



Session #6: Understanding Missional Theology – Dr. Ed Stetzer

The Sending of God

“apostolos” is a Greek word that means **sent**.

“missio” is a Latin word. It, too, means **sent**.

If we’re going to understand our role in the Kingdom of God, we need to understand God’s sending – and respond to it.

A nine year old boy was sent to the store by his mother to buy a head of lettuce. This was the first time she’d ever sent him on such a mission – his older brother and sister had always been sent before. He had money in his pocket. He knew right where he was going. He went into the supermarket, got it, paid for it, and went home feeling proud of himself. Only problem? He’d brought home a cabbage. Why? It was green. It was round. It had leaves. Was his mission a success? He’d been willing. He’d gone. He’d returned triumphant. But – no. He’d not achieved the *intent* of the one doing the *sending*. Oh, and he hated coleslaw.

Mission isn’t the *going*, mission isn’t the *getting* – mission is the understanding of the intention of God.

Our mission is not *our* mission. It’s God’s. If we don’t understand His purpose, we can do all the right *things* and fail.

1. God is a Sender by Nature. He sent messengers to prepare the way.

Genesis 12:1-4 – Abraham was **sent** by God, both to be blessed and to be a blessing. He succeeded – well, eventually – because he was obedient.

Isaiah 6:8 – Isaiah was **sent** by God and *for* God – and succeeded, not just because he was willing, but because he understood his task.

John 1:6 – There was a man **sent** from God whose name was John. He came (was sent) for a witness that he might bear witness of the light John was **sent** by God – not to *be* the light, but to bear witness *to* the light. He succeeded, because he bore witness as he’d been sent to do.

2. The sending God sent His son into the world – the second person of the Trinity – to reconcile the world to Himself

John 1:1 – Christ – through whom He made the world – was **sent** into the world as the Logos, the Word.

John 3:16 – God so loved the world that he **sent** His only begotten Son – that those who believe in Him would no longer be condemned, but might be saved.

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4. The sending God sends the Spirit – the third person of the Trinity

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit—the Father will send Him in My name—will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you” (John 14:26, HCSB)

5. The sending God sends the church – both the corporate church and we the individual members of the body – with this same message. The church is **sent** to be God's missionary in the world

John 20:21 – As the Father had **sent** Him, so Christ Jesus **sent** His disciples – now, His *apostles*.

Hebrews 1:1—“God who spoke in time past to our fathers by the prophets has in these last days spoken to us by His son – through whom he also created the cosmos...” God has a message and a messenger, and we are **sent** to pass along that message, hence the writing of the book of Hebrews as a means of witness and teaching.

Acts 1:8 -- The Apostles were empowered for witness by the Holy Spirit – to which they were sent. History tells us that succeeded.

6. God is sending us for his kingdom purpose. We, the church, are His sign in the world to the world. We, the church, are his instrument to deliver His message – and His love.

Acts 11:2 – The Holy Spirit said to the Church that was at Antioch “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”– which the Church did – and “So, being **sent** out by the Holy Spirit they” – went. They succeeded.

Eph. 3:6 -11 – Paul wrote with excitement about the gift he had been given – the **sending** to share the mystery of God’s eternal purpose – the mystery of the plan of the ages hidden in God.

Romans 10:14 – Paul wrote “How shall they call on Him without belief? How shall they believe on Him of whom they’ve not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? How shall they preach unless they are **sent**?” The church is not incidental to the sending God – it is His **sent** instrument in the world, with instructions to **send** others, whom we recognize to be empowered by the Holy Spirit for this purpose.

7. God, who so loved the world, does not limit Himself to working *through* the church.

Act 14:16-17 – Restraining the pagans from sacrificing bulls to him and Barnabas, Paul says that God did not leave Himself without a witness, in that He did good and gave rain and fruitful seasons. God works through **natural process** to sustain the world He loves. But while the rains and sunshine are sent by God, they are not specific messengers.

Romans 13:1 – Urging the Roman Christians to subject themselves to governing authorities, Paul says that no authority comes except from God. Thus God’s presence is felt throughout



the earth. God is in *ultimate* control of **earthly authority**. But the scripture doesn't say these are **sent**.

Romans 2:1 – Paul explains that in passing judgment upon one another people condemn themselves, for they reveal themselves to be under the law of God and without excuse. Legal authority comes from God, but the **moral law** within us is placed there *by* God as well. People who do justice and show mercy reveal God's moral law, and many who don't know Christ *do* know this. When the church works in concert with these it is only demonstrating that it *knows* God's loving, *global* activity.

Some Christian Pharisees need to hear what Jesus said to the Jewish Pharisees in Matthew 9:13: "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

We need to work in concert with God in the world, wherever we can. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork. However, the world can't know the source of all blessings without the church making the message from God *specific* – special.

8. The mission is not the goal of the mission. The *gospel* is the goal of the mission. It is **good**, and it is **news**, and we are to **publish** these glad tidings.

Gratuitous sports illustration (it *is* football season...) The wide receiver is sent out on a pass-route. The point is *not* the going, although he must go. The point is *not* getting open, although he must avoid the defender. The point is receiving the pass of the quarterback, preferably in the end-zone, for a touchdown. The point of being a receiver is in the *receiving*, not just the running out. The point of being a missionary is the gospel – the receiving of God in the proper place to accomplish God's purpose. Without Gospel there **is** no mission.

Luke 19 contrasts with Luke 4. Jesus *was* the Jewish Messiah, and fulfilled the Jewish prophecies and pointed with particularity during his ministry toward the Jews. But he also pointed out the faith of various Gentiles – and spoke so favorably of them in the synagogue of Nazareth that the home folks tried to kill him. – God was in Christ, reconciling the *world* to Himself. He came to seek and save the **lost**. And, as the Father sent Him, so sends He – us. Not just to "go" – but to *gospilize*.

9. We must "live sent" – that is, recognize and fulfill our messenger responsibility in every day.

W.O. Carver, great missiologist of the early part of the 20th century, wrote of three sources of mission.

First is the **theological** source: Missions began in the heart of the Trinitarian God – a sending God – who sends us with His message.

Second is the **historical** source. While the Bible is the word of God, it is also the earliest historical record of what God began in creation and brought to fruition in Jesus, and how that message was first spread to the world. Between the scriptures and us is 2000 years of faithfulness in the midst of persecution, obedience in the midst of temptation, and good



news in the face of bad. We are sent by God. We are also surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, who cheer us on **our** pass routes...

Which leads to the third source of missions: The **personal**. In this regard we may be like Paul in Ephesians, thrilled at the task given by God to the least of all the saints (and chief of sinners.) We may be like John in the gospel, knowing so many things we *could* say but choosing to say *these* things so that the world "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." But perhaps we all need to begin as did Isaiah – willing to say to the Lord, sitting high and lifted up, "Here am I Lord. **Send** me."

Ed Stetzer, 40, became director of LifeWay Research and LifeWay's missiologist in residence June 1. Before joining the LifeWay staff, Stetzer was senior director of the Center for Missional Research at NAMB.

Before going to NAMB in 1998, Stetzer planted churches, served as a pastor and helped revitalize churches in four states. Stetzer also has trained pastors across North America and on five continents.

He holds a doctor of philosophy degree from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a doctor of ministry degree from Beeson Divinity School, as well as two master's degrees and a bachelor's degree.

Stetzer served for three years as a professor at Southern Seminary and has taught at 15 other seminaries. He has written numerous books for LifeWay's B&H Publishing Group including *Breaking the Missional Code*, *Planting Missional Churches* and *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and How Yours Can Too*.