

Lesson

7

God has Commissioned You

GO INTO ALL THE WORLD

This passage at the close of Matthew's gospel is universally known as "*The Great Commission*".

"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'" (Matt 28:18-20)

We have been commissioned by God, not just as soldiers, but as builders, labourers, ministers, counsellors, encouragers - as people who carry the presence of God and the anointing of the Holy Spirit into a lost and dying world. The Believer's Study Bible notes have this to say about this passage:

The great commission is Jesus' final earthly command to the church! It is customary for a person, who knows his time to die is close at hand, to speak only those things which are of the utmost importance. Oftentimes profound things are uttered by people as "last words" before they expire. Their words are often remembered long after the individual has gone to their reward. Jesus knew He would soon physically leave and be with the Father. He wanted to make sure His final words were both profound and memorable. "Go ... and make disciples" was what He chose to say!

God's passion is for lost people. Therefore the ultimate goal of the church is to populate heaven"

So even as a new believer we have been commissioned, called into service, called into ministry - the ministry of sharing our faith - and God requires us to be prepared.

What Does It Mean To Be Commissioned By God?

Enlistment in the army of the Lord is voluntary, not compulsory. However, once in we are signed up for the duration unless we go AWOL (Absent Without Leave - an armed forces term, otherwise affectionately known as 'going over the wall'). If we go AWOL, or fail to grasp the responsibilities we have as new believers to be committed to the cause of Christ and find a good church through which we can express this commitment, we can miss out on partnering with God's great passion for a lost humanity.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet 3:9)

Your commission cost God dearly, and this cost is reflected in the Lord's attitude to your life once you claim to be a believer.

***"For you have been bought with a price,
therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:20)***

***"You were bought with a price;
do not become slaves of men" (1 Cor 7:23)***

Once we enlist, we are commissioned to serve the kingdom of God in any way the Lord requires. However, while we await our specific orders as soldiers in the army of the Lord, we are to be trained, and prepared for our commission, and for promotion:

"No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything" (2 Tim 2:4-7)

The Purpose Driven Church

Rick Warren says in The Purpose Driven Church:

"The fruit of a believer is another believer. Considering the Great Commission that Jesus gave to the church, I believe the definition of fruitfulness for a local church must include growth by conversion of unbelievers. The Bible clearly identifies numerical growth of the church as fruit. Many of the kingdom parables of Jesus emphasise the unavoidable truth that God expects His church to grow. In addition, Paul connected fruit bearing with church growth (Col 1:6).

Is your church bearing fruit and growing? Are you seeing the fruit of new converts being added to your congregation? Churches that have few or no conversions often attempt to justify their of ineffectiveness with the statement, *"God has not called us to be successful. He has called us to be faithful."* I strongly disagree because the Bible clearly teaches that God expects both. Any church that is not obeying the Great Commission is failing in its purpose, no matter what else it does.

Both faithfulness and fruitfulness are required by God. But how do you define faithfulness? Are you being faithful to God's Word if you insist on communicating it in an outdated style? Are you being faithful if you insist on doing ministry in a way that is comfortable for you, even though it doesn't produce any fruit? Are you being faithful to Christ if you value man-made traditions more than reaching people for Him? I contend that when a church continues to use methods that no longer work, it is being unfaithful to Christ (remember, Saddleback is a Baptist church). Sadly there are many churches today who are completely orthodox in their beliefs but are still unfaithful to Christ because they refuse to change programs, methods, style of worship, buildings, or even locations in order to reach a lost world for Christ.

The commission of Jesus was to the whole church in every age. The imperative word in the commission is “make disciples of all the nation”. However, the baptising and teaching ministries have the force of a mandate because they follow logically the imperative “make disciples”. Matthew concludes his Gospel with the blessed promise of our Lord’s presence as we endeavour to carry the gospel to all people. Acts 1:8 informs us that it is by the precious Holy Spirit that we are empowered for our global task. The presence of the Saviour and the power of the Spirit are God’s twin certainties that we are to lay hold of and continually keep dear to our hearts as we serve our risen Lord until He comes.

The great commission is Jesus’ final earthly command to the church! We are to go, preach, teach, baptise and make disciples. For those of us genuinely born again by the Spirit of God this is not a divine suggestion, or an attractive option - it is a command!

Jesus intended the church to grow, and as members of His church we are to reproduce ourselves by witnessing of His miraculous, life changing, sin destroying, sickness annihilating, bondage breaking, overcoming love and power! Our friends, neighbours, family and acquaintances desperately need to hear *and respond* what we have to say, even if, at first, they don’t always appreciate the urgency or the need.

Personal Testimony

The most powerful and effective tool in spreading the gospel and motivating people to seek the Lord, which every believer must always keep current, is their ***personal testimony***.

In the early church there were no newspapers to speak of. Radio, TV, social media, the Internet and other forms of mass communications were unknown. People lived simpler lives, but they were hungry for something more than what they had, and Jesus gave it to them. When the Holy Spirit fell on the early church in the book of Acts a boldness rested on the people of God. They had seen the Son of heaven come to earth, live as a man, die on a cross and be raised from the dead. They were in awe of God. They were excited by what was happening.

The early Christian Church took the command to ***“Go into the world and make disciples of all men”*** seriously. They were simple people. They only had their experience. The personal testimony of their experience with Jesus was all many of them had, but it was enough! They only knew what they knew, and what they knew they wanted to share. They had a passion to share what they had received freely from God. They had no Bible - the New Testament was being written as they went. But they did have the Holy Spirit, and they had each other. Very few even had access to the Torah, or any Scripture to speak of. They found, however, as they shared what they had been given, that the spiritual kindling in the lives of their friends, their families and their neighbours was so dry that a little spark became a flame, and that flame became a bushfire, and that bushfire swept the then known world off its secular and religious feet.

Our country, our city, our friends, relatives and neighbours are as dry and hungry for spiritual truth as the people of the first century were. Despite the prevalence of TV, radio, streaming services, mobile devices, Internet, advanced technology and mass communications capability, the principles that fired the early church, and turned the world upside down, are as effective today as they were then - maybe even more so.

Jesus said, ***“The harvest is white, but the labourers are few”*** (John 4:35)

Remember, we have been commissioned for service, and we are commanded to share our faith, make disciples, baptising them and teaching them to obey God’s Word and Jesus’ commandments.

Keys to Growth

When people get saved, churches grow. When churches grow, everyone gets excited and nothing stays the same. Growth brings many rewards for the church as a whole, and there are great personal benefits poured out among the individuals who participate and partake of it.

A SENSE OF ADVENTURE - The book of Acts is a book of high adventure. Wherever we read about revival we read about adventure, excitement, miracles and changed lives. We all long for it, but are we willing to work for it. Revival, and church growth, doesn’t come cheap. There is a cost, and it must be paid by those with a vision to *bring* revival, not just enjoy the fruit of it when it arrives!

A SENSE OF PURPOSE - The Disciples and the early church were galvanised into action after Calvary, and found their life’s purpose in Christ and the preaching of the gospel. Whenever the power and presence of the Holy Spirit begins to move in a church, people shake off the old religious practices and come into a new awakening.

A SENSE OF PERSONAL FULFILMENT - Nothing fulfilled the early church like the results they gained from sharing their faith. They were so excited and passionate about their witness, and their trust in Jesus, that they willingly suffered persecution, imprisonment, even torture and death, echoing over and over Paul’s words in Phil 1:21 ***“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”***. Not everyone suffers for their faith, but everyone who is sold out for Jesus, fulfilling the Great Commission to ***“make disciples of all men”***, carry within their heart and soul a great sense of personal fulfilment and destiny.

IT RESULTS IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH - Nothing enhances spiritual growth like witnessing, missions and outreach. Confrontation with a world at enmity with God produces believers of strength, character, integrity and maturity. Opposition will come, criticism will come, even persecution may come, but out of all this will grow an army of battle hardened believers, willing to go “all the way” in their service for their God and King, Jesus Christ!

IT BRINGS SPIRITUAL CONFIDENCE - Nothing compares to beating the enemy at His own game. Winning lost souls into the kingdom breeds confidence, and the anointing of God rides on confidence. Faith begins with believing something can be done, then doing it!

IT IS AN ENDURING INVESTMENT - We spend such a lot of our time thinking and planning for our financial future, for our family's health and wellbeing, for our own self-development, or even just trying to survive in the present! But Jesus clearly stated:

"Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things (material needs abundantly met) shall be added to you" (Matt 6:33)

Earlier in the same chapter Jesus continues to encourage His disciples with the following words:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt 6:19-21)

Why did He say such things if He did not expect us to listen, understand and obey! Let's follow on with some thoughts from Peter, who was one of the twelve disciples, and who knew what it meant to give everything up in order to serve his trusted friend and personal Saviour, Jesus:

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!" (2 Pet 3:10-12)

Nothing you invest in has the kind of enduring investment potential that investing in the kingdom of God can provide, and I know something about investments after spending over 45 years in the Australian financial planning industry!

Nothing will reward you better in your heavenly retirement than putting your time, talents and finances behind the work of God, as represented in the community by the local church.

THE HONOUR OF BEING GOD'S AGENTS - It is an honour to serve as an ambassador for your country, and it is a position keenly sought by those who understand these things, and who wish to serve in such a capacity. We are God's ambassadors on earth.

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20)

"And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph 6:19-20)

Are you fulfilling your role as an ambassador for God? Is your life sold out for Him? Do you represent Him with your words, your deeds, your service? When people see you do they see Jesus? Food for thought, isn't it?

Mobilising the Church

How to mobilise the church for action is what all pastors spend a lot of time trying to figure out. One man can only do so much, but a motivated, enthusiastic, dedicated and focused team of people can accomplish much more.

The great task given to the church as a whole is **EVANGELISM**. But in order to do this effectively we must endeavour to do three practical things:

- a) Identify those within its members who are especially gifted by God to win men and women to Christ.
- b) Devise programs which will enable those so gifted to fulfil their role.
- c) Mobilise the remainder of the people to serve God in their particular area of expertise and calling.

I cannot think of a better way of saying what needs to be said on this topic than quoting from Ken Chant's excellent teaching booklet entitled *'Building The Church God Wants'*.

The exert on the next page comes under the heading *"Mobilising Soul Winners"* from chapter 14, pp 1 & 2.

*"We are all involved in soul winning ...
We are not all soul winners" (Ken Chant)*

We do everything we can to encourage and motivate everyone to become involved in the process of soul winning. However, the Ken Chant exert is always in my mind because I believe what Dr Chant says is true – *"to find such foolish and ridiculous behaviour you have to visit the church"*. A sad fact, but true.

We need to get everyone involved in soul winning, and we need to change our approach to how we go about doing it. Winning the lost at any cost is what we're here to do.

God has a passion for lost people. We have been commissioned by God to go out into our world, seek them out, and then come up with strategies to win a sometimes antagonistic people to Christ by any and all means possible. Eternity depends upon it - both theirs and ours!

Communication The Key to Growth

The key to effective witnessing lies in our ability to express ourselves clearly and precisely to those with whom we wish to communicate. Of special concern to many Christians who desire to share their faith, but lack the confidence to do so, is how to begin a conversation about the Lord. (Romans 1:16; 10:8-15)

Creating The Right Circumstances

Almost anyone who loves the Lord can witness effectively, especially if they are also baptised in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). But if we wait for the right circumstances to come along before we start seriously sharing our faith we will end up like many Christians who, after years in the faith, still lack confidence in this vital area of basic Christian ministry, and find that leading someone to the Lord is a rare or perhaps non-existent experience!

Ken Chant Article

One way to help each member of a congregation find his or her proper place is to reduce all ministries and offices in the church to *four major functions*: **evangelist, shepherd, exhorter, servants**. But first, here is an illustration of the principles upon which I have built this premise:

"Many years ago I worked as the accountant of a group of furniture stores in the suburbs of Melbourne. The firm had at least a hundred other employees. Some of them worked as shop sales people; others sold on commission from door to door; others drove trucks, packed the goods, repaired damaged items, and so on. Then there were the handful of us who worked in the administration building.

I was employed there for over a year, during which time I never once saw any of the shops, nor a single item they sold, nor even one customer.

How did that happen? Simply because my job was upstairs in the accountant's department, in a separate head office building. The nearest shop was miles away from where I worked. So ledgers, journals, accounts and countless columns of numbers engaged all my attention. Yet no one in the organisation was any more committed than I to the success of its primary business, which was to sell domestic furniture and hardware to the citizens of suburban Melbourne.

Now imagine this scene. Suppose the owner has called all his workers into his office to rebuke them for declining sales. "The task of this business", he roars, "is to sell goods. A downturn in our profits cannot be tolerated. I want our sales turnover doubled in the next few weeks. All of you drop whatever you're doing and get out onto those streets and sell, sell, sell!"

So we all down tools - clerks, drivers, packers, mechanics, bookkeepers, typists, shop assistants - and off we go to join the commission sales agents, cold canvassing the streets of Melbourne, trying to persuade reluctant customers to buy our goods!

If such a thing were to be done, what do you suppose would happen to the business?

You know the answer: swift chaos and total ruin!

True, the success of the enterprise did depend upon constant growth in its sales. But there was only one way to achieve that goal: each employee had to do well just the job he or she was employed to do.

In my case, that meant balancing the books of account to the last penny each month, which was done. There was no need for me ever to see a customer or sell a chair. Indeed, I would have harmed the corporation, not helped it, if I had abandoned the job in which I was skilled (accounting), and had taken on a job for which I was ill-suited (commission selling)."

Of course the story is silly. No owner in his right mind would do anything so foolish. To find such ridiculous behaviour in real life you have to visit the church, where you see this in operation constantly!

Effective Communication

Generating favourable circumstances is not hard, merely an interesting challenge really. When we master the art of effective communication, knowing what questions to ask, how to phrase them for maximum effect and when to ask them is a skill which every believer can and should learn.

When it comes to communication, of particular benefit is understanding this basic principle:

He who asks the questions is generally the one who controls the conversation

Five Common Communication Problems

Let's look at some common errors Christians make whilst they are learning to be effective communicators. Sometimes out of sheer enthusiasm, and at others times out of ignorance or arrogance, we find ourselves falling prey to one or more of the following five most common causes of communication breakdown (Proverbs 19:1,2):

1. **Failing To Listen (Prov 18:13)** Failing to listen is something we all do sometimes, but when it comes to communication, and especially witnessing, it is not simply what is being said that we need to hear, but also what is not said. Listen carefully to what the other person is trying to say, or avoids saying. Asking specific questions that gently but firmly lead the conversation in the way you believe it should go can be both revealing and informative. Listen to what people have to say and make sure you have the complete picture before you offer your advice.
2. **Anticipating The Answer Expected (Jam 1:19-20)** If we are not careful, we can find ourselves anticipating what someone is trying to say and then finish the sentence for them. The problem is that it really doesn't matter whether you anticipate correctly or not because you won't make many friends by doing this. It is perceived as rude and arrogant. Hear people out and consider carefully your reply, for this is wisdom.
3. **Jumping To Conclusions (Prov 18:17)** Answering a matter before it is heard is spoken of in Proverbs as being unwise and foolish. Jumping to conclusions (sometimes wrong conclusions) can be the same. It is one thing to know by a gift of intuitive knowledge, which the Holy Spirit may send us, and quite another to operate in the carnality of our own thinking. Don't be too quick to jump to hasty conclusions.
4. **Ignoring Vital Signs (Prov 16:1-2)** There are "vital signs" which are transmitted by a person which can indicate where they are up to in any conversation. Subtle body language movements or side comments often reveal what might otherwise be hidden in the heart. The Holy Spirit will cause this to come about as we are faithful in our sharing and sensitive in our listening.

5. **Being Too Ready To Give Advice (Prov 29:20)** This is a common problem for many Christians. We oversimplify complex issues, offer text book advice rather than individual solutions to problems, and generally try to have all the answers. Wisdom dictates that we know our limitations and defer to more experienced counsel when required. Even with a special move of the Holy Spirit in a person's life, people with deep or long standing problems will usually need further help, at least for a time.

A detailed study of these five areas will help us better understand the important role communication plays in everyday situations. This is even more obvious when we are called upon to share our faith and be a witness for Jesus Christ. Once these common weaknesses and errors are isolated and recognised, skills can be developed to overcome them and enable us to function more effectively.

We should always be eager to find ways to improve our effectiveness as Christian witnesses. As we look deeper into the art of effective communication and the skills that are needed to influence people positively to our way of thinking, we find that they have universal significance, both inside and outside of the church.

Whatever our personal opinion, we should not discount the things we can learn from other sources, which may include the sales and business world. But for the application of what we learn to be effective here we must apply the integrity and sure foundation of the Word of God to every situation. Also, just because we become very good at influencing people doesn't necessarily mean we have to win every time. Sometimes wisdom or the Spirit of God will dictate otherwise.

Universal Communication Principles

Jesus strongly infers that the children of this world are often wiser than the sons of light in regard to their own kind (Luke 16:8). Not only does the business world frequently run rings around the church in the area of communication, but cults and pseudo religions that deny the deity of Christ and preach a gospel foreign to the one we believe often take their lead from the world's system and become very effective at winning converts, influencing them strongly in negative ways (Prov 18:21; 2 Tim 2:1,2).

Witnessing is about communicating. It is a skill which must be learned as few are natural born communicators. However, all Christians are called to be Jesus' witnesses. To be effective witnesses we must practice and perfect our skills and follow appropriate communication principles to such an extent that it becomes second nature, as much a part of our life as eating, washing and sleeping. It will gradually develop into a useful tool which can be used in almost every area of life to lasting effect.

It is commonly agreed by experts in the field of communication that certain patterns of behaviour and response are common to man. Even after allowing for such things as cultural differences, language or education, the similarities are still quite amazing. Perhaps this is why the simple gospel message has been so successful around the world for two thousand years.

Picking Your Moment Wisely

You can create the right circumstances by picking your moments wisely and beginning a conversation with questions rather than statements. Everyone is interested in talking about themselves, their interests and their opinions. No one is really interested in yours - at least not at first - and especially if you are going to preach to them! Learn what to say, when to say it and when to keep silent! One of the most effective ways of convicting someone is silence (John 8:3-11).

Of course these principles are not just useful when we find ourselves in a witnessing situation. An ability to communicate effectively and influence people positively towards our way of thinking is a valuable skill which we all should endeavour to learn and practice. Whether applied in a personal, work or educational environment, in relationships, in confronting difficult situations or just getting your point across, a thorough knowledge of human dynamics and the art of effective communication is essential to guarantee success.

When we speak of effectively sharing our faith we mean that what we say becomes a tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit, able to sow something positive about the gospel message into the life of the person or persons being ministered to in this way.

There are many instances where Jesus Himself skilfully held the attention of a hostile crowd or gently but firmly persuaded someone of the error of their ways. Jesus was the foremost communicator of His day. An outstanding example of this can be read in John 4:7-42, which details Jesus' experience with the Samaritan woman at the well. This story shows graphically what can be done using teachable communication skills. We need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading and an avid student of better communication skills if we are to be properly equipped to evangelise and lead others to the Deliverer, Healer and Saviour of the world.