

## 4 Practices Series

### 2 Think Steps, Not Programs

Matthew 28:16-20

#### INTRO:

Today is Rededication Sunday, our opportunity to join in Covenant Renewal as we rededicate ourselves to the mission of Jesus Christ. Last week we considered the practice of Clarifying the Win to foster unity in all the ministries of our church. We are in ministry to help people take steps towards Christ and to being the best people they can be. This is true in all the ways First Church is in ministry to the community and the world. Today we are moving on to thinking about steps and not programs.

May God guide us as we continue to think about how we can best connect people to Christ and not just look busy!

#### ME:

Looking busy! I used to work at a store called MJ Designs. It was a craft store. Ever heard of it? Anyone ever shopped there? It's out of business now. I worked in receiving and I stocked the shelves. But the first thing I did every morning was buff the floors with a high speed buffer. Sometimes towards the end of my shift I would finish my work early. Since I got paid by the hour I would shuffle stuff around on the shelves looking busy. Or I

would work in the stockroom stacking and restacking boxes. I looked busy to management, but I wasn't really making any progress.

The tendency in business, or even in church, is to mistake activity for progress. We think that just because people are busy and doing a lot of stuff that we are being successful. The truth is, if all that activity isn't taking you where you want to go, then it's just wasted time.

WE:

Do you think activity and busyness are signs of progress? Sometimes they are, but sometimes they're just people shuffling stuff around on the shelves to look busy. Let's open our minds and our hearts to Jesus and his great commission to the disciples and to us and see what it has to do with steps:

Let's pray for eyes to see . . . first . . .

GOD:

Matthew 28:16–17 Meanwhile, the eleven disciples were on their way to Galilee, headed for the mountain Jesus had set for their reunion. The moment they saw him they worshiped him. Some, though, held back, not sure about worship, about risking themselves totally.

I don't know if we can blame some of them for holding back, this is pretty intense! I love the subtlety in this translation too! Would you be willing to risk yourselves totally at that moment?

18–20 Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: “God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.”

Did you notice the steps in this program Jesus is instituting? Go out, train, baptize, instruct them in the practice of all he has commanded them. This program is going somewhere! It is designed to move people into a relationship with Jesus!

YOU:

They say that programs can lead to life change . . . or . . . programs can just become a way of life. There is a real difference between a step and a program. A dictionary defines a program as:

A system of services, opportunities, or projects, usually designed to meet a social need.

Most churches are great at designing programs to meet needs. Church staff and leadership usually feel like it is their job to know their congregation and community needs and to create appropriate programs to meet those needs.

When you “think steps” there is a real difference in your perspective. Now your priority is not to meet someone’s needs, but to help them get where they need to go. The same dictionary defines steps like this:

One of a series of actions, processes, or measures taken to achieve a goal.

Steps are part of a process designed to take people somewhere. The book 7 Practices of Effective Ministry says that when you think programs, you begin by asking, “What is the need?” Then you ask, “How can we meet that need?”

When we think “steps” we start by asking, “Where do we want people to go?” Then we ask, “How are we going to get them there?”

We should still have programs, but not to meet needs. We should have programs that move people to where they need to go. It reminds me of the Wesleyan Way of Salvation. There is Prevenient Grace that is God at work in our lives before we are aware of it. There is Justifying Grace where we accept God’s grace in Christ and are restored to God. Then there comes Sanctifying Grace where we grow in grace and love.

In confirmation classes we describe it as the House of Salvation. Imagine a house where Prevenient Grace is the porch, Justifying Grace is the door, and Sanctifying Grace is the interior of the house. We begin on the porch of Prevenient Grace where we are drawn to the house by God's grace and we enter into the house by the doorway of Justifying Grace and then we walk around the interior of the house getting to know our salvation and being made holy in Sanctifying Grace.

The author of *7 Practices for Effective Ministry* says that churches often tend to hold so many studies or classes that they hold hands with their adults too long. They say that is like a baseball team that keeps its runners on first. If classes don't keep moving, if they are not seen as steps, they can work against people growing spiritually.

Jesus hints at this in our text. This week we are reading The Message translation:

18-20 Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."

This practice resonates with our mission statement too. It seems most connected to our Growing in Faith. Growing is taking steps towards maturity in faith and love and grace.

**BOTTOM LINE:**

Programs must help people take steps towards Christ.

**WE:**

We began our service by praying Wesley's Covenant prayer together. Each New Year Methodist gatherings in Britain and eventually around the world celebrated a Covenant Renewal Service. It began in the 1750s with a desire by Charles and John Wesley to renew the commitment of the people under their care. It continued to be celebrated near the New Year mark in London, but Wesley established it in new societies whenever he went to visit them.

John Wesley often spoke of this service as deeply meaningful and moving for the people when writing about it in his journal:

“Many mourned before God, and many were comforted” (April 1756)

“It was, as usual, a time of remarkable blessing” (October 1765)

“It was an occasion for a variety of spiritual experiences ... I do not know that ever we had a greater blessing. Afterwards many desired to return

thanks, either for a sense of pardon, for full salvation, or for a fresh manifestation of His graces, healing all their backslidings” (January 1, 1775).

We have all taken steps towards Christ, and many of us with Christ. Wesley’s Covenant Prayer is a great way for us to get back in step with Jesus. I would like to invite you to look in your bulletin again so we can end this message praying it together again:

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;

put me to doing, put me to suffering;

let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,

exalted for you, or brought low for you;

let me be full,

let me be empty,

let me have all things,

let me have nothing:

I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things

to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

you are mine and I am yours. So be it.

And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.'

Amen.