesus told a parable about a farmer who sowed seed. It fell on various soils with various results. Jesus often didn't give the meaning of his parables, but in this case, he did. He said the seed is the word of God, the message that comes from God. Since Jesus is called the word, we can say the seed is telling about Jesus, who he is, what he has done and what the results can be for people.

Jesus explained the various soils represent the receptions people have to the message of God. In most cases the seed doesn't produce a crop. However, there are those who are good soil and the seed produces.

Jesus doesn't identify the farmer, but it seems like it's those who spread the message of Christ. In other words - Christians. Our responsibility is to scatter seed. This is where Luke and Mark bring in the teaching about lighting a lamp and either hiding or putting it in a place where it can enable people to see. Spread seed. Be light.

Stuart Briscoe describes a witness: “someone who by explanation and demonstration gives audible and visible evidence of what he has seen and heard without being deterred by the consequences of his action... A Christian witness is someone who, in a variety of ways, communicates the truth as it is to be found in Christ...The point is not whether you will or will not be a witness. The point is that if you are a Christian, you are a witness and the only options open to you are whether to be ‘good, bad, or indifferent” (Getting Into God pp. 76, 78).

On the back of the sermon notes are insights from Chuck Swindoll about how we can share our personal story of what Jesus Christ has done for us and what he means to us.

We've had two Christian life assignments. First: Know Christ. Challenge read 1 John. Second: Grow. The challenge use 2 Peter 1 to see what God has provided and what we need to add to our faith in Christ.

Today's Christian life assignment is Romans 10:9 – 17. Discover how to have beautiful feet. Vv. 14 and 15 deal with the proclamation of the good news of Jesus. Working through the statements in reverse order can give more insight. I encourage you to think about how you heard about Jesus – how, who, what, where, when...who had the beautiful feet when they brought the good news to you.

A few weeks ago I was in Appleton to serve on the district superintendent search committee. The weather was predicted to be horrible, so I stayed at a hotel. The clerk noticed my hat. Thanks Joan. It has a cross and the words “I've read the final chapter. God wins.” She said she liked the hat and somebody in her family has something similar. I asked if she knew Jesus. She said, “Oh my yes. I've known him for 49 years.”

The day I checked out was a different clerk. We talked about the storm and the semi crash that had taken place near the overpass by the hotel. He thought there may have been a fatality. This led him to talk about other experiences he's had of losing friends. We talked a little more and I told him I would pray for him.

Opportunities.

Go. Flow. Glow. Show. Sow.