

Missionary Qualities for Every Christian *Strategically Spontaneous*

Passages: Acts 18:1-11
Matthew 10:2-15

Let's pray.

Are you *'strategic'* or are you *'spontaneous'*? By that I mean, do you love to plan out every moment of your life or do you prefer to *"fly by the seat of your pants"*? The answer to this question largely depends on your personality. (Indeed, there's quite a wide spectrum of possibilities.) On one extreme are those who live extremely ordered lives and who follow one simple rule: **"Failing to plan is planning to fail"**. (We sometimes refer to these people as 'anal retentive'!) On the other end of the spectrum are those whose motto in life is **"Do what you like, whenever you like!"**

Well, today, we launch into the second sermon in our Missions Month series from **Matthew 10** entitled **"Missionary Qualities for Every Christian"** and the question we want to answer from today's passage is this:

Was Jesus *"strategic"* or *"spontaneous"*?

Now, you might think this is a silly question, but it strikes at the heart of who we imagine that Jesus was. You see, in a lot of books and films about Jesus, Jesus is often portrayed as a long-haired hippie type; a man who lives life spontaneously, moving from town to town, wherever the wind blows. He's portrayed as a man without a care in the world; simple and free! Indeed, He's often portrayed as a man who couldn't be bothered making plans for the day!

But the truth couldn't be any further from this! In today's passage from **Matthew 10:2-15**, Jesus is amazingly strategic! He begins to implement a well-defined series of steps for reaching out to the world:

Step 1: **Jesus calls 12 ordinary men to be His "apostles"**. (Read verses 2-4)

² ***These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax***

collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Please note that this is the very first time in the Bible that the word **“apostle”** is used. “Apostle” literally means “sent one”. And so, step 1 of Jesus’ strategy is to *send out 12 men* who will become the symbolic heads of **the 12 new tribes of God’s new Israel!** As Jesus sends these men out, He clearly intends for them to make more disciples and gradually build up God’s new Israel, the church!

And, of course, a key part of that strategy was to choose 12 men who didn’t fit the expected profile of Israel’s *‘religious types’!* Instead of choosing priests or religious leaders, Jesus chose the ordinary people (the **nobodies**) of this world! Four of them (**Andrew, Peter, James and John**) were fishermen. **Simon “the Zealot”** was a Jewish nationalist who opposed the Roman occupation of Israel, while **Matthew the Tax Collector** was one of those despised Jews who collected taxes for the Romans. Two of the men chosen by Jesus were sceptical by nature: (**Bartholomew** was the one who, prior to his first meeting with Jesus, questioned, *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* **Thomas** was the one who questioned whether Jesus had really risen from the grave.) **Thaddaeus** was probably a farmer from Caesarea Philippi, while the backgrounds of **Phillip** and **James (the son of Alphaeus)** are practically unknown. Finally, we have **Judas Iscariot**, whose betrayal of Jesus for 30 pieces of silver is the only thing for which he was famous!

I think the conclusion is fairly obvious! As 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 says:

²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.”

This was not some ‘spontaneously-inspired’ idea. This was a deliberate and well-defined strategy!

Step 2: Jesus limits the scope of their mission field. (read vv 5-6)

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.

Now, this one may be a bit confusing. Why would Jesus restrict his apostles from going beyond the boundaries of Israel? After all, wasn't Jesus meant to be “a light to the Gentiles”? Wasn't His glorious Gospel supposed to be proclaimed “to the ends of the earth”? The answer, of course, is ‘yes’. But for that to happen properly and systematically, a good base was needed amongst God's people, the Jews. After all, they were the only people who had the necessary OT background to fully understand the Gospel. In fact, the Jewish faith was an essential precursor to Christianity, for, as Paul said, “Salvation is from the Jews!” That's why this strategy was so important! By limiting the apostles' ministry to Israel, Jesus was building a base of Jewish converts who would become the foundation members of the church that would, soon, expand rapidly through Gentile lands.

Step 3: Jesus strips them of extra money and extra clothes. (read verses 9-10)

⁹ “Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— ¹⁰ no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.

Jesus was simply making His apostles more vulnerable. Why? Because vulnerability wins people's hearts! And besides, in Israel, every Rabbi had to be vulnerable—that is, they all went around seeking the support of the people. This was expected by the culture. In like fashion, then, Jesus sent out His 12 apostles without money or extra clothes. That is, **He sent them out as if they were Rabbis!** Not only did they have to be *vulnerable*, but Jesus *was expecting that they would be recognised...and treated by the people... as Rabbis!* Being seen as Rabbis would also give greater credence to the Gospel message. Now, you might say that this was a bit *presumptuous* on Jesus' part. Then again, you'd have to admit that it was pretty *bold as well!* From now on, it would become society's *obligation* to support them as Israel's newest **Rabbis**.

Remember, this step was not conjured up on the fly! It was part of Jesus' deliberate and well-defined strategy!

Step 4: Jesus instructed them to search for a “worthy person” in each town who would welcome them into their homes. (read v11)

¹¹ *Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave.*

Have you ever thought about what this step would involve? Maybe one or two apostles would arrive in a town and start preaching in the open air market. Then, as the preaching progressed over the day, the apostles would need to pay close attention to who was being touched by the message. A “*worthy person*” would be someone who was (1) receptive to the Gospel and (2), as far as could be discerned, had a good reputation in the community. Only then were the apostles free to engage in a direct conversation with this person and, quite literally, invite them into his home. And it wouldn't be for one or two nights. They were instructed to stay there “*until they were ready to leave the town*”.

So, why is this strategic? By staying in the home of a ‘*worthy person*’, they were more likely to enter into the *social networks* of their host. A *worthy person*, open to the Gospel, would probably have family and friends who were also ‘open’. A *worthy person*, respected in the community, could also introduce the apostles to many others in the community, opening up further connections for the Gospel.

What our exegesis of these verses in Matthew 10 reveals is that **Jesus had a clear plan**. He was a strategic thinker! But, now the question we must ask is; **How rigidly was He fixed to these plans?** The more you study this passage, the more you see his **spontaneity** shine through!

Think, for example of His strategic choice of the 12 Apostles. Even though He chose them and gave them clear guidelines to follow, they were not tied down to Him. They were free to come and go. (Bartholomew and Thomas felt free to question Him; Peter felt free to challenge Him and disown Him three times; Judas felt free to betray Him to the officials.) What this shows is that Jesus was not a control freak! He blended the *task-orientation* of **strategy** with the

intimacy of **spontaneity**. (Relationships need spontaneity!) The only reason why these men followed Him is because they were captured by the loving embrace of the Kingdom!

The second thing to notice is how, despite having laid out this strategy of sending His apostles only to the “lost sheep of Israel”, it was not fixed in concrete. Indeed, even though most of Jesus’ three year ministry took place amongst Jewish people, on several occasions He was found spontaneously interacting with Gentiles. Indeed, at one point in His ministry, He felt compelled by His Father to pass through Samaria and evangelise! Clearly, the **strategy** to reach the Jews first didn’t rule out a more **spontaneous** response to these other possibilities whenever they arose!

There’s one last point to be made in regards to the **spontaneous** side of this earliest missionary work. Even as the apostles were moving from town to town; even as they were discerning the “worthy person” in each town and staying there in that house; there was no way that they could simply rely on the objective **strategies** given to them by Jesus. If you remember, they were not only commanded to go out and **preach** the Gospel—they were also commanded to **display** the Gospel... in signs and wonders! (Read vv 7-8)

⁷ As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,^[a] drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

This would not have been possible if the apostles simply stuck to a **strategy**! They needed to be **spontaneously** connected to the Holy Spirit! Signs and wonders happened in a totally unplanned way!

What we see, therefore, is the way the Apostles were called to hold **strategy** and **spontaneity** together, in a flexibly powerful way. That’s because Jesus lived in the beauty of both. He was **strategically spontaneous**!

Through the history of Christian missions, finding the balance between strategy and spontaneity hasn’t always been easy.

In 1792, William Carey, an impoverished and youthful English pastor, part-time teacher, and shoemaker, wrote a short treatise advocating the urgent need for

more missionary strategy! Carey, considered by many to be the father of modern missions, argued that, in order to fulfil God's promise to increase His kingdom, we who are joined to the Lord and made one with Him in Spirit, ought to begin “**forming committees, making plans, and gathering monies for the propagation of the Gospel**”. Carey was a strategist! He believed that missionaries needed to do far more **planning and strategic preparation** if they were going to achieve “*great things for God!*”

Other missionaries, however, have argued for more **spontaneity**! In the 1920's, Roland Allen wrote a booklet entitled **The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church**. Here's a taste of what he said: “*Today, we are enamoured with organization; we pride ourselves on our skill in designing and directing it; but when we are dealing with the propagation of the Gospel, our love for (strategy) leads us into serious dangers. It leads us to give to material an undue importance; it leads us to attempt to organize spiritual forces.(As a result), all our missions have been bound up with the administration of property, the building and equipment of large stations, schools, hospitals, industrial institutions, and the like, all financed largely from home. For spiritual work, spiritual organization is necessary; but can we create a spiritual organization of spiritual forces? Only a divine intelligence can do that. But we attempt to do the work of that divine intelligence by fixing our stations and immobilizing our men. Consequently, we see spiritual movements taking place not far from us, and we ourselves outside them, or, if not outside them altogether, utterly incapable of taking our proper part in them. To be God's agents in spiritual movements we must follow, not lead.*” (Roland Allen, Spontaneous Expansion of the Church 27)

Now, tell me-- Who is correct? Our passage in Matthew 10 seems to say that **both approaches** are correct! But here's the deal-- There are clearly times when one approach may need to temporarily dominate over the other! In Niger, we saw many missionaries wasting precious time and resources because they had no clear **strategy**. At other times, we saw missionaries who had a great strategy but who lacked any spiritual **spontaneity** when it came to relationships with local people!

With all that in mind, let's talk about the missionaries that we support—people like **Virginia Thomson**. Let me ask you, Virginia, how do you see **strategy** and **spontaneity** coming together in your ministry?

Let me draw the threads of this sermon together by asking each of us to think about our own missionary work! As God's chosen person, sent out into the world at this particular place and time, do you have any strategy for reaching out to your neighbours, friends and family? Take a moment of silence to think again about the **strategies** Jesus initiated when He sent out the 12 Apostles:

1. Jesus chose *ordinary* people as His apostles. Think about how God might use your '*ordinariness*' as a way of introducing the Gospel. (His strength is made perfect in your *weakness*.)
2. Jesus placed *limits* on the 12—“*Go only to the lost sheep of Israel*”. Do you have some 'limiting focus' to help you determine where your mission field is?
3. Jesus asked His apostles to lay aside their personal financial security so that they might become vulnerable and learn to depend on others. Are you vulnerable? Do you depend on others? Or are you self-sufficient, without any need for anyone else?
4. Jesus instructed His apostles to search for a “worthy person”; someone who was clearly open to the Gospel. Have you detected a “worthy person” in your neighbourhood or amongst your colleagues or friends? If so, have you come into their home?

These are **strategies** for the Gospel! And once you begin to take the necessary steps to put them into practice, let me remind you that you also allow yourself the grace to be **spontaneous** as well...to live in total dependence on the Holy Spirit to lead your conversations and make deeper connections, and perhaps, even to the point of witnessing signs and wonders!

Be **Strategically Spontaneous!** Let's pray.