

Last week, we had the Parable of the Talents. And the message was about how the Parable of the Talents, isn't necessarily about physical talents (although we could apply it in that way). The Parable of the Talents, is primarily about the enormous value of what Christ has invested into us, His disciples. The cross; Salvation; forgiveness; love; the Holy Spirit; eternal life; life itself; ... And the cost of His investment is enormous – It cost His life....

Our Master (The Lord Jesus Christ) ascended into Heaven, and one day, He's going to come back again... And on that day, when we meet Him, face to face, He's going to have a question for us – “What have you done with the investment I've put into you?” “What have you done with your faith

Faith begets faith. When you use faith, it grows. Disciples of Jesus Christ, birth other disciples of Jesus Christ. When you share your faith with those who don't know Christ, **this** is carrying on God's work, of Kingdom building...

So, that was last week, and maybe, if you're a bit like me, you might have gone home last week thinking, “Well that's all very good and nice”:

- “I know I can't just bury my faith – I know I've got to be using it.”

- I feel encouraged by God – maybe I feel chastened by God – because I do bury my faith too much.
- I feel I do need to be doing something,....., but I don't know how to go about it - I don't know where to start...

We do **not** want to be one of those, who when Jesus returns, He says to us, “You wicked and slothful servant. You were too tentative. You were too scared. You were too ashamed... I left you with the gift of the Gospel, and you did nothing with it...” – We don't want to be that person, do we?

And we **do** want to be one of those who, when He returns, He says, “Well done good and faithful slave. You have been faithful.”.... – We **do** want to be a slave that gets commended, don't we? I know I do....

I hope all of us want to be the faithful slave, but we just don't know, how to begin to be that slave: sharing faith, acting in faith, living by faith, - building the Kingdom of God... Most of us find it very easy (in fact it comes naturally) – to be like the wicked servant – it's very easy to bury our faith... But not so easy to work with it....

Sometimes God does something, and you just know it's God. You pray about something, and then a day or two

later, something happens, and you just know God was answering your prayer, or God was getting your attention.

What others may put down as co-incidences, well, we know they're actually **God**-incidences.

A few weeks ago, I was actually feeling pretty down... Just wondering, "God, what do you want us to do?" Things aren't working out how we thought they were going to with building a home, and I began to question, "God, do you even want us to stay in St George? I mean, we're happy to stay in St George forever, if this is where you're calling us... But if you're telling us to move somewhere else and do something else, well, God you know we'll be obedient to that (We just need to know)." And I was asking, "God, what about Bush Disciples? I know you were in its beginnings, but do you want it to continue? – I mean it's jolly hard work... Church finances were low – I was about 3 months behind in getting paid. Lord, does the Christian church need Bush Disciples???"

I just felt we were at a cross roads, and I wanted to make sure that me personally, us as a family, and we as a church, weren't just doing our own thing, but that were following the will and purpose of God.

I actually visited a few of you, and asked you to pray about it...

And over the next couple of weeks, I really saw God at work, in people's lives. I heard stories of transformations that were taking place in people, as they grew in God... People told me how God was really touching them through what we've been doing together here...

And also, for the first time since November, we're actually up to date with my pay – people have been generous.... God is Good. ... All answers to prayer...

But that's not the end of it. A couple of weeks ago, out of the blue, I also got a visit from a couple, named Ron and Paula Turner – they run a ministry they call, "Outback Connections". And their passion is planting churches, which is essentially what we've done here & Dirranbandi & Begonia & Westmar... Ron is actually an ordained Baptist pastor, but the work they do is very much non-denominational.

Anyway, they found themselves in St George, they saw a bush Disciples flyer in their caravan park, and they rang me, and asked if they could come around for a yarn. And Robyn and I really enjoyed the time we were able to spend with them – they were a great encouragement to us.

Anyway, they told me a bit about what they do, and how they go about encouraging Christians into mission right where they are.

And that was lovely, but they left town the next day, and headed off to Bollon, and then on to Cunnamulla.

Last week, as I began reading for the sermon, and realised it was going to be a fair bit about not burying your faith – about working with your faith, to increase your faith, and to promote the growth of faith in others. And I really felt that I should share some of what Ron had told me about... But I couldn't remember it, so I was thinking, "I should ring Ron Turner and get him to tell me again, the process he uses to encourage us lazy Christians out on mission (my phrase – not his)..."

But even as I thought about it, I knew I wasn't going to do it – it was going to become yet another one of those good ideas I left undone...

Well, guess what???

Half an hour later, this comes into my inbox:

Hi Michael!

Hope you had a great time on Sunday. Paula and I are really excited by your vision for bush Disciples.

Thought I would send through a copy of our strategy for making disciples that we use for your interest.

And attached, was this little document that I'm about to hand out right now....

Now, to me, it doesn't matter how challenging this is, I believe this is God saying, "Michael, you have to share this. This is important." You see, I'd only just thought, "I should ring him and ask for it, and , nah, won't bother", and 20 minutes later, there it is... To me, that's the work of God, getting my attention, and hopefully getting your attention.

So, this is the strategy that they use, for making disciples... And I believe, that if we begin doing this sort of stuff, the Kingdom of God, cannot help, but to grow...

The challenge though, is "It ain't gunna happen, if we keep our faith buried"... This sort of stuff, requires an investment of faith, for Kingdom returns.

So, here's their strategy for making disciples, and it begins with

1. Prayer

The reason we pray, is not just to give God a shopping list for Him to fulfil... If that's our view of prayer, then we've missed the whole point. The Lord our God, is a God of relationship. He's our Heavenly Father. And He wants us to live a life of prayer – a life of communion and communicating with Him. When we pray, this is an opportunity for our hearts, to align with God's heart.

It is God's desire that all people should be saved. And so, as we commune with God, and in our prayer life, we begin to allow God's desire, to become our desire, we start praying for the sorts of things that God deeply cares about.

And so the action for us, is this:

Pray in teams

And the reason for this is a shared prayer, is a powerful prayer. **Matthew 18:¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."**

Now, for some of us, to pray together with another person – well that's a big step. But it's actually an easy step. Let that be your first step of faith.

Fast and pray for individual people and the community.

Don't just generalise your prayer. Don't be afraid to get specific. If God has put a certain person on your heart, then pray for them. Pray that God would open their eyes to His mercy.

- Ask for discernment, for God's heart and His compassion to give you eyes to see what He does
- Ask for power to set people free from the past
- And pray persistently and sacrificially

Do you know what that means? It means pray a lot, even if you have to put yourself out to make time to do it.

And then we transition to the next step – **While continuing to pray, start to connect with people.**

2. And so the second step, is Share

- **Go and meet people and talk with them.**

You know, the lost are not going to meet Christ, if Christians don't meet the lost.

Will I say that again???? The Lost will not meet Christ, if Christians do not meet the lost. I know

it's tempting to cut yourself off from the sinful world, but that's not what Jesus did. The Lost need to meet Christ's disciples.

- **Observe what people's needs are and then seek to meet those needs.**

If you know someone is crook, take them a meal; clean their house; mow their lawn... If you know a single mother isn't coping, offer to take the kids for an afternoon. Or invite her and her kids to spend the weekend with you... Everybody has needs, and as servants of Christ, we serve others.

- **Do what is easily multiplied** – that means “Do for somebody else, what can be done by another one of us, for somebody else”. If I see you serving in a certain way, I might go, “Yeah, I can do that”.
- **Spend your time meeting people who do not know Jesus**
- **Set some goals to build relationship with people that are mutual**
- **Sow seeds of truth generously in people's hearts by praying with them, expecting God to answer and reveal Himself powerfully.** (you've got friends who need prayer. And you might normally pray for them, in private, where they can't hear... Do you know how much of a witness it is to Christ, and how much it means to people, if instead of going away and praying for them in private, you ask, “Is it alright if I pray for you?”, and you pray for them, right there)

You see, most people out in the world, feel a disconnection with the church. And doing this sort of stuff, **moves us away from an “in” or “out” mentality.** We Christians need to get re-connected with those who are lost, so we can have opportunities to share our faith with them, and so they can see the Christian life modelled.

The Kingdom of God has always grown best, and bears the longest-lasting fruit, when we Christians are engaged personally with people, rather than expecting them to come to programs and respond to programs that we've organised.

3. The third step is to disciple.

Start to identify people who are open to having spiritual conversations – the person of peace.

I've never heard that phrase before – “the person of peace” – but I think I know what he means: Some people are open to hearing about your faith in Christ. And until they're open to it, there's not much we can do about it.

- **Offer to meet with them and explore their questions through Scriptures**

If they ask a question and you don't know the answer, that's OK. Just say, “I don't know, but I'll find out”. And get another Christian to help you.

- Share about those things that God has given to you and pass them on to others.
- Help them to discover the real Jesus and His call to mission
- And then Ron lists his Discovery Bible Study Method, and you can read that yourself, but the key to it is, God speaks to all of us. I'm not the intermediary between God and you. Christ is the intermediary between God and you. And when you read your bible, you can expect God to speak to you.

4. The fourth step is to **Gather**

That's what we do here. That's what we do at Westmar & Begonia & Dirranbandi – We get together to be an Authentic Christ like community – eating together, discussing the Bible, and praying together

The goal is to develop transformational communities where the Kingdom of God values are lived out in action.

And he says, Remember “Have discipleship as the priority and churches will emerge... but if you focus on developing a church structure, discipleship does not always occur.

5. And the fifth step, is to **Multiply**

Let's not set out to build a mega-church, but let's keep on multiplying.

But we don't need to worry about that just yet. We've already got 4 churches, and a few bible studies going – we began with multiplication.....

So, what do you reckon? Is that a pretty good plan for putting your faith into action?

- Praying for individuals – praying for our community – praying in teams
- Sharing – meeting people, and sharing Christ with them
- Discipling – identifying people who are open to spiritual conversations, and having them
- Gathering – inviting them to church; inviting them to Bible study
- Multiplying – as a group gets too big, be like an amoeba – divide and grow again.

Friends, Mission is at the heart of the purpose of the very existence of the church. When we consider discipleship, mission is key for our purpose.

Something that's concerned me for my whole ministry career (for want of a better word), is this: My gift is teaching – I believe that is a gift that God has given me, and so most Sundays, I teach – I teach what the Bible says...

Now, that's all very good and nice, but to what end? You see, if I simply teach, and you simply learn, then all that's going to happen, is we'll evolve into a group of very knowledgeable people...

The Lord our God demands that we go beyond knowledge, to action.

The purpose of learning, is so we know God better. And my hope and my prayer, is that day-by-day – week-by-week, you are growing deeper and deeper in love with God.

And my prayer also, is that out of this love for God, will spring forth an insatiable desire to share that with others.

The longer you've been a Christian, the easier it is to bury your faith – but it's not too late.

My prayer is, that each one of us – me and you together, will work with the faith that God has given us – investing faith for God's glory, and the building of His kingdom.

Questions???