

MISSION IN ACTION



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2008 Lenten Study Guide
Lutheran Church of Hope

Welcome to the Small Group Study for Lent 2008! This year, Lutheran Church of Hope's yearlong focus is Hope for the World. We know that the only true "hope for the world" is Jesus Christ, and in this year, we are learning what it means to be Christ's hands and feet in the world, and then practicing what we've learned. The Bible is very clear that our faith is lived out in action, so grab your Bible, your small group, and strap in, we're gonna get moving!

~Pastor Caroline

WHY BOTHER?

Week 1

Is anyone busy these days? Silly question, huh? Our lives are incredibly full with family, friends, work, school, neighborhood gatherings, church activities, small groups, political goings on, hobbies ... and maybe we'll even try to fit in a little sleep somewhere. So why should we bother with missions when we have so much to do in our lives? Isn't going to worship, giving an offering, ushering occasionally, and meeting with our small group enough to keep our faith alive? Why do we need to add missions to our already overflowing schedules?

Simple answer: Jesus says so.

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus gives his disciples their marching orders – we're to go into all the nations, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey all that Jesus has commanded. These two verses are known as the Great Commission; you can think of it as the mission statement for the Christian Church.

But that isn't all. Jesus also gives us a new commandment in John 13:34, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." Not surprisingly, this is known as the Great Commandment. As Christians, we need to focus on both, for we must *go*, but we must *go in love*.

So what does that love look like? Read Matt 25:31-46.

- ❖ Is love abstract or concrete, a fuzzy feeling or a deliberate choice? What are the concrete ways we show love to Jesus?
- ❖ It's sometimes hard to imagine Jesus in the "distressing disguise" of those who are poor, hungry, outcast. Discuss with your group the feelings you have when you encounter someone who is homeless and standing on the entrance ramp of the interstate holding a sign asking for help. Please be honest about your feelings even if you may not be especially proud of them.

This passage in Matthew teaches that faith is love in action. This is a theme we find throughout the Bible.

Read 1 John 3:11-18; Luke 6:43-45; and James 2:14-26

These passages add to the description of love in action we found in Matt 25. Love cannot walk by another person who is struggling and not offer to share the abundance they have (1 John). Luke reminds us of the fact that you cannot hide your character because it will be evident in your actions. And James teaches that faith is not just agreeing to some doctrines, but is actually worked out in the lives of other people. How we treat other people is a direct *result* of our faith, not the *reason* for our faith. We need to remember faith is a gift God gives us; caring for others flows from that gift.

What the Bible is really saying is that you can't just talk the talk; you need to walk the walk as you follow Jesus.

- ❖ When you were a kid, did you learn more from what your parents said, or more from what they did?
- ❖ How are you doing on walking the Christian walk? Do people know you're a Christian because of what you say or by what you do?

Read Luke 10:25-29

What follows these verses is the famous parable of the Good Samaritan, but sometimes we skip over the set up for the parable. Jesus finds himself in a familiar situation – some clever leaders are trying to trap Jesus in order to discredit him and his ministry. This lawyer was a person who knew the law of Moses so well, he taught it to others. Think of a person with a JD from Harvard Law School, who was the editor of the Law Review, and who clerked for the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court – this lawyer knew his stuff and was ready to take on Jesus.

Jesus, as a good teacher does, throws the lawyer's question back to him; the lawyer gives Jesus the correct answer, of course. Then Jesus challenges the lawyer, "Do this."

Now the lawyer is in trouble; he really only wanted to *define* a neighbor, he didn't want to *be* one! So he tries to avoid action by studying the question more; "but Jesus, who is my neighbor?" Maybe the lawyer wanted to form a committee to name a task force who would sponsor a symposium on "The Definition of 'Neighbor' in a Multi-Cultural, Post-Modern Capitalist Economy." If he were lucky, several papers could be written out of this symposium, which would offer more opportunities to hold classes and conferences on the subject of neighborliness. This would be really helpful in the lawyer's pursuit of tenure at his prestigious academic institution and eventually lead to his being named chairman of his department.

Instead of indulging the lawyer, Jesus tells a story.

First, Jesus shocks the lawyer by putting the words "good" and "Samaritan" in the same sentence. For Jews of Jesus' day this was unthinkable because the Samaritans were evil and the enemy, they could never be considered good. Then Jesus, horror of horrors, makes this despised Samaritan the hero of the story!

In the story, Jesus never identifies the person by the side of the road; the man was stripped and beaten so he no longer had any identifying clues; he was merely a man, someone without a name, a family, a socioeconomic status, an educational degree, a country, an ethnicity, a language, a man without an identity.

Then Jesus turns the question back to the lawyer, but it's a different question. Jesus didn't ask what the definition of a neighbor was; he asked who acted as a neighbor. Pity the poor lawyer. He's been trained to answer correctly, but he can't choke out the word "Samaritan" and so answers, "The one who showed him mercy."

- ❖ What group of people do you struggle with calling "good"?
- ❖ How would you respond to someone in need if you had no clue as to their name, their country of birth, their achievements, their successes or failures in life? Would it be easier or harder to stop to help?
- ❖ How often do you use thought to avoid action?

Hopefully you're beginning to see that missions cannot be an afterthought in the life of a Christian because Jesus commanded us to care and because there are so many people to care for. The opportunities are endless!

But *how* do we go about this thing called mission?

Read Luke 10:1-12

These are Jesus' "instructions" for doing mission. Can you identify six key aspects to doing missions?

1. Jesus sends the disciples out in pairs – we need to do missions together. We are certainly better when we pool our gifts, talents, and resources together and can do much more working as a committed group rather than as Lone Rangers.
2. Jesus sends the disciples out to all the places he intended to go himself – we have been given the great privilege to go to all those places Jesus wants to go, which is to the whole world. Jesus doesn't say, "Oh, don't go there, that's reserved just for me." No, he calls us into all the places he intends to go.
3. The laborers are an answer to prayer – Jesus and all his followers have been praying for you to go. Did you realize centuries of Christians have prayed that you might answer the call to be a co-worker in the Kingdom?
4. Jesus tells the disciples to travel light, and to rely on local hospitality – we don't need to be bogged down by all the "stuff" we think we "need." This is a test of faith that God will supply all we really need through the people he's sending us to care for. Besides, it makes packing a whole lot easier!
5. Jesus instructs his disciples to stay with the locals and share their food and homes – we are to approach missions with a humble heart, not arrogantly demanding what we're used to, but what our *hosts* can offer.
6. The disciples are first to cure the sick and then tell them of God – we need to care for the physical needs of people which often makes them more receptive to God. It's hard to hear a preacher if your stomach is grumbling, your kids are sick and dying, and your clothes are rags upon your back.

What Jesus is trying to teach us is that when we are called to care for others, we must operate from an attitude of doing missions *with*, rather than missions *for*. When we attempt to do missions *for* others, we come from an attitude of pride and arrogance; when we do missions *with* others, we recognize the value of the other person and the rich things they can show us. We need to be open to being taught by the people we come to serve.

- ❖ Which of these six aspects of Jesus' instructions on missions was most surprising to you? Why?
- ❖ Which of these six aspects seem to be the easiest? Why? The most difficult? Why?

Sometimes people wonder at the last verse in this passage when Jesus mentions the city of Sodom. Sodom was a city that was destroyed after Lot and his family fled; you can read the whole story in Gen 18 and 19. Oftentimes people believe the reason that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed is because of sexual sin, especially homosexuality. Read what Jeremiah and Ezekiel include in the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah: Jer 23:14; Ez 16:49-50.

Given what you have learned so far, are you surprised that Jeremiah and Ezekiel condemn Sodom and Gomorrah because the rich refused to help the poor and turn from injustice and their own sin as well? The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were not limited to sexual sin, but included sins of injustice.

- ❖ How do you react to the thought that the sin of turning our backs on the poor is so strongly condemned?

Remember the story of Cain and Abel? What was the question Cain asked God when God confronted him after he had killed his brother Abel? (Hint: read Gen 4:9). Some Biblical scholars have remarked that the rest of the Bible after the story of Cain and Abel is commentary on the answer to Cain's question – yes, you are your brother's keeper.

That's why we bother.

Closing Prayer:

Stir me, O Lord, to care:

For a world that is lost and dying,

For values that are rejected and scorned,

For enemies that hate and malign me.

Amen.

This week, practice bothering about others:

The Bible is very clear that love is lived out in action. What could you do this week to show your love in action? It could be something as simple as writing an encouraging note to a co-worker or a family member, chatting with an elderly neighbor, taking a youth out to share a cup of coffee and conversation, or dropping off a bag of groceries in the shopping carts at Hope that are marked for the DMARC Food Pantry. Have fun and be creative in what you do and who you share with, but most importantly, *do something!*