

# Discipleship Moment

**Text: Acts 17:16-34**

I remembered something this week. It was one of those memories that just sneaks up on you, you don't know why, and you don't know how to get it back out of your head. I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and had a crush on this girl. We enjoyed each other's company and ate lunch together (or at least at the same table) practically every day, we were in band and several other classes together. One week, my youth group was having this big event (I can't really remember what the event was), and I was finally ready to ask this girl to hang out outside of school, I wanted to ask her to go to this event with me. I talked to my mom about how I should ask her.

I grew up in a community that was decidedly, and, for the most part, proudly *non-Christian*. They were too enlightened to have religious belief. It was a university town with one of the top research universities in the United States. I went to public school and most of my peers in school came from families that had secular college educations. This community was known for its progressive open mindedness and social acceptance. There are many great things that come from this kind of environment, but one of the negatives is that religious belief is seen as less-than, and unless your religion's central concern is social justice, you're considered foolish at best, and bigoted and hateful at worst. You're either an ultra-progressive, non-moral, social justice Christian (the good guys) or a gay-hating Westboro Baptist Christian (the bad guys), and there is little room for anything else.

My mom said that it was a great idea to ask her to the event, but just be careful, because she may not believe in God or be a Christian. Don't feel bad or uncomfortable if she doesn't want to. So, after school, I walked up to her at her locker and simply asked the question: "Hey, my youth group is having this event tomorrow night, would you want to go with me?" She smiled and said, "Nah, I don't really do the church thing, Christians are just kinda, BLAH!" Her tongue stuck out the side of her mouth and her eyes crossed when she made this "blah" sound. "That's alright, I understand, I'll see you tomorrow!" I said and walked away.

Here's the deal. We live in a society that does not value Christianity. There is a lot of interest in transcendence and spirituality. For Boomers (55-75 year olds), Gen X (40-55 year olds), and Elder Millennials (30-40 year olds), this spiritual-but-not-religious view is generally expressed by interest in Eastern philosophy and meditation or interest in the teachings of Jesus, but not his claims that he is divine. For Younger Millennials (25-35 year olds) and Gen Z (24 years and younger), there is less interest in spirituality. There are actually twice as many atheists in the Gen Z generation that any generation before. But for Younger Millennials and Gen Z, social acceptance, care for one another, and authenticity are in high demand: social humanism is the name of the game for Gen Z. They want people to be cared for, they want social justice and less poverty, they want equality among all races and genders.

According to the PewForum, self-proclaimed Christians still make up 70% of the U.S. population, but get this, only 63% of Americans believe in a god. Let that sink it, 70% of all Americans say they are Christians, but only 63% of all Americans say they believe in a god. No matter how we cut it, in the U.S. we have a population that is confused, wandering, and not sure what to believe. When we enter in the "marketplace" as we see Paul doing in the passage for this week, this is the reality that we walk into. The U.S. has a plurality of belief, and a plurality of ideals. Some want to do what they want without judgement, others want a utopian social order, some earnestly have a religion, but most are only marginally religious. But most people believe that Christians are just "BLAH." Mostly because we are.

So, the question is, "how do we effectively evangelize in this U.S. context?" Well, the first thing we must know is that not everyone will receive Jesus. "Wide is the path that leads to destruction, and narrow is the path that leads to life" Jesus says. So, we can't be offended or upset with people think our faith is "blah." But Mitch gave some great advice on Sunday, he gave us four things to that we can do, and it doesn't matter how successful we are, we are not called to win souls, we are simply called to do what God has commanded. So, we ought to, (1) Know the Gospel, (2) Believe the Gospel, (3) Pray the Gospel, and (4) Share the Gospel.

**Know the Gospel:** The word "Gospel" simply means "good news announcement." A gospel can be any announcement of good news. The news of a healthy new born is a "gospel," for example. What is the Christian Gospel? The Christian Gospel is this: God created all things good, and placed humans in the good world to rule it in his place. He had close, personal, relationship with them. They rebelled, they wanted to rule the world based on their own wisdom, and not God's wisdom. Mankind never recovered. No one ever was able to live in perfect relationship or with God's wisdom since then. So God sent his Son, the co-eternal second person of the Trinity, to live a perfect life for us. Jesus came, lived with God's wisdom, and then suffered the punishment of our sin: death. He was brought back to life, defeating death, and ascended into heaven to be with the Father again. The Father and the Son gave the Church the Holy Spirit, so that we, too, can live like Jesus: in perfect relationship with God and with God's wisdom. Jesus will come back to re-create all things, so that the world will be perfect again, our bodies will be made perfect, and all bad things will be sent away. This is the Gospel.

**Believe the Gospel.** God has done an amazing thing. Despite you and I constantly messing up and falling short, he has given us a great gift: life with him. We sin, we do not live by God's wisdom, but Jesus has been sinless and has lived by God's wisdom for us. So we can now live in the freedom that Jesus gives us. We are free from sin (but we are not sinless), we are free from guilt (but we are not guiltless), and we are free to love God and love our neighbors (but we do not do this perfectly all the time). Believing the Gospel means living in the freedom that God has granted us, loving God with reckless abandon, loving others with reckless abandon, knowing we will mess up, but trusting in God's love for us.

**Pray the Gospel.** We are given, through Jesus, perfect relationship with God. It doesn't feel this way. God feels distant and hard to reach. But God has come to us. Jesus says in John 15 that if we abide with Jesus and he abides with us, whatever we ask will be given. This doesn't mean that all of our petty prayers will be answered, but it means that we have direct connection to God through prayer. Even if you don't feel like you have this connection, you have it. It is yours. When you pray, God hears. When you pray, God works on your heart and mind. He won't give you everything you want, but he is with you and will speak to you through the Scripture and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

**Share the Gospel.** Paul tells us in Romans 10 that people can't come to faith unless someone tells them about Jesus. The Gospel is spread through people like you simply telling others about Jesus. You don't need to convince or argue, just tell people about Jesus. Tell people about forgiveness, tell people about freedom. Our neighbors are hurting, they are feeling guilty, they are confronted with their own failure. Tell them they are forgiven for Christ's sake. Tell them that if they receive God's love for them, they are free from their guilt. Share with them the better way, the way of Jesus. Share the Gospel.

## Going Deeper

*Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once.*

1. Are you surprised by the demographics given at the beginning of the devotional? Why or why not? What surprises you? What doesn't surprise you?
2. Have you ever evangelized to someone? Have you ever invited someone to church? How did that go? What was that like?
3. Out of the 4 tips to sharing the Gospel (Knowing the Gospel, Believing the Gospel, Praying the Gospel, and Sharing the Gospel) which is the easiest for you? Which is the hardest?
4. Read Romans 10:13-15, what does this tell us about how people are saved? Why do you think it is important to God that the Gospel is shared from person to person? Why is it important that we proclaim the Gospel?
5. With your Life Group or by yourself, read 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Ephesians 2:4-5, Colossians 1:19-20, Titus 3:4-7. Using these Scriptures (and others, if you think of them) think through and write out a 2-3 sentence explanation of the Gospel. Commit it to memory. Use this explanation of the Gospel when you talk to people about your faith.