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Gospel Obedience

Living into Our Commission to Go

God's love compels us to press beyond our comfort zone to go into new places, where the gospel has not yet been carried. The commissioning passages of Scripture command that we go and make disciples of the nations. We have been sent. The first question is, to whom are we sent? Then what does obedience look like in our daily lives?

When you see yourself having an identity as a “sent one,” the answer to these questions is rather all-inclusive. We are sent, really, to all people, but sometimes God calls us to a specific people and place. As you live your life incarnationally in your neighborhood, at your work place, at the gym, and elsewhere in your everyday life, you will have opportunities to be a blessing to those with whom you interact, and you will have the opportunity to share with them your gospel story.

There are also times, however, when you may sense the Lord leading you to go to a specific place or people. Consider Acts

16, where Paul has the desire to go to Asia. In fact, he tries to go, but the Spirit of the Lord says, “No!” Then, he does what many of us would do: he simply tries again. He’s motivated by a heart that wants to take the gospel where it is not yet known. He thinks he should go to Asia, so he tries again, but he gets another “no” from God. During the night, he has a dream of a man in Macedonia, who tells him to come there. He gets up and concludes that the Holy Spirit was not directing him to Asia but to Macedonia, so they go to Macedonia.

Continuing with Paul’s story, we see him and his co-workers in Philippi, where they obey God and proclaim the Good News there. As a result of their obedience, Lydia and her household come to faith. We then read about a slave girl who had been possessed by a demon becoming a free follower of Christ. This, incidentally, did not make her owners happy. This activity led to them being put in jail, where we then read that the jailer comes to faith. What an interesting core group of believers for the church at Philippi! What is intriguing also about this story is the timing: it comes just after an obedience encounter between Paul and our Lord—one where he had a divine dream and he responded.

Being a sent one is both where you are and where you might be called to be. It is not an either-or proposition but a both-and opportunity. Oftentimes, we as the church have just emphasized those who are called to be missionaries or church planters in another place, but we also need to recognize that it is the everyday choices we make that can lead us to gospel encounters with those around us. We have to strive to make intentional choices in sharing the gospel.

Proximity and Presence Are Not Sufficient

We want to emphasize the importance of intentionality as we move toward the close of this book—because proximity and presence alone are not enough for salvation.

Proximity of the gospel is not enough for salvation.

I (Larry) live in Madrid, where there is the presence of many beautiful church buildings. When you walk around the city, you cannot help but notice the cathedrals and churches. As an outsider to Europe I'm fascinated with its buildings. I walk by them and cannot help but observe the intricacies of their magnificent architectures. When I do this, I cannot help but notice how big God is and how small I am. It gives me a sense of the awesomeness and majesty of God. I am not sure, though, that people who live in my city and who have seen those buildings from the day they were born are drawn to them as I am. I sometimes wonder if they even notice them. Even though they often live within walking distance of a church building, they may have never heard the gospel in a personal way.

This reveals an important truth about the gospel and our need to be intentional: While these churches share close proximity to the people, they do not necessarily reach them. It is not enough to have simple access—or live in close proximity—to gospel places, such as a church building. It takes gospel intentionality. It takes intentionality in our:

- Conversations
- Relationships
- Sharing the gospel
- Asking for a response

It is recognizing that God has placed you wherever you are at this moment in time to be a proclaimer of his message. As a Christ follower, you have received the gospel, and as a Christ follower, you have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Obedience is a daily observance in the Christian's life—it is recognizing who you are in Christ and what he has done for you and being able to transmit your story in a relevant way to those around you. It is not simply about being a Christian and hanging out with your friends on a regular basis. Somehow the not-yet-believer has to hear the gospel and respond to it too.

Presence of the gospel is not enough for salvation.

Discipleship happens in the context of relationship. Can someone come to faith in isolation? Maybe. But God designed humans for interaction, and following Jesus happens in community. We see this with Paul's life, as he relates to the churches to whom he is connected. He cares for them deeply. From all that we read from his letters in the New Testament, relationships are important in his ministry because it is the believers' interactions with one another, among other things, that demonstrate God's kingdom here on earth for others to see.

Sharing the gospel happens through intentional relationships—that lead to salvation.

Read how Paul describes this to the church at Philippi:

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you

will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
(Phil. 1:3–6, ESV)

We also see the importance of community when Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica:

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.
(2 Thess. 1:2–6, ESV)

Paul writes this also to the same church:

So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.
(1 Thess. 2:8, ESV)

The gospel was never meant to be shared outside of relationship. You may have never talked to a person before, but God could give you an open door to talk to them and tell them the gospel story. In this case, perhaps he will open their heart and they will receive the gospel. This is the gospel-in-relationship that we share with people. There is a unique bond between you and that person. Sure, you may not even live in the same city as that person, but chances are you feel that same connection that they feel and you work hard to be sure they are connected to another believer. Why? Because following Jesus—from evangelism

through discipleship—happens in the context of community and relationships.

Paul loved the people of Thessalonica. He describes his feelings for them as being “affectionately desirous.” He longed to see them know Christ. He cared so much for them that he not only shared the gospel but he also shared with them his life.

I (Larry) have come to see that my self-centric lifestyle tendencies often conflict with this. In order to feel productive, I typically cram too much activity into a normal day. And it’s not just my schedule but also my attitude that can leave little room for others.

For example, this affects how I handle interruptions to my day. Sometimes, I’m really a task-oriented person with a people-oriented veneer. I like to write out what I aim to do each day (maybe you can relate). I’m the kind of person who will go back and add things to my to-do list after I’ve done them just so I can mark them as completed. It makes me feel good inside. I’ve learned to include time in my calendar to explore parts of my neighborhood, meet new people, and build relationships with friends. I literally write these things in to my to-do list and try to stick to it. Creating that sort of structure in my daily life helps me increase my capacity for the things I value most. The danger in this approach to life is that I sometimes don’t handle interruptions well.

Ironically, people tend to mess up my plans even when people are written into my schedule! As I look back over my life, I know I have failed to create enough margin in my life for the unplanned. Living with gospel intentionality can actually cause

a lot of interruptions in our day. We simply do not have the margin in our lives.

I look ahead to what is next on my calendar; I look behind to what I have done; and I forget that I actually reside in the present. As I try to be intentional with the gospel, I am working at also giving myself enough margin in my day for sharing the gospel and my life with others. I often find that a lack of margin in my life is one of the biggest enemies of obeying God's leading during my day.

Obedience is abiding with Christ daily and in all things. It is reading and studying his Word. It is praying and being an active listener in my prayer time. It is being in community with a local body of believers getting guidance and direction. It is being sensitive to the circumstances and surroundings around us constantly and then following through in obedience to his leading and for his glory.

Conclusion

By now, you've got our point: that Christ's love compels us to live with intentionality as we share the gospel in the world. Jesus called us *out of* the world, only to send us back *into* it as his agents of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:11–21). In order to do this, let's not forget what the gospel is:

“In its simplest form,” says pastor Matt Chandler, “the gospel is God’s reconciling work in Christ—that through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, God is making all things new both personally for those who repent and believe, and cosmically as He redeems culture and creation from its subjection to futility.”⁶

This foundational truth of the gospel motivates a thoughtful, deliberate, grace-filled, kingdom-oriented lifestyle for all of God’s people. Let’s remember what we’ve covered in this book as we continue to learn how to live with gospel intentionality:

1. Identity. The gospel transforms who we are and makes us new people. In Christ, you have a “sent identity” no matter your address or vocation. When we forget who we are and start thinking and acting like the world, we become very bad

6. Matt Chandler, Eric Geiger, and Josh Patterson, *Creature of the Word: The Jesus-Centered Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014).

representatives of Christ. But when we remember our identity in Christ, we gain the ability to effectively reach people with the gospel.

2. Lifestyle. The best way to start living out our gospel identity is to consider our identity as God's sent-one in every decision we make throughout the day. In this way, we make it our lifestyle. If we had not been sent to make disciples, it might be okay for us to pursue our own safety, comfort, and convenience. We would probably be free to pursue our own wealth or social status. But we have been sent. Our thought process now has one overarching consideration that may trump all the other factors in the decisions we make: How can I best represent the King who sent me?

3. Obedience. Ultimately, gospel intentionality is expressed in our obedience to the call to "go." We obey the teachings of Christ because he has been given all authority and because he has sent us. We honor God by doing what he has sent us to do. Obedience has a powerful effect on how we feel about God. When we do what he tells us to do, we begin to see the loving kindness he has for us. Furthermore, by proclaiming Christ in the world, we demonstrate that loving kindness to others.

What we have written here comes from our real-life experiences, which we describe in more detail in the book *Tradecraft: For the Church on Mission*. Included in that book is how we have learned these key missionary skills, which are available to all believers and can help you in your missional journey. We pray this eBook will help give you a solid biblical foundation for your journey toward gospel intentionality.

God has commissioned us as a community of faith to live this intentional lifestyle! We should remember well what Jesus said to the disciples—which applies today as much as it did back then:

As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.
(John 20:21, ESV)

And finally, remember that we are not sent alone but with Christ:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

You are not alone. Live your life with gospel intentionality.