

## Introduction

I'd like to begin by addressing a critical issue. How do perishing people get rescued? How do they become disciples of Jesus? Tony Campolo often asks groups to whom he speaks this question, "**How did you come to Jesus.**" Very few answer that it was through a Christian radio or television show or a church program. Almost all answer instead that it was through a Christian who cared about them telling them about Jesus, which leads Campolo to conclude, ". . . **the best and most powerful means of evangelism is ordinary people who love their friends and relatives and tell them about Christ.**" He's right. Most perishing people are rescued by disciples of Jesus who love them carrying out the Great Commission and that's what I'm going to preach about today on the second Sunday of our "Rescue the Perishing Month."

## Become a Disciple

In Matthew 28:16-20, the resurrected Jesus gave His disciples the very last instruction He would ever give them. We call it "the Great Commission" and it tells us specifically how to rescue the perishing. We do five things.

First, we ourselves become disciples of Jesus. Verse 16 and the clause "**some were doubtful**" in verse 17 reveal to whom He spoke His Great Commission. It was to 11 of the 12 original disciples and another group of disciples as well. That implies the first thing we need to do in order to rescue the perishing - become disciples ourselves.

Don't get me wrong. There have been instances in which non-disciples have made disciples. I know two devoted followers of Jesus, for instance, who were led to Him by the same man – who was and still is a mediocre professing Christian at best. The words "**I am with you always**" in verse 20 help explain that. They indicate that making disciples is primarily the work of Jesus Himself, through the Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit. And we can never limit what He's capable of doing. He can use non-disciples to make disciples if He wills and does.

But that's exceptional not normal and not something upon which we can count. Jesus' method of choice to rescue the perishing is disciples making other disciples. So, let's become one. Let's make and carry out the decision to be with Him in order to learn and do all that He says.

## Go

There's a second thing we do to rescue the perishing. We **"go,"** to quote Jesus in verse 19.

This **"'Go' Strategy"** of Jesus stands in sharp contrast to the **"'Come' Strategy"** of our modern American church. This strategy is actually called **"Attractional Evangelism,"** which defines its approach. The local church offers programs and events that appeal to the perishing. Then when the perishing come to those, it presents the gospel message in subtle ways that they like. It's hoped that they will start attending church and eventually make a decision for Jesus as we say it.

The rise of sports evangelism is a classic example of what I mean. Shirl Hoffman describes this phenomenon well in his enlightening book *Good Game*: **"The trend of inserting sport into church programs and supporting those programs with the church's general budget has vastly accelerated in recent years and enthusiasm runs high."** But it isn't just sports that churches use to attract the perishing. It's a host of programs and events: jazz festivals, Christian night clubs, coffee houses, comedy nights, juice bars, rock or rap concerts, and on it goes.

The problem is that Attractional Evangelism doesn't make disciples. It's inherently consumerist and thus, what it does make, when it succeeds, is what C.S. Lewis called **"hyphenated Christians."** People become only Christianized versions of what they were before, what we might call Christian secularists. They incorporate Jesus into their lives here and there where they think they need Him but nowhere else.

If you and I want to make disciples, we have to **"go"** to where the

perishing are. That is of course the real world of our own personal lives. Jesus has planted us where we are, in the places of our everyday lives. And in those places, there are the perishing. So, we go to them. That is, we make them our primary target group to rescue and direct our efforts to do just that – rescue them. The “Rescuer-Perishing” card we passed out purposes to assist you with that.

## **Proclaim**

We rescue the perishing by doing a third thing. We proclaim. That’s inherent in the word “**make.**” Paul’s logic in Romans 10:14 reveals how it is. How can the perishing submit to Jesus unless they believe? And how can they believe unless they hear? And how can they hear unless someone tells them? So, we tell them.

In his book that we’re reading, *A Life that Matters*, Ron Hutchcraft shares a testimony that reveals the urgency of we doing so. He turned on the news one morning and heard about a murder at a local university. A student walked up to a dining room table, pulled out a gun, and shot and killed another student named Cindy. Ron was stunned and grieved when he heard the news because Cindy and he had been good friends in high school. But it wasn’t just her death that grieved him. It was his own silence as well. He says that he had talked to her about many things: family, homework, classmates, the news, the future, and more. But now, none of those things mattered to her at all. The only thing that mattered to her now was what he hadn’t talked to her about, Jesus. He concludes his testimony with these words: **“Even as I think about this tragedy these many years later, it still hurts. Not so much Cindy’s death, but my silence.”** His silence, as they say, was deafening.

Sometimes, we cop out on the proclamation part of making disciples by relying on the manifestation part. We afraid to tell the perishing about Jesus. So, we don’t and justify it. Yes, I didn’t tell them with words but I did show them with my life – and that’s enough.

I speak from experience. Many years ago, I was the law clerk for a

Summit County common pleas judge. The judge was a secularist who knew almost nothing about Jesus. I knew that I should tell him about Him and wanted to, but was afraid to and never did. I was able to rationalize it though: **“It’s true that I didn’t tell him about Jesus. But I clearly reflected Him by the way I lived and worked in the judge’s presence. And that’s enough.”**

But it isn’t. Conspicuously hanging in our secretary Sandy’s office is a Francis of Assisi quote: **“Preach the gospel all the time. If necessary use words.”** But the fact is it’s always necessary. It isn’t enough just to show Jesus with our lives. We must also tell about Him with our mouths. The perishing usually won’t become disciples of His if we don’t. The judge for whom I clerked never did. He died, perishing I assume, ten years ago. I can’t justify it. My silence, like Hutchcraft’s, was deafening and I deeply regret it.

So, let’s proclaim. Let’s tell the perishing about Jesus. I’ve read two outstanding books that will assist you, in practical ways, to do that. One is our book of the month, *A Life that Matters* by Ron Hutchcraft. The other is *Out of the Saltshaker* by a dynamic writer, Rebecca Pippert. I will also share some of the most vital insights I’ve learned about telling in the remaining sermons of our “Rescue the Perishing Month.” Learn and apply all of that. You will be able to proclaim, courageously and competently, if you do. If I had known 30 years ago what I know now (what I’m going to preach), I would not have been silent. I would have courageously and competently proclaimed Jesus to that judge.

## **Manifest**

A fourth thing we do to rescue the perishing is, manifest. We manifest what we proclaim. That’s only common sense isn’t it? As all of us know, what we are and do speaks more loudly than what we say.

We live in what is called a **“postmodern”** world. That means that the masses now believe in and long to experience spiritual realities. One new age website, for instance, [www.infinitebeing.com](http://www.infinitebeing.com), says this: **“With**

**Infinite Being you can: make the deepest possible spiritual connection and consciously transform your reality.”** Notice that last clause, **“transform your reality.”** That’s what the perishing are looking for – something that will transform their reality. So we proclaim that Jesus does. He is a presence and goodness here and now that we can engage. And when we do, He gives us graces and powers that lay beyond or even set aside the usual course of life and even nature itself.

I once talked with a third generation non-Christian whose two sisters were criticizing her handling of their mother’s estate. She was deeply upset about it, which afforded me the natural opportunity to tell her about Jesus. I claimed to her that He gives His followers the grace to receive criticism with gratitude and joy instead of with the defensiveness and anger people universally do.

That’s the kind of thing we proclaim about Jesus. But is it true? There’s an old aphorism that says, **“The proof is in the pudding.”** That means results are what count. The test of something is reality. We proclaim that Jesus transforms people and human life. But does He actually, in reality? That’s what the perishing want to know.

There’s only one way to show them He does. It’s by manifesting what we proclaim. They must *see* that our persons and lives have been transformed. So, we show them, in the natural course of things, that they have been. We do that by being and behaving like transformed kingdom people. We manifest Jesus in other words. There’s proof in the pudding when we do.

Joseph Aldrich, president of Multnomah Bible College, spoke at a conference. A young woman approached him after he did and identified herself. She had lived next door to him years before and had babysat his children. She went on to tell Aldrich that when she walked across the strip of grass between her home and his, it was like going from darkness to light. She couldn’t figure out why his family was so different than hers. So, after she’d put his children to bed, she’d go to the den, pull books off the shelf, and try to find out what made him tick. She then

told him that someone had led her to Jesus two years before. **“But,”** she said, **“The main reason I trusted Jesus was because of what I saw in you and your family fifteen years before.”**

What an instructive testimony that is. Aldrich manifested and someone else proclaimed Jesus. That in turn led a young woman to apprentice herself to Him.

That explains why I said what I said earlier. We must be disciples to make disciples. That’s because discipleship enables Jesus to transform our persons and lives into the image and likeness of His. Those transformed persons and lives then manifest Him to the perishing.

## **Teach**

Verse 20 reveals the fifth thing we do to rescue the perishing. We teach. As a result of our going, proclaiming, and manifesting, some perishing people will decide to become disciples of Jesus. We don’t then just let them “wing it.” We give them detailed and thorough instruction instead about two things: (1) God and His presence and goodness with us; and (2) how to interact with that in our everyday lives. As we teach, we draw on what we’ve learned about those two things not only from the Bible but from our own experiences with them as well.

I’ve written a discipleship curriculum for the express purpose of doing that – teaching. It’s comprised of seven studies, each of which teaches disciples how to **“observe what Jesus commanded.”**

## **Conclusion**

That then is the Great Commission and I’d note in closing that the first Quakers in England carried it out fervently. They had a motto that reflected the depth of their passion for it, **“All witness and all witness all the time.”** They not only said that but lived it out. They were disciples who went, proclaimed, manifested, and taught. May we do the same with those whom we know and meet every day. We’ll rescue the perishing if we do.