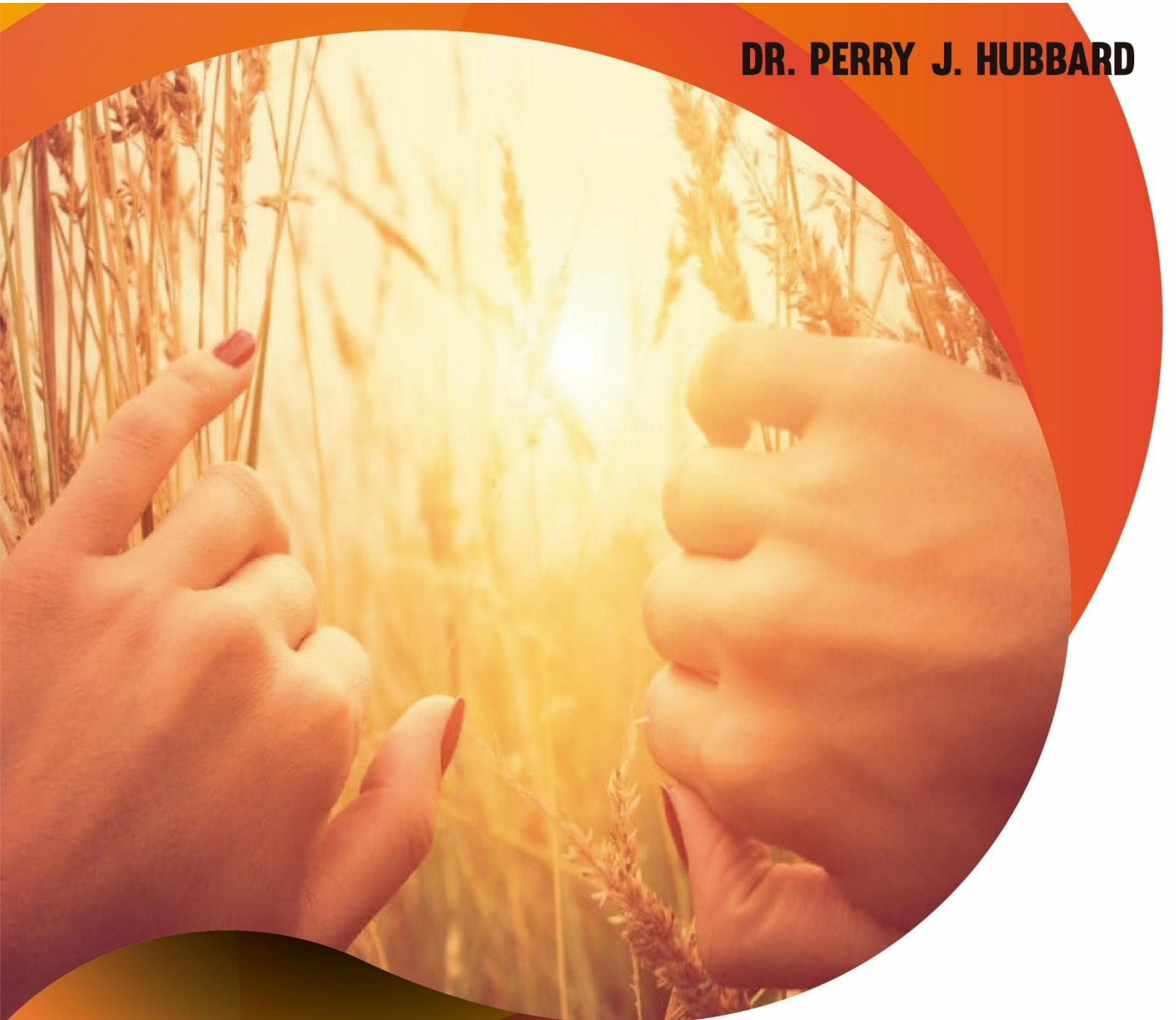


DR. PERRY J. HUBBARD



Loving and Going

UNDERSTANDING THE CALL
TO MISSIONS

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Loving and going –

Lesson 1 - understanding what we have been commanded to do

Introduction

We all know the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves and we all know that we have been commanded to go to the world and tell them of God’s love. But what do these phrases mean to us? Are we really understanding what they mean and how we carry them out?

This short series of studies is designed to look at each of these key ideas of loving and going. The focus is to help us do the best job of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom so that there will be Christ-followers in all the world.

Topic one – the first level of love

In several places, Jesus talks about loving our neighbor and loving our enemies. These are topics we will cover later. In the midst of these discussions which are recorded in Lk 6:27-36 and Mt 5:43-47 he adds an interesting phrase, he talks about “loving only those who love you.”

Stop and read the passages and then we will continue.

In these two passages, Jesus gives us a few examples of what this means.

- Tax collectors love those who love them (sinners love those who love them)
- Everyone greets their brother or friend
- Lend to those who can repay
- People do help those who help them (even sinners do this)

I am sure you can come up with many more illustrations of what it means to love those who love you. To care about those who care about you.

The reality is that until someone shows us some kindness we will not respond to their need. So much of our life is guided by this idea of getting before giving. It is most clearly revealed in the concept of when I have time, or when I have funds, or when I am better established, then I will be able to help you. This concept

usually means the other person needs to help you get to where you want to be before you will consider helping them.

It is seen in how we interact with others. We rarely say hello to a stranger unless there is a particular context that requires us to and usually when that happens it is related to something we need or want. It can be about advancing ourselves in our job, relations with an employer, relations with teachers and so on. If they are not family or close friends, we ignore the people we have contact with on the streets and in public places. If we do greet them, it is only to fulfill social expectations in a given setting. And then the greeting is as brief and informal as necessary.

According to Jesus, there is no reward in greeting those who will greet you because they are family or friends. There is no reward in inviting people to your house because you know at some point, they will be able to do the same for you. There is no reward in giving or loaning money or goods to the one you know will repay you.

At this level of love, you are not thinking about their needs or concerns but about yours and the inconvenience that stopping and greeting someone may cause. The truth is you don't want to know them, their needs, or anything about them. You only have time for those who have time for you and can benefit you in some way.

The sad thing is that they have the same view of you. They greet because of the expectations that exist because you are family or a friend.

This sounds harsh and is not a completely true or fair evaluation of all our relations with family and friends. We do care about them. But when you are the outsider and being rejected this is what it feels like. And all too often we in the church behave this way. We care about each other and there is no room for others in our world.

It is little wonder that we are so unattractive to the world. We have nothing to offer them that they don't already have.

Pause and consider your behavior towards others who are not friends and family. Would Jesus' description of only love those who love you be an accurate description of you or your church?

Until we understand this concept we will have nothing to offer the world and no hope of proclaiming the good news because that is not what they will hear.

Lesson 2 – Loving the way you love yourself

We all know the second greatest commandment. It is repeated many times in the scriptures, from Deuteronomy through to James. The most recognized version is found in Luke 10:27, "He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

This is the response of a religious leader to Jesus' question about the greatest law. Then follows the story of the good Samaritan. That story redefined who our neighbor is, but there is more to understand in this command to love your neighbor as yourself.

This one command is a summation of all the laws related to how we treat each other. They are set in the negative; Don't lie to your neighbor, don't cheat your neighbor, don't steal from your neighbor, don't kill your neighbor, don't covet your neighbor's things, and don't commit adultery. In other words, if you don't want to be mistreated then don't mistreat others.

But that also creates limitations. We will treat others the way we want them to treat us. Which means we are still the focus and so a bit selfish in our thinking. This concept of loving others is better, but still limited, and it does move us further along the way to truly understanding what love is about.

Let me repeat myself, at this level, the focus is on treating others the way I would like them to treat me. I help a person in trouble with the hope that someday another person would do the same to me. I won't lie to them because I don't want them to lie to me and so on. I will respect them and protect their rights and life because that is what I want others to do for me.

I can repeat this, but there is one key item to keep in mind. This law of love is based on the law of the old testament. A law that could not be kept and required sacrifice to repair the damage done by the inevitable failure. It is important to note what Jesus said to the religious leader before answering the question about, "who is my neighbor?" He tells him in Luke 10:28 that he has answered correctly. This makes us feel good, but the next statement, "Do this and you will live," is what is critical.

He does not say do this and you will enter the kingdom of heaven. Only "and you will live." It suggests that if we want to get along in this world and do more than just survive, we have to learn to love at this level. And this is a big part of what we teach in our churches. We teach survival and how to live in this world. We teach a basic form of love that will not allow us or others to truly understand love or move to the next level.

Even when Paul and James quote this phrase in Ro 13:8-10, Ga 5:14, and Ja 2:8 the context is that this act of loving someone the way you love yourself sums up the law. In Galatians, Paul adds the concept that we are no longer to indulge ourselves but serve one another and in Romans that this type of love does no harm to others and is a fulfillment of the law. James uses the phrase in the context of not showing favoritism and loving each other equally for that is how one fulfills the law by treating everyone as equals.

There is no problem with what is being taught here. Truthfully if everyone treated each other the way they wanted to be treated. If we all spoke to each in kindness and encouragement. If we all valued truth in the same way and so on, this world would clearly be a better place. This type of thinking is the basis of much of what governments seek to do in order to govern the people and provide guidelines on how to live together. That and the rules to protect people from those who don't want to love others the way they want to be loved.

When everyone abides by this law then we all live happier and the selfishness and pride that are often the problem are greatly reduced. We see others as something of value because we want to be seen as a person of value. But is it enough to value others in the same way we want to be valued?

Now think about how this teaching affects the church. We teach this law, but what are we teaching in reality? Are we teaching them how to feel good in the church and around others? Or are we teaching them to be more concerned about others than themselves?

If what we are teaching them is to feel good and if this is what people are learning, then it is not hard to understand why we are not attractive to the people around us. The focus is on being as good as we can be in our treatment of others. And that is the problem, focusing on our actions and abilities and the expectation that we will be respected for this behavior and people will listen.

Think about how you apply this teaching to your life. What do expect: of those around you, the members of your family, the members of your church? Do you treat them with this expectation of fairness and equality? I will treat you this way so that I can expect you to behave the same way towards me? What will happen if they love you the same way and have this same expectation of you?

In the end, if this is the only way in which we love others, what does that say about us as Christians? Is this level of love enough to truly impact the world around us, and beyond us?

Loving and going –

Lesson Three – Loving my enemies

We have now established the reality that loving others is a foundational principle of the teaching of Jesus and clearly defined by the Law. Now we need to go beyond the Law and begin to understand what loving others means in the context of the kingdom. Read the following texts where Jesus takes us to another level of what it means to love your neighbor.

Matt 5:43-46 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

Luke 6:27-28 "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

In the first two lessons, the focus was on people we knew and with whom we have what one could call normal relations. We treat each other in respectful and honorable ways. In the one, we do so because of what we may get in return. In the second because it is the right way to treat others. In both situations, there is no enmity. If there is it is covered by a layer of civility since the goal is to get along and live quietly.

But what happens when there is animosity, discord, and differences that create tension and even mistreatment? What about those who we don't like, don't want to tolerate because of their behavior and attitude, or those who don't like us and even hate us?

This is a tough question and Jesus' response is clear. We are to love them. In the passage in Matthew, we are told to pray for those who persecute us. The goal is by this type of love that we will be sons of our Father in heaven. In the Luke passage, we get even more details. We are to do good to them, pray for them, and bless them. But in Luke, it goes even farther, if they take something from you be willing to give them more. In fact, we are to give them what they ask for.

What is even more interesting is that in closing the passage he states "Do to others as you would have them do to you." This is the law of love your neighbor but at a higher level. Before the focus was on those you expect equal treatment from. You treat them good and they will likely treat you the same way. Now we are talking about applying this same idea but to people who may not reciprocate your good treatment of them.

Both Peter and Paul echoed this truth in their teaching. We are not to reciprocate with anger, cursing, or insult.

- Rom 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- 1 Cor 4:12-13 When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly.
- 1 Peter 3:9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

But the best summary of how we are to treat others at this level is found in 1 Cor 13:4-8

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails.

Here is the guideline for us in how to learn to love our enemies. It is a lot of information. More than can be covered in this short study. But as you read take time to read it again and again and consider what would happen if the church began to love the enemies of Christ, our enemies. Consider what would happen if those we treat as outsiders, people we think of as different and so as if they were enemies, with this level of love.

For Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres because the enemies of our faith in God can be saved by love.

Do we love the outsider, the stranger, our enemy in this way? If we do how will this affect the church and its ability to be involved in the mission of God?

Lesson 4 – Loving as Jesus loves

Now we are beginning to understand what it means to love in the kingdom. Loving those who love us is not enough. Loving others the way we want to be loved is only fulfilling the law. Loving our enemies is a major step forward. But the greatest form of love is ahead.

In John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Again we have probably read this and memorized it and without thinking about what it may mean. We simply think of it as another way of expressing the commandment to love our neighbor. But is it?

When we hear this phrase "love the way I have loved you" do we understand what that means?

Think about it a moment. Jesus calls this a new commandment. It is not just a refining of the law of love given by the Law. It is an instruction to love in the way God loves. So how does God love us?

Consider the following texts

1 John 3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

Rom 5:6-8 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous,

These are powerful scriptures about how Jesus sacrificed his life for us and clearly, if we are to love the way Jesus has loved, then we need to be willing to make critical sacrifices so that others will hear. And yes sometimes those sacrifices have involved being willing to die so others will hear.

The sacrifices range from simple things like time and money to a more complicated one, like family, personal goals and our life out of love for those who need to hear.

But that is only outward or a visible result of something much more critical, much more profound. Something that Paul tells us in Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

God forgave us before we knew him. Before we even existed our forgiveness was already available. He chose from the beginning of creation to put into place our forgiveness. The only thing required to receive this forgiveness is our confession of sin and the need for forgiveness.

So how does this relate to us? For most of us until we see the person and hear their words of confession we really don't think about forgiveness. We want to see evidence of repentance. For those involved in the mission of God, there is the concept that if we tell people they will see their need to confess and so we go.

This is forgiveness before we even know who the person will be. This is the ability to forgive your enemy. This is making forgiveness available even though they may reject it. Jesus died while we were still in our sin. Jesus made forgiveness available before we knew we needed it.

Is this the goal of our love, to make forgiveness available before people even know they need to repent.? Our enemy has no thoughts about the confession of sin. Our enemy only thinks about themselves, protecting their world, and living the way they want.

Without this way of loving the way Christ did, before we knew our need, there is no hope for anyone. We love them before they understand. We love them no matter how they may respond. We love them because it is what God does. It is why people go to the world. They believe that it is possible to love those who are enemies and that through this love they can find healing and hope.

Do we as a church love people before they understand their need? Do we go to them, knowing how bad they are because they can be forgiven? Or do we wait until they see a need for change and come? Do we wait until we see evidence of repentance before we love them? If the latter, then we are not loving the way God loves, while they are still sinners. God loves us not because we have changed. He loves us because that is who he is. And his hope, his desire, is that we will see this and then respond.

That is what we must do love others with the hope that because of our love they will respond.

Lesson 5 – The authority

We all know Matthew 28:18-20. Maybe we have all memorized it. It is the key passage used in teaching the church about the missions and what God wants us to do. Most of the time we think of the four commands of go, disciple, baptize, and teach. But there is a declaration that comes before all of these.

Jesus declares that all authority has been given to him in heaven and earth. Then he closes with a similar powerful declaration, I will be with you always, to the very the end of the age. This defines both the beginning and end of the mission we are called to carry out.

My question is do we fully understand what this information means? We clearly understand two key elements. One that Jesus has control of all that is happening in all of creation. Two that this authority will exist from the day he announces it to his followers until this current age is completed.

This is a significant shift in the concept of power. It is a definition of something new and a change from something past. While no one would argue that Jesus, as a member of the trinity has always had authority

in heaven. What is different is the concept of authority on earth. For the Jews, this power was centered in three individuals, the king, earthly governance, the priest, religious practice, and the prophet, communication with God. In Jesus, all of these are brought to an end and united in him.

God, in the past, at least since the time of Moses, and more clearly in the time of Samuel, had used these three individuals to express his authority, guide his people, and carry out his plans. And while he intervened at different times these three remained the symbols of God's authority, until the arrival of Jesus. In Jesus, these three are brought together in one person. He now has the authority of all of them.

There is a lot of theology tied up in this concept and while important is not the critical idea being expressed. Jesus now has all the authority and calls us to represent his authority in the world. Without this declaration we have no hope of carrying out any of the following directives.

Imagine be sent by a leader to carry out a specific task but every time a decision has to be made you have to stop, go back to the leader, and consult him. How will that affect the work? It will make it very difficult and those you are working with will never trust you or listen to you because you have not been authorized. You become mainly a messenger and not a representative of the one who sent you.

It is hard to do a job when it is clear to all that the one who sent does not trust you and must check on everything you do. This is not the same as serving as a leader and consulting as needed the one you work for. This is normal. There are always issues that need further direction. But this is not needed for everything that has to be done.

The second part is how long the authorization is in effect. We have contracts that define these parameters. And businesses are very careful in how they define who can do what work and for how long they will be authorized to do this. While these contracts are useful they can also cause problems. A person seeing the end of the authorization can decide to be less efficient, less concerned about quality, and even create problems because they are about to lose their authority.

But with Jesus, this authorization has only one endpoint. Basically, it is when God decides the work is done, at the end of the age. While we don't know when that is specifically, we have been told no one, not even the son knows, we do know that we are authorized to carry out the work until that date arrives. This simply means we are free to do the work without worry about whether we are authorized to do so. It also means, based on context, the authorization is for all who believe and are disciples of Jesus.

So do we believe that we are authorized to carry out the work of the kingdom? Do we believe that this authority will remain in effect until Jesus returns? Do we believe that Jesus will always be present to ensure that his authority remains in effect? Or do we allow others to usurp this authority and decide who can go, who can serve, who can proclaim the good news?

Keep in mind that the authority does not come from the church or key leaders. It is not bounded by the traditions and practices of the church. Its focus is on submitting all we do to the authority of Jesus and the work of carrying out the mission of God to announce the gospel to all the nations.

Lesson 6 – having gone

The first direction after the declaration of authority centers around the word go. Usually, it is translated as a command to go. This is because we do not have the complexity of grammar to fully translate the Greek

meaning. In this case, the verb is in the past tense and means that since you have already gone to the world you need to do the following.

For us, the simplest way to translate this is to use the command form of Go! With emphasis.

But, based on the Greek concepts the meaning is much more powerful. This is not the direction a commander gives to his troops to go. It is not attention, right face, march. This instruction makes a key assumption. It assumes that we are already on our way and headed towards the world.

Jesus did not have to tell them to wait. In fact, they were quite ready to go and had already been going. Jesus first appeared to the ladies, then two men on the road to Emmaus, then the twelve and peter, and finally according to Paul over 500 people. They already had begun spreading the word. In Fact, they were so eager to tell others about the risen Lord that He had to tell them to wait.

They were not yet ready to go further. They needed to wait for God's power so they would not depend on their strength for the work that lay ahead. They had to return to Jerusalem and wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit to be given. So they were already going and needed to be slowed down just a little to be sure all would be in place for them to go. They needed to have the power of God in them so they could do more than just announce, tell everyone what had happened.

And once that happened there was no end to the going. People were on the move and telling others. The church grew because people were going, not waiting to be told they could go or told they needed special training. They already had the good news and the promised counselor who would help them as they went to communicate correctly to those they met.

Now it is a fact there are two types of training that are very common in the world. There is the textbook training we receive in schools and the like. Then there is what is called hands-on training or on the job training. The one gives us lots of information but until we actually use it, hands-on activity, it is only theory. The most effective training combines them both. It provides training to those already engaged in an activity. The focus is not on teaching them what they don't know but on improving their ability to use what they already know.

The truth is when counselors are helping people find a career or a job they first try to learn what skills and abilities they already have before suggesting a direction. It is always easier and more profitable to build on what already exists instead of creating from scratch. And even when a person with the book learning, is looking for a job often a criterion for being hired, is do you have any prior experience? If not then you go through a screening process to determine if you are capable of applying what you learned to the real world of work.

So do we act in this way? Are the members of the church already going? Or are they waiting for someone to decide if they are capable of going? Is the church establishing a limited scope of opportunities for going? Or are they going and the church is looking for ways to improve what they are already doing as they are going?

Acts tells us that those who believe began immediately to go. It tells that because of the behavior of the believers more were added each day to the church. This is because they saw how the believers lived and cared for others. And then when Stephen is martyred we are told that as the church was scattered they shared the gospel everywhere they went and the church grew.

Where are we as a church? Have we restricted people from going by the way we teach and authorize them? Do we prevent them from going because of what we think they need to know before they can go?

Now it is true that for specific types of ministry there will be a need for specific training. But this should be based not on waiting to find someone to send but identifying those who are already going and equipping them to do the best possible work they can do. Nobody should feel hindered from going.

Is this how we work as a church? Or do we only send the few we have approved?

Are you already going or waiting for someone to authorize you to go?

If we understand that Jesus has said we all should already be going and doing the work in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

Lesson 7 – Make Disciples

So now that we are going to the world, what do we do? Jesus makes this quite clear. We are to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them. In the next three lessons, we will consider each of these ideas.

Today there is a growing emphasis on the need to do more than proclaim the gospel and see people repent

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from their sin. A growing emphasis that being a Christian is much more than attending church and giving your tithe. It is about making Christ part of every aspect of your life. It is about becoming a disciple of Jesus.

The directive of Jesus is for us to go and make disciples. This action of making disciples is linked to the word go. And remember the idea is that we are already going and proclaiming the good news. As we do this, we are to engage with the people we are meeting to help them become disciples.

I say this because we have a serious problem in this area. We are not going to them. We expect them to come to a program, a seminar, or to church to be disciplined. This is not the best way to do discipling and it limits the process in many ways.

Look at what Jesus did in relation to making disciples. He, first of all, went to them where they were. He talked with them and called them to follow him. But he did not call them to follow him to the synagogue or a rabbinical school. Both were tied to locations and a set program of instruction. He called them to follow him and become part of his ministry and life.

At the same time, he committed himself to teaching them as they walked together in life and ministry. Jesus' manual of training was not based on 10 steps or a series of levels of development. His manual was life itself. As life occurred, he used it to teach them. As they reacted to what was happening and asked questions, he responded with teaching related to what was happening.

There is no manual that is designed to handle the needs of an individual. There is no program that can fully cover and deal with all the variety that occurs in life. It is simply not possible and if we do have something like this it will be unresponsive to all those involved. Why do I say this? Simple. Not everyone is dealing with the same issues at the same time and in the same way. Each member of a group has different levels of maturity, capacity to learn, and needs.

This does not mean we should avoid having groups of people with different needs and issues meet for discipling. In fact, that is just what we want because they will help each other grow as well, based on their experiences, abilities, and insights. Discipleship is a dynamic experience that allows life to guide what is being taught and learned.

Jesus did not teach on every topic possible. He did not provide a systematic theology for us to study. He did not provide an exhaustive textbook covering every possible scenario and situation. What he gave us was a way to help each person grow in an appropriate way in the relationship to him. The manual we have, which is called the Bible, gives us everything we need to be able to meet people where they are.

That is why the most critical part of discipleship is entering the world of another person and interacting with them in real-time. It is about walking with them in their life. It is about not being controlled by a plan that cannot be altered as needed to deal with what is happening in the life of those being discipled.

Again, real discipleship involves us going to where the person is to help them grow in their relationship with Christ in the world where they live. Real discipleship happens in the world of the person. It is not about them taking a specific class on Christian living or a similar topic. These are important classes to have but if they don't go beyond simply presenting material, and probably good material, to meeting the needs of the person where they live, it will always be just that, a presentation of good material.

So, are we treating the command to make disciples seriously? Do we understand what disciple-making is? Are we intimidated by the term?

Actually, most of us have been practicing a basic form of discipleship. If you have children you have been discipling them to be good children, good members of the family, and good citizens. Every day you work with them and help them deal with any number of situations that life presents. And you are very aware that no two children are alike, which means you adapt to each one's needs.

If you are not a parent, you have been receiving this type of discipleship from others. And you don't only receive it from them. You receive it from other family members, others at church, and your friends. Sometimes what you are being taught, especially if it comes from those who are not Christians, is not helpful. Friends may disciple you in how to lie, how to abuse your body and other similar practices.

The question for us as leaders and as a church is are we truly involved in discipleship that is personal and occurs where the people live? Does our discipleship happen in the real world and relates to what is happening in a person's life? Are we going to them to meet them where they are and teach them in that context, as Jesus did the disciples?

Lesson 8 – Baptize them

John 1:33 "I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'

The first time we hear of the concept of baptism is related to the teaching and work of John the Baptist. He was the last and greatest prophet who had been sent to proclaim the coming of the promised messiah. A big part of his ministry was to proclaim the need to repent. He was very direct and clear in declaring what sin was and he was very pointed in his explanation.

In fact, no one was excluded, not even the religious leaders, who to him were some of the worst because of their legalism. Instead of learning the law and be transformed by it, they sought to transform the law to conform to their world and expectations.

John expected and desired all to repent. As the symbol of the sincerity of a person, he required them to be baptized. He expected them to make their confession public for all to see and hear. But even as he performed

this action, he proclaimed another level of baptism yet to come. He said one was coming that would baptize them with the Spirit. That one would be Jesus. And when Jesus came to be baptized it is noted that the Spirit descended on him.

In Jesus, we see the full picture of baptism. It is more than just a public acknowledgment of my sin. It is a declaration that from now on I belong to God and will serve him. It was not until this act of baptism that Jesus began his ministry. And that ministry began with an act of obedience and testing to be sure the commitment was true.

Jesus' disciples baptized people as well as part of their ministry.

- Luke 7:29 (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John)
- John 4:1-2 The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, 2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.

What is interesting to note in the John passage is that they were baptizing disciples. Could that mean that not everyone who wanted to be baptized was allowed to do so? If the key requirement was that they desired to be disciples that could indicate there was need for some kind of evidence of commitment on the part of those who came to be baptized.

We already know that John was critical of some who came to be baptized. He called them a brood of vipers (Mt 3:7). Clearly, John had an expectation even a standard he used to decide who he would baptize. And if the statement about Jesus' activity is true they needed to be committed enough to not just hear the teaching but ready to make the changes needed to be called disciples.

Disciples are people who set aside who they have been so they can become a follower, no that word is too weak, adherent would be better, of the teachings they were receiving. It meant evidence of a change in their focus and their life.

But what about Peter's call to the multitude to repent and be baptized in Acts 2:40-41?

- With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

How do we know if they truly made the commitment to be disciples? Two things present themselves. One, it states that he warned and pleaded with them. This suggests those who responded were well informed and made a decision based on a real understanding. Also, keep in mind that many of these people had heard and seen Jesus when he was alive. His teaching and its requirements were not unknown. Also, they knew that the leaders did not approve of it and so responding would have consequences, which become evident very quickly. They were not in the blind about what was being taught and what it meant to be baptized.

Two, it says that they accepted the message. This is not merely acknowledgment of the teaching but a choice that will change the life of the person. The Greek word carries this idea, it was accepted, no, even more, it was received wholeheartedly. This level of acceptance implies a decision to change and incorporate what has been received into a person's life as a basis for living.

So are we calling people to this level of commitment? A baptism that is a public declaration that I have accepted enthusiastically, wholeheartedly the teaching of Jesus and am a disciple of his. I have repented of my sin and choose to live for him in all areas of my life. Is this what we teach and promote?

In this sequence of teaching, having gone, be making disciples, and be baptizing so that all will know that they have chosen to commit themselves heart, body, soul, and mind to love the Lord their God. Baptism is the evidence of a complete sacrifice of self to be a true disciple. Is this what we did when we were baptized? Is this what we expect from those who are baptized?

Lesson 9 – Teaching them

This phrase poses a critical issue for us. And it is clear that we don't always understand it, much less carry it out.

Matt 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

We understand the idea of teaching people to obey. We understand that the focus is on all that Jesus' commanded. The problem is what is included in the word all.

In this passage we actually see several levels of teaching. The first is the level of providing information. We are to be going and declaring the message. That is basic teaching. It is what is given to children. We give them information so they can make decisions about life and what it involves.

The second level is that of teaching people what is important so they can make decisions. We teach right and wrong. We teach options related to work. We teach them the importance of being good citizens. All this is done so they can make choices about how to live. This is the discipleship phase. And then we follow this up with more teaching to support and encourage them in the decisions they make.

The third level is the teaching that brings a person to the place where they have the ability to make critical choices and commitments. We teach people about marriage and family so they can make choices about who to marry and how to commit themselves to that relationship. We teach people the importance of loyalty to country so if and when the time comes they will commit to defending it. This is what baptism is about.

Now we have come to another level of teaching and we often miss what this is all about. Many assume it is the truth of the gospel. But what is the true content of the gospel? For most, it is a simple outline of information: 1. God created man for fellowship with him, 2. Man sinned and broke that fellowship 3. Christ came died and rose again so man could be forgiven. 4. All who confess their sin and believe Jesus died for them can be saved and have that fellowship restored.

But is that really what the gospel means? Consider the following three scriptures.

- Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- Mark 13:10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.
- Rom 2:16 This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

There are two things to note here. Looking at the two Mark passages it becomes somewhat clear that the gospel is so much more than four points or a call to repentance. They suggest that all of the life of Jesus is the gospel and all that he taught is the gospel.

Paul's statement is one of four times he talks about his gospel. How can it be his gospel and be Christ's as well?

The truth is found in the command to teach. We are to teach all that Jesus taught. The best summary of what that means is found in the passage about what Jesus did as he talked with the two men on the road to Emmaus

Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

The gospel is everything found in the scriptures. It is the entire word of God. And it is everything that God does in and through those who are his children. It is the reason that Mark can say in the first verse of his book, here begins the gospel of Christ. The gospel encompasses everything that Jesus did and said and taught and since he is also God then it includes everything that God has said and taught.

As for Paul, using the idea above of everything God says and taught, Paul could talk about his gospel. A gospel that included everything Paul had learned and experienced. All the word of God in scripture and all that God had done in and through his life became his gospel. A gospel based not on Paul's teaching but in having received and been taught all of what was included in the gospel of Christ.

The gospel is all-inclusive because it is the whole story of God and his work to redeem each of us. And it includes personally everything that God has done in us to make that story real and readable for others.

So what is your gospel? Is it the basic outline like above? If so then it is trite and impotent. Does it include the vastness of God's love, the history of God's work, the immenseness of his presence in everything? Does it include all that Christ taught and did and so include all that he has taught you and done in your life?

Now think about the church. What kind of gospel are we really learning and teaching? Are we really teaching people the whole word of God? Do our members really read and know the entire gospel, the Bible from Genesis to Revelation? Do they have their own addition to that gospel, a gospel of(name of person), which reveals how God has worked in and through their life?

What does our gospel really look like and how does that affect our ability to go, disciple, baptize, and teach people to obey all that Jesus taught and commanded?