

8. Explaining/Equipping Subjects of the Kingdom

You'll remember (pp. 61-63) that the word **proclaiming** is used in the New Testament especially for telling the good news of Christ and to people who are not yet his followers, while **teaching** is used especially for telling the truths and way of life that are to be adopted by those who have decided to follow him. There is some overlap in the way the terms are used, but generally this distinction is made. Both proclaiming and teaching, however, are vital aspects of how Jesus Changed the world.

Our key passage says Jesus was going through "all the towns and villages, *teaching* in their synagogues, *proclaiming* the good news of the kingdom and *healing* every disease and sickness" (Matthew 9:35). We've already covered the proclaiming (**A**nnouncing) and healing (**R**eflecting) aspects of his mission. This week we will focus on his Teaching. I refer to this aspect of how he changed the world as **E**xplaining / **E**quipping the subjects of the kingdom, and it is the E in the **SHARE** acronym. In case it is not clear, this way of describing what Jesus was doing has a dual meaning. We are to *explain* the *subjects (topics)* of the kingdom and also to *equip* the *subjects (servants, the people)* of the kingdom.

This aspect of Jesus' ministry, too, is extremely important. Remember, our charge is not merely to baptize people. Rather, we are called to change the world like Jesus. In order for the world to change, the new subjects of the Kingdom must be taught and trained to live drastically different lives from what they were before they came to Christ.

Too often Christians become dull and then stagnate in their faith. They stop growing, get comfortable and even begin to regress. Though there are many faithful followers, there are also too many who cannot in any way be described as the salt of the earth or the light of the world. Far too often Paul's words are true of the church today, that "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (Romans 2:24). It is imperative that we ourselves seek to become more like the Lord and do whatever we can to help all believers be more like Him as well. To the church in Rome at large Paul said he was convinced that they were full of goodness and knowledge and competent to instruct (admonish, counsel) one another (Romans 15:14). Doing so is another part of being a worker in the Lord's Harvest field.

How do we Explain/Equip the Subjects?

Sometimes helping other believers grow is a matter of teaching in the sense of mere explanation. Suppose a new subject of the kingdom doesn't

understand what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." You *explain* to them that an attitude of recognizing our spiritual poverty is essential to entering the kingdom of heaven. Teaching them the meaning of that particular word from God is largely a matter of *explaining*.

The best teachers, however, always do more than just explain. They help their students see the importance or application of what they have explained. They also care about the ones they teach and make themselves available to help them whenever it is needed. We could make a long list of many other good attributes of effective teachers.

In Christianity, generally, our teaching needs to go beyond mere explanations. We need to equip (supply with whatever is needed) and empower (give the strength, ability, and confidence) people to live like Christ. That is why I use the word equip instead of merely teach to describe this aspect of Jesus' ministry.

To equip and empower the subjects (people) of the kingdom entails much more than merely explaining subjects (topics). We noted (p. 4) that the way Jesus empowered the twelve to SHARE the kingdom was by: 1) setting the example personally, 2) giving them tangible power to help others (Matthew 10:1), 3) instructing them, and 4) sending them out to actually practice what he was teaching them. If we follow Jesus' way of equipping others, we will use all these same tools:

- **Explaining.** We can explain Scripture, life in the Kingdom, the nature of the Kingdom, what Jesus was like, how to live like Him, and much more. Sometimes we will do this with opened Bibles, and other times it may be done in conversation. Again, in some situations explaining is all that is needed. Often, however, the additional tools below are required.
- **Example.** Our own example is always sending a message, whether we want it to or not. Even if we are merely explaining a Scripture, our attitude and manner will reinforce what we are saying or contradict it (remember content, tone, and body language). Because of this, we ourselves must constantly be listening to the King, allowing him to search our hearts, and praying that we will continue to be transformed into His image. Even if we have matured in Christ, we need to continually seek to grow. We will not display Christ fully and perfectly in our lives, of course, but we must be striving to submit to him more fully, and we must have the humility to admit our sins and failures. Humility itself is another part of our example for the other believers.

- **Empowering.** Though we may impart confidence to our fellow subjects, we don't give them actual, tangible power. That is the work of God. We can, however, make them aware of what God has given them. This includes helping them grasp the power of the Holy Spirit who enables them to become more like the King. It also includes helping them recognize the spiritual gift(s) God has entrusted to them and the powerful way they can use those gifts to **Reflect** the kingdom to others. Not only do we make them aware of these things, we also pray that God will give them power (Ephesians 1:15-19; 3:14-16).
- **Exhorting** and more. Christianity must be understood, to be sure, but it must also be lived. Because of this, we will use broader means of communicating than just explaining. We will exhort (urge to live according to the truths we are explaining), encourage (help them maintain a hopeful, godly perspective on whatever is going on), and urge them to follow the word (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12). Other times we will teach, rebuke, correct, and train them in righteousness so that they will be thoroughly equipped for every good work (1 Timothy 3:16-17). This broader communication urges people to actually put the truth into practice in their lives, just like Jesus did.

It is possible to *explain* aspects of God's truth to a person that we may only see one time ever. As noted, there is a need for that. *Equipping, on the other hand*, entails the other three bullets above—example, empowering, and exhorting. If we hope to speak to people effectively in this broader sense, it's going to take a relationship. When we form a meaningful relationship with people, they inevitably see our example and experience our love and compassion for them. These things add greatly to the credibility we have in their minds and enable our words to have much greater impact.

The best example of the power of forming meaningful relationships is Jesus himself. He chose the twelve, focused special attention on them, and spent enormous amounts of time with them. He allowed them to see the kingdom of God in his attitudes and deeds. He gave them the opportunity to know his great love and compassion for them. As a result, over time, they became increasingly like him and ultimately sacrificed themselves for him. That is the transforming power of equipping relationships.

Paul built relationships with the people he was helping to live in the kingdom as well. He told the Thessalonians, "Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well" (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8). He didn't merely explain things to people. He cared for them greatly and shared his life with them. A man who practiced

this same thing once told me, "You can say anything you need to say to someone, if you have a relationship with them." It takes a relationship to equip the subjects of the kingdom.

Which Subjects (servants) Need our Explaining/Equipping?

A. New Subjects (servants) of the King

We need to make a concerted effort to teach new subjects of kingdom how to live a life submitted to the King. Most churches provide a lot of teaching, but we must not be deceived into thinking this will take care of the needs of the new believers. They may not even be coming to the classes or times of teaching, especially at first. Even if they are, the teaching we provide for people who have been Christians for many years may be way above their heads or may deal with matters that are not nearly as important as what new believers most need to hear. We need to provide teaching and equipping that is tailored especially for the new believers.

Acts seems to emphasize preaching the good news about Jesus to non-Christians more than teaching the Christians how to live faithfully. Still, the latter is mentioned a number of times. We see mature Christians spending time with new Christians on a number of occasions (10:48; 16:15, 40; 18:18; 20:3). Sometimes Acts mentions that they spoke to the new believers, strengthened them or urged them to remain faithful (11:22-24; 13:43; 14:22; 18:23; 20:1, 2). When Paul addressed the elders at Ephesus, he reflected on how, over the years, he had not only set an example for them but also had declared to them the whole counsel of God, admonished them day and night with tears, not shrunk back from declaring anything that would be profitable to them, and taught them in public and from house to house (20:18-19, 20, 27, 31, 32). When we read closely, we see a lot of concern and effort toward people's growth.

The letters sometimes reveal something about the early teaching that had been given to those receiving the letter. For example, Paul tells the Thessalonians that, like a father with his children, he had exhorted, encouraged, and charged them to walk in a manner worthy of God (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12). He tells the recipients of Ephesians that the pagan lifestyle of the Gentiles is not the way they were taught to live, *if* they had heard about Christ and were taught in him to put off their old self, be renewed in the spirit of their minds, and to put on the new self. He seems to assume that they either had been taught or should have been taught to put off the old, be renewed in mind, and put on the new. It is imperative that we teach new believers basics like these for how to live their lives in a manner worthy of the King and kingdom.

There are a number of basic studies designed for new believers. I can recommend one I wrote called *Rock Solid*. It is a 50 day devotional, self-study guide that is intended to be discussed on with a mentor. You can find it if you google Westbow Press and then do a search for "Rock Solid." Another good way of giving new believers a strong foundation is to study through a Gospel with them. Matthew's five large sections of teaching interspersed with five large sections of Jesus' deeds make it an especially appropriate for giving a person a good grasp of Jesus' life and teachings. One could also develop a good course for a new believer based on the five areas of life in the kingdom we noted during our own basic training (pp. 14-20). Handling the reality that we will fall short and accessing the power of the Holy Spirit, which are mentioned there, should also be included. I'll suggest another way we could teach new believers below. There are many possible approaches, but the important matter is that we recognize the need and importance of providing good, comprehensive teaching and relationships for all new believers and then do it. We cannot just assume they'll figure out how to live like Jesus.

B. A Few Subjects (servants) of the King

In addition to providing for new believers, we would do well to concentrate our explaining/equipping of the subjects of the kingdom on a few people. We already noted that Jesus did this, and Paul seems to have done the same with Timothy, Titus and a few others. Focusing on a few allows us to pour ourselves into them fully, using all four of the tools for equipping mentioned above. This will usually yield considerable growth into the image of Christ. We may maintain a deliberate focus on a person or a small group of people for an indefinite period of time. Or it may be for a limited time, after which we move on and equip others. Even if it is for a limited time, however, the relationships will remain and we can still spend time with them and get with them occasionally.

A focused effort to equip a subject of the King may be for general purposes, including any aspect of the faith and life we are called to. Alternately, we may focus for a while on some specific need or subject, such as relationships, emotions, marriage, parenting, finance, leadership, SHAREing the kingdom, etc. I'm convinced that followers of Christ in the USA today need extended training in how to have Christian relationships. Another area where special equipping may be needed is to help people identify, understand, and use their spiritual gift(s). Related to this, people will often need equipping on how to serve in some particular ministry. The community of the King would be so much stronger if we all focused on a few people and invested intentionally in equipping them.

C. Any Subjects (servants) of the King

In addition to equipping new believers and investing in a few believers, we should also be open to helping any and every believer, as we have opportunity. We've all benefitted over the years from getting together with different people who advised us, listened to us, challenged us, explained something to us, solved a problem for us, etc. We may not get to be with that person very often, but even one time together can sometimes make a great difference in our lives. Recognizing this, we need to make ourselves available to do the same with others.

We should be alert to opportunities to help whoever we encounter when we are at any gatherings of the church, when we're out and about, or at occasional appointments for coffee or lunch. Likewise, when someone calls us or emails us out of the blue, it may be an opportunity to explain / equip the subjects of the kingdom. We need to realize that, when we focus on a few people (B, above), we will develop close relationships with them, and if we're not careful, we will spend all our time with them. This can come across as a clique and be off-putting to others. At church gatherings in particular, we need to be aware that there are many people present who don't have any nourishing relationships and so do what we can to reach out to them and bless them in some way.

In these occasional, anybody-and-everybody equipping relationships, the topic will usually be whatever is on the person's mind. Maybe they are facing a problem, not understanding a Scripture, feeling discouraged, or not very involved. It seems to me that whatever they are dealing with is the right subject for our interactions with them, unless they are overly focused on some peripheral or controversial matter and need to be steered toward more central aspects of the Kingdom. In addition, we can always be ready to share important matters we have learned as subjects of the King.

With all three groups of people mentioned above, I want to encourage us all to make sure we are open not only to explaining / equipping the subjects of the King, but also open to learning from them. We may be further along than some folks, but we still need to grow in many areas. We need to guard against the danger of viewing ourselves as the expert, putting ourselves exclusively in the teacher role and not being willing to learn from others. This is true even to the new subjects of the King. Sometimes it is very helpful to view matters through their eyes. We are all fellow-servants, growing together to please the King.

Which Subjects (Topics) are Needed?

Exactly what needs to be discussed with people will vary according to the individual, and we have indicated some of that above. There are some things, however, that seem to me to be especially important to being and living like Christ, and I want to highlight some of them here.

In general, of course, our goal is to equip people to be like Jesus. Jesus himself said, "The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher" (Luke 6:40). Jesus wants all his subjects to become like him, so that's what we help each other do. That includes many specific attitudes and actions. A study and discussion all the way through one of the Gospels, as mentioned above, is certainly in order for everyone at some point in their growth.

There are also some particular things that every believer and every church ought to be doing. I use a JESUS acronym to teach and remind people of what we are called to do. These are some important subjects (topics) for every subject (servant) of the King.

Joined together in Love

It is imperative that we teach subjects of the King to be joined together in loving relationships with others, especially other believers. Relationships in the community of the King are supposed to be quite different from the way people typically treat each other in the world. We must teach each other...

- Love is paramount (John 13:34-35).
- Unity is extremely important and we need to make every effort to preserve it (Ephesians 4:4), especially in a world like ours.
- The attitudes of humility, self-denial, and other-centeredness are characteristic of the mind of Christ and are also the primary pathway to unity (Philippians 2:1-11; Ephesians 4:1-2).
- Focusing on major matters instead of smaller, controversial ones is also right and helps maintain unity (Romans 14:17, 22; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Timothy 6:3-5).
- Forgiving others is another key component of unity and life in the Kingdom that must be taught (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-35).

Exalting God

We worship our King! Doing so reminds us that he is the center of the universe, and we are not. Worshiping Him also helps us become like Him.

- The primary focal point for worship is glorifying God (Romans 16:25-27; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:17).
- Worshiping God in a way that he finds acceptable entails recognizing who He is and what he has done for us, and then offering worship to Him with gratitude, reverence, and awe (12:28-29).
- A secondary focal point is being united with and building up others (Romans 15:5-7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-22; Philippians 2:1-11; Hebrews 10:24-25). Like Christ, we set ourselves aside for the benefit of others.
- Self-centeredness in worship is a significant danger in our society. We must teach people to guard against insisting that worship be acceptable to them and help them focus on worship that is acceptable to God and sensitive to the rest of the body.
- We can no longer assume people know what worship is about. Instead, we must *prepare* them to worship. We must help them understand the purpose of it, the attitudes appropriate to it, and the special dangers of self-centeredness and consumerism. In a society like ours, we may well need to spend a couple sessions studying and discussing these matters before we try to get a person to come worship with us.
- True worship extends to how we live our lives 24/7 (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15-16).

Serving Others

The Kingdom of Christ and God has been described as an upside down kingdom because the King Himself was a servant. He did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom (Mark 10:42-45). Serving others is paramount for keeping our sinful self-centeredness in check, for preserving unity, and for focusing on doing God's work.

- We must teach people to deny themselves and serve others (Matthew 16:24-25).
- We must also teach them to have the *attitude* of a servant as they do so (Luke 17:7-10).
- Jesus made it clear that the greatest in the kingdom is the one who humbles himself or herself as a child (Matthew 18:1-5). Apparently his meaning is that, in order to enter the kingdom of God, we must be willing to take on the status of someone who has no status.

Undergoing Transformation

God wants to transform us from who we have been into his image (2 Corinthians 3:18). It is not okay for someone to become a Christian and fail to change their ways (2 Timothy 2:19).

- Though it is not popular, Scripture is painfully clear that we will not enter the kingdom if we continue in sin (Matthew 5:20; 7:21; Mark 9:42-49; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; 6:7-8; Ephesians 5:5). At the same time, Scripture is also clear that we will not be totally free of sin (1 John 1:8, 10). Still, we must strive to please him (Luke 13:22-29; 2 Peter 1:5-11). The entire passage from 1 John just referenced includes a balanced emphasis on both the inevitability of sin and yet still the goal of sinlessness (1 John 1:5-2:3).
- We do not transform ourselves but rather *undergo* transformation. We are *being* transformed (2 Corinthians 3:18) and are to allow ourselves to be (Romans 12:2). The power of God and the Holy Spirit are essential for us to change (1 Corinthians 4:20; Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:3-4).
- Our obedience is not a matter of law-keeping. We must teach people to obey from their hearts, out of faith and love (Matthew 5:20; John 14:15, 21; 1 John 5:3; Romans 1:5; 6:17; 16:26).
- Teaching people how to read Scripture humbly and take it to heart is paramount for them to be shaped into the image of Christ.
- People need to be warned about the danger and harm of focusing on unimportant or controversial matters (Romans 14:17; 1 Timothy 4:7; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:14; Titus 3:10).
- The activities indicated by all four of the other letters in this JESUS acronym will contribute to a person's transformation.

Sharing the Good News

Every subject of the King should care about Him becoming known to the rest of the world and participate in it in some way. Some will be gifted at sharing the message and do it more than others, but every believer should be able to explain why they have hope (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). The reason, in short, is that Jesus is the King of the universe.

- We need to help people clearly understand the message we are to speak to non-Christians and be ready to do so.
- We need to help them see the importance of backing up the message with their own life and deeds, as well as their manner of speaking.
- We need to teach people to rely on God to work in His mission by encouraging them to pray and watch for opportunities.
- We should help them see that sharing the news is not an isolated act but is a part of the broader, constant sense of being "on call" to SHARE the kingdom in various ways as God gives us the opportunity.

Practical Application (#1). Is there someone you helped come to the King but who has not received any concentrated explaining and equipping? If so, make a plan now for providing this teaching yourself or asking someone you know to provide it. Also decide what approach you will use (see top of p. 107 and pp. 109-111 for some ideas).

Practical Application (#2). Think about what aspects of Christianity you have learned and feel strongly about (certain Scripture, a quality, a skill, a priority, a subject, etc.). Then think about how you might find someone(s) who could benefit from this. Do you know someone who especially needs it? Or do you know people who might participate in a short term study / discussion / application of it? How would you set this up and get it going?

Practical Application (#3). Anytime you are around or communicating with Christians, be alert for opportunities to explain or equip or enter into a deep relationship that will allow for this. Given the opportunity, how could you share the important matter in #2 with a person in a foyer conversation or over a cup of coffee?

Practical Application (#4). Continue to clarify the message, if needed. Then pray, practice watchfulness, probe, and be ready to proclaim the good news or SHARE the kingdom in any way the Lord gives you opportunity.

Practical Application (#5). Spend some time in thought and prayer, and jot down any thoughts or experiences about any of the applications here.