

Empowering Subjects

Changing the World like Jesus

The purpose of Empowering Subjects is to equip subjects of the King to experience the sacrifice, satisfaction and joy of cooperating with God's work to grow his Kingdom among us.

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Empowering Subjects Changing the World Like Jesus Strategy and Approach

The world is an absolute mess. People are destroying themselves and devastating each other. This has always been the case, but matters seem especially turbulent right now. The pandemic, race, violence, and politics have us on edge, and people are passionately divided. Bickering, blaming and even violence are rampant. Satan is having a heyday.

Destruction and havoc were present in various forms in the first century as well. People were harassed by Satan and helpless to get free from him (Matthew 9:35-36). Though Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, and Caiaphas were all in office, the people were still like sheep without a shepherd. The leader they really needed was the Ruler prophesied by Micah, who would shepherd God's people in the strength of the Lord and be their peace (Micah 5:2-5a; Matthew 2:1-6; Acts 10:36).

The Ruler came in the person of Jesus. His approach to helping the brokenness of the world was to establish the Kingdom of God and make it available to thousands of people throughout Judea and Galilee. He then entrusted the mission of growing God's kingdom to his followers, telling them that the crowds of broken people all around constituted a plentiful harvest. His compassionate heart went out to these harassed and helpless people, and he stated clearly that there was a need for more workers (Matthew 9:37).

That need is enormous still today. The church has far too many consumers, complainers, critics, hand-wringers, troublemakers, bench warmers and ambitious people pushing their own agendas and far too few who will embrace the identity and responsibility of "workers." Yet workers are precisely what Jesus said are needed. If we want to make a difference in our badly traumatized world, we need to take Jesus' emphasis on workers to heart.

Jesus' words and example in Matthew 9-10 teach us three vital truths about workers. First, *Jesus* is the one who sends out workers, not us (Matthew 9:38). We must determine not to pressure, manipulate, guilt or heavy-hand anyone into being a worker. People not sent by Jesus do not need to be representing him. *He* is the Lord of the Harvest, and he commissions the workers. We must respect and cooperate with that.

Second, we are supposed to pray for workers (Matthew 9:38). The word "pray" or "ask" is a strong one and can be translated beseech, implore,

or beg. How and how often we beg the Lord to send out workers says a lot concerning what we truly believe about reaching our broken world. I urge you to add an earnest request for workers to your regular prayers.

Third, workers must be equipped (Matthew 10). Immediately after pointing out the need for workers and telling us to pray for them, Jesus gave the apostles additional power and instruction and sent them out, calling them “workers” (Matthew 10:1, 5, 10).

I want to devote the rest of my life not only to *being* a worker but to *praying* for workers and *equipping* them. That is what *Empowering Subjects* is about. It should not be thought of as a class but as a training program. The purpose is to empower subjects of the King to change the world like Jesus did, by being workers who cooperate with God for the growth of his kingship and reign. Since this is what Jesus did, it is clearly the best possible way to help our broken world.

To be faithful workers, though, we must understand just what a worker is. In the context of Matthew 9-10, a worker is someone who does what Jesus had been doing. What Jesus had been doing, beginning in Matthew 4:17, is summarized in Matthew 9:35-38. It can be remembered with the acronym SHARE. This word is not only helpful but also appropriate in light of Jesus’ charge: “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). Specifically, a Christlike worker is someone who will

See People (Matthew 9:36)

Have compassion on them (Matthew 9:36)

Announce the good news of God’s kingdom to them (Matthew 9:35)

Reflect the reality of God’s rule in their deeds (Matthew 9:35)

Explain/equip the subjects of the kingdom (Matthew 9:35)

The training will go into detail on each of these aspects of ministry.

Jesus’ *method* of training people to do these things was to focus on twelve of them: 1) showing them his own personal example of SHAREing the kingdom, 2) giving them actual power to help others (Matthew 10:1), 3) instructing them about the mission of changing the world (Matthew 10), and 4) sending them out to actually practice what he was teaching them (Matthew 10). I will follow his method as best as I can through: 1) having us all share *example* stories of how we are seeking to help the world, 2) making us aware of the *power* God has given us to reflect his kingdom to others, 3) *instructing* through videos and assignments we will work on during the week, and 4) giving *practical applications* to get us involved in actually doing what we are seeking to learn to do (these applications will not be coercive).

Since Jesus' approach to helping the world was to establish and grow the kingdom of God and empower his subjects to do the same, I'm thoroughly convinced it is the best thing we can do to make a difference. I realize we are weak, sinful human beings, but so were the first twelve workers Jesus called and sent out. We will fall short just like they did, but God can use us just as he used them. We do need training, however, substantial training. The situation in the world is dire, the enemy is well entrenched, and most of us are not very fit for working in a harvest field. Both the world and the church have much to gain if we allow the Lord to empower us to grow his kingdom.

Features of the *Empowering Subjects Program*

Substantial Training, because the need is great, the enemy is well entrenched, and few are adequately prepared for working in the harvest field

Balanced, between demonstrating the kingdom (serving), declaring the kingdom (evangelism), and describing the kingdom (spiritual formation).

Personal, emphasizing the need to see people as Jesus did and have compassion on them

Biblical, emerging directly out of the key passage in Matthew 9:35-38, read in the context of Jesus' ministry as a whole

Faithful, structured to rely on God's working and not mere human effort

Urgent because of the horrible destruction going on in the world and because of the judgment that is coming at the end of the age.

Timely because it can not only save the lost from destruction but also save Christians and Churches from self-centeredness, distraction, dissatisfaction, and discouragement

Visionary in the sense of thinking about the future with wisdom, because if we give people an initial foundation of submitting to God as King they will be properly oriented toward an attitude of humble service throughout their lives. (Conversely, when we attract people to the church by offering them an over-simplified message of salvation without cost, we shouldn't be surprised when then spend the rest of their Christian lives focused strongly on searching for the best possible deals they can find for themselves.)

How Empowering Subjects Works

The training opportunity provided by Empowering Subjects each week consists of:

1. Going online to nwchurch.us, click on "Wednesdays" at the top, and watch the video that introduces the theme of the week.

While you are there, also download and print the "Notes" that contain the written assignment. You are strongly encouraged to actually print them versus merely looking at them online. If you will literally write out your responses, it forces you to clarify your thoughts and makes more tangible the matters being considered. It is an easy way to build a pattern of *acting* on the material.

You are encouraged to do this download on Wednesday night or Thursday because you will benefit more if you spread your work out over a few days, and because some weeks it will be difficult to complete everything if you wait to the last day.

2. Invest time and effort into working meaningfully on the reading, questions, prayer and practical applications on a few different days of the week. The meat of the training takes places between you and the Lord as you make your heart and life available to him in this way. You will benefit even more from this work if you find a partner to discuss and work on it with. A partner will be especially helpful for some of the practical applications later on. **NOTE:** *actually doing the practical applications* is essential to our behavior actually changing. Remember, this is not a class but a training program. The applications are small steps but they are indeed steps toward a change of behavior.
3. Join the Zoom meetings every Wednesday at 7:00 pm for discussion, sharing, clarifications, and to ask questions about the work you have been doing during the week before. The primary focus of these meetings is support and encouragement.
4. Repeat this entire process each week
5. Call or email me any time you want to talk or have a question.

Introductory Training Opportunities

1. Skip to the end of this document and read this week's practical application to make sure you can make time to work on it before the next Zoom meeting.
2. Get a one inch, three ring binder to keep all your materials in. Get one that has a clear plastic cover that allows you to insert a cover sheet. Then search online for a picture that helps you remember the need or gist of what we are doing in this training (a harvest field, people in need or people talking, Jesus, the King, etc). This is a super easy assignment and may seem trivial, but it is extremely important to establish a pattern from the beginning of *actually doing something*. Our behaviors need to change, and this is an intentionally simple assignment to ease us into actually changing behaviors.
3. Prayerfully read and re-read the key paragraph of Matthew 9:35-38. Also compare John 4:34-38. Then jot down whatever observations and insights come to you and pray about these. You may want to repeat this item again on a couple different days.

4. Jesus said there was a plentiful harvest. What do you think he knew or saw that made him say this? Do you think his words mean there will always be a plentiful harvest everywhere or was he speaking only of his time and place? Do you believe there is a plentiful harvest around us today? What do you base your answer on?

5. Jesus said the workers are few. Do you think this is still the situation around us today? Do you ever tend to be a consumer, complainer, critic, hand-wringer, troublemaker, bench warmer and agenda pusher instead of a worker? How do you feel about embracing an identity of "worker"? Do you believe the Lord has/is/wants to send you out as a worker?

6. What change would you like to see in yourself as a result of *Empowering Subjects*? What are some things you can do to increase the likelihood of this change taking place?

Practical Application: Add to your daily prayers an earnest request that the Lord of the Harvest would send out workers. Pray also for your own heart and all your fellow-subjects who are seeking to be empowered along with you, that we would all be open to the Lord's training to prepare us to be workers.