

2023 | LESSON 5

DISCIPLE-CYCLE:

SENDING YOUR LEADERS

SEEING THINGS MORE CLEARLY

A major enemy of seeing a disciple-making movement take place is choosing to supplant mission with ministry. Ministry is important. We need to be organized within congregations so that we can be good stewards of God's blessings. But, as mentioned in our Introduction, focusing inward stymies a church's effort to fulfill the Great Commission. A pastor/church leader's number one objective is to provide guidance to people who are helping groups of people make disciples. This requires a vision that extends beyond your congregation.

In Matthew 9:35-38, Jesus is moving through cities teaching, proclaiming and healing. During all this exciting action he looks upon the crowds coming his way and sees their profound needs. He then tells the disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send more workers.



This is profound. Jesus, as a man, recognized his limitations. He knew that for the movement of God's kingdom to take place it had to extend beyond him. How much more is this true of us who lead? To quote Clint Eastwood, "A man has got to know his limitations."

Real leadership is not making yourself essential to the movement of God. It is making you and others instrumental in seeing more and more people become disciples. To do this we must see beyond our comfort zones and personal biases to behold the vastness of the need and the opportunity before us.

When we do we begin to get alignment between our desires and Jesus' desires, a radical shift of priorities like this gets us on track to see more people engaged in the Father's enterprise. This represents our fifth value of Disciple-Cycle: To be and make disciples we must embrace a kingdom-mindset. The core idea behind a kingdom mindset is the concept of being sent.



A rustic wooden cross stands on a grassy hill. The cross is made of two weathered, dark wooden beams. The background is a dramatic sky with orange and yellow clouds, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is contemplative and spiritual.

JESUS, THE SENT ONE

The launching point of a kingdom mindset is getting people to take up the call of Jesus to do the work we are called to do. At first this might sound rudimentary. All of us are familiar with the Great Commission and know that the first word initiating this command by Jesus was to “go.” Movement is part of our spiritual heritage.

Despite knowing this, we rarely center in on the fact that the spiritual DNA behind being sent is more about our identity than our activity. This was true of our Savior. In fact, one of the main aspects of Jesus’ identity was that he was sent by the Father. In the Gospel of John alone there are no less than forty-one times in which Jesus talks about being sent. This is where his authority came from and where he received such great clarity about what he was to do and not to do. It was not about what he wanted or even about what he initiated. It was, rather, all about walking in such close communion with the Father that he knew what to do next.

Jesus even talked about how the disciples had the same opportunity to do the very things he had done under the Father’s authority and through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-22). Yet when we abdicate this calling, we reap for ourselves and our congregations self-serving institutionalism, hierarchical forms of leadership, and watered-down acts of compassion.

This is not who are to be. When we come to Christ the very presence of the greatest leader and spiritual revolutionary the world has ever seen comes to reside in us. Therefore passivity, fear, myopic mindsets, and egotistical posturing should fall by the wayside as we mirror the one who has called us.

THE FIRST GENERATION OF SENT ONES

The Apostles were the first people sent out on mission. In Matthew 10:1-42 we see a model of how Jesus did this. First, he sent them out not as individuals but as a band of brothers (10:1-4). This is very important. Lone Rangers get sliced, diced, and laid aside by the enemy. Isolation results in shallow understanding of what God is up to and engenders discouragement. As you send people out on mission, they need to have a sense that they are not alone. Creating gatherings where people are reminded that they are a part of something bigger than themselves is important.

Second, he sent them with a concentric view of evangelism (10:5-7). They were to start with their countrymen. They were to announce to them that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand. In other words, God was in their midst working through Jesus the Messiah. This fulfilled prophecy and gave people access to God's saving work.

It also shows us that when we think about sharing the Gospel and discipling people, we should start with people we know. It is easier in some ways to share with people that are strangers because there is no examination of our lives that follows. But, individuals who know us can see if real change has occurred. We are to go beyond our borders to fulfill the Great Commission. We just need to make sure we cover our home base which would include family friends, neighbors, co-workers, and acquaintances.

Third, they were to minister to felt needs to get to forever needs (10:8). We look at his directive to heal and even raise the dead and we understandably shrink back; who wouldn't? The biblical and corresponding theological reasons for this to happen at this juncture of redemptive history could be boiled down to the fact that the advent of the Messiah meant the supernatural breaking into the natural. Is this a one-time event? It was unique when it came to the physical ministry of Jesus on the earth. Could the miraculous happen again? Sure. God works in mysterious ways every day.

Yet there is a deeper guiding principle at work here. It can be summarized as follows: Openness to the Gospel happens as people sense the love of God operating through his people. Sin always brings brokenness into the human equation. This is manifested in a multitude of ways. Therefore, any help we lend is a temporary demonstration of the love and power of God. When God's people are conduits of his compassion miracles of various sorts can happen. This should bring into consideration their eternal needs.

The fourth thing we see at work in Jesus sending the Apostles is he wanted them to rely on the hospitality of others (10:9-15). Some have taught that Jesus wanted the disciples more focused on doing the work than strategizing about the work. Using this perspective Jesus' directions here seem a bit mundane or utilitarian, as if he were encouraging them to "travel light." We should never overcomplicate evangelism and discipleship. Focusing too much on methodology can get you bogged down, but there is another way to look at this passage: Those coming to receive the Good News of the Kingdom of God move from hearing, to believing, to participating.

This means that every person who joined the band of Jesus had immediate skin in the game through their home becoming a launching point for future ministry. It has been said that relationships are the soil through which the seed of the Gospel grows and multiplies. This was to be reflected through Apostles being both bold and vulnerable. They were to be bold in proclaiming the Good News and vulnerable in seeking hospitality and support from the very people they were sent to reach. But make no mistake, this vulnerability wasn't to be poured out indiscriminately. If people refused them hospitality the Apostles could move on knowing that these people were rejecting Jesus, and this carried with it serious repercussions.

Throughout history the Gospel has advanced through followers of Jesus showing compassion and personally connecting to people in the mission field. This can initially be seen throughout the book of Acts. Following the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection and ascension the home and even marketplace eventually replaced the synagogue as the main contact point with a lost world.

In our day and time, a tell-tale sign that a church is moving backwards is when their sole methodology for evangelism and discipleship is bringing people to a centralized location at a certain time where religious consumers can do one-stop shopping. This can be seen through people defining church as coming to a place rather than being on mission with God.

The fifth thing Jesus sought to impress upon his Apostles was that being sent meant taking risks (10:16-39). Jesus didn't pull any punches. He told them to be ready for difficulties. Here is a summary of what they were to encounter:

- Public prosecution
- Familial rejection and betrayal
- Constant need for adaptability
- Slandorous attack from outsiders

This list would not be a great lead-in for a promotional brochure. Who would want to sign up for such a tough tour of duty? The answer would obviously be not a vast amount of people. Yet, in our day preachers sometimes soften the Gospel or dilute the costs of following Jesus; they only talk about all the benefits of being a child of God. But when have you heard someone say that great risks are involved in following the Messiah?

Jesus did the exact opposite from prosperity preachers. In 10:1 he tells them that he is sending them out as sheep among wolves, a bit scary. Not only would people reject the message, some would harass and even harm them for simply doing God's will. Amazingly, no one bailed. Why? People appreciate being told the truth upfront rather than being sold a bill of goods about how serving God is simply moving from one blessing to another. Such preaching is just smoke and mirrors. The surprising thing is that instead of repelling people this buoys them for the long voyage of being a disciple- rough seas make good sailors as the saying goes.

The sixth thing Jesus sought to explain to his Apostles about doing Kingdom work is that they didn't need to live in fear (10:26-31). It is understandable for him to say this. If I was sitting there and heard about all these stark realities of being a follower, I might have opted out. Fear of what could be around the corner can make us flee or freeze in place. An antidote for fear is by faith to be courageous in proclaiming the hidden truths of God.

Plain and clear speech helps people understand who God is and, as a result, confidence increases as you obey God. Courage is not a gradual accumulation of self-assurance. You speak forth the truths of God while you struggle with fear. When you obey this way God builds within you increased capacity for effective service.

Another antidote to fear of rejection and persecution is remembering whom we serve. Fear of what people can do to you makes sense especially if it results in your death. The average person would probably say that this is the worst thing that can happen to you.

But, Jesus said there is one who sees everything and will bring everyone to account one day. We, as followers, realize that we should never fear losing our salvation. What I see here at work is that fearing God for the believer is being soberly reminded of the all-seeing and just nature of God. Being on mission with Jesus is serious stuff. Destinies are in the balance. Courage combined with sobriety helps disciples have balance in how they see their part in God's redemptive plan.

The seventh thing Jesus revealed to his Apostles about diving into Kingdom ministry is that allegiance to him was the ultimate measure of success (10:32-33). Jesus had already been very honest about the costs of following him. He had told them not to fear people because God was with them. But, we can be disappointed. We will experience misunderstanding, misrepresentation, or worse. It is therefore very easy to be overwhelmed by difficult circumstances.



The answer to all of this is to be faithful to the one who called us; unashamed allegiance to Jesus results in his affirmation. Denial of Jesus results in some kind of rejection. Many have explained this as the difference between true and false faith. I think that is valid. Others have discussed the possibility that rejection could also mean that there is a demotion of sorts in being used by God. Whatever the exact case, it is important to remember that the heart of Kingdom work is being faithful to the one who saved us and called us.

The eighth description Jesus laid down for his Apostles for effective service in the Kingdom was to embrace the reality that proclaiming the Gospel has a separating affect upon those around them (10:34-39). Jesus told them that the Gospel can bring division even in the closest of relationships. No one would want this to happen. Yet the unfortunate truth is that it will.

The Gospel not only offers free and unconditional forgiveness, it also reveals the hearts of people who want to chase their own dreams and fulfill their selfish agendas. This provides a real gut check. Jesus reminds his Apostles that the true path to ultimate fulfillment in life is to follow him, even in suffering. To seek the approval of people above being faithful to him has deleterious results.

The ninth break down that Jesus gave pertaining to fruitful service is a reminder that there are rewards waiting for those who serve him and to the people who show kindness to his servants (10:40-42). Jesus gave some very frank and direct information about the costs of following him. It could be too heavy perhaps if that was all there was to being his disciple. But, he lets them know that there are blessings coming to those who participate in spreading the Gospel. To glorify God was their aim, but to look forward to rewards also provided them real encouragement.

Athletes who go through the necessary and grueling requirements to excel know that they do it to win. Winning has its own benefits. Few people would just work out for the fun of it. You work out with a purpose in mind and a drive to accomplish this purpose. In similar manner, we gain the energy to persevere by looking forward to substantial rewards from Jesus. This truth keeps us going through the toughest of times.

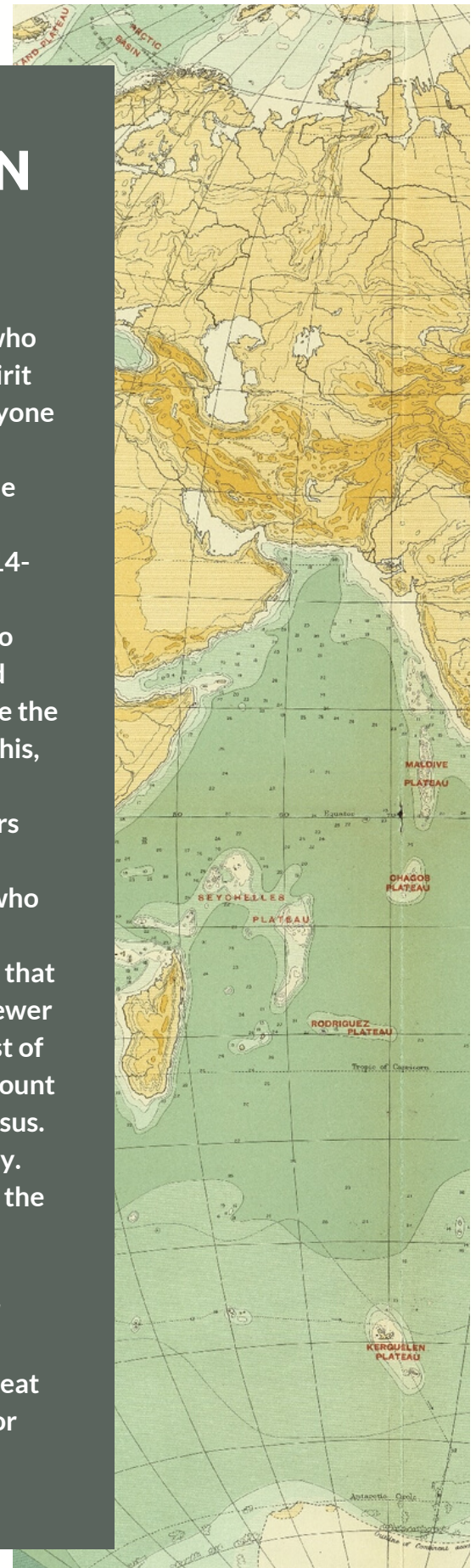
THE SECOND GENERATION OF SENT ONES

After the ascension of Jesus there were 120 disciples who comprised the band of committed folks. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost he filled not only the Apostles, but everyone in that group. They were empowered to proclaim the Good News to people who have come from the four corners of the earth. Peter then preached a message that explained what occurred, and as a result 3,000 people were saved (Acts 2:14-41). The Great Commission had officially begun.

From Acts 2-12 we see several different excursions into various regions surrounding Jerusalem by the Apostles and other leaders. Yet, it took persecution in Jerusalem to move the believers out of their comfort zone (Acts 8-12). Following this, we see the first commissioning of missionaries through a predominantly Gentile church (Acts 13:1-3). Paul and others went through a second assignment from the leaders in Jerusalem to clear up what would be required of Gentiles who became followers of Jesus (Acts 15).

Throughout the rest of Acts and in the Epistles we find that as the church expanded, so did the fellowship of leaders. Fewer and fewer Jews were converted, and by the mid-fifties most of the original Apostles died through persecution. Still, no amount of oppression would deter the world-wide movement of Jesus.

This truth of being on the move is important for us today. Just like the early church we can become focused solely on the success and expansion of local fellowships. This mindset becomes the foreboding death knell for churches. We are created, redeemed and called to be people on the move for Jesus. Any form of denial of this truth will turn the church inward and disconnect people from seeking to fulfill the Great Commission. Like the early church we need to be looking for ways to expand our own fellowship of leaders.



CONCLUSION

As we wind up the teaching of Disciple-Cycle, there are three important things to note.

First, you need a good guideline regarding how a group is structured and what it studies. I mentioned earlier that a good rule of thumb is to create discipleship groups (some people now call them DNA groups) made up of three people and a leader.

There are all kinds of curricula out there that can get people started. We suggest teaching them the Disciple-Cycle Model as a template for being a lifelong follower of Jesus. To think of it another way, you will want to teach who Jesus is and how he is at work; show them how the grace of Jesus helps them confess, repent and re-engage after they sin; show them how prayer and greater obedience fits together and get them learning how to share their faith.

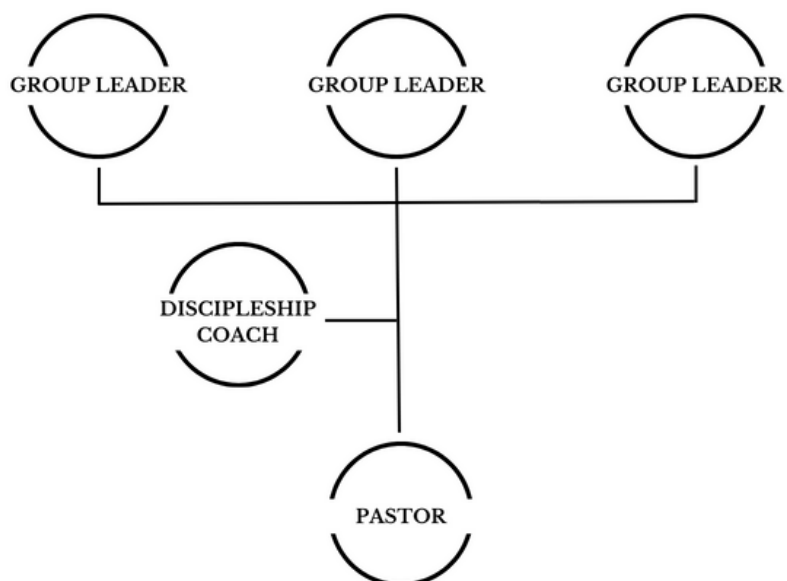
Also, as mentioned earlier, *The Good News Series* is a good primer to get people anchored in the Gospel and provide conversation starters with their non-Christian friends. In addition, whichever curriculum you use, you will want to make sure that other people can repeat what you have done.

The key here is to not spend a vast amount of time just teaching in these settings. If it is too “teaching heavy” you will need people with that gifting. Not everyone can do that. That will mean that the content is not only simple but that the group knows that they will be called on to disciple someone else.

A caution to be observed: If a group meets too long without multiplying, it will be focused only on the acquirement of knowledge as the primary mark of maturity. When you do that, you will get Christians who are waiting on some artificial level of doctrinal mastery before becoming a Gospel revolutionary. Based on that, you will need to encourage each group member to reach out to three more people and disciple them.



The second guideline is to create leadership roles as the group(s) you lead multiply and then start others groups. We can think in terms of two-three generations of disciples that are making disciples. You will then want leaders who are actively discipling others and have a desire to coach others. These leaders of leaders could have people assigned to them that they can help deal with any challenges they face. Obviously, there are no hard and fast rules that pin you down. But the following illustration can give you an idea of how to structure things:



Something like this is not about control. It is about growing your leadership pipeline while increasing your missional reach. You can and should do both at the same time or you will run into all kinds of problems if the movement takes off.

Finally, you can use this model to help plant churches. As the saying goes, “If you make disciples, you will plant new churches. If you plant new churches, you might not get disciples.” The goal is not to plant churches. The goal is to plant churches with disciples who are making other disciples. Too often, people plant churches as a better version of what is going on today.

While innovation in reaching people is important, if a group is not careful, this model can degenerate into a consumer approach to the faith. People who want to be a part of a church because of dynamic preaching, great youth/children’s programs, and inspiring music will often seek to be served rather than becoming servants. You are not looking for attendees. You are looking for people who want to be followers of Jesus.





The good news is that this approach is being done in some version all over the world. Churches that are committed to planting other churches will have to possess a replicable model for disciple-making.

We pray that something from these lessons stimulates you to get off the bench and into the game. Anyone who has ever been part of something like this is forever changed. They will measure success in a local church by how intentional, aggressive, and forward thinking the people are versus following a ministry model that is more about collecting people than sending them out on mission. When it comes to making lifelong followers of Jesus, our bottom line of measuring results will be if more and more people are growing into Christ-likeness.

OUR PRAYER IS THAT YOU HAVE INCREASED ZEAL TO BE INVOLVED IN JESUS' REVOLUTION AND DEEP WISDOM TO SEE WHOM YOU WILL SELECT TO JOIN YOU.

Soli Deo Gloria!



QUESTIONS

1. How is being sent part of our spiritual DNA?

2. Of the nine aspects of being on mission with Jesus, which ones stick out the most to you? Why?

3. Why would it be important to think about appointing leaders in the endeavor as soon as possible?

4. How would you describe your strategy of implementing something like we have discussed in these lessons?