

Church, Mission, and Ministry

Lesson 6: Mission is not ministry. Don’t confuse the task with the goal and result.

# Getting going

1. Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, wrote to Captain Meriwether Lewis, “The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri River, and such principal stream of it, as by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean …. May offer the most direct and practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce.” After those instructions, Lewis and Clark spent 15 months traveling west only to arrive at this point:

“Lewis and a small scouting party had gone ahead of the rest of the Corps of Discovery to try to make contact with the Shoshone tribe. They had followed a small trail up a creek and now were at the spring itself. This little trickle was the source of the mighty Missouri River. This water would flow all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. They had found what no person of European descent had before them. And the most challenging obstacle on their journey from what was then the United States to the Pacific Ocean was now behind them. … Lewis believed that he would walk up the hill, look down a gentle slope that would take his men a half day to cross with their canoes on their backs, and then they would see the Columbia River. …. They would crest the hill, find the stream and coast to the finish line.

“What Lewis actually discovered was that three hundred years of experts had all been completely and utterly wrong. In front of him was not a gentle slope down to navigable river running to the Pacific Ocean but the Rocky Mountains. Stretching out for miles and miles as far as the eyes could see was one set of peaks after another.”

“There was no Northwest Passage. No navigable river. No water route. The driving assumption of the brightest, most adventurous entrepreneurial and creative leaders regarding this new world had been absolutely mistaken.” (Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains,* pg 25-26)

What do you think Lewis felt when he saw the Rocky Mountains before him?

Do you think you would have kept going?

1. When the going is tough and seemingly impossible, the only thing that will keep us moving is the mission. In the first lessons, we considered who the Church is. In lessons 4-7, we are considering the mission God gives to his Church.

* Lesson 4 surveys the variety of ways groups of people think about the mission God has given to them.
* Lesson 5 surveys the larger mission of God and considers the work of God’s people in light of his work
* Lesson 6 clarifies the Church’s mission among God’s many commands
* Lessons 7 let’s us see how mission becomes ministry

# Getting into God’s Word

1. We’re going to clarify the mission God gave his Church in two ways today: first, look at God’s many commands, second look at the mission the apostles passed on.
2. God wants his people to do many things. For example, he says, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly  with your God.” (Micah 6:8) From this, many people understand that part of the Church’s work is mercy and justice. What are some of the many other things God wants to do or accomplish through his people? Read through the following passages. Underline, circle, or highlight key words and phrases that tell what the Church is supposed to do. After you’re done, is there anything you would add to the list?

Matthew 28:18-20 “18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.””

Mark 12:29-31 “29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’  31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’  There is no commandment greater than these.””

Mark 16:15-16 “15 He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Luke 4:18 “18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,”

Luke 6:32-36 “32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Luke 24:46-48 “46 He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.”

John 13:12-17 “12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. 13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

John 20:21-23 “21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.””

Acts 1:8 “8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.””

Romans 12:1-3 “12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 “18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

Ephesians 3:10 “10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,”

Ephesians 5:19-20 “be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

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

1 Timothy 5:3 “Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.”

Hebrews 10:24-25 “24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

1. That’s a lot of commands. Is there a main thing that God wants us to focus on? If so, how do we sort through all these passages to what that main thing is?
2. One of the easiest places to see what people think is the main thing is to look at what they asked other people to do. The apostles passed on their mission to others. Take a look at the following passages. In each one, what task or mission did the apostles pass on?

Acts 20:17-34

1 Timothy 1:3-7

2 Timothy 4:1-2

1. Based on the many commands of God and the example of the apostles, why do a lot of people like Matthew 28:18-20 as a summary of the mission Jesus gave his Church?

# Going forward in faith

1. For discussion: Try to identify a few reasons, both in general and in our time, that make it hard to keep the main thing of the Church clear.
2. Most people know very little of the Bible and phrases like “make disciples” or “preach the gospel” or “teach the Word” can be very helpful to explain what we are supposed to do. What are some of the benefits of those brief phrases? What are the dangers?
3. When the mission gets hard and the way forward is unclear, the Lewis and Clark team operated with this philosophy: (a modern adaptation) “Start with conviction, stay calm, stay connected, and stay the course.” How are we doing at the mission right now? Which part is the hardest? (the conviction, the calm, the connection, or the direction?)
4. What’s a passage from this Scripture that impacted you?
5. How are you going to respond to this message?
6. Who is one person you’d like to share this with?