

## ***“Teach One Another”***

*Deuteronomy 6:1-9 • Colossians 3:1-17*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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This morning I want you to think for a moment about some of the people who have influenced thousands of people to follow Christ over the last 75 years. Now let me suggest some names to you. I want you to raise your hand if you know who the person is. That means you have to pay attention. OK, how many of you have heard of Billy Graham? How many of you have heard of Jim Rayburn, the founder of Young Life? What about Dawson Trotman? He was the founder of the Navigators. How about Bill and Vonette Bright? They started Campus Crusade for Christ. Alright, here's a couple more. Richard Halverson was the chaplain of the United States Senate for a number of years.

Think about all the people who have come to know Christ through the ministry of these people. Now, other than Jesus, what do all of these people have in common? Here's what. They were all inspired and influenced and mentored by Henrietta Mears. How many of you are familiar with her? Billy Graham once said, “I doubt if any other woman outside my wife and mother has had such a marked influence on my life. She is certainly one of the greatest Christians I have ever known.” And Bill and Vonette Bright started Campus Crusade while living at Henrietta Mears' home.

For most of the Twentieth Century, the name Henrietta Mears was nearly synonymous with the Sunday School movement. From 1928 until her death in 1963, Mears was the Director of Christian Education at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, California. When she took the position Sunday school attendance was about 450. Within just a couple of years it was over 4,000 and at one point was over 6,000 each week. In addition to leading and training teachers to staff a Sunday school program that large, Mears also started Gospel Light, the first publishing company to produce curriculum specific for every school grade, and she was a co-founder of the National Sunday School Association.

If you grew up going to church, there's a good chance that Sunday school has been a big part of your life. The Sunday school movement first started in the late 1700s in England and quickly moved to the United States. It was really a response to the Industrial Revolution. Before there were laws prohibiting it, the children of factory workers usually worked in the factories with their parents, often for 13 hours a day, six days a week. As a result, they were not educated and were mostly illiterate. Churches began to offer Sunday schools where they would teach the children to read and write, using the Bible as their textbook. The idea spread quickly among churches and turned into a movement. As laws were enacted that prohibited children from working in the factories and a system of public schools was built, Sunday schools no longer needed to teach basic skills and so they concentrated primarily on religious education.

Thanks to people like Henrietta Mears, the Sunday school movement had a tremendous impact on teaching the Christian faith to millions of families. But somehow in the process we've forgotten the bigger picture – the mission of the church. We can get so caught up in *doing* church that we forget to *be* the church.

When you look at what the New Testament tells us about the mission of the church, it's very clear that the Church exists primarily to make disciples of Jesus. Actually, the Church exists to make disciples of Jesus who make disciples of Jesus. Just before he ascended to Heaven, Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Make disciples. Somewhere along the line we exchanged making disciples for “Christian education.” It was a subtle change at first, but a

significant one. Education is about transferring knowledge. It's about learning facts. Discipleship is about a relationship. When you look at how Jesus taught his disciples, it was by spending lots of time with them, teaching them along the way. Sometimes he taught them with words, but more often they learned by watching how Jesus lived and how he interacted with other people.

One of the things that happened when we bought into the idea of Christian Education is that we professionalized it. Just like we have professionals who teach our children in school, we decided we needed professionals to teach us at church. The result is that for most of us, the only time we spend learning the Bible is during the Sunday morning sermon. Now I try to make sure that the sermon teaches not only what the Bible says but also how it applies to your life. But the truth is that's less than thirty minutes a week. And most really committed Christians today worship an average of 2-3 times a month.

In Colossians 3, the Apostle Paul gives us a better way, a biblical way of being disciples and making disciples. He says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom." We're looking at the "one another" commands of the New Testament and this morning we are talking about teaching one another. The church is not primarily an institution that provides religious services. The church is the Body of Christ. It's a group of people who have been transformed by Jesus who then band together to build one another up.

Lesslie Newbigin was an Anglican missionary to India for many years. When he returned to England in the 1950s he found that the church there had lost its sense of purpose. They had forgotten their primary mission. In a lecture about the state of the church, Newbigin said, "It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community." According to Paul, that community has certain characteristics –

compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, forgiveness, and above all love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

But this community is also characterized by growing in faith from teaching one another. That means we must be willing to teach but we must also be willing to learn. In our reading from Deuteronomy 6, we're told, "these words that I command you today shall be on your heart." That's another way of saying, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts," and "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Each of us needs to spend time not just with God's word but with God Himself! Then verse 7 says, "You shall teach them diligently to your children." If you have children, teaching them the Word of God is one of your primary responsibilities.

Then Deuteronomy 6:7 continues, "you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." In other words, you are to discuss God's Word when you're inside and outside, when your moving or being still. I think the point is that any time is a good time and any place is a good place to get together with a handful of people to talk about what the Bible says.

So here's my challenge to you today. Find one or two other people and make a commitment to get together about once a week and talk about the Bible. Maybe you meet for breakfast or lunch, maybe just for coffee or ice cream. But find a time you can get together to talk for about 30 minutes. Start with one of the Gospels – Mark is a good choice. Spend about 5-10 minutes a day reading, planning on about a chapter a week. Make some notes about what God is saying to you in that reading and then when you get together with your discipleship partners discuss what you've read and what you've written. Listen to what the others get out of that passage. Have a conversation about it. It's that simple. We're only talking about 60 to 90 minutes a week. But what a difference it

will make in your relationship with Christ and your relationships with other people.

And one last thing. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." An important part of teaching one another is worshiping together. When you come to worship each week, pay attention to those around you. Because your genuine worship is contagious and helps others to experience God in worship.

Henrietta Mears arguably ran the most successful Sunday school program in the

United States. But Billy Graham and Jim Rayburn and Bill Bright weren't in her Sunday school classes. You see, Henrietta Mears understood that Sunday school was a tool but the real purpose was to make disciples. And making disciples meant building meaningful relationships. Mears personally led Bible studies and mentored college students and young adults. Her purpose was to win young men and women for Christ and train leaders for the future of the worldwide church. In other words, she made disciples of Jesus who made disciples of Jesus. We should do the same.

*Amen.*