

# Zebedee Commitment: A study for Personal Stewardship Growth

## Lesson Four: Stewardship of our Talents

Can you imagine the education and the experiences of James and John as they follow along the road towards Jerusalem with Jesus? One day their task was to fish, care for their boat and nets and sell their produce. The next they were learning about the Kingdom of God and how to help others understand God's love and care and how to teach the faith of Jesus Christ to the world. Along the way they learn in stages the lessons that Jesus teaches. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke the journey from the baptism of Jesus to the crucifixion and resurrection in Jerusalem spans a single year. In the gospel of John it appears that this same journey takes three years. But whether one or three we can probably agree that there was a lot to learn in a short period of time AND that time was transformative in the lives of these sons of Zebedee. In this lesson we will look at how James and John developed new skills to accomplish the work to which Jesus called them and how they offered those new abilities to the development of the early church.

### Disciples in Training

**Read Luke 9: 1-6.** In this passage Jesus sends out the twelve disciples on a ministry training exercise.

What tools have they gained to accomplish this task?

We also need certain conditions to be able to develop our own talents and to learn skills that will enable us to do God's will in our world. Can you identify the circumstances in which you have learned important skills and lessons that have allowed you to undertake new ministries?

How do you think James and John felt about this assignment?

Jesus gives them the instruction to take nothing along on the journey. To take provisions meant that they had a type of insurance in case things did not go well. They were to totally trust in God to give them what they needed to accomplish this assignment. In addition they were instructed to be good guests. They were to receive what was offered at the homes in which they stayed They were not to shop around for the best accommodations. Do you think that such an approach was a good learning environment? What were the positive components? What were the risks?

How does our fear of failure or embarrassment get in our way as we think about the ministries to which God might be calling us? How can our self-protection become a self-defeating measure? Can you think of a time when you or someone else demonstrated faith by letting go of the safety net and thus became a powerful witness for others? What did you learn about God's ability to care for our needs?

What do you think James and John learned about themselves and about God? How did they feel about their own abilities to make a difference in our world?

### Our Talents for the Mission of God

The ministry that was given us in Jesus Christ is a ministry of community. No single person can accomplish God's plan for healing the division and brokenness in our world.

**Read John 14: 12-14.** This is Jesus' farewell message to his disciples. He has already told them that he is going away to prepare for them a place in his Father's house. He promises that he will come again and bring them to himself. What does he assert in these verses?

How is it that those who believe will do greater works than Jesus? (*hint: Think about the scope of the work that Christians all around the world do in combating hunger, illness, poverty and injustice.*)

What is the implied assignment for Christians today?

The church needs many different talents to accomplish Christ's mission in our world. Paul has something to say about this. Read **1 Corinthians 12: 12-27**.

As a member of the Body of Christ, you have much to contribute to the ministry of the community. In fact, you are already contributing! Make a list of the ways you have offered your skills and talents to the ministry of this (or another) congregation. Share that list with a partner and see if together you can think of other ways you each have offered yourselves in ministry.

Discuss with the same partner the following questions. What would you like to do in the life of this congregation? What have been the barriers that have stood in the way of such participation?

Share some of the barriers with the larger group. What could our church do to assist individuals to walk around or scale the most common barriers?

## The Church of Jesus Christ

The Church of Jesus Christ is a human community. That means that we live within a larger cultural reality. Our North American context is to us like the water in which a fish swims. It is so much a part of our world that we often have difficulty recognizing the assumptions that have been handed to us. Below is a list of expectations that many hold about what it means to be a church. Think about your own beliefs around these assumptions.

- The church is simply one social institution among many. It is the agency that gathers like minded people to meet their spiritual needs.
- The church is a social service agency, filling the gaps in human services.
- The church is a promoter of moral values for individuals and/or society at large.
- The church is a prophetic voice for the poor and oppressed.
- The church is a sanctuary for the hurt and wounded.
- The church is a chaplain to society, challenging the immoral structure of the world and performing the rituals (weddings, funerals, socialization of the young that is needed by society.)
- The church is like a filling station. It is the place we come to fill our tanks with spiritual energy to enable us to get through the week. (1)

The church is all of these things, at some level, and much more. The church belongs to God. Lesslie Newbigin states it this way.

*“The purpose of the church is to be found in the purposeful activity of the Triune God: of God the Father who is ceaselessly at work in all creation and in the hearts and minds of all human beings whether they acknowledge him or not, graciously guiding history towards its true end; of God, the Son who has become part of this created history in the incarnation; and of God, the Holy Spirit who is given as a foretaste of the end to empower and teach the Church.” (2)*

The implications of such an understanding is that the church is to be engaged in the activity to which God is already at work in the community and world. It means being about the mission and purpose of God right here, right now. Therefore, the church is called to preach and teach, and also to learn. We are to remain open to renewal and reform through our continual study of scripture to be aware of God’s call to us.

How is the above analysis of the purpose of the church different from your assumptions either as you walked into this study or when you were growing up?

What does such an understanding call us to be about as members of Christ's church?

Consider the following tasks/activities within the life of the church. Put an X beside the tasks you have been a part of.

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|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attend worship            | <input type="checkbox"/> attend worship                | <input type="checkbox"/> Worship leader             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sing in Choir             | <input type="checkbox"/> Gave \$ to general budget     | <input type="checkbox"/> Gave \$ to mission         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Serve as Deacon           | <input type="checkbox"/> Serve as Elder                | <input type="checkbox"/> Taught Sunday School       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building/Grounds care     | <input type="checkbox"/> Attended Bible Study          | <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare food               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visiting sick or shut ins | <input type="checkbox"/> Encouraging faithfulness      | <input type="checkbox"/> Preparing Communion        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Give items for mission    | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Group leader            | <input type="checkbox"/> Bible Study Leader         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Musician for worship      | <input type="checkbox"/> Commissioner to Presbytery    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lay Preaching              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Invite others to church   | <input type="checkbox"/> Represent Church in community | <input type="checkbox"/> Pray for church and others |

How did you come to offer your gifts in these aspects of church life? Did you feel your gifts were called forth by God for the purpose of fulfilling the mission of God's church? Did you feel appreciated by others and thus drawn more fully into the community?

**What do you think?** Mark the following as True or false. Why do you think this way?

\*Attendance in worship or Bible Study is an important part of developing talents and gifts for Christ.

\*For the Church to grow in its understanding of its mission in the world we need more Bible Study, Worship and prayer. As we are a part of these activities we are participating in the life to which God calls our church.

\*God has a task for our congregation that only we can do. To do that task my gifts are needed.

\*Preparing the fellowship meal is much less important than preaching on Sunday morning.

\*To be faithful Christians we need to follow the traditions and practices that have been handed down.

\*Only those who can naturally do things in the life of the church (preach, lead Bible Study, teach, sing in choir) should do those things.

\*God will give His church the people and the things needed to do the mission that God has given us. That might even be me!

Think of how you can offer yourself more fully to God through the ministry of this church. On the back of this sheet write two or three ways that you could offer your talents to God.

**Pray:** Thank you, Lord for pulling me into your church. Help me to develop my talents and gifts to offer them to you more fully. Help this church to discern you in our midst and to know the blessing of your purpose and mission in our lives. Amen.

### **End Notes –Lesson Four: Stewardship of our Talents**

1. List developed from materials in “Called to be Faithful: An Introduction to Missional Transformation in the Church” Paul Dietrich, Inagrace Dietterich, Ray Shulte & Dale Ziemer. (The Center for Parish Development, 2004). Page 8. and “Discerning God’s Call” (The Center for Parish Development, 2004) An Essay by Lois Barrett, “Sharing the Gospel from our Strength: Four Images of the church.” page. 45.
2. Lesslie Newbigin. The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society (Grand Rapids, MI. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), Page 135.