

## Spiritual Life:

*“The Beach”*

8-29-10

This morning we begin a series called ‘Spiritual Life’. It is actually a chance for us to peer into the pages of the Gospels and ask the question, “Jesus, how do you grow people?” How did you take this small band of fishermen and tax collectors and sinners, and make them into world changers?”

The catalyst of these messages really started back in 1987, when I was preaching a sermon in a small church in South Darke County, in Western Ohio. It was about 9:20am on this Sunday morning and the usual crowd was shuffling into the church. Except for a young woman in her early 20’s who moved rather timidly from the front door, through the gathered people at the back of the church into a seat about six rows from the front. A few people had shaken her hand but I could tell she was not wanting a whole lot of attention given to her. Nor were we a church that gave much attention to new people, other than to give them a hearty handshake and smile and move them on to where ever they were going.

Well the service started and this particular Sunday I was going to preach a sermon that was going to end with an altar call. I ended the message, prayed a closing prayer, we all stood up to begin singing the final hymn and I opened the altar for anyone who wanted to come forward. When I did, this young girl did not hesitate, she got out of her seat and came straight down to the altar. She wanted Jesus and she wanted Jesus now. She came and buried her head in the carpeted steps that lead up to the altar area, and began to weep. I had my hymnal and I was singing the song, I looked up and saw that not one person in the church moved. So I set my hymnal down and went over and knelt by her and prayed with her.

After we prayed and while the song was still played she turned her head toward me, and through tears and hair she said, “What do I do now, pastor?” Now I am pretty sure what she meant was do I wait here until the song is over, or do I get up now and go back to my seat. But my thoughts went into a completely different direction, I thought about this girl’s spiritual road ahead, the obstacles and the victories, the pitfalls and joys. Then I thought about the congregation that was sitting behind her and I realized that they were totally unprepared to help answer that question for this woman, even more than that, if push came to shove, the pastor who was kneeling beside her, yes me, was totally unprepared to help her either. Oh, I would come up with something. I would offer her to come to a bible study or I would suggest a book or two to read, but by and large I had no plan, no real plan for the intentional spiritual development for any person who came into the church I served.

This story reflects a statement made by Howard Hendricks some time ago, He said, “Most of us, are the product of unintentional discipling.” When we enter many churches these days, we are in many ways, on our own, to try and figure it out when it comes to our spiritual development.

I believe one of the reasons for our unintentional approach is that we have not spent time thinking about why we need to be intentional, why we need a process

So this series of messages over the next 6 weeks is going to set out to open up a question to Jesus and the scriptures. That question is this, “Jesus, how did you do it? How did you take that rag tag band of tax collectors and sinners and turn them into world changers? Men and women who were totally and fully surrendered to you.

So I want to begin today by addressing that issue and explain why we need to be intentional in the form of a picture we call **the ocean diagram**. It is a window into the stages of individual spiritual development that provides a biblical seedbed for an intentional pathway to discipleship. The ocean represents the body of Christ and the figures represent the 6 identifiable stages people experience as they move to a deeper and more abiding relationship with God.

We are going to look at one stage each week. As we look at the New Testament, we see each of these stages emerge in the form of men and women who are experiencing them. Each week, with each stage we will **ANSWER** some critical questions about these people such as:

- Who is the primary person at this stage?
  - What is the primary question they wrestle with at that particular stage?
  - What are the primary relationships that move them further on their spiritual journey?
  - What is the primary barrier that will stop them dead in their tracks?
- and
- What is the primary ministry the church must put in place in order to help them move forward?

So if you're ready to take some notes, let's begin.

Today we are looking at **Stage One** this is the person on the beach. The primary person here is an **unchurched person** who has no connection to the church.

*"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:10*

I want you to just stop right now and close your eyes and think about the answer to this question. "If they think about the church at all, what question might run through an unchurched person's mind as they drive by our church on Sunday morning?" (Take some answers from the congregation) I am going to sum it up here, it is stated in many different ways but all responses are summed up in this primary question: **"Is this for real?"** This is a question of relevance and what these unchurched people are questioning is the ability of this church to be relevant to them.

Now I want you to remember, these are not church people who have a deep and lasting respect for the church.

*'Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."' 'If you can?'" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." Mark 9:21-23*

But there is a primary relationship in the life of an unchurched person that cuts to the heart of that question and helps trigger the move from unchurched to the next stage of spiritual development and that primary relationship is an **old trusted friend**. WE are the old trusted friends of our unchurched co-workers and neighbors. Our kids are on the same baseball team together; we're on the same bowling team; we work in the same office; they have known us for a long time and have come to trust us.

This relationship between old trusted friends is reflected in John chapter 1 in a conversation between Philip and Nathaniel. *“Philip found Nathaniel and told him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth.’”*

Here we have two long time friends engaged in a conversation about Jesus. Listen to Nathaniel’s response, *“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”* This response reveals the primary barrier that keeps an unchurched person from moving toward the church in their search for the truth. That barrier is **cynicism**. Have you ever heard that? “The church? Can anything good come from there?” What we see here is that Nazareth had no credibility with Nathaniel and, for the unchurched person, the church has virtually no credibility either. What *does* have credibility with Nathaniel, however, is Philip.

When faced with Nathaniel’s raw cynicism, Philip’s evangelistic efforts boiled down to a non-threatening invitation, Philip simply said, *“Come and See”*.

In these words we have the foundation for the primary ministry to an unchurched person. It is a **come & see** ministry.

The acid test as to whether your church has a come & see ministry is not whether you or I will come because most of us in church will come to anything the church offers. The acid test is whether or not the average person in your congregation will stake their reputation on the quality of your worship service and invite their unchurched friends.

Let’s play this out in our minds. Someone in our congregation has just invited their somewhat cynical unchurched friend to come and see our worship service. Maybe they did that on Wednesday and the person accepted the invitation and now it is Sunday morning. To keep going with this scenario, where would you be if you thought that your friend was going to come. That’s right, out in the lobby. Now they look out the lobby window, and there to their surprise comes their friend’s car pulling into the parking lot. What is our congregation member thinking to himself or herself? They are excited but they are also sizing up if this is going to be a good experience for their friend. They maybe thinking, “O God, I hope Dan didn’t write this one Saturday night!” “I hope the choir doesn’t sing out of tune!”

Why are they thinking this to themselves? Because Monday’s coming and they will once again have to face their friend at the water cooler.

And if it was not worth coming and seeing, then we will have a lot of faithful church attenders coming to this church because it is Your church, but we won’t have a lot of new people because people in this church won’t stake their reputations on a service that is not worth coming and seeing for their friends.

So we have to ask ourselves, is our worship really worth coming and seeing? In that critical moment in the marketplace, Philip did not hesitate because he was confident he had something relevant and meaningful for Nathaniel to come and see.

So in this first stage of spiritual development, how do we stack up as a church?

Do we have a lot of unchurched friends who if they did encounter Christ in their life would ask, “What do I do now?”

Is there a relevance to our ministry here that captures the attention of unchurched people and speaks to their real needs?

Do we have a church full of trustworthy friends who know lots of people around this community in need of God in their life?

Does cynicism run rampant in our community?

Is our ministries, our worship, our student ministry, our children's and men's and women's ministry and others worth coming and seeing?

These are the questions we have to answer if we are ever going to be used by God to reach the unchurched community that lives right around us, here in Tipp City. If we answer these questions successfully, then maybe just maybe God, will begin to have the cars of unchurched people start rolling into our parking lot as they begin to move toward stage two in their spiritual development. Let's Pray