



# Giving Birth

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Matthew 9:35-10:16 (selected verses)

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Let me show you something. Do you know what this is? It's an antique birthing chair. Thanks to Pam Sellars for sharing it with me. Women would sit on this chair—it's wide, providing for leg support to women in labor; its back is angled so that the woman would have support, especially when pushing—and the doctor or mid-wife would crouch right here to catch the baby as it came out. Pretty cool, right?

I want to talk to you this morning about “giving birth” to other people—the second kind of birth. Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:3, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” He said it a second time, “You must be born again.” We have all been birthed physically, but when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we are new-birthed spiritually.

The question is, for those of you who were/are born again: *how did that happen?* How does it usually happen? Other people were involved: Parents, a friend, a pastor, Sunday school teachers, a neighbor, a co-worker, a teacher—all of these people, or at least some of these people. You were second-birthed thanks to the words and love and example and witness of many other people of faith whom the Lord used in the power of the Holy Spirit to help you come to faith. This morning, I want to encourage each of you who are born-again to be active and involved in “birthing” others who are “lost,” not yet “born again.”

Jesus, we're told, in Matthew 9, “had compassion” on the people because they were “lost sheep without a shepherd.” That's why he came to this earth; that's why he was sent. Then, he spoke to his 12 disciples about the need for more workers to be sent “into his harvest field”—about the need for more shepherds to go out to the lost sheep—and then, he sends them, because, as he says, “the harvest is plentiful.” The only thing needed are more “workers.”

Well, the harvest is still plentiful! There are still many, *many*, “Lost Sheep!” out in the world! Today the need is

still for more “shepherds” to go out— in love, with a word, a witness, to be an example of what real faith looks like—to be used of God to “give birth” to others who need to be born again, that they might be born again.

I want to make two points this morning: Each of us who are born-again are first *sent* and, as we *go*, we are to be *strategic*.

We, like the 12 disciples, are sent. In John 17:18, Jesus prays for his disciples: “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” He said, “I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world,” and so he *sent* them out into the world. And he sends *us*.

The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:19-21, “... He (GOD) has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God was making His appeal through us.” And our message? It’s here: “We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God!” How? Tell them: “God made him (Christ) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” That’s the message! It’s great news! When anyone believes this, they are born-again, given new-birth—and God wants to use us to give that birth!! We can be the spiritual midwives! He sends us out to the “lost sheep.” The message of the disciples was, “The kingdom of heaven is near!” (Matthew 3:2) That’s Jesus Christ himself! This is still our message: He is still near—closer than anyone’s next breath!

He is, as he said, in John 14:6, “the way, the truth, the life.” And God sends us to show others “the way” who don’t know the way, “the truth” to those who haven’t encountered this truth, “the life” that is “life to the full” now and eternal life forever with the Lord later, to those who do not have such a life—that they might be “born again.” We are sent—the only question is: Will we go? Will we do? Will we speak? Will we model it?

But, when we go, as I read Matthew 10, we are to be strategic—that's my second point.

I want you to notice what Jesus says to his disciples here. It's easy to miss. In verse 5 we read, "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel." *Hmm*. What do you think of that? Is Jesus being sectarian? Is he being a racist? "I'm not sending you guys to the Gentiles, because I don't want them to know about me, I'm sending you *just* to your fellow Jews, to your own kind!" Why would he say that? What's going on? Jesus is being strategic: he is sending them to the people most like them, to people with whom they have a lot in common, to people who may know them. It's easier overall. Barriers are not raised, but may come down. Plus, it's their first effort at outreach with a new message. That's not to say that it was easy—if you look at this chapter, Jesus warns them of all sorts of troubles that they'll face.

Later, once they received the Holy Spirit, he expands their territory to a wider group of people. In Acts 1:8, he said, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." We are the beneficiaries of their obedience to that call! And, the Apostle Paul, remember, was then sent to be a missionary to the Gentiles! Do you see? God was strategic.

Almost none of us are missionaries—we are mostly just like the disciples at this stage. So, to whom does Jesus send us? He sends us to those most like we are, to people with whom we have a relationship, with whom we have some things in common, people in our circle of influence, people we know. A few people become missionaries to foreign lands, to a different people, but most of us do not.

In fact, if you look at the New Testament, the most natural way that "lost" people came to faith in Jesus Christ is through their already-existing relationships, with their own kind. Jesus called a couple of men to follow him; one of

them went to find his brother to tell him, “We have found the Messiah!” Jesus invites another, and he went to find a friend. He speaks to a Samaritan woman—she tells her family and friends everything he said. He heals someone—they went to tell their family what Jesus did for them! Paul shares the gospel with his jailer, the man comes to faith, and takes Paul home with him to tell the rest of his family! You see this repeatedly.... Studies show that 75-90% of all those who come to Christ in faith did so because of the loving witness of a family member or friend or acquaintance—Nothing has changed from Bible times! You and I are sent by Jesus—to be strategic, to be used of God to give birth to someone who needs to be, whom God wants to be, “born-again” to a new life and to everlasting life! What a privilege to be someone else’s spiritual midwife! What greater gift could we possibly give to anyone?

Let me talk first to you, parents, about your children. I mean, it doesn’t get any closer to one’s “own kind” than our own children. Christian parents: God calls you to be the primary source, not only of giving physical conception and birth to your children, feeding, clothing, educating, raising them, but, he also calls you to be a part of giving them new birth, leading them to Christ. You are #1 in that task as far as God is concerned—first and foremost. Again, studies show that 75% of all those who call Jesus Savior and Lord knew about him, knew the stories of the Bible, what Jesus came to this earth to do, and had a basic faith in him, before the age of 13. And who’s mainly responsible for that outcome? Parents. Oh, sure, there are grandparents, aunts and uncles as well, but always with the blessing of the parents. Allow me to get personal. I’m going to open a window just a crack into my own life and let you look in. I’m a Pastor—you know that. I have been a pastor since December of 1987—almost 33 years. I have five children. Five. Only one of them walks with the Lord in faith, goes to church, reads the Bible.

Four of them don't—in varying degrees—I'm not going to get specific.

Now, it's not my intention to throw any of them under the bus. They're all great kids! They're good people, caring people, they're smart, they're hard-working, they care about this world, and they want to make a difference. They're each very different, do different things, but I'm proud of each of them for the people that they are. They're fun to be with; we always have a lot of good times when we're together. They're all great kids! I love them deeply! But, some of them have chosen not to walk with the Lord in faith as one of his followers. I want to say, too, I am not personally disappointed in any one of them because of that fact—but it's hard, very hard. You know, that's not how my wife and I raised them. Because we have a faith relationship with the Lord, we would love for all of them to have a relationship with Jesus, too.

Let me go back to this birthing chair. It has three legs. In the tradition in which I grew up, we were taught that the best way to “give birth” to a child's faith, is to think of it like a three-legged stool. One leg represents the home, one leg represents the church, and one leg represents the Christian Day School.

In our home, we read children's Bible stories, we read some Scripture or devotion that was age-appropriate after every dinner-time meal, prayed before and after the meal, prayed with them before bed, and tried to live our faith in front of them.

We took them to church, the second leg of the stool, to worship, sent them to Sunday school, youth group—the whole bit. And, third leg of the stool, we sent them to a Christian Day school, at great expense, where they learned the three R's and all the subjects with a distinctively Christian worldview—we wanted them to learn to think

about all of life from a biblical and theological perspective. We lived the three-legged stool!

You know, in my lower moments, I still blame myself. Boy, I made plenty of mistakes—I wonder sometimes whether maybe, just maybe, I made just one too many! All parents make mistakes—my parents made plenty!

Yet, I know, deep down, I did what God called me to do as a father—I gave them, mostly, to the best of my ability, the three-legged new-birthing stool: A loving Christian home, a Christian church, and a Christian school.

Parents, I want you to think about that. Jesus “sends” you to them. Obviously, I am a prime example, there are no guarantees—but you don’t want to look in the mirror someday and feel you didn’t do what God called you to do. I know it’s hard right now. These online services are hard for kids to watch, and to stay engaged. It’s easy to want to tune out and skip it altogether. I want to encourage you to figure out a way to make something work on Sunday morning. Get creative. Your kids need you to lead spiritually. And, of course, just because you do something on Sunday morning, remember that there are six other days in the week to lead your children spiritually. If you don’t have a church, if it’s not this one, find one! You are, as a parent, the back leg of the birthing chair, holding the thing up! Without the Christian home the chair will fall backwards!

Now, I want to add that I’m not saying that your children have to go to a Christian School or you’re not parenting them properly—hey, I know it isn’t cheap, and transportation to and from school isn’t generally provided. It’s a big sacrifice! But then, at least, stay engaged with what your children are learning. More and more, sending children to a public school is like sending the lambs and the sheep to the wolves. Know what your children are learning and teach them what the Bible says when you must—which means you have to learn it for yourself. Do that, and I think you’re still

trying to put the three-legged new-birthing stool into practice.

You have our promise as Pastors and Staff—we're going to do whatever we can to come alongside of you in this most important role that you have. We want to be your partners in raising up the next generation of Jesus-followers.

I would also add, pray. Jesus tells his disciples to pray. Pray for your children and their faith every day. If anything, I wonder sometimes if I didn't pray enough. I might have taken for granted that since I had all three legs on our stool, I was good! Now, I pray—it just feels like a much harder prayer to be answered. But, God is great, and I know “nothing is impossible” with Him.

So, to whom is Christ sending you? He talks about eternal judgment, right? “It will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment” (Matthew 10:15). Imagine someone you know, someday looking up from hell at you in heaven and asking, “You knew about *this* and you didn't tell me? I thought you were my friend!” “Uh, yeah. Hey, you know, sorry!” “You're sorry? It's a little late!”

We who have been “born again” are strategically sent to be part of the new-birth of new believers: friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, children...I mean, what an honor! Yes, our efforts won't always work. That's right here in this text—the disciples failed plenty! They got into a lot of trouble! Many wouldn't listen and they were told to move on! Even Jesus' efforts didn't yield 100%!

But, if you love someone—like your children—or even just *like* someone—you have to try. You have to do whatever you can. That's all Jesus is saying: like my disciples, I am sending you to the “lost sheep” that you know. So just *go*—go! —and try to share your faith. Pray, and see what happens. All we can do is all we can do.

But if God uses you to be a part of someone's new birth, you will be thrilled!