

IN HIS SERVICE

Matthew 9:35-10:8

As we look at the life and teachings of Jesus, we can discover not only what the Kingdom of God is all about, but we can also see a methodology that is useful in starting a successful operation of any kind. Jesus first directed those who would follow Him. He laid out the principles of the Kingdom of Heaven in His discourse on the mountain. A basic understanding of the underlying principles is necessary in anything we undertake. We would legitimately expect a physician to understand the basic principles of how the human body functions and the principles of the medicines and drugs he prescribes before he treats an injury or illness. Similarly, we would anticipate needing a basic understanding of electrical circuitry before replacing a wall socket in our house. If these are needed, why would we think we could be successful in life without understanding some of the basic life principles such as Jesus outlined in the Sermon on the Mount? The next step in the methodology that Jesus used was to demonstrate the practice of the life-changing power that is available to those who would be His followers. He demonstrated for all to see that what He taught really worked. The final step was to delegate to others this same kind of ministry. The methodology is to direct, demonstrate, and delegate.

Methodology focuses on “how” things are done. All of us realize that how things are done can be critically important if the jobs or tasks are to be completed successfully. As we study the word of God and learn more of His character we soon discover that equally important is our motivation for what we do. We may do the right things for the wrong reasons and Jesus had taught that even healing the sick and casting out demons in His name was not acceptable to God if the motives were wrong. Motive is basically a question of “why” do we do what we do. Matthew makes a clear statement about Jesus’ motivation.

Motivated by Compassion – 9:35-36

³⁵ Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. ³⁶ Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Matthew 9:35-36 (NASB95)

We sometimes look up from our Bible studies, or singing hymns, hearing sermons, working in the nursery at church, taking meals to church members who have been sick, singing in the choir, and any number of worthwhile activities and we see things going on in the world that literally amaze us. We see people who abuse their bodies with drugs, we see people having children without being married because that provides more welfare payments, we see gangs selling drugs, women using abortion as a means of birth control, and crazy people who want to commit suicide by first killing a number of innocent people. It gets even closer to personally impacting the church and us individually when we toss in all the persecution against Christians throughout the world. Our first reaction is certain not one of compassion. We want to “smack ‘em down,” put them in jail, and in the worse cases shoot them. How well is that approach working out? Some would try to solve the problems by misguided compassion that would legalize drugs, increase welfare payments, make abortions easier, prohibit the ownership of guns and prohibit sharing the gospel those who might be offended by it. How well is that approach working out? The problem with either approach is that we are reacting with short-term responses that only deal with the symptoms.

Compassion is always a better alternative than punishment if that compassion recognizes the root of the problems and addresses the fundamental underlying causes of the problems. Do

we find any suggestions as to what was the source of the problems for the people of Jesus' day? Jesus saw that the people were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. So confused and aimless they were, like sheep with no shepherd. They were fainthearted and cast down, like sheep without a shepherd. These descriptors could be summarized as being hopeless and with no purpose in life other than survival. Is that still a common problem in the world today? We don't even have to look to third-world nations to find people who are hopeless and without purpose. They are in our hometowns and there may be even some in our neighborhoods.

Do we see a common cause of these symptoms? The common cause (based on what Jesus said) was the fact that they needed a shepherd and did not have one. Lack of real, dedicated leadership is an epidemic problem in the world today. The supposed leaders of the Jews in the time that Jesus was ministering to people were looking out for themselves and did not really care about those who were the downtrodden "masses." One of the main problems of third world countries (and the reason they maintain their "third world" status) is that their leaders are concerned only about themselves and how they can become rich.

The rising number of people who are confused and hopeless and without purpose can be correlated with the absent of proper leadership. The solution to the problem is also well defined.

Challenged to Pray – 9:37-38

³⁷ Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." ³⁸ "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." Matthew 9:37-38 (NASB95)

The solution to the problems of the world is not just saying a prayer. Prayer, in this case, seems to be a request for "problem solvers." If you have a water leak in a pipe in your basement, the problem can be solved by someone who takes on the role of a plumber and corrects the problem. The phone call to the plumber is not the solution. It is certainly a very important step in the overall process. But, notice that the first step in most problem solving activities is to recognize and define the problem as to its nature and its extent and know the general requirements for correcting the situation.

The problem was that people were "hopeless and without purpose." (There is a water leak in the basement.) The extent of the problem was that it was widespread as stated that the harvest is plentiful. (Water is coming out in several places.) The extent of the problem helps to define the number of needed problem solvers – the workers are few. (This leak is beyond what can be done by a single plumber – he needs to bring an assistant or helper.) Initiate action by asking (praying) for more workers to bring in the harvest. (Call the plumber.)

Jesus used word pictures of common everyday activities to teach spiritual truths. If we have a water leak in the basement, then we need a plumber. If we have wheat in the field then we need reapers. If we have men and women who are hopeless and without direction or purpose, then we need helpers who take on the role of a shepherd.

In his book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Phillip Keller observed that "Sheep do not just take care of themselves as some might suppose, they require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care." The shepherd will stay with the sheep day and night for their provision and protection and to lead them from place to place. Just as we cannot send the neighborhood teenager who mows our lawn to fix the water leak in the basement, we should not think that just putting a "Four Spiritual Laws" brochure in the hand of a church member to go knock on doors in an area of town is the same as sending workers to rescue those who are hopeless and without purpose in life. There needs to be some enlisting, inspiring, equipping, instructing, empowering, incentive, and operating rules for the workers before sending them out.

This is what Jesus did with the disciples.

Commissioned to Go – 10:1-8

¹ Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. ² Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; ⁶ but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ ⁸ “Heal *the* sick, raise *the* dead, cleanse *the* lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. Matthew 10:1-8 (NASB95)

When Jesus instructed the disciples to pray that the “Lord of the Harvest” would send workers into the fields they may not have thought that they would be the ones who would be sent. The lesson we could learn is that the sincerity of our prayers can be judged by our willingness to become the answer to those prayers. We could probably generate a lot of guilt by thinking of the number of times we have prayed for people who were in harm’s way because of hurricanes or flooding or earthquakes and we did not go to where they were hurting with relief assistance.

The enlisting started with those closest to Jesus. They had watched Him as he ministered to people who were part of the “sheep without a shepherd” group who needed hope and purpose in life. We would think that those who had watched Jesus would be the best resource people to take on the role of a shepherd. They should have already been inspired after hearing Jesus proclaim the principles of the Kingdom of Heaven and having seen the miraculous results of Jesus demonstrating his authority over the physical and spiritual world.

Jesus equipped them with that same authority as He had and sent them out to do the same kind of ministry He had been doing. Jesus recognized that delegation of responsibility must be preceded by delegation of authority. The authority He granted was in three areas:

1. Unclean spirits: Paul taught that our real battles in life are not in the physical realm but the spiritual realm. Our understanding of the spiritual realm is limited; however, we need to discern and recognize the source of problems. Jesus said to “cast them out.” Some problems in life cannot be corrected via education, psychological counseling, or medical treatment. (Spiritual)
2. Sickness (unsoundness): Jesus did not limit the type of sickness but included all manner of sickness in the body. We should not hesitate to ask for healing for anything. It should not matter if it is psychosomatic, organic or the result of an injury. (Physical Body)
3. Diseases (malady): This ailment may be related to general listlessness and is often caused by our outlook on life. (Soul)

God is concerned for the total person. We tend, so often, to relegate His influence to the spiritual and forget that He is the Creator of all that is.

The instructions that Jesus gave were related to a particular area (place and people group) of ministry for that time. Prior to the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus focused His ministry on the lost sheep of the Jewish community (physical Israel). Because of their unique relationship with Abraham and the promises that God had made to Abraham his descendant (God’s covenant people) they needed to accept their King Who had arrived. If Israel did, then the nations would be blessed through the Jews. This acceptance was to be the culminating or concluding step that was outlined by Daniel in his prophecy given in Dan 9:24

“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to restrain transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.”

We know that acceptance did not happen and, following the resurrection, the emphasis of

the message shifted from “the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” to the “Good News of Salvation” through the atoning work of the Cross of Christ. The limitation of focusing on physical Israel was replaced by Jesus’ instruction to “go into all the world and preach the Gospel.”

The empowering can be summed up in their being given the ability to heal, to cleanse, to raise the dead, and to cast out demons. What we saw in verse one was that they had been given the authority and now we see that they were empowered to do what they had been authorized to do. We tend to equate the “right” to do something with the “ability” to put that something into actual practice. These are two different ideas. It may be safe to say that the modern-day church has a lot more authority than we are putting into practice because we fail to be empowered by the active ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The incentive to carry out the ministry that Jesus gave them can be summed up in the statement “Freely you have received, freely give.” This incentive is still a valid motivation for us today in the church. Being gracious and being generous are legitimate ways for us to express our gratitude for God’s free gift of salvation and we can turn those emotions and good feelings into actions by sharing the Good News with those we encounter in life as we go about daily living.

The lesson text for our present study does not include the operating rules that Jesus gave the Apostles for their mission trip. In verses 9-15 Jesus mentioned several specifics such as not taking extra money or extra clothes and relying on the hospitality of those who would welcome their ministry. Many commentaries point out how difficult that would be for people who are career missionaries and wind up in far away places with strange sounding names. However, these limitations could easily apply to what we can do in witnessing and ministering to our friends, neighbors and coworker that we encounter every day as we share the good news of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ.

As we go about our individual mission work, we should realize that disciples in a hostile society are as vulnerable as *sheep among wolves*. To survive and to fulfil our mission we need to be *shrewd* without being harmful; *innocent* without being gullible. We cannot take a “bull in a china shop” approach to sharing our faith and expect anything other than rejection. Getting to know people and “being sensitive to their needs and ministering to those needs” opens doors to the message of the gospel. If the problem is that “people are like sheep without a shepherd,” then we need to take on the role of a shepherd.