

15. Creativity and Effective Ministry – Part 3

In our last two topics, we have talked about the creativity of Christ as He showed the disciples creative ways to share the Gospel and minister to others. Today, we are going to see the creativity of Christ as He trained the disciples for effective ministry.

In Matthew 4:18-22, Christ promised four disciples that, if they would follow Him, He would equip them to become fishers of men. Then, Matthew 4:23 says, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.” Christ showed the disciples what to share, and how to share it, by taking the disciples with Him, so they could observe what He shared and how He shared. Today, many Christians have never learned how to creatively share the Gospel. They have been told how to share the Gospel, but never been shown how to share the Gospel so they could see both what to share and how to share it.

The disciples traveled with Christ for about twenty-one months before He first sent them out to minister on their own. During that time, they saw the prayer life of Christ and began to realize the importance of having daily fellowship with the Father in order to be effective in ministry. In Matthew 6:9-10, Christ taught them, “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In this part of what we call the Lord’s Prayer, we see that Christ taught the disciples the importance of recognizing their relationship with God - “Our Father”, His holiness - “Hallowed by Your name”, His work - “Your kingdom come”, and His will - “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. Only when we begin to pray for God’s work, and His will to be done, will we become effective in ministry.

As we help people develop in ministry, we need to help them learn how to cross four barriers:

- ◆ the barrier of their own fear (their Jerusalem)
- ◆ the barrier of making contacts with strangers (their Judea)
- ◆ the barrier of another culture, religion, or ethnic group (their Samaria)
- ◆ the barrier of language (their uttermost part of the earth)

Christ had spent twenty-one months showing the disciples what to share and how to share it, as well as the importance of learning to depend on the Father through prayer. Those things were important to help the disciples learn how to cross the barrier of their own fear.

Now, as Christ sent out the twelve to learn to make contacts with strangers, He gave them very specific instructions. Matthew 10:5-6 says, “These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’” Christ gave us an example of creativity by showing us how to equip people for ministry. The lesson that we see here is to teach people to cross one barrier at a time. Christ specifically told the disciples not to cross the barrier of language. He also told them not to cross the barrier of another culture, religion, or ethnic group. This first time on their own, Christ only wanted the disciples to cross one barrier - the barrier of learning to make contacts with other Jews.

Christ also told the disciples exactly what to say. Matthew 10:7 says, “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Matthew 4:17 shows that was the exact message Christ had been preaching. “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” The disciples had traveled with Christ for twenty-one months and had heard Him share that message. Later, Christ would give them a new message. Luke 24:46-49 says, “Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.’” This is the message we are to show people how to share.

Christ also told the disciples how to minister to physical and spiritual needs as they preached. Matthew 10:8 says, “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” The disciples had observed Christ as He did each of these things, so they knew what Christ had done. Christ also wanted to make sure they did not follow the example of false teachers. That was the reason for the final instruction in this verse. False teachers did what they did for self-gain. Christ had given, to the disciples, freely. Now, the disciples were to give to others freely. They were to serve others, not seek to be served.

Christ also promised to supply their needs. Matthew 10:9-10 says, “Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.” Here, we see that Christ chose a very creative way to help the disciples learn to depend on Him to supply their needs. He sent them out with nothing extra. They had to first learn that the Lord, not men, was their source of supply, or they would have spent time worrying in the future. They needed to know that they could depend on the Lord to supply their needs.

Christ also told the disciples how to make initial contacts in a new city or town. Matthew 10:11 says, “Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out.” The first thing the disciples were to do was find out who was worthy. This meant they had to ask a variety of people who the people considered to be a family that was respected in the city or town. A respected family will always have many other contacts, because they have a network of relatives, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and other acquaintances. Since one of the purposes of this ministry trip was to help the disciples learn to make contacts, they were taught a principle that would help them many times in the future.

Christ also told them how to begin to build a relationship with that family. Matthew 10:12-13 says, “And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.” Here, we see that the first thing the disciples were to do was greet the family joyfully. “To greet a family” means *to take time to get acquainted with the family*. It shows that you are interested in them, not just using them to get what you want. Many times, as you get acquainted with a family, you will also have the opportunity to meet other relatives and friends in their home.

Christ also gave the disciples specific instructions about how to handle rejection. Matthew 10:14-15 says, “And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!” The disciples needed to know that they would be rejected in some places. They were to just accept the rejection and go on to the next city. The Lord said He is the One who will handle the rejection.

Christ also helped the disciples realize that they were totally dependent upon Him as they went to different cities. Matthew 10:16 says, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” A sheep has no form of defense to protect himself. The only thing that protects a sheep is the shepherd. One of the key lessons Christ knew the disciples needed to learn was to depend on the Lord, not their own strength. That is still the most important lesson today, as in John 15:5, Christ said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” People will accomplish nothing in their own strength.

However, this verse also teaches a second lesson. Christ told the disciples to be as “wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” It was important for the disciples to learn to exercise wisdom as they followed the Lord. James 1:5 says if we lack wisdom we are to ask God and He will give us wisdom. Wisdom produces both wise attitudes and actions. The attitudes are shown in James 3:17-18. Those verses say, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” James 3:13 shows the actions of a wise person. That verse says, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.” As we help people develop these attitudes and actions, the Lord will help them develop a very creative ministry.

It is a great privilege to help people learn to develop their God-given creativity so the Lord can give them a very effective ministry. Christ took time to show the disciples what to share and how to share it. Then, the first time He sent them out, He sent them with very specific instructions, so they would know exactly what to do. Later on, all He had to do was focus their vision on Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth, because they had been shown what to say and do and how to do it wherever they went. May the Lord richly bless you as you show people what to say and do to serve the Lord effectively. Once people have been shown these things, your main role is to serve them by encouraging them to carry out the vision the Lord has given them for effective ministry.