



WHAT'S MISSING IN OUR GREAT "COME-MISSION?"

THE ROLE OF REPRODUCING EVANGELISM, DISCIPLE-MAKING AND CHURCH PLANTING FOR ORDINARY BELIEVERS

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In May 2007 my national partner baptized Joe, a Muslim-background believer. Instead of taking Joe to church, we taught him how to make disciples and start multiplying churches. Less than three years later, Joe handed me a chart showing 175 churches that had been planted, one-third of which were fourth generation and beyond.

Hundreds of new Christ-followers are becoming outstanding disciples, while discipling the next spiritual generation. More than 450 house churches have been planted in this new Church-Planting Movement (CPM). Perhaps even more rewarding is the fact that others who are emulating this first-century approach are also experiencing astounding breakthroughs. Beyond evangelistic results, Christ is showing his approval through numerous answered prayers and miracles, much as he did in Acts.

Practitioners of CPM strategies link church planting and church growth under the umbrella of disciple-making. By returning to the Acts pattern of kingdom growth, rather than church growth principles, the established church grows and simultaneously plants the church in unreached areas.

Viewing the Great Commission through the lens of Acts, rather than our traditional lens is the key to discipling both the established church and the newly planted ones. Christ's world-wide discipleship plan effectively disciplined the first-century world and can disciple the

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twenty-first century world as well. Understanding what the commission says, and how it works, helps us visualize how the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to implement it in Acts. The simplest way for understanding Jesus' world-wide discipleship plan is, "1, 2, 3 Do the Great Commission."

One Core Command

Jesus gave one core command in the Great Commission, "Disciple all of the ethnic groups." This command was given to the twelve apostles, but applies to all believers.

Two Assurances

The preface and conclusion to the Great Commission guarantee its success. Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore..." First of all, every believer has the authority to do the entire Great Commission. Second, Jesus promised his accompaniment to those who obeyed it—"I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mt. 28:18b, 20c)

Three Tasks

Going, baptizing, and teaching them to obey, form three parallel tasks to be completed in fulfillment of the command, "Disciple all of the ethnic groups." These three tasks both initiate the new church and guide it to maturity.

Going implies sharing the gospel with everyone (e.g. Mark 16:15) as the first step toward discipleship. *Baptizing* is immersing new believers in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to picture their profession of faith in Christ. Baptism also initiates them into the body of Christ. *Teaching* them to obey all of Christ's commands reveals the task of training each new believer to

participate in the core command, “Make disciples of all the nations” while obeying all of the other commands of Christ as well. How the three parallel tasks of the Great Commission are applied often differentiates the Acts church (which is similar to modern CPMs), from the modern established church.

Task One: Sharing the Gospel with Everyone.

What’s missing in Task One?

Established churches often rely on professional staff to share the gospel. Lay persons are passive in evangelism, even though they are naturally better equipped than many clergy because it is they who have relationships with lost people. Nonetheless, lack of expectation, training and accountability robs the church of its most dynamic evangelistic potential.

Beyond witnessing, each believer should lead people to faith and initiate the discipleship process. Calling the pastor to lead people to faith or simply inviting them to evangelistic events not only stunts the growth of the witness, it insures that all new believers will “call the pastor” instead of becoming fully functioning spiritual adults. In other words, it sets the stage for the “Come-mission.”

Changing from “Come-mission” to “Go-mission” for Task One

CPMs maximize the evangelistic potential of each new convert. It is natural for new believers to share the gospel if they are trained to do so. After baptism, whether or not new believers share their faith is the earliest sign of their sincerity when we equip them properly. By sharing the gospel with others, they make themselves accountable to live out the Christ-life in holiness. Therefore, witnessing facilitates the believer’s spiritual growth.

To accomplish the task of each new believer sharing the gospel, it is best to have one simple, reproducible default evangelism method. Even though a person is capable of sharing the gospel in varied and perhaps multi-faceted ways, it is better even for the church leaders and clergy to model a simple way of doing evangelism. The main reason for this is because a single, simple method is more easily replicated by lay persons. Similarly, this kind of method can be immediately applied by new converts. Every CPM employs one simple, culturally appropriate way to witness that can be emulated by every new believer.

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Task Two: Baptizing New Believers into Christ and His Body.

What’s missing in Task Two?

In Acts, baptism illustrated the believer’s new faith in Christ and introduced them into the body of Christ. Each new believer was baptized by immersion, immediately after profession of faith in Christ. Normally either the person who reached the new believer or someone else who attended at the time performed the baptism.

Striking differences appear when comparing baptism in Acts with that of most established churches. Practices such as infant baptism, withholding baptism, baptizing by modes other than immersion, limiting baptizing to the clergy and post-conversion delayed baptism are examples of diversions from the baptismal pattern of the early disciples. These diversions were perhaps well intended to resolve practical issues, but have hindered Jesus’ discipleship plan.

Changing from “Come-mission” to “Go-mission” for Task Two

Churches should reconsider their current baptism patterns in light of the Acts pattern. For instance, does delayed baptism diminish the evangelistic zeal and effectiveness of new converts? Profession of faith and baptism are inseparable in the New Testament, because baptism represented the new convert’s profession of faith.

When delayed, baptism comes to signify spiritual maturity, rather than profession of faith. The result is that growth in maturity ironically progresses slower because the new convert has actually failed to obey in one of the first steps of obedience—baptism. To the contrary, when genuine believers are immediately baptized, they immediately practice their new lifestyle of obedience by professing their faith publicly. The wonderful result is that they remain perfectly on the path towards spiritual maturity.

Many churches are already implementing patterns of baptism in which the person who leads another to faith actually baptizes the new convert. Handing a new convert off to the pastor for baptism interrupts the natural discipleship process which should occur between new converts and the persons who led them to Christ.

Further, the Acts baptism pattern can be fully implemented when planting churches in Samaria and beyond. Samaria represents people beyond our local area or those near us who aren’t being reached because of ethnicity, class differences, or other heterogeneity issues. There the goal is not to take new converts to the sending church, but to make them a church. Therefore, they are baptized by the person who reached them, into the new church they are forming rather than into the established church.

Task Three: Training New Believers to Fulfill All of Christ's Commands, Beginning with the Great Commission.

What's Missing in Task Three?

Traditional churches often teach believers to grow in knowledge. However, Jesus' challenge is "teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you." Instructing people to learn is indeed teaching. But teaching with the goal of obedience is training. We are usually strong in teaching, but weak in training believers to do, not just know about, evangelism, discipling new believers and church planting.

The goal of genuine training is that Christ's followers will obey all of his commands. In reality most new believers are only expected to attend worship, give, read their Bibles and pray. Few believers even aspire to become full-fledged disciples of Christ. Only the cream of the crop even consider being involved in evangelism, much less church planting.

Most protestant denominations believe in the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer, but we don't practice much of its true meaning. Even when lay persons do priestly functions, they are usually limited to evangelism, teaching, and praying. How would the world be different if all new believers were trained priests who have the authority and expectations to do all priestly functions? That is what Christ envisioned—a kingdom of priests who would disciple all ethnic groups beginning in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

Changing from "Come-mission" to "Go-mission" for Task Three

The revolutionary concept of the Great Commission is that each new believer was entrusted with the command of discipling all of the ethnic groups and was trained with a reproducing manner to become a partner in the plan. Each believer was expected to pass on the gospel to the next new believer. The plan was a great "Go-mission" rather than a "Come-mission." The "Go-mission" continues to push outward until it is either neglected by new converts to whom it is entrusted, or not shared by those who bring the gospel.

Sharing the task of evangelism, discipleship and church planting with each generation of new believers requires effective training with accountability. The goal is not for new converts to become our disciples, but rather our partners in world evangelization. In addition to recognizing the new believers' authority to fully carry out the Great Commission, they must be trained to do it. The commission was powerful, yet simple, making it readily transferrable. The goal of the practitioner should be to hear the new convert say, "I can do this too," rather

than, "You can do that because of your advanced training. Maybe someday I can too."

With this in mind, CPMs have discovered that immediate transfer of authority, coupled with ongoing training, is the key to making new converts into partners. Modeling tasks too long for new disciples creates unhealthy dependence and usually guarantees that they will not grow to full spiritual maturity. Training new believers to implement the Great Commission is foundational to their personal spiritual development. Discipleship becomes active, instead of passive. In the process of reaching their own oikos and training those they reach to do the same thing, new believers often grow in dramatic advances as they abide in Christ and do his works.

Active discipleship in obeying this command of Christ equips them to obey Christ's commands and teach them to others as well. On-going, step-by-step discipleship provides the incremental training with accountability which is ideal for making disciples. In this way a disciple becomes a student, practitioner and teacher simultaneously.

Training new believers to obey all of Christ's commands includes both outward and inward commands. As new believers focus outward, they must also be trained in a transferrable way of studying and teaching the Bible. This ensures that new believers can pass on these skills to others, even without the church planter present.

1, 2, 3 Go Mission!

Following the pattern of the Great "Go-mission" instead of our usual "Come-mission" challenges us to consider the benefit of making new believers into churches, instead of taking them to established churches. It also challenges us to make disciples and disciple-makers simultaneously.

The advantages of the "Go-mission" are numerous, as are its challenges. Radical execution of Jesus' commission prepares the established church to serve on the front-line of spiritual battle, where true spiritual life is most often experienced. Miracles most often occur in the field, rather than in church buildings. This is especially true when the gospel enters new areas.

Doing the "Go-mission" instead of the "Come-mission" maximizes every believer's ministry potential. Among the greatest joys of participating in Acts-type CPMs is observing as normal people become outstanding evangelists, trainers and church planters. Equipping them and sending them out to do the Great Commission dramatically increases their competence and confidence. Moreover, by recruiting priests instead of spectators, the kingdom of Christ rapidly multiplies toward fulfillment of his mission. As CPM practitioners and established church ministers, we share one focus, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Mt. 6:10, NASB)^f