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Personal Evangelism and Discipleship

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In Luke 10:2, Jesus said: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” When Jesus looks out at the world, he sees a lavish harvest. In John 4:35, he said, “Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” This means that there are people everywhere who are ready to hear Christ’s message and respond to his grace. This news should excite us to go out and find them. However, not everyone finds this idea of a plentiful harvest easy to believe.

When we see so much corruption in the world, we wonder how people could be open to the idea of Christianity, the Bible, and surrendering to Christ. When we see how people have been immersed in their own religious systems for centuries and even millenniums, we wonder how they could ever switch to Christianity especially when it could result in being ostracized, persecution or even death. We hear stories of those who have ministered in foreign countries for years and maybe their whole lives with little or no results. We see churches in decline despite the availability of



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abundant resources and the dedicated efforts of many and wonder why there's little or no harvest. It's true that the harvest is abundant in some parts of the world, but unless people see it can become a struggle to believe. Either Jesus' statement of a plentiful harvest is untrue and he's just trying to put a positive spin on an impossible situation—or it's true and people everywhere are hungry for God's message of love. Of course it has to be true.

So what's needed to experience this bountiful harvest if it's not happening in our own contexts? Thankfully, we don't have to try to come up with the answers. Jesus himself has given them to us. See in Luke 10:2 – "... the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

First Key to the Harvest: More Workers

Jesus is clear that when it comes to building God's kingdom - the issue is people. Jesus underscores this repeatedly:

- Matthew 28:19 – *You* go and make disciples of all nations.
- Mark 16:15 – *You* go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.
- Acts 1:8 - But *you* will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses
- Romans 10:14, 17—How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without *someone* preaching to them? ... Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 5:19-20—And he has committed to *us* the message of reconciliation. *We* are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through *us*.
- John 15:16—You did not choose me, but I chose *you* and appointed *you* to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.

Building God's eternal kingdom always has been and always will be based on people. So what kind of work is required to ensure a bountiful harvest? Acts 1:8 reveals this: "... *you* will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my *witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The work assignment Jesus calls us to is to be his witnesses.

Discovering the Ministry of Witnessing

The Definition of a Witness

A witness is someone who testifies about certain events or truths relating to the past. What are the things that Christ calls us to bear witness to? They're found in Luke 24:46-48: He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are *witnesses* of these things." Simply put, to be Christ's witnesses involves declaring the truths pertaining to Christ's life, death and resurrection and preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name. There are many ways to connect with the world, but this is most important to Christ. This is key of there is to be a bountiful harvest.

Consider also Isaiah 55:10: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." It's important to realize that our mandate is not to win people, but to witness. God is one who does the winning and brings in the harvest.

The Cost of being a Witness

While Christ has made his calling clear, there's still another dimension to it. Notice that the Greek word for "witness" is *martus* from which we get our English word "martyr." When Jesus chose this word to describe our calling, he was careful to use one that not only communicated our function, but the depth of commitment involved.

So here's how we should understand this call to witness—to go out and bear witness to his life, death and resurrection and preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name—even if it means having to suffer and even give up your life. These are the workers that Jesus says there are few of and are key for the harvest.

Some Examples of the Disciples and Witnessing

Let's see how this ministry of witnessing unfolded with the disciples. Let's consider Peter in Acts 2:22-24; 29-41: "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs ... and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact' ... When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter

and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.’ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

After God poured out his Spirit in Acts 2, people were ignited with a new fire and declared the wonders of God. Then Peter stood and gave the first clear gospel witness in this new chapter of God’s story. All the elements Christ had asked him to testify were there—acts relating to Jesus life, death and resurrection and the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. He hit the mark! The harvest was bountiful.

Not only were they faithful to witness, they also continued even in suffering. Note in Acts 5:40-42: They called the apostles in and had them *flogged*. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus ... Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, *they never stopped* teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

It was no different for Paul. He recounts his ministry to Ephesian elders in Acts 2:20-24: “You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus ... I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. Paul saw his task as simply to be Christ’s witness—no matter what the cost. He, too, saw an amazing harvest. Over and over we see this partnership of witness, suffering and abundant harvest in the witnessing accounts of the disciples (Acts 3:11-26; 4:1-22, 32, 33; 5:17-42; 10:1-43; 26:1-29).

There are some other things we can learn from the disciples in their witnessing ministry. First, for them witnessing was not an option. There was no choice in the matter. We read in Acts 5:27-32: Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,’ he said. ‘Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.’” Peter and the other apostles replied: “*We must obey God rather than men!* We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” In many Christian circles, witnessing the way Christ advocates has been presented as optional. The need to witness is declared, but people are given the freedom to decide whether it’s their calling or their gifting. This inevitably results in fewer workers and a smaller harvest. For the disciples, there was no option. If they didn’t witness, they were disobeying God. Note also these verses that speak of our mandate to witness:

- Matthew 4:19 – “Come follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men.”
- Luke 5:10 – ““Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.’”
- Mark 16: 15 – “He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.’”
- Acts 1:8 – ““But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth..”

Second, the disciples didn’t wait for opportunities to witness, they went out and created them. In Mark 16:15, Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” Why does He call us out? It’s because that’s where the harvest is. It only makes sense that if a farmer is going to get a harvest, he must leave his barn and work in the fields. The same is true for the church. If we are going to experience a harvest, we must leave our church buildings and work in the fields of the world.

Third, the disciples didn’t take long periods of time to first develop relationships before they witnessed. There’s nothing wrong with developing relationships in order to create opportunities for witness, but it should be noted that the majority of the disciples’ witnessing opportunities were with people they didn’t previously have relationships with.

The Rationale for Witness

Why does Jesus call us to this costly ministry of witnessing? The possibility of people having to leave their families, to suffer public shame and humiliation, to experience physical and emotional suffering and possibly even death is such a heavy burden.

First is because testifying about Christ’s life, death and resurrection and preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins is the means through which the seed of eternal life is planted into the heart of an unbeliever. The Holy Spirit then causes that seed to grow until it produces the fruit of salvation. This message is the basis of conversion. Doing good things like letting your light shine, demonstrating the love of Jesus, giving to orphanages and other humanitarian causes, praying for missions, going out on short-term missions trips, having mission conventions, restructuring church governance, advertising your church programs and even building a new building will never in and of themselves bring salvation. Somewhere in the process the seed has to be planted if there is going to be a harvest. It’s this message that pierces the heart and brings about repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” One of the greatest tragedies of modern-day Christianity is when we strategically organize people, resources and finances to meet the physical needs of people, but fail to declare the message of eternal life to meet their greatest need—salvation. This is why Paul was so bold to testify about Christ’s message. Romans 1:16 declares, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”

The second reason why our role in witnessing is so important is because Jesus has no backup plan for getting the message out. If we don’t testify about the work of Christ and preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins, the seed won’t be sown. If no seed is sown then there can be no harvest. Consider Romans 10:14: “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

Witnessing may cost much, but it’s key if people are going to hear and then come to faith. The consequences of someone not knowing Jesus is a far greater tragedy than the suffering we might endure in getting the message out. Jesus has no other plan. If we don’t do it, there’ll be no harvest. This is why Jesus says that there is a need for more workers.

A Framework for Witnessing

The Method for Catching Fish is Similar to that of Catching People

Notice Luke 5:4ff:

“He said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.’ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break ... When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’ ... Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.’”

Jesus’ metaphor of fishing is one that helps us to understand the process of catching people—bringing in the harvest. If we are going to catch fish the obvious first step is to go to where the fish are. Going anywhere other than the lake, stream, river or ocean will not produce a catch. The same is true with regard to fishing for people. We must go to where the people are—out in the world where they work, live, play and socialize.

If we are going to catch fish, it's important to have a baited hook. Without bait, there's nothing to attract the fish. The same is true with witnessing. We need to make the message attractive. Just approaching someone and launching into the message could do more harm than good. We need to work with the Holy Spirit to guide us to how to create that interest so that will open the door for people to want to hear. Christians often tell me that no one seems interested in the Lord and so they give up trying. The problem is not that people are uninterested; it's that we're not using the right bait to make them want to hear. Jesus was a master at using the right bait. He used statements that made people want to hear more:

- John 3:3 – “You must be born again.”
- John 4:13-14 - “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst.”
- John 6:35 – “I am the Bread of Life.”
- John 8:12 – “I am the Light of the world.”

He also used stories and parables like The Wise and Foolish Builder, The Prodigal Son, The Rich Man and Lazarus, and The Wedding Banquet to open many doors.

Yet the bait he and the disciples used most was miracles. People were quick to listen when they experienced the clear manifestation of God's power. Miracles were a significant part of Jesus' witnessing ministry. Matthew 4:23-24 says:

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering with severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures and the paralyzed, and he healed them.”

Miracles were also a large part of the disciples' witnessing experiences (Acts 4:29-30, 8:7; Romans 15:19).

While there were clear benefits for those who were touched, miracles were powerful “baits” that broke down barriers of resistance to the gospel:

- See in John 12:9-11 after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. “Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, *for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him* (see also Mark 1:27-28 and Mark 3:7-8).
- Peter and John healing the cripple, Acts 3: 9-11: “When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man

who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were *filled with wonder and amazement* at what had happened to him. While the beggar held on to Peter and John, *all the people were astonished and came running to them* in the place called Solomon's Colonnade."

- Philip in Samaria, Acts 8:6-8: "When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs that he did, *they all paid close attention to what he said*. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many and many paralytics and cripples were healed. *So there was great joy in that city.*"
- Peter in Acts 9:40-42: "Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. *Turning toward the dead woman, he said, 'Tabitha, get up!' She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet.* Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. *This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord*" (see also Acts 9:33-35).

Throughout the gospels and the book of Acts, miracles are everywhere. They opened doors no matter what the religious background or culture of people. God is still doing it today on account of Christ's promise in John 14:12: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." Just imagine, Jesus says that we can do this too—even greater things! This should inspire us to pray that God might display his power through us so that many doors would open in our ministry of witnessing. On a recent trip to the Philippines, I was overwhelmed to experience exactly that and see God open many doors for a great harvest.

Here are some guidelines when praying for God's healing touch for others:

- Pray with authority and faith. Jesus did. "While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. 'Your daughter is dead,' he said ... Jesus said to Jairus, 'Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed' ... They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, '*My child, get up!*' Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up" (Luke 8:49ff.). See also Luke 5:24, 9:10. The disciples also spoke and healed with authority (Acts 3:6ff.).
- Be open to pray more than once for a situation (Mark 8:22–26).
- Sometimes it's necessary to fast and pray (Mark 9:17-29).
- Be sure to have people profess their healing to others and give God glory (John 9:1-5).

One of the greatest joys of my life is to be part of God's miraculous work. You can be part of this work too if you truly believe and trust him to do the impossible.

Not only do we need to go to the fish and use the right bait, we also need a good sharp hook. If there's no hook, there's no fish. The same is true in the witnessing process. We need to go out to the people and work with the Spirit to create ways to open doors, but we also need to communicate the sharp message of Jesus so their hearts will be pierced with the transforming message of Jesus. So what are the truths that create this sharp message?

- That everyone has broken God's law (Rom. 3:23).
- That because of our sin, we are separated from God (Isa. 59:2) and therefore under the punishment and penalty of God's wrath (Rom. 6:23; 2 Thes. 1:8,9)
- That God established a plan to rescue us from his penalty of death (Rom. 6:23) and to wipe out the entire debt of our sin (Rom. 5:8; I Pet. 3:18).
- That knowing about God's rescue plan is not enough. A person must recognize their need for forgiveness and reach out and humbly receive Christ's gift of eternal life through faith (John 1:12; John 3:16).

This is the sharp hook that pierces the heart, plants a spiritual seed and brings about eternal life.

Finally, if a person is going to catch fish, there needs to be a reel. It's the mechanism that ultimately brings the fish into the boat. The witnessing process also requires the function of a "reel." People need to be guided through a process that would bring them to become a committed follower of Jesus.

In the fishing context, there are three steps to reeling in a fish. First is setting the hook. Second is reeling the fish in. Third is netting and finally catching the fish. These same steps apply to the catching of "people." The setting of the hook is finding out if someone is interested in receiving Christ's gift. The reeling in step refers to the explanation of what it means to be a committed follower of Christ. For example:

- They need to be told that receiving Christ should not be done as a favor to the one doing the witnessing.
- They should understand that receiving Jesus means more than believing in a system of truth—it also involves the miracle of actually receiving his Holy Spirit into their lives (1 Cor. 2:12).
- They need to be challenged to repent of any known sin in their lives (Acts 2:38).
- They need to realize that receiving Jesus is more than just embracing what he has to give, it also involves surrendering their hearts to his lordship and making him their Master and King (Luke 9:23).

The netting step refers to the final decision where the actual commitment to Christ takes place through prayer.

To be an effective worker in the ministry of witnessing, all four of these elements must be present if a plentiful harvest is going to take place:

- going to the people,
- developing ways to attract them to want to hear the message,
- sharing a clear account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and
- giving people an opportunity to respond by preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

An Example of the Four Elements of the Witnessing Process

When we study the disciples, we see these four elements are evidenced. Consider the example in Acts 3:1-20. The first element of the witnessing process is “to go to the people.” In this account Peter and John go out to the people in the temple (3:1). The second element is the “bait” which refers to the process through which doors are opened for a witness to take place. In this context, God’s miracle of healing the crippled beggar is the bait (3:9-11). Notice how this miracle attracted people to come and hear. Throughout the book of Acts, the disciples used a number of different “baits” that were effective in opening many doors. They gave testimonies, made cultural connections, discussed the idea of Jesus as the Messiah, as well as others. But as we’ve stated already, miracles were the most common. The third element is the “hook” which refers to the testimony of Christ’s life, death and resurrection, and the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Notice how Peter shared the message with sharp clarity (3:13-16). Finally, there is the element of “reeling” which relates to the calling of people to repent and receive the forgiveness of sins. See again how Peter incorporates this into his witnessing ministry (3:19-20).

These four elements were always part of the witnessing accounts in the book of Acts. See these other passages:

- Acts 2:1-41 – birth of the church
- Acts 8:26-40 – Philip the Evangelist
- Acts 10:1-48 – Peter and Cornelius
- Acts 16:11-15 – Paul in Philippi
- Acts 17:1-4 – Paul in Thessalonica
- Acts 17:16-34 – Paul in Athens
- Acts 18:1-5 – Paul in Corinth
- Acts 26:1-32 – Paul with King Agrippa

When engaging in the witnessing process, typically the first two steps come more easily than the last two. This often results in the witnessing experience going no further than the first two steps. Clearly, Jesus wants his workers to incorporate all four steps:

- going to the people,
- developing ways to attract them to want to hear the message,
- sharing a clear account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and
- giving people an opportunity to respond by preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

All four may not happen all at one sitting, but they need to come at some point in order for us to hit the mark of what Christ is calling us to do and to lay the foundation for a great harvest.

May God ignite our hearts with fire to engage in this full witnessing process for his glory. Such was the heart of David Brainerd. He was born in 1718 and was a missionary to the Native Americans in New York, New Jersey, and eastern Pennsylvania. His service meant great sacrifices which eventually led to his early death (of tuberculosis) at the age of twenty-nine after only five years on the mission field. Listen to his passion: “I care not where I live or what hardships I go through, so that I can but gain souls to Christ. While I am asleep, I dream of these things; as soon as I awake, the first thing I think of is this great work. All my desire is the conversion of sinners, and all my hope is in God.”¹



David Brainerd

According to Jesus, there is a shortage of these kinds of workers. This is why the harvest is small. So how can we see more armies raised up to boldly go to the front lines of battle? Again, Jesus gives us the answer.

Second Key to the Harvest: More Prayer

Jesus said that the workers are few, but then in the same verse (Luke 10:2) he gives the other part to the solution: “... Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” According to Jesus, just ask the Lord of the harvest to make it happen.

The Rationale for Prayer

Why is there a shortage of workers? Why is prayer needed when it seems obvious that we should just go out and witness? It's because the hurdles that hold us back are spiritual in nature. The only way they can be overcome is through prayer.

The main issue that stands out is fear. Before the Spirit was poured out on the disciples, they were seized with fear. The same is true for so many today. We fear not knowing the right answers; not knowing how to talk to people about their sin and the justice of God; not knowing how to speak clearly and relevantly; being rejected and the threat of suffering.

This fear has such a strong grip on us that we become more concerned of what the unsaved will think if we share than what God will think if we don't. We have a greater fear of people than of God. The result is that we excuse ourselves from the ministry of witnessing—the result being only a few workers and a small harvest. There is no program, strategy or leader that's going to eliminate this wall of fear—only prayer! When the early church prayed, God poured out his spirit and set them free to become bold witnesses and the harvest was plentiful.

The Right Way to Pray

So what kind of prayer is needed? Notice, the Greek word for “ask” is *deiomai*, which literally means “to beg or to ask earnestly.” This same word is also used by the demonized man in Luke 8:28: “When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, ‘What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God. *I beg you*—don't torture me!’” The word *deiomai* is translated here as “I beg you.” It's a prayer of desperation, not a casual one like what we might give before dinner.

So when Jesus talks about raising up more harvest workers, his answer is that we need to pray the same way. It starts with us being broken over the tragedy of there being such few workers to bring in a ready and plentiful harvest. Then realizing our helplessness to change the situation, we cry out to the only one who can help, the Lord of the harvest, to send forth more workers who will boldly testify about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name. This is the kind of desperate praying that will move the mighty hand of the Lord of the harvest to send forth workers and bring in a bountiful harvest.

The Results of Prayer

When we pray, not only does the Lord of the harvest send forth workers, but prayer also opens the door for the Holy Spirit to take charge of the witnessing process.

See Acts 4:31: “*After they prayed*, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” So important was the Spirit’s involvement, Jesus told his disciples to wait before starting the witnessing process even though the need was there, “I am going to send you what my father has promised; but *stay* in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

Without the Spirit’s involvement, our work is worthless: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do *nothing*” (John 15:5). “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in *vain*” (Ps. 127:1).

So we need to pray. This will remove any and all barriers that keep workers from the work of witnessing and open the door for the Holy Spirit to empower the process of witnessing.

What kind of ministry can we expect the Holy Spirit to have in the witnessing process? Here are some examples:

- He helps us to overcome fear: “After they prayed ... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31).
- He helps us know what to say: “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people! ... Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved’” (Acts 4:8ff.).
- He opens doors of opportunity: “They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ‘Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, ‘and tell the people the full message of this new life’” (Acts 5:18ff.).
- He directs us to where God is at work: “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch ... the Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it’” (Acts 8:26ff.).
- He prepares hearts to hear the witness of Jesus: “At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius ... one day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, ‘Cornelius! ... Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter’” (Acts 10:1ff.).

- He gives visions to help us know where to do the work of witnessing: “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia ... they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to ... during the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’ ...we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16:6ff.).

It’s easy to see why we need God’s Spirit. What a wonderful world that opens when we cry out to the Lord and God’s Spirit takes over. He ushers us into a new sphere of power that is unattainable through our own human strength. That’s why Paul encouraged witnessing in Philemon 6, “I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.”

God brought the disciples from the paralysis of fear and through his Spirit set them free to proclaim Christ which resulted in an amazing harvest. Do you believe God can do this in you today? The answer should be yes. The disciples were no different than we are. May God touch our lives in such a way that we rise up with a new passion and anointing for the work of witnessing so we may see a great harvest for the glory of God.

Some Comments on Discipleship

When we think about the harvest, it’s important to see it within the larger picture of making disciples. In Matthew 28:18–20 Jesus outlines three parts to the discipling process. The first relates to the “going.” This is largely what we have been talking about in our discussion so far regarding witnessing and the harvest. The second part has to do with ‘baptizing.’ As people become committed followers of Jesus and experience his life, death and resurrection in their lives, they are called to bear testimony to it through the waters of baptism.

The third part is “teaching.” This relates to the mentoring and training of new believers. The goal is to give them a strong foundation in the word of God and equip them to become ministers to the body and witnesses of Christ. Teaching becomes the agent through which people mature spiritually for the glory of God.

While God wants us to make disciples, an important component often forgotten is for disciples to reproduce themselves. Why? Because the possibility of world evangelization (bringing in the harvest) is greater as people who are reached become people who reach others. There is a place for mass evangelism (casting of the nets),

but the greater impact comes as individuals reproduce themselves. Although it begins slowly, the power of multiplication brings more fruit in the long run. It's the difference between bearing fruit and planting fruit trees.

Success in making disciples then is not just seeing people make a decision to follow Jesus, it also involves having them declare what Christ has done through baptism and sitting under the teaching of the church so they can be grounded in the word of God. One of the key indicators that they are maturing in their journey is when they come to the place of being able to reproduce themselves.

Conclusion

It's a great honor to be called upon by the king of kings to work for his eternal kingdom. While this calling may cost us, it's worth it. Why? First, because the blessings are immeasurable: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life" (Matt. 19:29).

Second, because the need is so great: "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power" (2 Thess. 1:8-9). There is no greater tragedy than for a person to enter eternity without Jesus. The weight of this truth should cause us to want to lay down our lives if we can but see one person saved. This is why Paul said what he did in 1 Corinthians 9:19, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible."

Third, because Jesus is so wonderful. When we love someone deeply, there's nothing too great that can be done for them. Listen to how the disciples describe their deep, deep love for Jesus after suffering for him: "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 5:40-42).

May our love for God be so deep that serving him as his witnesses will not be a burden but a great honor as a representative of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Notes

¹ David Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards (ed.), *The Diary of David Brainerd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xxviii.

Study Questions

1. The author compares the ministry of verbal witness to the activity of fishing. Is fishing common in your region of the world? Are there other metaphors from Scripture regarding witnessing that might be more familiar?
2. Discuss the benefit of miracles as a “bait” for attracting others so that witness to the gospel can be given. Does your group of disciples experience miracles regularly or occasionally? Should more space be given for the “telling of miracles” in our gatherings?
3. Would you say we have given adequate attention to the ministry of prayer before the attention given to the ministry of evangelism or discipleship? Is prayer a recognized ministry in your church or conference? Discuss.