Know, Grow, Go, & Glow

The Scripture from Matthew that was just read is one of the most significant passages in the Bible. It is the last recorded personal instruction given by Jesus to his disciples. It is a special calling from Jesus Christ to all his followers to take specific action while on this earth.

The text is known as the “Great Commission.” The word “commission” is not a suggestion but a direction, a command. Jesus’ Great Commission implies more than securing salvation as his disciple. The imperative “make disciples” is both the call to and the process of becoming a disciple.

Jesus spent a great deal of time guiding and instructing the disciples in their growth. With these words, He now sends them out to do the same. This is Jesus’ plan of establishing God’s Kingdom throughout the earth. What Jesus did in making disciples of his first followers, succeeding generations of his followers are to continue.

The word “disciple” generally means a student or an apprentice. For our purposes, a disciple is a spiritual intern. Specifically defined, discipleship is the process of spiritual development which occurs within an environment of loving accountability, whereby the believer progressively moves from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity, ultimately repeating the process with others. That does say it all, but I choose to express the Discipleship Journey, the process of spiritual development, with just four simple words – Know, Grow, Go & Glow.

First KNOW - I remember when I first began Seminary. Suddenly I was asked to pray at every church event I attended. And with not more than a month of classes under my belt, in many person’s eyes I became the “Bible Answer Woman” for all questions about Scripture and God. Those of you who know me well, know for sure that I don’t know everything that I ought to know about God. Many in the congregation, young and old, know more about such matters than I do. But not even great and wise O.D. Lively, who studies and lives in the Word daily, knows everything. But we continue to strive to grow in our knowledge.

Colossians 1 verses 9 & 10 are a part of a letter from the apostle Paul to a young church in Colosse. It says, “So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give your complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.”

It should be the lifelong quest of each and every one of us as Christians to know God better and better. But where do you get to know God? One place you get to know God is in people. God puts people on our paths to help show the way. We get to know God better through the people around us, people in our church fellowship groups, people we go to Sunday School with, sing in the choir with, attend Bible Study with. We also get to know God better in the people we serve – the hungry, the poor, the outcasts.

Another place you can know God, and to me it’s one of the most valuable, is in silence. Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God!” Like most of you I’m normally so busy and so occupied with tasks, even if it’s ministry, that I really look forward to the times when I can simply sit quietly for a few moments and listen for the “still, small voice of God.” Often times just 5 minutes of stillness and quiet can make a big difference.
And another obvious place where we get to know God is the Bible, the Scriptures, God’s Word. Practically every time I open the Bible, I learn something new about God or am reminded of something that I had known but had forgotten or taken for granted. When we read the Bible, we not only get to know the words, we get to know the author – God himself. And as you get to know the author of the Bible, the words of the Bible will mean so much more to you.

Then we move to GROW. God wants us to grow. Growth is development or improvement toward a goal called maturity, or in the Bible – perfection. Ephesians 4:14-15 “That we henceforth be no more children… but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things…”

The Bible speaks of stages in spiritual development. These stages correspond to the stages in physical development of babyhood, childhood and adulthood. When one comes to the knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ, he or she becomes a born-again child of God and goes through a stage of spiritual infancy. He or she is spiritually immature. John refers to this stage as “babes” in the faith. (1 John 2:12).

Nobody is born a full grown human being. Likewise, no one is born a full grown Christian. People are born babies and they need to be tended to. They cannot do for themselves. They cannot walk, talk, dress, or the like. Spiritual babes also need to be tended to, followed up on and prayed with, talked to, and dealt with. As a newborn baby gets nourishment from milk and strained foods, the spiritual infant feeds on the fundamental truths of God in order to grow.

The next stage of spiritual growth is when we have been weaned from the basic elements of scripture and have developed an insatiable hunger for the truth. We have come out of our spiritual infancy and crave the solid meat of the Word. 1 Corinthians 13:11 “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

As we plunge into the Word of God, the Holy Spirit reveals more and more truth to us and as we continue to apply it to our lives we grow strong in spirit. We begin to experience a transformation as we are becoming more and more like Christ.

The next stage of spiritual growth is when we have become saturated with the word of God. Simply reading it isn’t enough. It needs to be put into practice. However, having a good knowledge of scripture does not make one spiritually mature. I’ve heard said that Satan can quote the whole Bible word for word. I don’t know what reporter witnessed that event. I’ll have to check it out on Snopes. But the point is – we must apply what we learn from the Bible to our daily lives and learn from our experiences; otherwise as James says, “We are hearers and not doers of the word.” As we mature in spirit, the word penetrates deep within our heart and we come to realize just how awesome our God truly is.

Then we move on to GO. We are called by God to go with Him in his mission. We are called to act and accept an important assignment. When I was a kid, I used to watch “Mission Impossible” all the time. It was one of my favorite shows. I particularly liked the very first part of the show, because that was when Mr. Phelps would get his assignment on a small tape that would self destruct after the assignment was described. The tape always started the same way, “Mr. Phelps, your mission, should you choose to accept it….” And then the assignment was described.
In many ways, our Christian life is very similar. God is holding out our assignment, and he has clearly defined it in scripture. Yet the choice is ours. Do we join the adventure or simply watch from the sidelines? What are we called to do? What is our assignment? We are called to serve God by serving others.

Matthew 25:35-36, 40 - Jesus said, “For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me…. I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!”

The good news is this, God not only calls us to serve, he says, “Let me show you how to do it.” 1 Peter 4:10 “God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.” God gives each Christian a gift or gifts - something put into you and into me, so that others can profit or be built up because of it. God made you to make a difference, and what really matters is not the duration of your life, but the donation of your life.

When you go, also Glow. Matthew 4:14-16 says, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light unto all that are in the house. Let you light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” God does not want us to hide our faith. Our life should be a living witness. Let the light of Christ’s love within you shine, radiate, glow on others. Your actions and attitude will speak volumes. They will get the attention of others so they will listen to your words.

Acts 1:8 – Jesus tells his disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Christ commanded us to tell others about Him and promised to give us power to do it. In the same way that a person is called to be a witness in a legal proceeding, we are asked to be Christ’s witnesses. In a legal proceeding, the witness will testify to the things that they have personally seen and heard. As Christians, we have the opportunity and responsibility to tell others what we have “seen” and “heard” and what we have experienced in our walk with the Lord.

You are the only one who can tell your story. No one else can adequately describe the wonderful things that have changed in your life since you surrendered yourself to Christ. If Christ has done great things for you, you have the privilege of sharing that good news with others. Remember the woman at the well? If the desolate and downtrodden woman at the well could be a witness, certainly you can do the same.

I have a plaque that I love on my desk in my office. Actually it is a rock shaped like a fish with a cross on it. I got it as a bunko prize a few months ago. I have no doubt that this was a God-send to me. On it are these words: “Only God can turn a mess into a message.” All of us are insufficient for the task of witnessing. But God is strong, and He can be strong in us if we let Him.

Romans 10:14 – “But how can they call to him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?”
We live in a world of mixed up and messed up people, who know little about God, Christ and eternal life. Look around you. The world is searching for earthly pleasures to fill the void that only God can fill completely. People are looking for all kinds of truths where there is only One. Who is going to tell them about the reason for hope? We need to recommit ourselves to reach people for Christ. Don’t be afraid of making mistakes. The biggest mistake is not to try, to say nothing. God will still use your witness even if you make a mistake. He blesses your obedience in trying. Often God does his best work despite us! I can preach and think it’s my best ever and nothing comes of it. But sometimes I think I laid an egg big enough to hatch twin dinosaurs, and then later hear about how God used it uniquely for many.

The last sentence of the Great Commission is “Lo, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” We need never fear that we will be left alone to speak for Christ. He will always provide us with what to say and the power to be effective. We just have to learn to trust. But we must remember that our going and glowing won’t save anyone. We can’t change the hearts of people, but God promises to do that. We are to do our part – to prepare the ground. The outcome is in God’s hands. The Holy Spirit is the one who makes disciples. He is the one who has the power to transform the world. We are just his instruments.

A story is told of a little boy who fell out of bed. When he was asked what happened, he said, “I guess I just stayed too close to the gettin’ in place.” That is where the early Christian community was on its spiritual journey, and where you might be on your own spiritual journey. Many find it easier to stay close to the getting-in place and do not grow to spiritual maturity. For many Christians, spiritual maturity is elusive. It is something they know they should aim for or want, yet they have no idea how to achieve it. When we become a child of God, we are given all we need “in Christ” to become a spiritually mature believer. The wonderful thing about being involved in God’s maturing process is that we will be changed. God does the changing, but we have to want to grow up and make the choice to participate in the growth process. We have to exercise our spiritual muscles. We have to practice for improvement. We must learn God’s Word, open our minds for renewal, and then be obedient to what we learn by putting our faith and love into action.

The last words that the Risen Christ said to his followers before he ascended into Heaven were “Go make disciples.” Making disciples is the mission of every church. It is our responsibility as a church to nurture, encourage and challenge persons on their life-long spiritual journeys. To accomplish this, we must have a discipleship plan – an intentional process through which we guide individuals step-by-step toward spiritual growth.

Here at First United Methodist Church of Euless, we want to help people grow beyond their getting-in place. We want to meet people where they are spiritually, and walk with them, and help them move from knowing God to making God known. We have developed our “Discipleship Journey.” This is much more than just another study or series of studies. It represents a new intentionality of our church in guiding people toward a life of discipleship.

I encourage you to come next Sunday and learn about the Discipleship Journey of First Euless. Come and discover how each of us – me and you and you and you and you – can become real, informed, and committed disciples of Jesus Christ.