



**“Leveraging Opportunities”**  
Luke 14:25-26a

**Idea:** Christians have a gospel mandate to make disciples.

**Intro:** Many times, when you need help, you can tell whether a person will help simply by the look on the person’s face. If you remember the story from last week, such was the case for the traveler who watched President Thomas Jefferson and his companions approach a flooded river with a washed-out bridge. The water was too swift for the man to swim across, so he hoped one of the riders would ferry him to other side of the river. After several riders had plunged in and made it to the other side, the stranger asked President Jefferson if he would ferry him across the river. The President agreed without hesitation. The man climbed on, and shortly thereafter the two of them made it safely to the other bank. As the stranger slid off the back of the saddle onto dry ground, one of the riders asked him, “Tell me, why did you select the President to ask this favor?” The man was shocked, admitting he had no idea it was the President who had helped him. “All I know,” he said, “is that on some of your faces was written the answer ‘No’ and on some of them was the answer ‘Yes.’ His was a ‘Yes’ face.”

Likewise, the message people could read on Jesus’ face was a “Yes.” As we work our way through Luke’s Gospel, this is the message that is on full display. In every story, Jesus is looking for opportunities to help people and ferry them across the great divide that separates them from God. He is on the search for far from God people, and He leverages opportunities to this end. If you do not believe me, then listen to Luke’s words.

Read Luke 14:1-2, 25-26a.

**Inquiry:** During the days of Jesus’ life and ministry, He pushed against a religious culture that pursued “*the appearance of godliness*” but denied “*its power*” (2 Tim 3:5). In all reality, the culture of Judaism at this time had a secular spirit to it that redefined essential beliefs in subtle ways. We might describe their religious approach to life as “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.” This is a category created by sociologist Christian Smith many years ago. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism consists of believing in some god who exists and created the world; a god who wants people simply to be congenial and kind; and that the goal of life is happiness and self-fulfillment. One of the most devastating aspects of this philosophy is the general belief that good works secure a persons’ place in heaven or an after-life.

The subtle secular drift in Judaism had fostered two streams of thought. One was championed by the Pharisees who were considered the conservatives of their day. They held to the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, and they sought to lead people to live out the letter of the Law. The problem with their conservatism is that it placed the emphasis on one’s ability to keep the Law for salvation. The other stream was championed by the Sadducees who were considered the liberals of their day. They denied much of the supernatural teachings of

Scripture such as angels, the immortality of the soul, and bodily resurrection. The problem with their liberalism is that it put very little emphasis on the teachings of the Law.

Both streams pursued the appearance of godliness while denying its power. The secularization within Judaism worked both passively and actively to remove God and insert self. The goal was never to annihilate Judaism. It was simply to redefine it, which is evident by the fact that Judaism still exists today. However, Judaism, whether conservative or liberal, remains secular in the sense that it still denies that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Therefore, secularism has not been a threat to Judaism's existence, but to its faithfulness.

The same can be said of the Christian Church today. Albert Mohler explains this threat to the Church in his book *The Gathering Storm*. He says, "The church of Jesus Christ... must always live as a people of the Book – as Scriptural people devoted to zealous study of God's Word. The Bible is the norming norm that cannot be normed." He goes on to say, "Where you find a church, you find a community committed to the Bible. If not, you have not found a church." Consequently, as a faithful people committed to God's Word, the local church must stand in today's secular world. We must stand for "*the faith once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3). Standing like this means we hold the preaching of the Word as the first mark of the church. It means we hold confessional fidelity as a hallmark of our identity. It also means we hold the totality of the Christian worldview. Finally, it means we hold firmly our commitment to the Great Commission.

The more I interact with people in all walks of life within our community and watch from afar the greater movements within society, I am reminded just how important our Christian commitment to the Great Commission is. The hope for the people in our community, nation, and the nations of the world is Jesus. The way to present Jesus to them is to make sure we as Christians stand on the Word of God and share it with them. We will never see people move toward God on their own. Similarly, culture never moves toward God because people left to themselves only move away from God.

The secularization of our American culture is influencing the church, including our church. Christians are being lulled to sleep by a passive secularism that says, "Live and let live." We do not see a need to get involved. This docile pressure prevents us from loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. Rather than warning of the dangers of sin, we lovingly approve of the sin that ferries people to a devil's hell. Christians are simply hesitant to stand on biblical truth and call people to repentance and faith in Jesus. As a result, our society and community continue to move away from anything and everything that resembles the God of the Bible and spiral downward into greater immorality. All the while, Christians lament this movement away from God and wonder why it is happening. Church let's wake up! The problem is us! We have and are largely failing to leverage the opportunities God has given us to share the gospel. Surely, we know the gospel mandate to make disciples. We talk often about it here at Red Lane, but not enough of us are striving to walk it out.

Jesus looked for opportunities to help people and ferry them across the great divide that separates them from God. This is evident in the few verses we read earlier. Are you looking for and leveraging those same opportunities? There are three categories of opportunities I want us to consider leveraging.

## **1. At Home**

Just as Jesus saw the man setting across from Him who suffered from dropsy, do you see the people living in and around your home who suffer with the spiritual disease of sin? Do you see your children who are lost and in need of a Savior? Do you see your parents, siblings, and cousins who are dead in sins and trespasses? Do you see the neighbors living next door and down the street who are on the road to hell?

God has sovereignly placed you within a family and within a neighborhood for gospel purposes. Do you see and understand this purpose for your life? Andrew understood this purpose for his life. Once Andrew met Jesus, he could not help but share the good news with his brother Peter.

Read John 1:40-42a.

As a follower of Jesus Christ, I encourage you to follow the example of Andrew and leverage opportunities by intentionally, strategically, creatively, and urgently taking the gospel to your family and neighbors. Leverage your home for Christ. God has sovereignly placed you there for gospel purposes.

## 2. At Work

In much the same way, as Christians we must also be able to see the people who need Jesus in our workplaces and classrooms. He has sovereignly placed us in those settings to be salt and light...to bring a godly flavor to a tasteless world and to bring light where there is only darkness. Levi or Matthew as he is also referred to in the Bible modeled this.

Read Luke 5:27-29.

The very first thing Levi did after meeting Jesus was to introduce his colleagues to Him. He brought Jesus to them. Brothers and sisters, as followers of Christ, I encourage you to follow Levi's example and leverage opportunities by intentionally, strategically, creatively, and urgently taking the gospel to your coworkers. Live out the gospel. Let it be seen in how you speak, lead, serve, encourage, and love others. Do all of that and more while also opening your mouth and voicing the gospel. Give the answer to your colleagues for the hope you have in Jesus Christ. God has sovereignly placed you in this setting for gospel purposes.

## 3. At Church

We often talk about exercising the gospel where we live, work, and play. Unfortunately, we do not spend enough time talking about how to exercise it in the church. One of the reasons for this is because we emphasize a "go and tell" rather than a "come and see" strategy to evangelism. This is what the Great Commission commands us to do. We are to go and make disciples, and the first step in that work is to tell people the gospel. While this is true, we also have the opportunity to make disciples in and through the church. Let's not forget that Jesus often preached in the Jewish synagogues. In similar fashion, the Apostle Paul would visit local synagogues in the cities and towns he would visit (Acts 9:20), proclaiming Jesus.

Therefore, let's value the gift we have in the church. Every Sunday, you and I have opportunities to make disciples in and through this local church called Red Lane. There are three ways we can do this:

### 1) Inviting Others

It has been said that 80% of the people we invite to church will attend. They just need to be invited. We could go around the room this morning and give incredible testimonies to this reality. Many of you are here today because someone in your family, neighborhood, or workplace told you about Red Lane and invited you to be their guest. I am constantly amazed by the number of people who have begun attending our church from certain neighborhoods. It is so exciting and encouraging to see our members living out the gospel where they live by inviting their neighbors and friends to church. Never underestimate the power of an invitation. People will come if you invite them. When they do come to worship, I can assure you they will hear the gospel and be given an opportunity to respond in faith and repentance.

### 2) Making Space

Jesus told the seventy-two disciples He sent out that *"the harvest is plentiful"* (Luke 10:2), and He told His disciples at Sychar that *"the fields are white for harvest"* (John 4:35). Peter tells us that the Lord's desire is for none to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). If this is

the Lord's heart and plan, then the church should mimic the same and do all it can to gather in the harvest. Thus, the reason to make space for those who have yet to come to Christ and His church.

We have been talking for several months about the need for us to move to two worship services. Some of you might not see the need for the move. You like the size of our church. You like the feel of our church. You see "enough" empty seats. I have heard some of your conversations, and I admit it breaks my heart. Here are a few things you might not understand:

- You will never know everyone in the church, and this should never be the goal. Truth is you can only know about sixty people. Therefore, unless the church consists of sixty or fewer people, then you will not know everyone. This is why small groups are vital to our discipleship process. Your small group is where you can know and be known by other believers. They serve as mini congregations within the greater local church.
- We have already surpassed the small church feel. I am probably the only person who knows the vast majority of the people in our church, though Trevor is catching up. Due to the nature of our leadership, we work with the breadth of our congregation, yet even in our roles we cannot know everyone. We have past that point, and it is okay. You see, my goal as the senior pastor of Red Lane is not to know every single person. Instead, my goal is that every single person knows Jesus Christ and is known by someone in our church. Again, this is where small groups make the difference.
- People will not attend for long if finding space is a struggle. Finding enough parking and seating space is crucial for guests and regular attenders. Therefore, it is important that we take measures to ensure plenty of both. So, we have been asking you to sit close together and move to the middle in worship. We have also been talking about the need for two services (8am and 11am) with small groups meeting between them at 9:30am. These are opportunities we can leverage for the gospel.
- People will not attend for long if their children are not served well. Children's ministry is crucial to a growing church because church's typically grow by reaching young families. For this reason, as we make plans to move into multiple services, we need more volunteers in our children's ministry. We need people to commit to worship in one service and serve in kid's church or the nursery in the other.
- One church's bad experience does not mean it will be our experience. All of us bring our past experiences with us into this local church. I would ask that we agree to not project those bad experiences upon our church. If your fear is that by going to two services means we will morph into two churches, then remember the priority we place on small groups. Many churches do not prioritize small group ministry. Their focus is on the worship experience. Also, keep in mind that none of us can know everyone nor should we necessarily strive to do so.

My wife and I have been members of several great churches who had multiple services. In all of them, there was a strong sense of unity and family primarily because of their priority on the gospel and small groups. We, too, can and will retain our unity and sense of family.

There is a third way for us to leverage opportunities at church.

### 3) Going Out

While we want to make space for those who have yet to come to Christ and His church, according to the Great Commission, the way for them to come in is for us to go out. Let's leverage opportunities we see within our community for gospel purposes. One new way we are seeking to do this is through the firewood ministry. Many of you have responded by volunteering time to cut, split, and stack wood over the last month. This coming Saturday is our pick-up day. People will be coming to our campus to get wood, and we will be delivering to others. While we are interacting with people, let's keep in mind our goal. We want to love and serve people with firewood for the purpose of sharing the gospel. You see, the greatest need is not physical warmth during the cold winter months. The greatest need is spiritual warmth through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Church let's be on mission in our community, throughout our state and nation, and around the world. We have a team serving in South Asia. Let's pray for them. Let's make plans to be on the next team we send back there or to Puerto Rico. And let's give generously to the budgetary needs of our church so that we can go and send more for the sake of the gospel.

**Conclusion:** In what ways are you looking for opportunities to help people and ferry them across the great divide that separates them from God? How are you leveraging the opportunities God has given you at home, at work, and at church? The Lord Jesus is searching for far from God people, and He desires for you to join Him by leveraging these opportunities. What does that need to look like in your life and family? What does it mean for your schedule and budget? How does your attitude need to change concerning the way you think about our church going forward? Church let's leverage every opportunity God has given us for gospel purposes.