

October 21, 2001 by Steve Brandon



The Mission of the Church

Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 11-18

1. Our Mission (Matthew 28:19-20a)
2. Our Sufficiency (Matthew 18,20b)
3. Our Practice (Acts 11-18)

In our series on the church, we have focussed our attention during the last two weeks on the activities of the church. These may be broken down into three categories:

Upreach (our worship to God)
Inreach (our service to one another)
Outreach (our mission to the world)

Tonight, we will address the outreach of the church by examining what the mission of the church is. Appropriately, I have entitled my message tonight, "The Mission of the Church." Please open your Bibles to Matthew 28.

In this passage, Jesus gives us what we might call our "marching orders." I remember talking to a man one time, who was a Navy Seal during the Gulf War. On one particular mission, it was his task to place land mines on a beach. I remember how he described this mission to me. He said that the United forces caused a distraction near the beach, but away from it with lots of ammunition fire. While the enemy was distracted, he and his group swam to shore and placed the land mines. He and his crew of men received the order to carry out this task. There was **no looking back** until the task was done.

So also with these words of Jesus. It is as if Jesus is the military general in an army giving out his commands for us to follow. We are to take these instructions and follow them. **No looking back!**

Let's pick up the context of our General's commands, beginning with verse 10.

Matthew 28:10

Our Resurrected Lord said to His disciples, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me."

They must have had a pre-arranged meeting place. Our family has agreed, in the event of a fire, or tornado, or any other disaster, that our mail-box outside our house will be our pre-arranged meeting place. Similarly, Jesus must have arranged a location in which he would meet them, as verse 16 indicates.

Matthew 28:16-20

But the eleven disciples [i.e. all but Judas] proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. And when they saw Him, they worshiped [Him]; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

What I love about this passage is that it makes the duty of the church so simple. Our General didn't confuse us with many, many different things that we are to do. So many people make it so difficult, but Jesus makes it simple. Scores of books are written on the mission of the church. Many seminars are offered to teach others the mission of the church. But Jesus has reduced it all down to one command, found in verse 19: make disciples.

As we have discussed before, the other actions in these verses (going, baptizing, and teaching) are all subordinate to the one main command to make disciples. These other actions tell us how to make disciples. We are to ...

1. Go.
2. Baptize.
3. Teach.

Here is an easy way to remember this ...

Making disciples is our **Plan**.
Going, Baptizing, and Teaching is our **Process**.

... and all of this is our mission. It is these verses tonight that I would like to expound for you.

I will take this text from the inside out. I would like to begin by focussing on verse 19. Then, I would like to pan out and look at the surrounding verses: 18,20. Then, I want to pan out a bit further to see how the disciples carried this out in the book of Acts. Again, like many messages in this series, tonight won't be so much expository as it is, visionary.

First, let's look at ...

1. Our Mission (Matthew 28:19-20a)

Jesus said that the disciples were to "go and make disciples."

A few weeks ago, I brought you to this passage when I taught on baptism (on September 9, 2001), and I asked the question, "What did the disciples understand by Jesus' command to 'baptize' the nations?" We sought to place ourselves in the situation of the disciples. So, we looked for other historical instances in Scripture where baptism occurred. We saw that baptism (in the Bible) was always after conversion by immersion. When Jesus told the disciples to "baptize" them, I am sure that images of repentance followed by immersion came to their minds.

Tonight, I would like for us here to do the same thing with Jesus' words. What did the disciples understand by Jesus' command to "make disciples of all the nations? What is it that they understood Him to mean?

In many ways, we have the same difficulty here that we have with baptism. Baptism has become a thoroughly "Christian" word today. You take a typical non-Believer and ask them what they think about when they think about the word, "Baptism," and church things will come into mind.

Likewise, if you would ask a typical non-Believer about what a "disciple" is, and they will probably talk to you about something to do with Jesus. This has become a "Christian" word. How many times have you heard a non-Christian even use the word, "disciple."

And yet, like baptism, it is a thoroughly Biblical word and we should not give it up simply because it isn't used much today in our American secular vocabulary. Most translations freely use this word. What does it mean?

Jesus is obviously speaking with the disciples at this point. They were identified as "the eleven" (in verse 16). That is, the twelve minus one (according to Matt. 27:5, Judas had hanged himself at this point). Four of these eleven disciples had been with Jesus since the beginning of His ministry (as recorded in Matthew 4), particularly Peter, Andrew, James, and John. By Matthew, chapter 10 the other seven disciples were identified.

These eleven disciples had been specifically chosen by Jesus and had spent much time being with and learning from Jesus. Essentially, disciples of Jesus were followers of Jesus. They walked with Jesus. They learned from Jesus. They did what Jesus told them to do.

A good verse in understanding this is found in Matthew 11:28-29.

Matthew 11:28-29

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and **learn** from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. My yoke is easy, and My load is light."

The same word which Jesus used to describe "making disciples" is found here, "**learn** from Me." The Greek word here is *matheteuo* (matheteuo), from which we get our English word, "mathematics." It is an educational word. Jesus is saying, "be taught from Me," "let Me be your teacher." This is what a disciple is. A disciple is a learner. A disciple is a follower.

In our day, this is a pretty foreign concept. In general, we don't have people who follow individuals around and learn from their teaching. Typically, in our educational system, we have many teachers, who are experts in their fields. Each of them teach us from what they know best. Whether high-school or college, teachers begin to focus on one subject. Whether they are literature teachers, chemistry teachers, or language teachers.

In Jesus' day, however, the common practice was to make one person your teacher and follow this man wherever He went and learn His ways. Often, the classrooms were the roadsides as you walked along. This was the ancient tradition. Teachers often had other followers, which were called "disciples."

John the Baptist had his disciples.

In the gospel of John, the story was told of two of John's **disciples** coming to learn from Jesus (John 1:25-29). On other instances, the disciples of John approached Jesus with questions concerning his ministry (Matt. 9:14; 11:3).

The Pharisees had their disciples.

On one occasion, the Pharisees "counseled together how they might trap [Jesus] in what He said. And they sent their **disciples** to Him, along with the Herodians," to ask Jesus a difficult question concerning the paying of taxes (Matt. 22:15,16).

Paul had his disciples.

In Acts chapter 9, Paul was in Damascus confounding the Jews by proving that Jesus is the Christ. It says in verse 25 that "his **disciples** took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket."

Furthermore, this concept was common in the Greek world. Greek philosophers and teachers commonly gathered students who followed them and learned their philosophy from them. Socrates taught Plato, who taught Aristotle, who taught Alexander the Great. This was the common form of schooling in the ancient world. Find a teacher and follow him and learn from him.

That tendency certainly is why those in Corinth had the problem of following other people. You remember when Paul rebuked them, when he said, "that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ'" (1 Cor. 1:12). The issue here is that in the Ancient Greek world, people were used to associating with an individual and following His teaching. The Corinthians merely adapted the common practice of their society to their Christianity.

We know some of this in our society, especially when you get the upper echelons of education. Artists and musicians are often taught by the masters. Perhaps Francis Schaeffer comes closest to this type of thing in our generation. People would often come to his *L'Abri* Fellowship in the Swiss Alps to be with him, walk with him, talk with him, and learn from him.

In the ancient world, learning came more from individuals, rather than from institutions of many, many individuals. So, we shouldn't be much amazed when this similar language is used in the New Testament. We simply need to understand it. This is what would have been in the minds of the disciples.

And so, when Jesus said, "Go and make disciples," this is certainly what the disciples understood to be their mission. They were to gather followers around themselves. They were to gather learners from all the nations of the earth. They were to teach them. They were into the world and seek to gather followers and instruct them, teach them, and train them.

But notice in the text before us this evening a distinctive characteristic. "... teaching them to observe [i.e. to keep, guard, preserve, obey -- see 1 John 2:3,4,5] all that I commanded you." When Jesus said to "make disciples of all the nations," He didn't mean to "make followers of yourselves," but to "make followers of **Me**" -- "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you."

They were to "make followers of Jesus Christ" -- following Him as their master teacher. They weren't to make followers after themselves. They were to make disciples of Jesus Christ. **That was their mission. That is our mission.**

But again, let's understand the context of Jesus' own disciples hearing this word. When told them to "make disciples," how did they understand this? Certainly, they understood that the training they received from Jesus was to be typical of the training that they would pass on. They were to make disciples as they, themselves, had been disciplined by Jesus.

They understood the implications of being a disciple of Jesus.

They left their occupation to follow Jesus. Jesus called James and John, "immediately ... they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went always to follow Him" (Mark 1:20).

These men knew that Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24), which is exactly what the apostles had done. As Peter said, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You" (Matt. 19:27).

They understood that the disciple will receive the same treatment as the master. Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!" (Matt. 10:24-25).

In other words, they understood that to be a disciple would cost them their lives -- Everything! Everything that they had was to be given up. It all was at the Lord's disposal. "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves on or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37-38).

This is what Paul said, "To live is Christ, to die is gain. ... Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, **I count all things to be loss** in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom **I have suffered the loss of all things**, and count them but rubbish...." (Phil. 1:21; 3:7-8a)

Jesus calls us to forsake all and follow Him. Remember, however, that we don't earn anything in following Him. But rather, we receive it all from Him. As Paul continues, "... in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, **not having a righteousness of my own** derived from the Law, **but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith**" (Phil. 3:8b-9).

We forsake all, because we are nothing. On the basis of our faith, God grants to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, "You shall find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29).

That's how they understood Jesus' words. When Jesus was telling His disciples to go into the world and make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:19), in effect, Jesus was saying that His disciples were to go into the world, and make followers of Jesus, who would forsake all in this life to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, without abandon.

They saw Jesus challenge others, who were anything less than whole-hearted in their commitment to follow him. For instance, in Matthew 8, a man came up to Jesus and said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father" (8:21). Jesus said, "Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead" (8:22). In essence Jesus was saying, "No, follow me now."

They say Jesus turn away a hot prospect, by challenging the rich, young ruler to "sell all of his possessions, give to the poor, and follow Me" (Matt. 19:21). That's our message to the world. Total abandoning of this world.

Is this not what we call repentance? In Luke's account of the great commission, Jesus said that "repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations" (Luke 24:47). That's how we make disciples. By opening our mouth and by telling others of the repentance that Jesus requires and the forgiveness of sins and will result.

I urge you again, brethren, to do what you can to speak with those you know. Be bold to proclaim the gospel to others. Be bold to call others to repentance. Do what you can to create opportunities for such an occasion.

Our open house yesterday was an opportunity to reach out and speak with our neighbors. We recently heard of an opportunity to host a foreign student during the Thanksgiving holiday. We are planning on taking up that opportunity as an opportunity to speak about "repentance and forgiveness in Jesus Christ." I would encourage you all to do the same.

Making disciples doesn't only happen in the four walls of a church. Nor does it only happen in our nice little gatherings for Bible study. It also happens when we rub shoulders with the world and speak with them of the marvelous riches of grace that is found in Christ Jesus.

Jesus calls us to make disciples. In one sense, we can make disciples, in that we can open the Bible and teach others. And yet in another sense, we are utterly incapable of imparting spiritual truth. It is God who needs to open "the eyes of your heart ... so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (Eph. 1:18-19).

Making disciples is heart work, and God is the one who changes the heart. Ultimately, for the work of making disciples, we are utterly helpless. Yet, look carefully again at Matthew. 28, where we receive our sufficiency for the mission God has placed before us.

We have seen ...

1. Our Mission (Matthew 28:19-20a), which is to make disciples.

We now look at ...

2. Our Sufficiency (Matthew 18,20b), which is found in Christ's role in making disciples.

Found in Jesus' authority (verse 18)

Look at verse 18. Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (verse 18).

As we come to the world, with the message of the gospel of grace, we realize that we aren't our own authority in this process. We don't hold it in ourselves to convince people to forsake the world and follow Christ the Lord. Only Jesus has the authority (and power) to do this.

It is not in our hands. In Men's Equipppers, we have been going through the book of Matthew, again and again and again and again. One of the great themes that we have seen (as we discussed yesterday) is that Christ is the one who has the prerogative to open the spiritual eyes of others.

Turn with me to Matthew 11. Beginning in verse 20, Jesus reproached the unbelieving cities in which He had done great miracles.

Woe to you Chorazin! (verse 21)
Woe to you Bethsaida! (verse 21)
Woe to you Capernaum! (verse 23).

The three cities in which Jesus performed "most of His miracles" (Matt. 11:20) were unbelieving to His message.

Jesus responded by praying, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that **You hid these things from [the] wise and intelligent and revealed them to babes**. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and **anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal [Him.]** Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light" (Matthew 11:25-30).

Do you hear what Jesus is saying? May God be praised, because it is God's sovereign hand, which can hide spiritual truth from even the wisest of individuals, even from those who saw the greatest evidence of Jesus' power. It is Jesus, alone, who can reveal Himself to others, verse 27, "anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." That is part of the authority that Jesus is speaking about in the great commission -- "to reveal Himself to whomever He desires."

This is what James Montgomery Boice described when he wrote the hymn we have sung on several occasions.

If sinners could be saved from sin by philosophical debate,
the wise, the brilliant might get in; but what of those of low estate?
but what of those of low estate?

(this sounds like Matt. 11:25 - hid from wise and intelligent, but revealed to babes)

But we preach Christ, the crucified, a gospel wicked souls count odd;
They think it foolish, weak, despised, but we: the pow'r and grace of God.
but we: the pow'r and grace of God.

Our gospel's simply Christ alone, for we know God sent him to give
A righteousness that's not our own and holiness that we might live.
and holiness that we might live.

(We find "rest for our souls" in Matt. 11:29).

But this isn't the only time in Matthew in which this is spoken. Turn over to Matt. 13. The disciples asked in verse 10, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" Matthew continues the narrative, ...

"And He answered and said to them, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him shall [more] be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

"YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND;
AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;
FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL,
AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR,
AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES
LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES,
AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS,
AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN,
AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM."

But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear" (Matt. 13:11-16)

I have often heard people say that Jesus spoke in parables to make the truth clearer. I have heard it said that preachers should be like Jesus and seek to make complex things easier to understand through the use of illustrations. After all, Jesus made the truth clearer with common stories to illustrate the truth.

Now, there is truth to what these people are saying. But that isn't why Jesus used parables. **Jesus used parables to hide the truth!** Look again at verse 13, "I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." Yes, there is a sense where Jesus communicated the complexities of the kingdom of heaven in parables, so that even the littlest ones could understand. But when asked specifically, Jesus used them to hide the truth.

When Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18), this included the authority to give eternal life to those whom He will (John 17:2). "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27-28).

Our sufficiency is in the authority of Jesus! But also, our sufficiency is ...
Found in Jesus' presence (verse 20b)

Look at the later half of verse 20: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Jesus has not abandoned us to make disciples on our own. To make this clearer, let me use an illustration. J ... Suppose that the church was a basketball team. In this case, our mission is to win basketball games.

I remember when I was a coach of the Junior Varsity Basketball team at Judson College, the Junior Varsity game often started at 5:30pm, with the Varsity game following at 7:30pm. On several occasions, I was given the keys to the van and the head coach would send me away to the game (hopefully to get a victory), he would arrive with the Varsity team a few hours later (after our game was underway).

With respect to making disciples, Jesus doesn't send the coach away with the team away to get a victory for the school. With respect to making disciples, Jesus isn't even like the coach, who takes the players to the game and counsels with them on how to get a victory. No, when making disciples, Jesus steps on the court and plays with us and assures us that we get a victory. (Like all analogies, the illustration breaks down, because even a great player isn't able to guarantee success.)

Jesus has promised his involvement in this process. "I am with you always! I have the authority. I will get the job done." You remember elsewhere that Jesus promised to build His church (Matt. 16:18). Our task is to make disciples. Jesus is the guarantee of our work.

Jesus has guaranteed the work by His authority (verse 18) and His presence among us (verse 20).

The mission of Rock Valley Bible Church is to make disciples.
The sufficiency of Rock Valley Bible Church is found in Christ's authority and presence among us.

Finally, Let's turn our attention to
3. Our Practice (Acts 11-18)

Let's return again, however, to the question, "How did the disciples understand this command?" When we looked to understand how the

disciples understood Jesus' command "baptize all the nations," we looked into the practice of the early church to determine this. We have the inspired account of this process recorded for us in the book of Acts. Likewise, I would like to do the same thing here. How did those disciples who heard this command work it out.

We will find out they preached the gospel and planted churches. They were proclamation focused and the church was central.

You remember the history of the early church. For the first 3 or 4 years, the church was in Jerusalem. "The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem" (Acts 6:7). Then, upon the stoning death of Stephen, the church scattered. Philip went to Samaria and Caesarea. Paul was in Damascus. Peter went to Joppa.

I would like to pick things up in Acts 11, beginning with verse 19, which takes us north of Jerusalem a couple hundred miles.

Acts 11:19-21

"So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and [began] speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord."

The good news of Jesus Christ had spread north and a large number believed.

Acts 11:22-24

"And the news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he had come and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and [began] to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain [true] to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord."

When the church at Jerusalem heard of this, Barnabas was sent to shepherd the church. But quickly, he found out that Paul was the man that was needed in Antioch. Paul was able to teach the church and to lead them into maturity.

Acts 11:25-26

"And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came about that for an entire year they met with the church, and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

The church was scattered. The gospel was preached. Many in Antioch believed. For a year, Paul disciplined those in the church, grounding them in the truth of God.

(As an aside, let me simply mention to you that there is a teaching that there are two levels of Christianity: the Christian and the Disciple, as if "Discipleship" is a higher calling of Christians. This verse alone ought to thwart that notion. "The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Christians are disciples! Disciples are Christians!)

The church was maturing. The disciples were growing. Watch what God did through this church in Antioch. Turn over to Acts 13, where the story of Antioch continues.

Acts 13:1-3

"Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was [there], prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

They sent them away to reproduce what God had done in Antioch! God had drawn believers to Himself in Antioch and had matured them. Barnabas and Saul (or Paul) were sent away to do exactly the same thing. They came to Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. They preached the gospel and strengthened the souls of the believers in those churches. A good summary is given in ...

Acts 14:21-23

"After they had preached the gospel to that city [i.e. Derbe] and had made many disciples [in direct obedience to our Lord's Commission], they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.' And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."

This is "missions." Preaching the gospel. Gathering believers into churches. Discipling them in the faith. Sending them out to do it all over again.

This happened during the first missionary journey of Paul. On the second missionary journey, Paul sought to strengthen those churches he had established and continue on to establish others. Look at Acts 15.

Acts 15:40-16:1

"Paul chose Silas and departed, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was travelling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. And he came to Derbe and to Lystra [the same place in which churches were established during his first missionary journey]."

Paul was strengthening these churches, by further discipling the people in these churches. The summary is given in 16:5, "So the churches

were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily."

Then Paul went on to duplicate his efforts. He planted a church in Philippi and in Thessalonica and in Corinth. Luke records for us that Paul, "settled there [in Corinth] a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11). In other words, Paul did exactly what he did in Antioch before he was sent out as he did in Corinth. He disciplined the believers in those cities.

This is missions. Making disciples at home. Sending to make disciples abroad. Let me close by saying a few things practically here. This is why our brochure says what it does. It reads in part, "the goals of Rock Valley Bible Church are twofold ... (1) to be a body of disciples; (2) to do the work of making disciples."

Today, Rock Valley Bible Church is a mission. We have been sent from DeKalb to do the work of making disciples here in Rockford. As the Lord continues His hand of blessing upon this work, we will have opportunities to send people out from our midst to do the work elsewhere. As we do this, we will have several choices to make.

What will we send people to do?

We need to send people to make disciples! That is what our Lord commissioned us to do.

There are many different opportunities for people to go and do things abroad. Many people go to do many different things, which are good things. But when Rock Valley Bible Church sends people, may it be for the purpose of making disciples and strengthening the local churches.

How will we send them?

There are two different mission philosophies today.

1. The supporting church.

In this setup missionaries send out letters and go around and speak to lots of individuals and churches seeking to raise enough money to be supported to go to the mission field. Missionaries come to Rock Valley Bible Church and ask for support. We evaluate them and send a little money their way each month to do the work abroad.

There are several implications to this philosophy.

- to whom are the missionaries accountable?
- what sort of guidance are the missionaries receiving?
- when these missionaries return, to whom will they go?

What tends to happen in this type of situation is that a church supports a bunch of missionaries a little bit. It looks like you have great missionary activity all over the world, but in fact it is mostly monetary activity. Your influence is a mile wide and an inch deep.

When the missionaries come back, there is little time to settle and minister to others because of the need to visit the many churches who are involved in supporting them.

2. The sending church.

This church sends people from its congregation, who have demonstrated their own character and giftedness. This church seeks to raise them from within, train them however possible, and fully support them in the process. They are sent out and supported by the home church. When they come back, they report to the church sending them and use their gifts to minister to the body at home.

The implications of this are that we won't have wide scale effectiveness across the world, because we will support fewer missionaries, rather than more. However, these missionaries won't be burdened by raising support for their efforts. They may devote themselves fully to the work. I have seen missionaries spend lots of time seeking to raise their funds so that they can do the work, rather than simply doing the work! I have seen the efforts of raising support actually hinder the effort of these missionaries.

I believe that this is the more Biblical model. Paul was sent from the church in Antioch. Paul reported back to the church in Antioch. We may not have fifty missionaries, all of whom we support a little. We will have a handful we support fully. But those we send we will have confidence in the work they do.

Rock Valley Bible Church needs to be about sending people from our midst to strengthen disciples who are involved in the local church in other areas.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 21, 2001 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.