

The Genius of Jesus' Strategy

I Thessalonians 3:8

The Genius of Jesus' Strategy

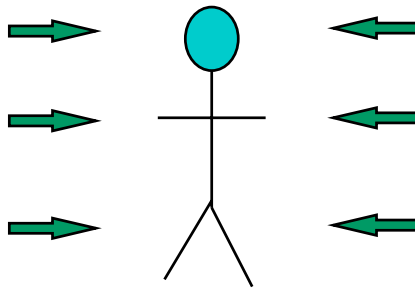
We will begin this chapter by “dropping in” on an innocent-sounding text. In fact, you might read Paul’s First Thessalonian letter a hundred times and give little or no attention to this verse. But, and this is quite often the case in Scripture, God hides the genius of Heaven in seemingly “obscure” or inconspicuous texts, and here is a perfect case in point. Hidden away in this text is the glory and the genius of Christianity. The verse is I Thessalonians 3:8, which says (KJV), “For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.” Note that every word is a monosyllable, so this text is certainly very simple. But the glory of it is far out of proportion to its apparent simplicity.

Remember that the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language, and one advantageous feature of the Greek language is that the placement and arrangement of the words in a sentence reveals whether any of the words carry emphasis, and, if so, whether the emphasis is *minor* (the Holy Spirit raises His Voice) or *major* (the Holy Spirit *shouts*). In I Thessalonians 3:8, the words are so arranged that *one word carries* emphasis, and it is *major* emphasis (the Holy Spirit *shouts* this one word from the page to us). Again and again, I have asked audiences to *guess* which word they think the emphatic word is. Note that there are only eleven words in the entire verse, and yet the normal audience will go through *six* or *eight* guesses and still not be correct. You see, we cannot with our human minds guess right about God. Even if we stumble onto a correct answer, our answer is wrong in that it is still a *guess*. This is the reason we must study the Bible, “rightly dividing the Word of Truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

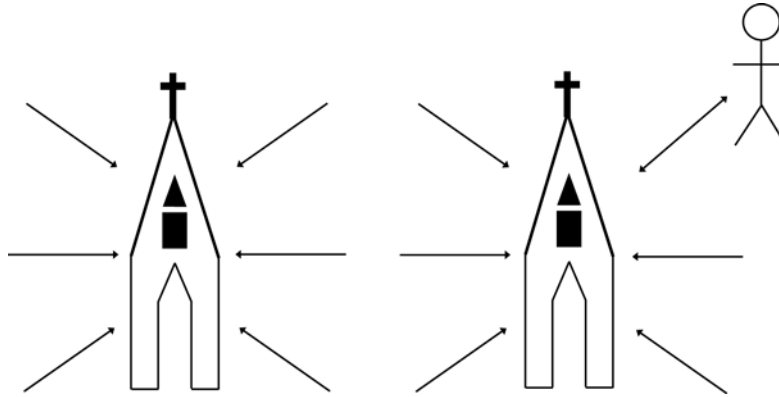
The one emphatic word (stressed with *major* emphasis) is the word “ye.” Take a moment and read the verse aloud, and *shout* the word “ye.” Can you now unravel the meaning? Can you now see the genius of Christianity? Can you see clearly why the word “ye” would be the emphatic word? Let’s explore further until we have a firm grasp of this handle of understanding.

There are two kinds of lives that human beings may live. There are two lifestyles that human beings may pursue. Most human beings never realize this, but one of these patterns is *Satan’s* lifestyle while the other is the *Savior’s* lifestyle. One is the normal lifestyle of a *sinner* (and it is *the only* lifestyle a lost man may live), and the other is the normal lifestyle of a *practicing saint*. I use these words carefully, because any saved person may still at any time lapse into the practice of Satan’s lifestyle.

Let me draw a simple diagram that will enable us to clearly see these contrasting lifestyles.



I call this pattern the “outside-in” lifestyle. This is the inevitable, necessary lifestyle of every person who has never been born of God. He lives like a sponge, always sucking resources from his environment for his own selfish advantage. This is *Satan’s* lifestyle. This is what created Satan: “I will,” he repeated again and again, transferring his trust from God to himself. This is the classic definition of sin: “S-I-N,” “self-ish-ness.” Sin is the “self-curl” of life which makes every human being turn everything back into himself. Sin is man’s



The same thing is true of *churches* that is true of *individuals*. Churches also may be turned in on themselves, living *selfishly* or for their own *survival* (even while seeking people, the course may still be only one of *implosion!*), instead of extending and exhausting their supply lines in such a way that they constantly test and tax the miracle resources of God.

The Christian lifestyle is to live so *relationally*, so *unselfishly*, so *self-forgetfully*, so *other-orientedly*, that the individual Christian only truly lives *if his disciple is standing fast in the Lord*. Paul said, "I only live if you stand fast in the Lord." So the Christian lives *in, by means of, for, and through* his disciples!

Is this not Jesus' entire method, manner, and means of world impact? He so built Himself into twelve men that, after a three-year training period, he said, "Good-bye! Now My life is totally in your care. *I only live if you stand fast!*" That, dear friends, is what disciple-making is all about. How I wish I could explain this again and again, exploring its many facets like the facets of a bright and priceless diamond, until every reader was overwhelmed with the glory, the possibilities, and the vocation of this "inside-out" lifestyle.

Almost all Americans will recognize this familiar adage: "Practice makes Perfect." I was taught this as long as I can remember. It was expressed to me as if it were an invariable, invisible, infallible law. But I want to raise a serious question. Suppose the standard practiced is an *imperfect standard*. Can all the practice in the world ever "make perfect?" Certainly not! You see, practice only makes *permanent*; it does not necessarily make perfect. Now the application. Could it be possible that the church of Jesus Christ has so operated by traditional standards and understandings that all of its "practice" is only further setting it in an imperfect standard.

If the premise of these studies is correct, that the Great Commission presents the only "Marching Orders" Jesus Christ gave to His church, and if the understanding of the Commission presented in these studies is correct, then the typical strategy of the typical church is wrong. Has institution-building to a greater or lesser degree replaced individual-building in today's church? Remember that the interpretation of "turning people into disciples" is determined by the method and mandate of Jesus. His mandate is clearly stated in the one command of the Great Commission: "turn people into disciples." And His method is shown in His internetworking small-group strategy with twelve men.

Let me ask the question again. Would the Christianity presently represented in your church have produced the Book of Acts to begin with? This is an embarrassing question, and thus it will not receive a ready answer.

To put it another way: would the Christianity of the Book of Acts tolerate the world situation of today, a situation in which nearly half of the human race remains unevangelized (2,000 years after Christ!), and in which 4/5 of the human race are (at best) only poorly evangelized? Would the Christianity of the Book of Acts tolerate the situation in the church in almost every evangelized country of the world, a situation which is described with monotonous refrain in Patrick Johnstone's Operation World: "This country suffers from a desperate lack of trained leaders"? The embarrassing answer to all of the above questions is a resounding "No!" Then, will the present strategies and methods correct these failures? Well, they have not succeeded as of this writing. Should we not back away, boldly re-examine the original strategy of Jesus, and see what variations have carried us away from His strategy?

There is a common term used in the church, another of those church terms which we have superficially presumed upon. It is the term, "Christ-like." Almost all Christians would admit that the goal of the Christian life is to make the individual believer Christ-like. In fact, this is God's clearly-stated goal for each of His children. Romans 8:29 indicates that it has always been God's purpose to "conform us to the image of His Son," or to make us like Christ. But again, we have stopped far short of the Biblical mark in defining this term. We define it typically in terms of "the fruit of the Spirit" of Galatians 5:22-23. Who could fault this definition? If a person bears the fruit of the Spirit, his inner character is like that of Christ. But follow the analogy of fruit a bit further. Does fruit only have an inner essence, or does it also have an outward form? To illustrate, when a shopper goes to the supermarket to buy lemons, does she look for "lemonness"? No, she looks for a small fruit that has a small round shape, a yellow, thick skin, and a rough surface. In other words, a lemon has a clearly distinguishable outward form, conspicuously different from the outward form of a plum, a strawberry, or a cantaloupe. I suggest that the fruit of the Spirit is only a good *beginning* in defining Christians. Does Christ-likeness have an outward form as well as an inner essence?

Let me put it in one sentence: you will never do anything more Christ-like than the training of groups of people to live in union with Jesus Christ inwardly, and to reproduce, multiply, and impact the whole wide world outwardly. The basic strategy words are "training," (with the strategy and curriculum patterned by Jesus), "groups" (with the approximate size of each group again patterned by Jesus), "union" (thus making Christ's life, ministry and motivation ours), "reproduce and multiply" (the responsibility of every single child of God), and "impact the whole wide world" (which should provide the moment-by-moment goal of every single child of God). And all of this is to determine the strategies by which we accomplish the goal.

In John 19:30, in history's holiest moment, Jesus spoke the one word which is probably the most important single word ever spoken. The word is *tetelestai*, "finished," "complete," "done." The work that was finished at that moment is the work of REDEMPTION, the one inclusive word which describes all that God has done to fully save sinners.

In John 17:4, Jesus used that word again (KJV): "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do." What work had Jesus *finished* at this point? Most commentaries say that this statement also applies to the work of redemption which Jesus accomplished on the cross, but this clearly cannot be the case. Jesus used a past-tense verb, and the cross was still in front of Him! No, He was not speaking here of the work of REDEMPTION, but the work of REPRODUCTION. At this point, His entire training process for His men was complete: So Jesus came to accomplish two primary and essential works: REDEMPTION and REPRODUCTION. Without the indispensable work of Redemption accomplished by Christ's death on the cross, there would have been nothing worth reproducing, but without the indispensable work of Reproduction through enlarging numbers of Christians, the work of Redemption would be only partially, poorly, or pitifully known (the exact situation of today's world, and even of today's church, as well).

Again a crucial question is forced upon us. What does "reproduction" mean from a New Testament

standpoint? How many people are expected to reproduce, and how much reproduction is to be expected of them? Is the reproduction mere duplication (the standard of soul-winning, or converting sinners to Christ), or is it to produce multiplication? If multiplication, on how large a scale? And how are valid goals in these categories to be reached? Again, the method and manner of Jesus are to provide our model.

Let's take one model for a momentary examination. What model did Jesus follow in reproducing? How did He produce multipliers? How did He produce a mind-set in twelve men that eventuated in massive world impact to the farthest reaches of the known world of His day within 60 years after His death? Read the last sentence again and let its truth saturate your mind. Let its question stir your heart. How? How *did* He . . . ? "How did he *produce a mind-set*? In twelve men!?!? That eventuated in massive world impact? To the farthest reaches of the known world of His day? And within 60 years after His death? He didn't have television, telethons, telephones, telecommunication means, just tell-a-person! How? How? How? Negatively, nothing of His program depended on a crowd. Nothing of His program depended on preaching (though He used mass communication to minister, to teach, and to emerge potential disciples). Nothing of His program was institutionalized (this is a mere admission of fact, not an evaluation of institutionalism). Nothing of His program centered in going to church (although He went to church regularly). Then WHAT WAS HIS STRATEGY? HIS TECHNIQUE? HIS METHOD?

We can get a hint by examining the Biblical lists of the men whom He called as "Apostles." Let it be said first that He trained them *to send them away from Him*, not to centralize increasing masses where He was. This strategy is conspicuously unlike today's church, which tends to evaluate its success (and the success of its leaders) almost totally by the measurement of size. The four lists of the Apostles are found in Matthew 10, Mark 3, Luke 6, and Acts 1. The compiling of the lists should stimulate ceaseless study. There are incalculable and eternal lessons to be learned from studying these lists over and over again. Let me place them on the page:

<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>Acts</i>
Simon (called Peter)	Simon (named Peter)	Simon (named Peter)	Peter
Andrew	James, son of Zebedee	Andrew	John
James, son of Zebedee	John	James	James
John	Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus
Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot	Judas, son of James	Judas, son of James
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	,

Note the most obvious features. The same name comes first on each list. Let me correct myself. It is the same *person*, though the name is not the same throughout ("Simon Peter" and then "Peter"). Let me correct myself again. He is the same person throughout, and yet he is clearly *not the same person*! The trip from "Simon" in control to "Peter" in control is a colossal study of the strategy, technique, method, and process of Jesus in building disciples. Was that (building disciples) not the only command in His great Commission to us? Surely, then, the strategy, technique, method and process of Jesus are to be followed as nearly as possible by us (or we can fully expect a different product, which is precisely what has sadly occurred in today's church). It is an unbelievably rewarding study to trace just the training process Jesus followed with Simon Peter *alone*. If the passages of encounter, exchange and construction between Jesus and Peter are to be the standard for building disciples in today's church, then it is very easy to see why we are suffering from a gigantic crisis of product (unbuilt Christians and a largely unevangelized world). I would recommend this study to any Christian. To examine the process by which Jesus reduced "Simon" (his pre-conversion, fleshly name) and emerged "Peter" (the name that is normally used for him in the Book of Acts) is an eye-opener for anyone wishing to know Jesus' technique in building disciples.

When you examine the second line across the lists, you see that the names are *not* the same. The same is true in the *third* line, and the *fourth*. But *eureka*, line number five contains the same name all the way across. This will prove to be crucial in understanding the training strategy of Jesus. Line six does not contain the same name, nor does line seven, nor does line eight. But *aha! Eureka*, again! Line number nine contains the same name all the way across. Line ten contains different names, so does line eleven, and line twelve (if you fill in the place vacated by the death of Judas Iscariot with the name of his selected replacement, Matthias). We may now be seeing a primary technique employed by Jesus in building world-visionary, world-impacting, reproducing multipliers of *others in kind*. We know without any doubt that Jesus' strategy was totally centered in a small group of twelve men. We know, too, that Jesus put all of His "eggs" in that one small

"basket." His total plan for world impact was placed in the hands (and the productivity) of twelve men! And the lists of the Apostles also strongly suggest his method in building these men. He apparently (and it is far more apparent than a *first glance* will see) divided His twelve men into three equal groups of four each, with an assigned leader for each group. What evidence do we have for believing this? The evidence is too overwhelming to be mere coincidence. All the men in the first group (and only these, as far as we know) were followers of John the Baptist who came to follow Jesus upon the selfless encouragement of their leader. All the men in the first group are dynamic and impulsive men, just like their leader, Simon Peter. James and John were nicknamed "Sons of Thunder" by Jesus Himself! They were dispositionally like developing thunderstorms. Andrew is apparently far more dynamic than we normally think. After all, he was the first home missionary (John 1:40-42), the first youth worker and social worker (John 6:8-9), and the first foreign missionary (John 12:20-22). It is very unlikely that a timid man would have accomplished any of the things attributed in those passages! These were dynamic men.

The second group is headed by the Apostle Philip, who has throughout the Gospel the profile of a highly *philosophical* man. And every person in his group is also highly philosophical, men like "doubting" Thomas and Levi Matthew, who wrote the Gospel of the philosophical teachings of Jesus. Notice that Jesus did not install a philosophical man as his primary leader, He would have never accomplished anything! Philosophical men make great doubters, great questioners, great investigators, great protestors, great procrastinators, and finally, great contributors to their Christian mission. But out-front leadership was not given to philosophical men. However, we are not to under-estimate the importance and necessity of these men in evaluating this statement. It just reflects another important factor in the strategy of Jesus.

The third group, are you ready? The third group is made up totally of political revolutionaries! The leader, James, the son of Alphaeus, was probably the mildest one in the group! Judas' surname, "Iscariot," may well derive from the "sicarii," the little dagger carried by certain revolutionaries, with which they had pledged themselves to kill any Roman official whom they could reach in a crowd (or *anywhere*, for that matter). Here is an interesting feature. There is substantial evidence that James and Matthew (both called "sons of Alphaeus") were brothers. Does this stimulate great thought in you? Why was one (Matthew) a traitor to Rome, having given his life to exacting taxes from the Jew for the despised Roman government? Why was the other (James) an ardent Jewish patriot? Did one react against the other's extreme views and actions? Did James' patriotism drive Matthew toward Rome? Or did Matthew's defection divide James into ardent political and revolutionary action? Or neither? Any argument we may give is weakened by Scriptural silence, but the question surely arouses speculation. The man who is called "the Zealot" is named by his identification with the furiously patriotic, rebellious, and violent political party bearing that name. Did you know that, if Simon the Zealot had met Matthew the publican under "normal" circumstances, he would have killed him as quickly as possible. Do you see why I believe that Jesus' Greatest Miracle was not feeding the hungry by multiplying food, or healing sick people, or even raising the dead. To me, His Greatest Miracle was the construction, out of "impossible" material, of a band of Twelve Men who would send the shock waves of Spiritual Reproduction to the ends of the earth of that day! And, had not the church replaced the strategy of Jesus (building individuals . . .) with a suitable substitute that surely originated from another source (building imploding institutions), those shock waves would be impacting the ends of the earth today, and would continue to do so unabated until the end of time.

When the famed comedian, Charlie Chaplin, was alive, a "Charlie Chaplin Lookalike Contest" was held in Monaco. Mr. Chaplin traveled to the site, entered the contest anonymously, and came in THIRD! I seriously wonder where the real Jesus would "place" in a Christ-Lookalike Contest in *today's* church???

Do not misunderstand this chapter. There is no clear command which necessitates our following the exact

group form. However, wisdom would suggest that "Christ-like" means "Christ-like." That sounds simple enough, but its truth has proved to be very elusive in the church. The *size* of Jesus' group appears very wise, as well as the divisions, affording accountability, assignments, fellowship, etc. But surely these were not closed and rigid groups. The outcome proves that Jesus was the Master of internetworking group dynamics. Would we not be wise to do the same? Are we *really* wise if we *don't*?

I repeat: you . . . you . . . and you . . . and you . . . will never do *anything more Christ-like* in *all your life* than the training of individuals by the strategy of Jesus ("turn people into disciples") for *total world impact*.

Isn't it time we checked all our activity to be sure we are fulfilling solidly, fully, and consistently, the Commission of Jesus?