

This is the final week of our series called “Great Commission Living.” Hopefully by now you know that the Great Commission is Jesus’ final instructions to His followers to “Go Make Disciples.” Making Disciples requires that we are living our faith in our everyday lives. The Barna Institute reports that *“9 / 10 people who experienced a big life change as a result of a spiritual conversation say the conversation was with someone they know well or very well.”* Our lives and our relationship are important when it comes to fulfilling the Great Commission.

Not only do we touch people’s lives individually, but we also do it collectively. Let’s take a couple minutes to think about the way we do that by looking at a little over a week in the life of Peace, things that happened here from November 4th through 11th. Sundays are the days for us to connect with each other in worship, Sunday School, Bible Classes, Confirmation Classes, Youth Group, Youth Praise Band and All Pro Dads. We welcomed the community around us by being the home for the Dexter Coop Preschool during the week, hosting the Jackson Trippers senior’s travel meeting, the Thornton Farms community meeting, UMAISE wheelchair basketball and a variety of groups using the gym for basketball or family recreation. We welcomed people in for Spanish Classes, AA and 12 step groups, Brownies and launch the Sitting Volleyball program. We collected and packaged Christmas Shoe Boxes and gifts for VA patients. We had Bible Studies during the week, choir, hand bells and praise team practices. The Ladies continued planning for Advent by Candlelight. Needless to say we are better together because we do far more together than we could every do individually. The real measure for Peace is how many lives are being changed for Christ.

So how do you measure your life? Do we measure our lives by how much we have or how much we do? Are our lives more important if we have power or influence? Is the key measurement how happy we are or how much time we get to spend in recreation? I have had several conversations in the past couple of weeks who feel their lives are out of control because they are so busy. We get the impression that we have to be busy all the time. But do we? Maybe we have to learn how to say no to some of the good things that come our way so that we can focus on the best. Good things that consistently pull us away from our families or from worshipping the Lord are not that good. Jesus tells us that the two most important things are to love the Lord and to love others. What would happen if we measured our lives by the love we have for God, for family, for others?

Maybe what we need is an attitude of gratitude to help shape our lives. Everything we have is a gift from the Lord. You might be thinking “but I worked hard for the things that I have.” That may be true. But who gave you the abilities, the strength, the energy, the good health to work hard? Those are gifts from God. Jesus gave His life for so that we could have a new life in Him. He paid the debt for our sins that we could never pay. He gives us the Holy Spirit to lead and

guide us through life. Recognizing the good gifts God gives us leads us to want to worship the Lord, to offer Him our thanks and praise.

Martin Luther makes that clear in his explanation of the First Article of the Apostle's Creed.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. What does this mean? I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife (spouse) and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

If we wanted to put this another way, we could say that God has blessed us to be a blessing to others. God told Abraham when He called him to be the head of the Jewish family line, ***“All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”*** (Genesis 12:3 NLT) There are a number of different ways that we can bring God's blessing to others.

1. One is to make connections. We do that by growing a relationship with other people, by becoming friends with them. Then we can connect them with our Christian friends, inviting them to do different things with you and your friends. When the opportunity comes, we can talk with them about Christ. If the Holy Spirit opens their heart to Jesus, then we can try to connect them with Peace or with another Christian family. But our connection with them has to be real, not contingent upon their becoming a Christian.
2. A second way to bless others is by serving them. Jesus lived a life of service. When we take the time to help another person, when we go out of our way to lend a helping hand it makes a difference. We are also blessed by serving others. I think there are two key things people should do when they are feeling depressed. One they should find another person they can serve or help because they are taking the focus off themselves and putting it on the other person. The second is they should praise God, because giving praise to God always lifts our spirits.
3. A third thing we can do is to share, to give to help others and to help grow God's family. God doesn't need our money. Everything belongs to God. But He wants our hearts. Jesus warns us that we can't serve both God and money (Matthew 16:24) He also tells us, ***“Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”*** (Matthew 16:20 NLT) Giving to God is an act of worship, an expression of our trust and thanks to God. Sharing brings joy to us, to others and to God.

God brings us together as Christians to be partners in the Great Commission, in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It has been exciting all week to see that play out in the Christmas Shoe Box project. Not only did the member of Peace bring in full shoe boxes and donations to be put into shoe boxes last Sunday night, but we have been a shoe box drop off site this week. We have had people from other churches, families and individuals drop off hundreds of shoe boxes to be given to kids all over the world. We have prayed with these people for God to bless the kids who receive these boxes and to open their hearts to the Gospel message included in each box. This is Christians working together to fulfill the Great Commission.

God brings us together at Peace to be partners in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are all in this together. It is not just the money that you give to help support the ministry of Peace, it is the things that you say and the things that you do to make a difference. I mentioned some of the things that happened at Peace over an 8 day period. Let me tell you about some of the things people did during that week to make these things happen.

People cleaned the church, sang in the Praise Band, lead Sunday School and Bible Classes, worked with our youth, welcomed our guests, taught classes, helped with the Brownies, coached and served our guests. People got things ready for the worship services and the baptism, spend time sorting and packing items for the VA and the Shoe Boxes. God has given us different gifts and abilities to serve together and grow God's family. We are partners in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For that we give thanks and praise to God. Amen.