

OUR TARGET – GOD’S GLORY

Overview Statement

Countless Christians around the world come to faith the expectation that the gospel should result in transformation of individuals and communities. Most, though, do not see the transformation they expect. Why? It is largely an incomplete understanding of the end purpose of the Great Commission and its relationships to God’s purpose – His glory.

Main Ideas: Part 1

1. God’s principal concern is His glory
2. God is most glorified when the crown of his creation, human beings, live the way he designed them to live – living in obedience to his commands.
3. When we live in obedience we participate in the incredible reciprocal love that exists in the trinity.
4. The Great Commission’s purpose is teaching obedience to Christ’s commands. Proclamation, church planting, and teaching people Biblical truths are essential steps, but only steps to fulfilling Jesus’ final instructions to his disciples.
5. Transformation is not something people or their institutions accomplish, it is a supernatural act of God in response to the conditions he has established for our healing – humility, repentance, and living in obedience.

Main Ideas: Part 2

1. Seven principles of application.

Outcomes:

1. Now:
 - a. To grasp and express the main ideas of the lesson in their own words.
 - b. To plan and carry out one new step in their personal life as a response to this lesson through a practical act of loving service.
2. Beyond:
 - a. To live out the implications of the “end” task of the Great Commission in the ministry of the participants.
 - b. To evaluate the participant’s ministry by the degree to which it contributes to their disciples obedience the the commands of Jesus.

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Participant Outline

- I. Story from Brazil

- II. God’s Glory
 - A. What is the chief end of man?
 - B. Man's chief end is
 - 1. to glorify God, and
 - 2. to enjoy him for ever
 - C. The Relationship of God’s Glory to the Great Commission

- III. The Cosmic Setting
 - A. Psalms 19:1-4
 - B. Creation
 - 1. Infinite size, sunsets, molecular complexity

- IV. God’s Character in Words

Supreme; Worthy; Honorable; Beautiful; Majestic; Guileless; Loving; Pure; Holy; Merciful; Just; Patient; Powerful; Protective; Glorious; Voluntary; Self sacrificial; Splendor

- V. God’s Glory
 - A. Awesome and Fearful
 - B. But Winsome and Enfolding

VI. God's Glory - His Central Concern

- A. God wants his people to reflect his Glory
 - 1. A priest to observing nations – *Deut 4:5-8*
 - 2. A light so observers praise our Father – *Mt 5:16*
 - 3. Chosen for his glory (three times) – *Eph 1:1-14*
 - 4. Do everything for glory of God – *1 Cor 10:31*
 - 5. Live so that observers glorify God – *1 Pet 2:12*

VII. God – Our Glory, We His Glory

- A. God is our glory, our everlasting light – *Isa 60:19b*
- B. We are God's glory, a crown of splendor, a royal diadem – *Isa 62:3*

VIII. God's Glory Is Reciprocal - In the Trinity

- A. God glorifies the Son – *Col 1:19; Jon 17:5*
- B. The Son glorifies the Father – *Jon 17:4*
- C. The Spirit glorifies the Son – *Jon 16:14*

IX. God's Glory Is Reciprocal - We participate in this reciprocity

- A. Crown of creation – *Gen 1:31*
- B. God is our glory – *Isa 60:19b*
- C. We are God's glory – *Isa 62:3*
- D. We glorify the Son – *Jon 17:10*

- X. Loss of Birthright
 - A. Creation to display – *Genesis 1:1-24*
 - B. Image bearers to reflect and participate – *Genesis 1:31*
 - C. Loss of birthright – *Genesis 3:1 - 6:7*

- XI. Restoration through Sacrificial Love
 - A. Reconciliation of all – *Col 1:15-20*
 - B. Grace - power to will and act – *Phil 2:13*
 - C. Reflect increasing glory – *2 Cor 3:18*
 - D. Bear much fruit to God’s glory – *Jon 15:8*

- XII. What Is God’s Glory?
 - A. Loving, sacrificial relationship on behalf of the other
 - B. IN:
 - 1. The Trinity
 - 2. The Creation
 - 3. O.T. – Israel
 - 4. The Cross
 - 5. Eternity

- XIII. The Great Commission – *Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19*
 - A. Proclamation - Go and preach the Gospel
 - B. Church Planting - Baptizing
 - C. Scripture knowledge - Teaching everything

XIV. The Great Omission

A. Discipling – Teaching to obey (application)

B. The Great Omission's Consequence

1. Lots of conversions

2. Many churches planted

but

3. Little transformation

XV. Reinstating the Omitted - *2 Chronicles 7:14*

A. Two Conditions:

1. Humility

2. Repentance/obedience

B. Two Promises:

1. Forgiveness

2. Healing

XVI. The Great Commission and Transformation

A. Evangelism and church planting – stringing the bow, positioning the arrow

B. Teaching what Jesus taught – aiming, pulling arrow against the string

C. Discipling to obey in the power of the Holy Spirit – releasing the arrow

D. Hitting the target – bringing God glory and being his glory

XVII. What Does God's Glory Look Like in Us?

- A. Passion for Restoration of the Broken – *Mark...*
- B. Voluntarily Suffering for Others – *Phil 2:8*
- C. Love for One Another – *Acts 4:32*
- D. Generosity toward "Neighbors" – *II Cor 8:1-13*
- E. Hospitality – *Rom 12:13, Titus 1:8, I Pet 4:9*
- F. Transformed Communities – *Isa 58:10-12*
- G. Works of Service – *Eph 4:12*

XVIII. The End Task Is Not

- A. Winning People to Christ
- B. Planting Churches
- C. Teaching people about what Jesus taught

XIX. The End Task Is

- A. Equipping God's people for God's glory
 - 1. By Equipping God's people to be God's glory
 - 2. How? By teaching to do all that he commanded

XX. Do we see God's glory (sacrificial love/service) in the work of:

- A. Our denomination?
- B. Our parachurch ministry?
- C. Our local church?
- D. Our personal life?
- E. Suggestion: If not, examine our target.

XXI. Our Father

XXII. Weakness of Current Equipping

- A. Personal Piety
- B. Knowledge of Scripture
- C. Training in Evangelism/Church Planting
- D. Without equipping for obedience

XXIII. Principle 1

- A. Reliance on Enabling Grace
- B. Abide in me and obey my commands – *John 15:7-8*

XXIV. Principle 2

- A. Integrity and Modeling
- B. Whoever practices and teaches... – *Matthew 5:19* (practice before teaching)

XXV. Principle 3

- A. Ongoing Teaching (Including Repentance as needed)
- B. Milk to solid food by constant use – *Hebrews 5:14*
- C. A constant example – *Acts 20:35*

XXVI. Principle 4

- A. Application
- B. Show love by our actions – *I John 3:18-19*

XXVII. Principle 5

- A. Accountability
- B. They reported everything – *Acts 15:4*

XXVIII. Principle 6

- A. Encouragement
- B. Encourage one another – *I Thessalonians 5:11*

XXIX. Principle 7

- A. Celebration
- B. Exalt His name together – *Psalms 34:3*

XXX. Summary

XXXI. Story from Uganda

- A. Implication 1
 - 1. Keep our focus on the target - God's Glory
- B. Implication 2
 - 1. Build discipleship on principles that equip for obedience
- C. Implication 3
 - 1. Evaluate not by numbers, but...
 - 2. By evidence of God's glory (obedience) in your disciples

OUR TARGET – GOD’S GLORY

Part 1

by

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Last November I was speaking to a group of indigenous Indian church leaders in southeastern Brazil. I asked the audience if they thought the Gospel should result in the transformation of individuals, families, and communities. They agreed that it should. I then asked if they observed that the spread of the Gospel in their tribes had brought the kind of transformation which they expected. The audience responded with a clear “No.”

Hanging on the wall of the assembly room where I was teaching, there was a bow and arrow from one of the tribes. I picked the bow and arrow from the wall and asked if there were any young warriors in the audience who knew how to use them. Several hands went up, and I asked for a volunteer from among those men. As one came forward, I asked if he could shoot the arrow I was holding and hit a target I would choose. He affirmed that he could. Next, I told him and the audience that I wanted to try an experiment.

I pulled a scarf from my back pocket and tied it around his eyes as a blindfold. I then pointed out an imaginary target to the audience—a place on the wall directly behind me. Then, I asked my blindfolded volunteer to hit the target. He protested that he couldn’t see the target. I told him that I would like him to aim the arrow in the direction that he believed was the most accurate. His first aim was directly at the gasping audience! I told him he was off and to try again. This time, his aim was in the general direction of the target but far enough away that he wouldn’t hit it if he released the arrow. I then took off the blindfold and asked the audience to point out the target. They did. My volunteer marksman again complained that, *if he couldn’t see the target, it was unlikely he could hit it.*

After my young volunteer took his seat, I explained that this illustration could reflect why our efforts at evangelism and church planting have not achieved the transformation we expect from the Gospel we proclaim. I proposed that we have not seen the transformation we hope for in individuals, families, and communities—when we have succeeded with evangelism and church planting—because we have misunderstood the *target*, the task Christ has given us.

The Target, God’s Glory

There are more than three-hundred uses of the word *glory* in Scripture. The majority of these refer to God’s glory. To understand what God’s glory can and should mean to us, we need to take a fresh look at our mission through the prism of the Great Commission. First, let’s examine the *cosmic* setting of the Great Commission. This context, or setting, is God’s glory as it is expressed in creation. David reminds us that the cosmos itself declares the glory of God. How does it declare His glory? At every level!

Near our home is one of the world's largest ground-glass telescopes. Each time I visit the observatory's museum, I am overwhelmed by the infinite scope of the universe. On the earth, the human neighborhood of this universe, we gaze in awe at the glory of sunsets. At the micro-level, we are amazed at the complex and interdependent molecular interactions that sustain life. Yes, David was right:

“The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.”
(Ps 19:1-4 NIV)

Scripture reveals that God's ultimate purpose is to reveal His glory—a reflection of His incredibly wonderful character. Glory is an attribute given to acknowledge supremacy, worthiness, honor, distinction, beauty, majesty, and splendor. C.S. Lewis compares glory to weight—something of great substance. When I think of *God's* glory, additional terms come to mind—absolute purity, holiness, justice with mercy, patience, infinite strength, and voluntary-sacrificial love. Oh, how we need these attributes in our broken world!

Without a biblical understanding of the incredible winsomeness of the glory of God, the goal of His glory could be misinterpreted as the egomania of a capricious sovereign who demands the worship of his/her subjects. However, when we understand God's glory from the perspective of what is revealed in Scripture, we see this glory in a totally different light. God's glory is so loving, so protective, so self-giving and sharing, so pure and holy, so without deceit or hidden agenda, that when we encounter it we want to be as close to it as possible.

As I write, the chimes at a nearby mission appropriately play a hymn by Joachim Neander (1863). The opening words flow through my mind: “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation, Oh my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation.”

Reflecting God's Glory

As the moon reflects the light of the sun, the creation is only a reflection of God's glory. Try for a moment to imagine what it would be like to directly see God's glory. It would be like looking directly into the sun. Isaiah was directly exposed to God's glory in a vision. In this word picture (Isaiah 6), God's glory is pictured as holiness and purity. In the face of that glory, sinful Isaiah fell on his face as a dead man. If we try to imagine God's glory, we cannot. It is far beyond our capacity. Yet, incredibly, God created human beings to reflect His glory!

God wanted His people, Israel, to be a priest to the nations around them, living in such a way that other nations would see his glory and be drawn to Him (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). At the individual

level, Jesus told His followers to let their lights shine so that those who observe would give glory to God (Matthew 5:13-16).

Paul reminds us three times that we actually are to be God's glory. In Ephesians 1 He says we are adopted "to the praise of his glorious grace (verse 6). In verses 11 and 12 he tells us that we were chosen for the praise of his glory. As if to ensure we understand this incredible truth, Paul tells us we are marked for redemption for "the praise of his glory (verses 13 and 14). Elsewhere, Paul tells us to do everything for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Peter said to live so that those who observe us will glorify God (1 Peter 2:11-12).

In other words, when we live the way God asks, we glorify God. And, God is our glory. Isaiah wrote that "...the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory" (Isaiah 60:19). There is more! When we live the way God created us to live, we become God's glory. Isaiah said, "You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God" (Isaiah 62:3). God's glory is reciprocal. Amazing!

This circular glory is a reflection of the self-giving love of the Trinity, reflected in Colossians 1:15-20, John 16:13-14, and John 17:4-10. The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus. Jesus glorifies God. God glorifies Jesus. We glorify Jesus. And so it goes, on and on.

I believe the reason God changed his evaluation of the creation as "good" (Genesis 1:1-24) to "very good" (Genesis 1:31) is that—between the "good" and the "very good"—God had created the crown of creation, human beings. Human beings have the capacity to reflect His glory more than all of the rest of creation. How can humans do that? We do it as we reflect His image in the care of His creation—including our care for one another. Through this care, we extend the knowledge of God's glory until "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9 NIV). Many theologians call this the "cultural mandate."

Human sin vandalized this vision—this purpose of God—but Christ restored our birthright of bringing God the glory He intended. Paul powerfully reinforced this truth in Colossians 1:15-20 when he summarized God's plan to deal with sin and enable us to participate again in His cosmic purpose: "through him [Jesus] to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace thorough his blood shed on the cross."

Because of the cross, we human beings can reclaim our birthright to glorify God by living as he intended and still intends us to live. Isaiah 58 tells us that living the way he intends is true worship. The cross represents grace—God's undeserved favor toward us. But this grace is more than God's undeserved favor. It is the enablement to know how God calls us to live and the supernatural strength to do His will, bringing Him glory by the way we live (Philippians 2:13). When we glorify God by right living, we are His glory! This truth is also reflected in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we...all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord..." John 15:8 says simply that "this is my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit."

God's Glory and the Great Commission

In the practice of our evangelical faith we have gotten away from the full implications of this understanding of God's ultimate purpose. We have studied the Great Commission, and we have been careful to implement the mandate of evangelism and church planting. But, we have generally missed its ultimate purpose, or its target. Because we have missed its target, I submit that we have also largely missed God's intended consequence—the transformation or healing of our lands.

Let's look closely at the Great Commission. This is not an exact study of each part of the Great Commission, but we will look at it from the perspective of common evangelical compartmentalization. The primary references to Jesus' last marching orders to His followers are in Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:19. In these passages, evangelicals typically find the following emphases:

1. Evangelism – “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15). “Therefore go *and make disciples of* all nations” (Matthew 28:19a). (Italics were added and will be discussed below in #4.)
2. Church Planting – “Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19b)
3. Teaching – “and teaching them” (Matthew 28:19c)
4. Discipling – “to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19d)

In #1 above, we see Christ's commission to go into the world to evangelize and to see souls saved from hell and for heaven. We evangelicals have been good at fulfilling this part of Jesus' commission.

In #2, we read that we are to baptize new believers as a form of sealing them into the Body of Christ, the church. An implication of this is the gathering of believers into an intentional assembly—a local church. In other words, baptizing can be seen as one aspect of planting local churches. We evangelicals have been good at fulfilling this part of Jesus' commission.

In #3, we see another strength of evangelicals. Evangelicals have recognized the importance of teaching people about our faith. Thousands of denominations and parachurch ministries have written their own discipleship materials, but most of them—like many Sunday sermons—do not make a great difference in the way followers of Jesus relate to the creation and each other.

You may have wondered why I separated “and teaching them” in #3 from “to obey everything I have commanded you” in #4. I did so because, even though we evangelicals know this is a part of the Great Commission, we don't put appropriate effort into teaching our people to obey, or apply, what Jesus taught. We have somehow fallen into the trap of the cognitive behaviorists who propose that knowledge leads to changed behavior. The idea that good education will produce the right kind of society is a reflection of this secular lie. Ideas produce consequences only if they are applied. As good evangelicals, we tend to think that when people fill their minds with Scripture they will be transformed.

The last element of the Great Commission (#4) is often, tragically, the missing piece of our response to Jesus' marching orders! The other elements of the Great Commission are essential but, if we don't teach obedience, Christ's purpose for His followers—the Church—is severely weakened. We may be thoroughly familiar with the cross and the atonement. We may be deeply touched by the forgiveness that has come our way because of Christ's sacrifice. But unless that awareness leads to a reflection of that sacrificial obedience on our part, there will be few visible consequences to this central Biblical truth.

I have the privilege of teaching pastors at conferences and students in Bible schools and seminaries around the world. I often ask participants to share the Great Commission in their own words. Most of the time, they mention the elements of going, evangelism, baptism, church planting, and teaching. Sadly, they often miss one critical element: teaching people to obey Jesus' teachings. It is not surprising that this element is also often missing in their denominations and parachurch ministries.

John Thacker, Head of Theology of the Evangelical Alliance in the UK, said in a recent issue of *Theological News* that teaching content only peddles a “partial gospel, if not a false gospel” (WEA Theological News, April 2008, Vol 37, No2). Teaching nothing more than content is a tragic flaw. Teaching followers to *obey* is the final but essential step of Jesus' command to us. *It is the means to reaching the target*. Unless we teach the means to reaching the target, the glory that God created us to reflect will be greatly diminished. People who are converted under such incomplete ministry may be saved, but they risk bringing God dishonor rather than honor.

Most of us are familiar with research that shows little difference between the values and lifestyles of nonbelievers and those who claim to be Christians. I propose that this inconsistency is the reason why my indigenous Brazilian brothers did not see the transformation in their communities that they expected. And I suspect that it is the reason we see vast numbers of reported conversions and churches planted without the consequent transformation we believe the Gospel should produce.

Hitting the Target

In an article in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (October 2005), I argued that transformation is not something that followers of Christ accomplish. Scripture makes it clear that biblical transformation is something *God* accomplishes as a result of His people living the way He has called them to live. A familiar verse quoted by those engaged in Christian transformational activities promises: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

My paraphrases of this verse read, “*If* my people will live the way I designed them to live, I will transform their brokenness into my shalom.” Or, “*If* the people who are My Church will obey

the instructions I have given them—if they will live out the final element of My departing instructions—I promise to transform them, their families, their communities, and their nations.”

The promise of this verse is conditional. It is also supernatural. The condition is humble repentance of disobedience—followed by obedience. The assumption of the Gospel is that, without Christ, we are dead. Being “dead,” we cannot heal ourselves, irrespective of the intelligence, money, or manpower we apply to our brokenness. The healing of our broken lives and societies is something that requires supernatural intervention. When God’s people obey, when they live as He has called them to live, He supernaturally intervenes in their realities—using their intelligence, their money, their manpower, and other resources to bring His healing. But, unless we live God’s way, the promise is voided.

In short, the Matthew rendering of the Great Commission is to disciple our nations. Evangelism, church planting, and teaching about our great faith are essential activities along the path that leads to the final step of teaching obedience. Although these elements of the Great Commission are essential, they do not, by themselves, allow us to glorify God as He intended. Using the earlier analogy of the bow and arrow, evangelism and church planting is like stringing the bow. Teaching is like pulling the arrow back against the string. Aiming and releasing the arrow is the final step, or the means to hitting the target. If the arrow is not appropriately aimed, it flies through space without hitting the target! Nations will not be disciplined for the glory of God until God’s people glorify Him by living His way—by doing what He commands—every day and every hour.

Biblical transformation is not immediate, nor will it be complete before the full establishment of Christ’s Kingdom. But history shows us that transformation can be a significant reality now. Social scientist Rodney Stark traced the incredible social transformation of the pagan Roman Empire during the first three-hundred years of the early Christian church (*The Rise of Christianity*, Princeton University Press, 1996). There were similar transformations during the Reformation and the Wesleyan Revival. In each of these eras, there was a remarkable demonstration of obedience—identified by an outpouring of Christ’s sacrificial love by the people who are called by His name.

I believe it is possible to experience the same transformation today, but that possibility is conditional. God clearly laid out the conditions in 2 Chronicles 7:14. There are two conditions: (1) God’s people must humble themselves before Him and seek His face; i.e., come repentantly before Him and learn His will; and (2) God’s people must turn from their wicked ways; i.e., do His will. When God’s people meet these two criteria, there are also two promises. In His glory, God (1) forgives and (2) heals.

How Do We Know When We Have Hit the Target?

How do we know when we have hit the target? What does it look like when we— as individual disciples and as local churches—glorify God? Scripture helps us answer the question:

A passion for restoration of the broken

“Go and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Matthew 11:4-5).

Jesus said that He came to do the will of His Father (John 6:38). What did that mean? We see one answer in Jesus’ reply to John’s disciples, above. I also find it helpful to see the topic headings in the book of Mark in my NIV Bible. Examples include: “Jesus Drives out an Evil Spirit,” “Jesus Heals Many,” “Jesus Heals a Paralytic,” “Jesus Calms the Storm,” “The Healing of a Demon-possessed Man,” “Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand,” “The Healing of a Deaf and Mute Man,” “The Healing of a Blind Man at Bethsaida,” “Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight,” and “Jesus Clears the Temple.” There are implications for us, as followers of Jesus:

1. God seems passionate to heal brokenness. *Question:* What are we doing individually and corporately to heal the brokenness of those around us?
2. We see evidence of God’s sovereignty over the cosmos. *Question:* What are we doing individually and corporately to reflect God’s concern for the brokenness of our physical environment?
3. We see evidence of God’s concern for the desecration of sacred places. *Question:* What are we doing individually and corporately to heal the brokenness in our families, in our churches, in our communities?
4. We see overwhelming evidence of supernatural intervention to heal human and cosmic brokenness. *“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:12). Question:* Is the observing world astonished to see evidence of God’s supernatural intervention in our lives and in our service to others?

When we began our ministry in Haiti, a group of Christian young people in the worst slum in Port-au-Prince were challenged to *do* God’s will. As they prayed, the Spirit drew their attention to an sick elderly man who barely survived in a filthy shack. They went to this man’s shack. They bathed him, put him in clean clothes, fed him, and cleaned up the filth in his tiny room. Slum residents passing by were *astonished* and said, “These could only be Christians!”

Suffering

“But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, (even) Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every (man). For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:9-10 ASV).

There is a way in which suffering can reflect the glory of God. Jesus suffered sacrificially—not for himself, but for others. When we suffer for others, we reflect what Jesus did for us.

Questions: When we look at the individual followers of Jesus in our churches, do we see God’s glory as they suffer for others? When the people in our communities look at our church, do they see followers of Jesus who “give until it hurts” to heal the brokenness in their community?

One of the cell groups of an African church saw the needs of the Muslim children in their community for food, clothing, and school. They sacrificially gave of their own meager resources to bathe, feed, and teach the children in their own homes. The initially suspicious parents were touched when they saw this demonstration of God’s glory. Some of those neighbors are now becoming people who reflect the same Glory that astonished them.

Love for one another

“And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:44-47, KJV).

Another evidence of God’s glory is illustrated by the loving care that the first believers had for one another.

Question: What do the people of our respective communities see and hear in terms of our care for one another?

Generosity toward those we don’t know

“Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own” (2 Corinthians 8:2-3 NIV)

Scripture celebrates this reflection of the glory of God. For example, in 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, Paul commends the Macedonians for giving beyond their ability to needy believers in Jerusalem—believers they had never met.

Three years ago in my own country, we suffered one of the greatest natural tragedies in our history, Hurricane Katrina. It was God’s people—far more than our government with its billions of dollars—who responded with immediacy, love, aid, compassion, and manpower for cleanup and rebuilding. (Heralding Unheard Voices, Homeland Security Institute, US Government, December 2006). Three years later, many churches continue their involvement

An extension of this service is hospitality—an expected characteristic of those who are named in Christ. See Romans 12:13; I Timothy 3:2 and 5:10; Titus 1:8; and 1 Peter 4:9.

Questions: Do the people whom we have never met see God’s glory in our generosity? Are the people of our respective neighborhoods touched by God’s glory through our hospitality?

A transformed community

“Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1:17 NIV).

If Jesus were mayor...if the will of God were done in our families and neighborhoods...if there were no corruption in government...if business were honest...if there were peace between classes and ethnic groups...if the disenfranchised were treated with dignity and justice... Any or all of these would be what we would expect to see if we are being God’s glory.

These are not goals that we can accomplish in human strength, however. They are the consequence of supernatural intervention in our broken world. We will see them...if. The *if* is dependent on our meeting the conditions God has set out, in humble obedience to Him.

We long to see the above “ifs” become reality, but they are primarily a by-product of living as God intends. If we work toward these results as our target without teaching God’s people to *live* the Gospel in their daily lives and worlds, our communities will not be transformed. The Body of Christ should engage both in personal reflections of God’s glory and in corporate efforts to advance justice and mercy. But corporate efforts and programs—without the obedience of individual followers of Jesus to live as He taught—will not produce transformation.

Question: Do we believe transformation is dependent on obedience?

Part 2

How do we equip them?

If the end task of the Great Commission—the means to glorifying God—is to equip disciples to *know and do* the will of the Father, the question that follows is “How do we equip them?”

There are probably as many discipleship programs and strategies as there are denominations and parachurch organizations. These programs most often have goals like these:

1. Personal piety—the vertical relationship between the disciple and God
2. Knowledge of Scripture
3. Training disciples to evangelize and/or to plant churches

Each of these is a necessary step in discipleship, but they are not the full biblical goal. By themselves, these emphases cannot hit the target. The goal can only be attained as we equip God’s people to *do* the things that Jesus commanded.

Some pastors expend great energy, encouraging their people to become doers of the Word—but they don’t see results. Why? There are multiple reasons. One reason I frequently hear is that the people being discipled really don’t want to do what Christ asks. That may be partially true, but I think what is often seen as unwillingness to do the will of God is more (1) a fear of what obedience might mean; (2) a lack of practical knowledge about how to obey in the individual believer’s context; and (3) the absence of a cohesive strategy for realistic and practical application. If the believers’ confession of Jesus as Lord is genuine, I believe most will at times join Paul in his cry: “Oh wretched man that I am...” (Romans 7:24). At his deepest level, Paul wanted to obey.

There is another reason we don’t see Christians living in obedience to Jesus’ teachings—the worldviews from which we teach Scripture are often influenced by the lies of our cultures. In my culture this is reflected by the non-biblical influence of secularism, materialism, and relativism. These cultural lies are often clothed in assumptions, and often we are not even aware of them. We need to practice the discipline of recognizing lies and helping our people distinguish lies from Truth.

Seven Principles

If God’s glory is the goal and if equipping our people for works of service is an essential means to that end, it *is* possible to hit the target. How? There are different discipleship scenarios that are effective. The purpose of this paper is not to propose strategies. I believe there is something more important than a good strategy. It is the embrace of principles on which the strategy is built. While strategy needs to be contextualized, biblical principles are non-negotiable and are essential for whatever strategy is employed. These principles could be articulated in various ways, but I will share those that, when applied, appear to work in any cultural or generational context. I will suggest seven principles.

Principle 1: Reliance on enabling grace

“But if you stay in me and obey my commands, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted! My true disciples produce bountiful harvests. This brings great glory to my Father.... When you obey me you are living in my love, just as I obey my Father and live in his love. I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your cup of joy will overflow!” (John 15:7-8; 10-12 TLB)

The first principle is helping or coaching disciples to find and maintain their relationships with Jesus. Unless disciples are abiding in Christ, other principles for equipping will not produce disciples who bring glory to God, nor will the disciples be His glory. Their efforts will be man-powered. They may look good to an outside observer, but their “service” will have little lasting and/or eternal impact.

Not only must disciples have solid connections to their Lord, they must also learn constant reliance on enabling grace—the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit—to do what they cannot do in their own strength. Consistently doing the Father’s will in one’s own strength is impossible. But, *“Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* (Romans 7:25), obedience is possible. It is in the continuous practice of obedience that service moves from obligation to joy, from legalism to freedom, from religion to grace.

Principle 2: Integrity and modeling

“Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19).

The second most important element in equipping is the integrity between the messenger and the message, the discipler and the disciple. Equippers must be modelers. Jesus demonstrated and taught that *doing* comes before *teaching*. In other words, equippers must develop the spiritual DNA of sacrificial servanthood in their own lives before they encourage their disciples or mentees to develop and practice the same.

When I was writing discipleship materials for my doctoral studies in the early 1990s, I was convicted by the Spirit that the discipleship material I was developing would have no power unless I was writing from personal experience. Thus began an intensive year of exploring the spiritual discipline of sacrificially loving others. That year shaped the rest of my life.

For example, a small discipline I regularly practice begins before I leave home for the office. I put a plastic grocery bag—sometimes two bags—in my back pocket. As I walk the two blocks to and from my parking space to the office, I pick up trash and often subconsciously hum “This is My Father’s World.” I don’t talk about it, and I don’t do it to be noticed. Actually, I’m shy about this strange-looking behavior, but I do it anyway. Whether this or my other expressions of

service are noticed or not, they allow me to teach and mentor others about small and larger demonstrations of our Father's love.

Principle 3: Ongoing teaching

“But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:14 NIV).

“And I have been a constant example of how you can help the poor by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' ” (Acts 20:35 NLT).

The third principle is ongoing teaching—the continuous reinforcement and coaching of the centrality of what can be called faith-praxis. What is “faith-praxis”? It is the disciplined, intentional lifestyle of allowing Christ's spirit of sacrificial servanthood to flow through our every thought, word, and action. This principle can be introduced through curricula or a teaching series. However, faith-praxis is not sustainable in a local church unless it permeates the teaching, discipleship, and mentoring of the membership. If the teaching and modeling of sacrificial servanthood is not explicit, it must be intentionally implicit throughout the equipping process in order to maximally impact the ministry lifestyle of a local church. Why? Living our faith in a way that reflects what Jesus modeled and taught—sacrificial servanthood—is a critical vehicle for reaching the goal of glorifying God *and* of being His glory.

There is a large church in East Africa that integrates this kind of teaching and practice throughout the church. The themes that are developed in the sermons, the Bible studies, and the cell groups constantly remind the members that the principal call of God is to live out His Kingdom, both individually and corporately. The call to faith-praxis in this church is explicit—or intentionally implicit—in all of the church's equipping process. As a result, this church is known—from the neighborhoods where its people live, to the halls of the national government—as a church of people who sacrificially invest to see their society healed of its brokenness.

Principle 4: Application***(see last page)*

“Little children, let us stop just saying we love people; let us really love them, and show it by our actions. Then we will know for sure, by our actions, that we are on God's side, and our consciences will be clear, even when we stand before the Lord” (1 John 3:18-19 TLB)

The fourth principle is application. Wherever possible, discipleship must lead to present—not future—action. Obedience to God's commands is to be done now. It is not merely a good idea to be carried out sometime later.

Unfortunately, disciplers sometimes see application as something for the mature disciple. Jesus told the rich young ruler to obey first and then follow Jesus. I wonder how the results of our

evangelism and discipleship would change if we first asked seekers to do what Jesus commands as a sign that they want to follow Him?

Guiding the application process is not easy, especially for those who have not developed the needed skill. Leading a group of Christians to application is like learning to drive. In the beginning, there are jumps and stalls. After awhile, the maturing driver coordinates starting, steering, and stopping with grace—without thinking.

Unless they apply what they learn, little will change in the lives of church members and the people of their respective worlds—the people they are called to serve. Leading or facilitating lesson application requires skill, humility, patience, persistence, a deep love for Jesus, and a commitment to obey by discipling others to obey. Other than evangelism and spiritual discipleship, the skill of leading disciples to live lifestyles of “doing” what Jesus commanded is not often modeled or taught in Bible schools, seminaries, or church-based teacher trainings. Like driving, this skill is best learned through experience, but it is one of the most important arrows in the quiver of one who has a passion to hit the target.

Principle 5: Accountability

“When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them” (Acts 15:4 NIV)

The fifth principle is accountability. A well recognized management mantra is, “Regardless of written policy, employees pay attention to what the boss notices.” Our people need to see that their leaders see and acknowledge sacrificial service—that they expect service to be the principal mark of membership. Opportunities to share the joys, questions, and frustrations of application should have a regular and reserved place in worship services, small-group settings, and accountability groups. This is another way to provide structured and spontaneous opportunities for our people, giving testimony to what God has done and what people are learning as they serve. Opportunities for accountability need to be expected, positively anticipated, regular, and frequent—a part of our worship. Isaiah 58 reminds us that the demonstration of God’s sacrificial love is the essential form of true worship.

Principle 6: Encouragement

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV)

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose” (Philippians 2:1-2 NIV)

A sixth principle is encouragement. Encouragement is especially important for the inexperienced disciple. Sustained joy of serving comes naturally when service as a lifestyle is so practiced that it becomes unconscious. The follower of Jesus who is just learning true discipleship needs the encouragement that comes from recognition, group interaction, and coaching. Such encouragement and recognition should not lift up the disciple, but the Lord the disciple serves.

Principle 7: Celebration

“Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together” (Ps 34:3 NIV)

Finally, we come to the seventh principle—celebration. When I see what people celebrate, I have a good idea of what they value. What we celebrate reflects our values. If we value numbers over obedience, we will celebrate the number of people who have “been evangelized,” the number of people who were baptized, the number of churches planted, or the number of new church members. We can legitimately celebrate these things. But if the end goal of our efforts is to bring glory to God as our people serve in His name, our celebrations should primarily reflect that value. When we see our people serve, let’s celebrate! Let’s glorify the Lord who enables us to be His glory.

How? We can tell stories. We can talk about the struggles, the surprises, and the evidence we have seen of God’s supernatural intervention. Numerical growth is good, but saints who serve are a greater evidence of fruit than numbers.

Implications

The above examples reflect how the watching world sees the glory of God in and through us. What are the implications for the churches we plant and the people we disciple...

- If God’s ultimate propose is to reveal His glory?
- If we express His glory by doing His will?
- If we are God’s glory by reflecting his character?

Let me propose three implications.

1. We must keep not only the initial steps of the Great Commission in mind, but, most importantly, we must never lose sight of the relationship between our obedience and the glory of God, “on earth as it is in heaven.”
2. Whatever discipleship strategy is employed, we need to creatively ensure that the strategy is built on essential biblical principles for developing disciples who glorify God in their lives.

3. We need to evaluate our evangelism, church planting, teaching, and discipling—not by numerical measures but by the evidence of God’s glory in the lives of disciples.

Our Father

Forgive us for our unfaithfulness to Your full intentions. Help us to not only evangelize, plant churches, and teach Your commands. Help us to teach those you bring under our care to do Your will. Your goal is that Your name would be honored. Grant that we may increasingly make Your glory our goal. And, in the process, may we increasingly *be* Your glory. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done...” Amen.

END

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I know a young African man who was unemployed when I met him. God used him as a catalyst to provide schooling for hundreds of children in an impoverished community. Through our teaching, he came to know that Scripture’s command to demonstrate God’s love did not depend on his convenience, his resources, or his perceived abilities, but on obedience in his present reality. He says, “I was a good Christian. I knew how to tell people about Jesus. But there was one thing that I did not know. I did not know that obeying Jesus was not an option. It is a must!”

Understanding this, he acted in faith. For eight months he and his friends voluntarily taught local children to read and do arithmetic, without any personal compensation. God supernaturally intervened in this young man’s slum community and began a process that has resulted in multiple elementary schools, one secondary school, and the planting of several local churches populated by people who saw the demonstration of God’s love for their children. Note that evangelism and church multiplication were not the goal, but they were a consequence of the demonstration of God’s love, His glory.

Many wonderful discipleship curricula are available, but they seldom lead to tangible application other than personal spiritual discipline or content-oriented evangelism. Suggestions for lesson applications are often so vague that they seldom result in action. For effective applications, lesson instructions should nurture specificity, planning, and joyful accountability for service. For example, instead of the lesson leaving participants with an instruction to “go and love your neighbors,” the group leader could ask, “Which of your neighbors has a need you could meet before our next meeting? What is that need? What will you do to meet that need? When will you do it?” The application should be realistic in the sense that it can be completed within the context of other obligations and before the next session.

Ideally, the disciple or learner should seek God and decide how he or she will apply the lesson before leaving the session. Of course, the Holy Spirit may bring an opportunity to serve that isn't anticipated. That unanticipated opportunity becomes the priority. But, making a specific decision to act develops both resolve and creativity. The chosen application should be something beyond what the disciple would ordinarily do, in order that the disciple will grow. Finally, the application should require personal sacrifice on the part of the person who is doing the service.

Wherever possible, the application of a given teaching should be an intentionally planned element of every Bible study or discipleship lesson. This takes time—perhaps as much as one-third of the time available. Some teachers or disciplers are reluctant to give that much time to application. My response is a question: Which do you prefer—disciples who know more but don't apply what they know, or followers of Jesus who know less but apply what they know?

For more information and help with these principles, go to the Disciple Nations Alliance and/or Harvest web sites – www.disciplenations.org and www.harvestfoundation.org

Questions for the Round Tables

1. Do you agree with the propositions presented this morning that God intends that the Church must do more than evangelism, church planting, and teaching content-oriented discipleship?
2. Does the Great Commission require the teaching of obedience?
3. To what degree do you think that teaching obedience is related to transformation?
4. Can the Church fulfill the Great Commission by doing more of what it has been doing? If not, what needs to change?
5. What are we doing individually and corporately to heal the brokenness of those around us?
6. What are we doing individually and corporately to reflect God's concern for the brokenness of our families, our churches, our communities, and our physical environment?
7. Is the observing world astonished to see evidence of God's supernatural intervention in our lives and in our service to others?
8. When the communities in which our churches minister look at our church, do they see people who "give until it hurts" to heal the brokenness in our community?
9. Do the people of our communities see and hear us carrying for one another? What do they observe?
10. Are the people of our neighborhoods touched by God's glory through our hospitality?
11. To what extent do we believe that biblical transformation is dependent on obedience?