

LeaderLesson 22: A Call to Obedience

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[This LeaderLesson is a portion of my message to the MBA Annual Meeting on October 24, 2013 – some of those in attendance asked that it be our next LeaderLesson. This call to obedience is a message God clearly spoke to me...may He speak to you through these words as well.]

As we prayed Luke 10:2 recently, that the Lord of the harvest would send out workers into His harvest field, I realized that in I had never felt the weight of that truth from Jesus more than I do now. The harvest truly is abundant, and the workers definitely are few. It was true 2000 years ago, and it is true today. There are hundreds of thousands of people right here where we live that are part of that harvest field, ready and waiting. And the number of those who are ready and willing to go work in those fields is small.

What does this mean? It means the times we face are crucial. The needs around us are great. We are in the midst of a significant mission field – this urban area now is home, just in Mecklenburg County, to over 1 million people – a million! The metro area in the surrounding counties pushes that number past 2.3 million people – the 23rd largest metropolitan area in the United States.

And while our population continues to grow significantly, including the estimated 200+ people groups here, the church in our area is not growing as a whole – meaning, the total number of committed Christians is not growing at a rate anywhere near being able to keep up with the general population growth. We have at least 600,000 people in Mecklenburg County that have no real connection to any church of any kind.

One of the ways we know what is happening in our association is through the ACP, the annual church profile our churches complete and send to us and to the state convention. This data helps keep track of what is going on in the churches. (Thank you to our churches that complete the ACP! We need more that will do this!)

With all of the needs around us, in the past ten years nearly 10% of our churches have lost at least 50% of their regular worship attendance. These churches have half of the people attending who were there ten years ago. If the trends continue, those churches will not be viable congregations in 2020, just 7 years from now.

God has blessed us with opportunities and more in the past seven years since I came to serve with MBA. But, what will the next seven years look like? And, what will we look like as churches and as an association in the year 2020?

As we look to the future, as we prepare for life day by day and for a new year in 2014, what do we need? What do we as Christians and churches need to do to respond to the multitudes around us - multitudes that do not know Jesus?

We need Christians and churches that will actively decide to obey the Lord in bold, biblical, and faithful ways.

We need churches that will push aside their preferences to be obedient to Jesus' commands.

We need churches that will see the harvest and respond with prayer and obedience.

We need churches that will see the people groups around us and act to build relationships and engage those people groups for disciple making.

We need churches that will realize the valuable resources they have in the facilities God has provided for them so that they will decide to serve other churches, church plants and ministries by sharing their buildings for the building of Jesus' kingdom.

We need churches to repent of a competitive spirit and decide to cooperate as the Scriptures teach, so our city can be reached and disciplined for Christ.

We need churches that will realize that the church is not theirs, but that the church belongs to Jesus, and it's our responsibility to obey Him.

We need churches that will open their eyes and see that their community is radically different than it was 25 years ago, and then do whatever it takes to reach that community with the good news and saving grace of Jesus Christ.

We need churches that will hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches and obey Him.

We need church members that will realize what it means to be part of Jesus' church and act accordingly.

We need churches that will hold the blessings God has given them with open hands, not selfishly clinging to people and resources, but being stewards of the grace and gifts of God in their communities.

We need churches that are known more by what they are for than what they are against.

We need churches to be churches and not clubs or societies or religious organizations or anything other than what Jesus built them to be.

This is why our theme for 2013 has been Focused Obedience and our theme for 2014 will be Obedient Love. I am convinced that if we will focus on Jesus and on obeying what He has told us to do, being who He has empowered us to be, we will see victory after victory, hear story after story, telling what God is doing in the lives of Christians and churches in Metrolina. We heard two stories of church revitalization from Covenant and Hoskins at this year's meeting. What if we could hear 20 stories next year of how God is transforming churches?

As Christians and as churches, we need one another! You may not feel that right now, but one day soon, you probably will. You may not be aware of how important your sister churches are to you. A significant number of them need you and your active partnership right now.

After years of serving in prayer ministry, a colleague once asked, "Why haven't we seen answers to our prayers for revival and awakening? We've been praying these prayers for years now. What are we missing?"

We came to agree that what we need is a revival of obedience – a return to doing what God has told us to do in Jesus' name and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Then, we would be ready for revival to change the churches and for spiritual awakening to sweep this region and our nation. What would happen if Christians obeyed what they know God has commanded them to do? What would happen if every church obeyed God, doing what He has told us to do?

It's true: the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few. Join me in praying that the Lord will send out workers into His harvest field...and be ready to go when He calls your name.

LeaderLessons are a ministry of encouragement and equipping from Bob Lowman and Metrolina Baptist Association. You can find them at www.metrolina.org or on the MBA Facebook page. If you would like to get a printed copy of these articles, please contact us by emailing leaderlessons@metrolina.org or calling 704.375.1197.

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