

Church, Mission, and Ministry

Lesson 5: The mission of God and the mission of God’s people

# Getting going

1. Marc Lewis gives us a sad but insightful example....

“Michael Chandler and his associates at the University of British Columbia … canvassed Native communities through much of western Canada. What struck them almost immediately was the astounding suicide rate among teenagers – 500 to 800 times the national average – infecting many of these communities. But not all of them. Some Native communities reported … a low of zero (true for 6 tribal councils) to a high of 633 suicides per 100,000. What could possibly make the difference between places where teens had nothing to live for and those where teens had nothing to die for?

“The researchers began talking to the kids. They collected stories. They asked teens to talk about their lives, about their goals, and about their futures. What they found was that young people from the high suicide communities didn’t have stories to tell. They were incapable of talking about their lives in any coherent, organized way. They had no clear sense of their past, their childhood, and the generations preceding them. And their attempts to outline possible futures were empty of form and meaning. Unlike the other children, they could not see their lives as narratives, as stories. Their attempts to answer questions about their life stories were punctuated by long pauses and unfinished sentences. They had nothing but the present, nothing to look forward to, so many of them took their own life.” (Marc Lewis, *The Biology of Desire*, 2016)

What things were missing from the teens lives so “they could not see their lives as stories”?

1. In the last lesson, we took a look at the variety of ways groups of people think about the mission God has given to them.

At this point, we want to try to assess those ideas and get a better idea of the mission of God’s people.

* Lesson 5 surveys the larger mission of God and considers the work of God’s people in light of his work
* Lesson 6 helps us start to distinguish between mission and ministry
* Lessons 7 and following will look at how mission becomes ministry

# Getting into God’s Word

1. Let’s start with the source of the Church’s mission. Please read John 20:21. According to this verse, where did the mission of the first apostles come from?
2. Now let’s see how that truth played out in key events in the early church. Please read Acts 15:12-18.

What event is taking place in Acts 15?

What is the debate or the controversy?

In verses 16 and 17, James quotes Amos 9. What does verse 16 mean?

What was the purpose of restoring David’s tent, spelled out in verse 17?

1. You notice James didn’t stand up and say, “Hey guys, God told us to go evangelize and make disciples of all nations (like Matthew 28:18-20). Instead, he says, God restored us for a greater purpose, to encourage everyone to seek the Lord.
2. Let’s take one more example. In Acts 13:13-52, Paul and his disciples are in Pisidian Antioch. Paul’ sermon tells the history of the Israelites. Then he explains why they are going to the Gentiles in verses 46-47. Please read those verses.

In verse 47, why does Paul say that he and the others are going to the Gentiles? What does that mean?

How did Paul and the others become a light?

Again notice that Paul didn’t say, Jesus told us to make disciples of all nations. He said God made us a light.

1. After looking at these two examples, we can see that in general, the first Christians didn’t go around saying, “Jesus told us to make disciples of all nations.” In your mind, why not? What were those first Christians actually thinking about?
2. Christopher Wright summarizes the truth in this way, “And as part of that divine mission, God has called into existence a people to participate with God in the accomplishment of that mission. All our mission flows from the prior mission of God. And that, as we will see, is broad indeed. “Mission arises from the heart of God himself, and is communicated from his heart to ours. Mission is the global outreach of the global people of a global God.” (Wright, Christopher J. H.. *The Mission of God's People (Biblical Theology for Life)* (p. 18). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition) What sticks out to you in this summary?
3. What is the difference between saying, “We’re making disciples because Jesus told us to” and saying, “We’re making disciples because we’re part of God’s mission and work”? If it helps as a comparison, what is the difference between a kid who says, “I’m doing my schoolwork and chores because my parents told me” and “I’m doing schoolwork and chores because I’m part of the family”?

# Going forward in faith

1. What are some ways that seeing our mission as a continuation of God’s mission helps us clarify the mission of the Church?
2. What’s a passage from this Scripture that impacted you?
3. How are you going to respond to this message?
4. Who is one person you’d like to share this with?