

A blurred high-speed train in a tunnel, moving from left to right. The train is silver and red, with motion blur on the windows and tracks. The background is dark, suggesting an underground tunnel.

RADIUS
INTERNATIONAL

A BRIEF GUIDE TO DMM

Defining and Evaluating the Ideas Impacting Missions Today

BY CHAD VEGAS

**A Brief Guide to DMM:
Defining and Evaluating the Ideas Impacting Missions Today
By Chad Vegas**

Introduction:

What if I told you that Disciple Making Movements have spread across the world leading to thousands of churches being planted, hundreds of thousands of people being saved, and the transformation of whole Muslim communities and Mosques to faith in Christ? What if I told you that movement was launched by the simple application of the disciple making methods of Jesus with the result that, “God is creating a remarkable and unprecedented momentum of ministry in some of the least expected places in the Islamic world, a ministry that looks a lot like a continuation of the book of Acts”?¹ A Spirit-filled Christian could hardly contain his enthusiasm to learn to apply these biblical methods and join the harvest of souls.

There is a missions methodology that has caught the imagination of sending agencies, churches, and missions candidates throughout the world. The influence of this movement among sending organizations supporting this methodology seems nearly ubiquitous.² This missions methodology is called “Disciple Making Movements” (DMM from here forward). It is believed that DMM is a recapturing of the missiology of Jesus and the Apostles. According to DMM proponents, the traditional models of church-planting and discipleship are methods built upon denominational doctrines and traditions which are foreign to how Jesus did discipleship. Perhaps the earliest practitioner and trainer of DMM, David Watson, wrote,

God taught me, through many failures, that I had to focus on making disciples of Christ, not followers of my church or denomination. He also taught me that I needed to teach these disciples to obey the commands of Jesus, not my church/ denominational doctrines or traditions. This is what led to the breakthrough that resulted in more than eighty thousand churches among a people considered unreachable.³

Watson does not seem to believe he is the pioneer of a new methodology, but rather a man whom the Lord led back to the practices of the New Testament.⁴ He has reported that his rediscovery of these methods led to millions of people being saved and thousands of churches being planted, in what is previously considered the hard soil of Muslim peoples.

It is no mystery as to why DMM is growing in popularity as the preferred approach of missions sending agencies. Missionaries want nothing more than to see people groups across the world come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Further, DMM purports to be the more biblical, and more effective model for doing so. They believe the “traditional model” built by denominations and churches attempting to press others into their religious and cultural garb just

¹Trousdale, Jerry. *Miraculous Movements: How Hundreds of Thousands of Muslims Are Falling in Love with Jesus* (Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition). 24.

² This observation is based upon anecdotal evidence generated through meetings, conferences, journals, and speakers from a variety of the major sending organizations around the world.

³ David Watson and Paul Watson. *Contagious Disciple Making: Leading Others on a Journey of Discovery*. (Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition). 4.

⁴ It is important to emphasize that DMM proponents do not believe anyone actually pioneered this method, other than the Lord Jesus himself.

isn't effective. As DMM proponent Jerry Trousdale has said, "...the most hostile and dangerous Muslim communities often yield to Disciple Making Movements much more rapidly than communities that have experienced many traditional churches in their midst."⁵ Who doesn't want to see the rapid multiplication of new believers and churches among Muslim communities?

Defining DMM

What is DMM? What are the methods and processes being employed by this rapidly spreading approach to world missions? From where does this method derive its existence?

Jerry Trousdale defines DMM as follows,

In a nutshell, Disciple Making Movements spread the gospel by making disciples who learn to obey the Word of God and quickly make other disciples, who then repeat the process. This results in many new churches being planted, frequently in regions that were previously very hostile to Christianity. All the principles that we are seeing at work are clearly outlined—indeed, commanded—in the pages of Scripture.⁶

David and Paul Watson also provide a general definition,

As believers obey Christ, they are to train men and women to be Contagious Disciple-Makers who pray, engage lost communities, find Persons of Peace (the ones God has prepared to receive the Gospel in a community for the first time), help them discover Jesus through Discovery Groups (an inductive group Bible study process designed to take people from not knowing Christ to falling in love with Him), baptize new believers, help them become communities of faith called church, and mentor emerging leaders.⁷

It is claimed that DMM is not an artificial method created by missiologists in some think tank. Rather, DMM is simply the proper application of biblical principles to the task of missions with the hope of bringing about "Church Planting Movements"⁸ (CPM hereafter) across the world. Jerry Trousdale claimed, "...we have seen the Disciple Making Movement ministry model before, especially in the Gospels and the book of Acts . . . actually, throughout the Bible."⁹

David and Paul Watson similarly claim,

The DMM is about doing what was done in the first century— giving the Gospel to a people and teaching them to obey it; seeing them become faithful disciples of Christ; leaving them to struggle in obeying the Word of God in their own context and history;

⁵ Trousdale, 46.

⁶ Ibid, 16.

⁷ Watson & Watson, 5.

⁸ "We defined a Church-Planting Movement as an indigenously led Gospel-planting and obedience-based discipleship process that resulted in a minimum of one hundred new locally initiated and led churches, four generations deep, within three years." Ibid, 4.

⁹ Trousdale, 38.

and allowing them to develop their own unique practices for worship, leadership, and governance within the confines of biblical obedience.¹⁰

In fact, DMM claims it has reemerged from the pages of scripture and history in spite of the long and pervasive influence of unbiblical missionary methods pressed by Western denominations. DMM "...may seem counterintuitive to Western Christians, as the church is often influenced more by modern communication models than by biblical values, principles, and practices."¹¹ DMM proponents often contend the West has been overly influenced by religious and denominational institutions pushing their brand of Christian dogma.

When institutions that promote a particular brand of Christianity forget their differences and get back to planting the Gospel instead of their doctrines, we may have a chance to complete the Great Commission. When we turn to making disciples of Christ instead of converts for our particular brand, we may have a chance to complete the Great Commission. Until then, Christians will be doomed to repeat the mistakes of our forefathers. Paul and I prefer to learn from our mistakes, not repeat them. When institutions that promote branded Christianity begin to plant the Gospel, make obedient disciples of Christ, and forget their own pet doctrines and practices, we will see the Great Commission fulfilled in a generation. They will also see their own brand of Christianity grow as never before, because they will become relevant to the people as they serve them in obedience to the Word of God.¹²

Some DMM proponents even make the audacious claim that over the last 1600 years the church has become an ineffective institution that has promoted its dogmatic brands, rather than preaching the gospel. The Protestant Reformation brought no relief to this institutionalized and dogmatic approach to disciple making and church planting. The results of these approaches have been meager, at best. As the Watsons have claimed, "If we keep doing what we have always done, we will keep getting the same results. Approaches promoted by branded Christian institutions for accomplishing the Great Commission have not succeeded in sixteen hundred years or in the years since the Protestant Reformation began in 1517."¹³

Are the proponents of DMM correct? Is their model as biblical as they claim? Have they restored the proper biblical understanding of missions methodology that has been lost for nearly 1600 years?¹⁴ We will examine these claims of DMM as we shine the light of biblical revelation on each aspect of DMM methodology. We will see that DMM is not the biblical methodology it claims to be. Quite the opposite is true. Major components of DMM are built upon a faulty understanding of the gospel, conversion, discipleship, and the church. As we approach the

¹⁰ Watson & Watson, 26.

¹¹ Trousdale, 38-39.

¹² Watson & Watson, 26-27.

¹³ Ibid, 25.

¹⁴ It is not unnoticed, nor unremarkable, that the Watsons seem to read church history as the same story told by many American restorationist sects. The claim is that the church has lost its way since the 4th-5th century, with the advent of creeds and institutions, and now the original understanding of Christianity is being restored to its rightful place. This is a faulty and dangerous understanding of church history. But it is not the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that.

analysis of DMM in an effort to sustain our thesis, we will assess the major DMM components we find unbiblical, and the doctrinal understanding upon which they are argued, in the following order: Obedience-Based Discipleship, Person of Peace, and Discovery Bible Studies.¹⁵

Obedience-Based Discipleship

What is Obedience-Based Discipleship (OBD hereafter)? OBD is at the heart of DMM. The goal of missions work is to fulfill the Great Commission and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). OBD is definitional to what DMM proponents believe is the nature of discipleship. Jesus made clear that essential to making disciples is to “teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.” In DMM, the disciple-maker is given the role of helping the unbelieving disciple obey the commands of scripture daily as he moves toward conversion to faith in Christ. After he has come to faith in Christ, he is baptized and incorporated into the church body.¹⁶ Trousdale lays this out clearly, “Disciple makers are prepared to invest weeks, months, and maybe years developing genuine friendships, facilitating someone’s discovery of and obedience to God’s story from creation to Christ, and eventually giving Jesus his life allegiance.”¹⁷

The centrality of OBD to DMM is clear. Without OBD, DMM has lost its unifying principle for its method of missions. As the Watsons wrote, “True DMM methodology is about being disciplined in educating, training, and mentoring people to obey all the commands of Jesus, regardless of consequences.”¹⁸ We would contend that OBD is the theological basis for DMM’s approach to Persons of Peace and Discovery Bible Studies. It might be argued that OBD is merely a method of discipleship. But this method of discipleship, as with any approach to discipleship, has a clear understanding of the nature of conversion, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the substance of faith.

DMM proponents regularly argue that the “traditional model,” the model of the contemporary western church, is to preach for conversion and then to disciple people that are already converted. They argue that this “traditional approach” is directly opposed to how Jesus approached discipleship. Jerry Trousdale said the following,

The church today is preaching to produce conversion; then teaching to increase knowledge; then giving periodic attention, usually in sermons, to encourage converts to obey what they have learned. Jesus’ strategy was very different... what Jesus did with the Twelve was exactly the opposite: He disciplined them to conversion. He selected the Twelve and spent more than three years with them. They went where He went, asking questions, watching what He did, doing it with Him, and then doing it by themselves, being coached and mentored to be obedient disciples. Then one day, He asked them, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). All those years, Jesus was revealing Himself to the Twelve. He brought them from the point of not knowing Him to the point where they discovered who He really was and were ready to follow Him anywhere, even

¹⁵ We will not challenge the thesis that prayer is necessary to discipleship and church planting. We do not know of any missionaries who discount the biblical necessity of prayer, though we are quite certain that all are not as consistent in application as they ought to be.

¹⁶ The Process DMM proponents advocate for such discipleship will be discussed below.

¹⁷ Trousdale, 180.

¹⁸ Watson & Watson, 6.

to die for Him. *This is the model of disciple making that Jesus gave us.* (Emphasis mine)¹⁹

Note how DMM proponents understand the model of disciple making. Jesus disciplined his apostles “to conversion.” Trousdale understands the story of the Gospels as one in which Jesus’ apostles followed him for a large portion of his ministry, learned from him, obeyed him, and ministered under his coaching, all prior to being converted to faith in him. Jesus was revealing himself to the (unconverted and unbelieving) Twelve “all those years” as they obeyed him day by day. This understanding of the nature of Jesus’ discipleship of the Twelve is the basis for OBD’s understanding of disciple making. Is this an accurate representation of the story of the Gospel accounts?

The Gospel of John recorded events for us during the week of the baptism of Jesus. He told us of the ministry of John the Baptist, as the forerunner to the Christ. He also told us of the claims being made about Jesus by him, and by some of the Twelve. These claims are pivotal to us understanding how the Twelve saw Jesus from the moment they began to follow him. Some of the Twelve were disciples of John the Baptist. They were Jews who were well-acquainted with the Old Testament and who had been well-prepared for the coming Messiah. When Jesus arrived we read the following,

John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” 32 And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

John the Baptist’s confession of who Christ is, accompanied by a theophany confirming his identity, would have been known to John’s own disciples. Further, John the Baptist’s faith in Christ met John’s definition of saving faith, “John 20:30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” In other words, we can safely assume John the Baptist had saving faith in Jesus Christ. Further, we also know John the Baptist’s disciples were aware of what he believed, and they followed him in this faith in Jesus, even believing Jesus is the promised Messiah (John 1:35-42). These two disciples of John the Baptist were Andrew and Simon Peter. Andrew and Peter added Philip and Nathanael the next day, who also professed faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah and Son of God (John 1:43-51).

We have direct evidence that, from the first week of his ministry, Jesus was being trusted by no less than four of the Twelve. They professed him as the Christ, the Lord, the Son of God on numerous occasions precisely because they were born again believers in Jesus by the

¹⁹ Trousdale, 101.

powerful working of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the only one who gives the new birth that enables a man to believe (John 3:1-8 cf. 1 Cor. 12:3, 1 John 5:1). Certainly, they struggled to trust and obey Jesus on every occasion. What believer doesn't? However, it cannot be sustained that after years of obedience, as unconverted unbelievers, they finally converted to faith in Jesus.

If OBD is the method of discipleship learned from Jesus, was it the method followed by the Apostles? Did the Apostles live alongside unbelievers for days, weeks, months, or years helping them learn to obey Jesus until they reached a point of fully-devoted faith in Jesus as the Christ? It can be easily established that this was not the pattern of the Twelve. Rather, in Jerusalem (Act 2-7), Judea & Samaria (Acts 8), and among the Gentiles (Acts 10-28), the Twelve preached that Jesus is the Resurrected Christ. They called their audiences to repent, believe, and be baptized. The Apostle Paul followed this same pattern. The Twelve, and Paul, then focused on teaching those new converts. And these new converts were consistently referred to as saints, brothers and sisters in Christ, and members of the household of God. The church met regularly and "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). The Twelve even appointed the Seven to serve Hellenistic Jewish widows so that they could be devoted to "the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:1-6). The Apostle Paul explained his own pattern of discipleship as not shrinking from declaring to the church "anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house" (Acts 20:20), and as not shrinking "from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Paul even admonishes the elders in Ephesus that they are to "care for the church of God" (Acts 20:28), which is the same Greek term for "feeding the sheep" Jesus used in John 21:16. He also commanded them to protect the church from false doctrine (Acts 20:29), as he did with tears (Acts 20:31). This is perfectly in accord with Paul's requirement that an elder be able to teach sound doctrine and refute those who contradict (Titus 1:9).

We simply never see a command, nor a pattern, from our Lord, nor his Apostles, where unbelievers are discipled through regular obedience until they finally have sufficient trust in Christ to be baptized. Rather, the consistent method is the proclamation of the doctrine of the gospel. The proper response is faith and repentance, followed by baptism and teaching toward maturity in Christ. Yet, the proponents of DMM contend their method is learned from the Lord himself.

The Gospel of OBD

This fundamental underpinning of DMM, known as OBD, is deeply problematic precisely because it builds a method upon a deeply problematic understanding of the gospel, conversion, and the work of the Holy Spirit. These issues are simply too important to leave unaddressed. Therefore, we will briefly look at the gospel message that is foundational to OBD.²⁰

²⁰ It is our contention that the Christian understanding of conversion is built upon our understanding of the nature and fall of man, the gospel work of Jesus Christ and its application through faith, and the work of the Holy Spirit in applying that work to us. For a better understanding of the gospel and conversion we recommend the following books: "What is the Gospel?" by Greg Gilbert, and "Conversion" by Michael Lawrence.

First, what is the gospel message taught and assumed in OBD? Is the gospel of OBD in any manner necessarily distinct from the biblical gospel?²¹ While the word “gospel” is used often by DMM authors, it is difficult to find an actual explanation of the content of the gospel. The Watsons provide the most comprehensive definition of the gospel when they write about a series of Discovery Bible studies that, “. . .leads them to discover a holy and loving God, face their own sin, find God’s provision for their sin through Jesus Christ, come into a grace/ faith relationship with Jesus, and commit to a life of faith that obeys His commands regardless of consequences.”²²

We see that their gospel message professes five elements: 1. God as loving and holy, 2. man and sin, 3. God’s provision in Jesus Christ, 4. a grace / faith relationship with Jesus, and 5. commitment to a life of faith that obeys His commands. There is not much definition given to any of these elements. For the sake of argument, however, we will assume the Watsons would define the first three elements in the same manner as any Protestant. This leaves us with the fourth and fifth element.

It is the fourth and fifth element of the Watsons’ gospel that OBD necessarily redefines in a manner not consonant with a biblical gospel. The definition of faith, and the basis of the “grace / faith” relationship with Jesus, in OBD is a false gospel. We realize this is a serious charge. We are not arguing this false gospel is malicious in intent. We hope and pray it is mere ignorance that will be realized and corrected.²³

Proponents of OBD show their cards in their understanding of faith in the very title. Discipleship is “obedience-based.” This is not gospel-based or grace-based discipleship. The basis for our discipleship relationship with the Lord Jesus, according to OBD, is our own obedience. Here is how faith is defined in OBD, “In this form of teaching, faith is defined as being obedient to the commands of Christ in every situation or circumstance, regardless of the consequences.”²⁴ Faith is defined as “being obedient.” Faith = obedience. OBD makes these the same in substance.

Equating faith to obedience is not a one time accidental statement made by the Watsons. This definition of faith is the very essence of their whole method of disciple making. As they write a second time, “In this model, everyone is trained to ask the question, ‘In this situation, how will I [or we] be obedient to the Word of God?’ Faith is defined as the continuous act of choosing to be obedient to God’s Word regardless of what it may cost, even our lives.”²⁵ Here faith is expanded to “continuous acts of obedience” (by unconverted unbelievers, no less!).

It could be objected that surely in the use of the term “grace / faith relationship with Jesus” they do not intend to say that the reception of grace is somehow predicated upon obedience? Yet, here is how they define our reception of grace, “Every time we open God’s Word, He invites us into relationship. We call His invitation ‘grace’ because we can’t do

²¹ It our belief that the gospel represented by the “5 solas” of the Protestant Reformation is the biblical gospel. In other words, we believe that man is saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone as revealed by Scripture alone.

²² Watson & Watson, 169.

²³ For more on this concern, listen to the following audio sermon from the Radius 2017 conference: <https://radiusinternational.org/core-gospel-chad-vegas/>

²⁴ Ibid, 15.

²⁵ Ibid, 37.

anything to deserve it. Obedience is how we accept His invitation.”²⁶ How do we receive grace? “Obedience.” They have redefined faith or replaced it with obedience.

These men are clearly writing of a Father who loves me, a Messiah who saves me, and a Holy Spirit who indwells me, *if* I am obedient. My obedience is a condition that when met receives these benefits that come to those in relationship with the Lord. It is true that the Watsons also wrote, “Even though Christ is our righteousness through faith, we must make every effort to be like Him in every way.”²⁷ They are clearly stating here that we receive the grace of Jesus Christ from God through faith. They consistently argue, however, that this “faith” is “obedience.” They have turned the gospel, unintentionally, we trust, into “justification by grace through obedience to Christ.”

The Roman Catholic Church, following Thomas Aquinas, argued that faith was insufficient as a condition to the reception of justification. Aquinas argued that our faith must be “formed by love.”²⁸ In other words, the Roman Catholic teaching is that love makes faith justifying. Further, Jesus taught us that if we love him, we will obey his commandments (John 14:15). Thus, if faith is formed by love, and love is shown through obedience, then obedience becomes necessary as a condition to justification.²⁹ In this manner, Roman Catholics smuggle good works into the basis for justification. DMM proponents argue for essentially the same definition of faith. They argue faith is defined as continuous acts of obedience, motivated by love, of course. This is a complete rejection of the Protestant understanding of the gospel.

The Protestant Reformers argued that faith expresses love and obedience as *fruit*, but not as its substance or essence. They defined faith as, “not only a certain knowledge whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word; but also a hearty trust, which the Holy Spirit works in me by the Gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.”³⁰ We do not have space to rehash the debates of the Reformation. It is assumed here that Christian faith is confident trust in Jesus Christ as our righteousness. It is believing he is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing we have faith in his name. Faith is receiving and resting upon Christ’s work in his life, death, resurrection, and present session.³¹ Sadly, those who hold to OBD seem to have adopted Rome’s understanding of faith. Their understanding of faith shines through in their method of discipleship.

Person of Peace

What is a Person of Peace (POP hereafter)? The POP serves a number of roles in DMM methodology. First, the POP is a bridge-builder, a significant part of Jesus’ strategy for reaching lost people. The people of peace “...are God’s pre-positioned agents to bridge the gospel to their

²⁶ Ibid, 156.

²⁷ Ibid, 50.

²⁸ For more on the nature of faith and the debate between the Rome and the Protestants see the excellent series, “What is true faith?” on the Heidelbergblog by R. Scott Clark. <https://heidelbergblog.net/2013/10/what-is-true-faith-pt-1/>

²⁹ We recognize there are different kinds of conditions. By “condition” we mean antecedent condition, not consequent condition.

³⁰ Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 21.

³¹ See the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 14; the 2nd London Baptist Confession, chapter 14; and the Savoy Declaration, chapter 14. These documents demonstrate the 17th century understanding of faith in the English Protestant world. Their definition is substantially the same as the Protestants in Europe.

family, their friends, or their workplace. This element of Jesus' strategy for engaging lostness is perhaps one of the most significant principles, and also one of the most neglected principles, for entering unreached people groups."³²

Second, the presence of a POP is how the missionary determines whether this is an area God wants him to engage. While this is not absolute, it is generally true that, "If there is no Person of Peace, then you move on."³³

Disciple-makers join God where He is working. The presence of a Person of Peace lets the disciple-maker know God wants him or her to engage the community deeply, that the harvest is ready. We partner with God to bring in the harvest. If the harvest isn't ready, we don't need to bring it in early! Instead, we move on to another field, another community, and look for Persons of Peace there.³⁴

Third, according to DMM advocates, finding the POP is really the only job of the missionary. Technically, they would argue that the missionary still must come alongside the POP and guide them. But finding the POP is so central to DMM that it can be spoken of as the missionary's only job:

The Person of Peace teaching is an entry strategy to new communities. In the Great Commission Jesus commanded us to "go." What do we do when we get to where we are going? We find the Person of Peace. This is radically different from traditional disciple-making methods. In the Person of Peace strategy, the disciple-maker has one job— find the Person of Peace. This person may be from any walk of life, but he or she will welcome you, listen to your message, help you with your livelihood, and allow you to stay in his or her home and influence his or her family and the community for the sake of the Gospel. ***The disciple-maker does not do any of the traditional things required by traditional disciple-making. He does not preach or teach.*** He does not hand out tracts or sell books or give away Bibles. He does not do mass rallies or healing services.³⁵

Once the missionary has identified the POP, he is not encouraged to instruct the POP individually, but in the context of the family. Further, the missionary is serving primarily as a group facilitator since the primary leadership duties in Bible study are given to the POP.

When the Person of Peace reveals him- or herself, the disciple-maker shifts the focus to the Family of Peace. The disciple-maker starts a Discovery Group to help the family discover on their own who God is and how they must relate to Him. The disciple-maker teaches them how to study the Word of God, but does not lead the Bible studies or do any of the preaching and teaching. The focus is on the family learning directly from God through His Word. The disciple-maker guides the direction of the study, but does not conduct the study, except to model the process a few times in the beginning.³⁶

³² Trousdale, 90.

³³ Watson & Watson, 127.

³⁴ Ibid, 139.

³⁵ Ibid, 127. Emphasis mine.

³⁶ Ibid, 128-129.

The question is raised as to whether the POP is a biblical idea and how the POP is identified. DMM proponents argue this strategy is taught by Jesus and seen in the ministry of the Twelve in the book of Acts. The Watsons argued, “The Person of Peace strategy was developed from a composite view of Jesus’ teachings when He sent out His disciples in Matthew 10, Luke 9, and Luke 10.”³⁷ Further, Trousdale stated, “Examples of people of peace in the book of Acts would include: Cornelius and his household (Acts 10), Lydia and her household (Acts 16), and the Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16).”³⁸

Did Jesus Teach POP?

Jesus never taught POP in the manner that is being asserted by DMM proponents. Given that finding the POP is so pivotal to the DMM method, in fact the missionary’s “one job,” a proper reading of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 10, Luke 9 and Luke 10, exposes that “the emperor has no clothes.” It is not merely one component of DMM, but the central strategy of DMM that comes unraveled through proper interpretation of these biblical texts.

We will walk through each of the key Gospel passages, as well as, the passages in Acts to determine if POP is indeed a biblical strategy and what it means. Before approaching the text, let us remember the claims of DMM regarding the meaning of POP. The Watson defines the POP thusly, “Persons of Peace have three primary characteristics: They are open to a relationship with you. They hunger for spiritual answers for their deepest questions. And they will share whatever they learn with others.”³⁹ Here is a list of the primary characteristics of POP germane to our consideration of the biblical passages:

1. The POP is a spiritually interested unbeliever whom God has prepared for faith in Christ.
2. The POP is hospitable, though not merely hospitable, and helps with the needs of the missionary.
3. The POP is ready to share what they learn with others in their family and community. Thus, the POP is the person whom God has prepared to lead a DBS, and through whom a church will likely be planted.⁴⁰

Given that Luke 10 provides us with the language, “Person of Peace,”⁴¹ we will begin with Luke 10 and look at it closely. We will then consider whether Luke 9 and Matthew 10 are consonant with what we see in Luke 10.

Luke 10:1 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. 2 And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. 3 Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no moneybag, no knapsack,

³⁷ Ibid, 125.

³⁸ Trousdale, 91.

³⁹ Watson & Watson, 135.

⁴⁰ We will cover this more under our section on Discovery Bible Studies.

⁴¹ The Greek language is, “καὶ ἐὰν ἐκεῖ ἦ υἱὸς εἰρήνης...”

no sandals, and greet no one on the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ 6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. 7 And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. 9 Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ 10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 11 ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ 12 I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.⁴²

Jesus appointed and sent out seventy-two disciples, in addition to the Twelve, two by two. He sent them out to proclaim the gospel. He gave them instructions for how they were to approach their missionary task. Let us list first those instructions of which there is likely no debate.

1. Pray. v. 2
2. Prepare for opposition. v. 3
3. Trust the Lord to provide. v. 4
4. Accept the hospitality and care of the POP. v. 7-8
5. Care for the physical and spiritual needs of the people. v. 9
6. Do not remain in a town that rejects you. v. 10

The question to which we now must turn is the identity of the POP. What did Jesus mean when he said, “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you” (Luke 10:5-6)? Further, does Luke 10:11-12 play into our understanding at all? How do those verses fit into this pericope?

Jesus began these verses by teaching the “seventy-two” to declare, upon entering a house, “Peace be to this house!” What does this blessing of peace mean? Are the disciples being commanded to declare an end to conflict in the house? Are they being commanded to declare that they hope for a generally happy environment in the home? Or, is there something more that is being stated here?

The word “peace” is a well-known one among 1st century Jews. The Old Testament context for this kind of language runs deep and wide across the revelation given to our fathers by the prophets. The Hebrew “shalom” is a word of blessing. The supreme blessing is reconciliation with the LORD. This is seen clearly in the famous Aaronic blessing.

Num. 6:24 The LORD bless you and keep you;
 25 the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
 26 the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and *give you peace*.

This is also the prayer of Psalm 29:11, “May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!” There is no greater blessing than to be at peace with God.

⁴² All direct citations are taken from the English Standard Version, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2007).

The people of Israel longed for the day that this great benediction would be fulfilled in their coming Messiah. The Messiah was promised to establish a New Covenant, a covenant of peace (Ezek. 37:26). His feet would be “beautiful upon the mountains” as he heralded the good news of peace and salvation (Isa. 52:7). The Messiah would be crushed for our iniquities, his chastisement, would bring us peace (Isa. 53:5). The covenant of peace the Messiah brings shall endure forever (Isa. 54:10).

This “peace” which is the blessing brought by the Messiah, and heralded by his ambassadors, is what is announced throughout the Gospel of Luke in reference to Jesus. The father of John the Baptist, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied that Jesus is bringing the “peace” promised in the Old Testament (Luke 1:67-79). The angels sang on the night of Jesus’ birth that Jesus has brought “on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14). Simeon, filled with the Holy Spirit, declared upon holding Jesus that he now had “peace” for his eyes had looked upon the Savior (Luke 2:29). Jesus regularly told those who trusted in him that they were saved and should “go in peace” (Luke 7:50, 8:48). Jesus wept over Jerusalem’s rejection of himself as Messiah, stating, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!” (Luke 19:42). When Jesus stood among the Twelve after his resurrection he gave them the benediction, “Peace to you” (Luke 24:36). Further, Peter taught Cornelius that God sent this word to Israel, “preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36). Finally, Paul taught that through faith in Christ “we have peace with God” (Rom. 5:1).

Thus, the disciples of Jesus were to enter a house and proclaim the gospel. They were to herald the good news that Jesus is our peace. He is the Messiah. He reconciles us to God. He is the “yes and amen” to the Aaronic Benediction. Jesus also taught the disciples that if there is a believer in Jesus, then they are to stay, but if the gospel is rejected, they are to depart. Jesus said this in Luke 10:6, “And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you.” This POP is better-translated “son of peace.” It is a reference to someone to whom the “peace” of the Lord Jesus belongs. In Matthew 13:38 we see a parallel description with the phrase “sons of the kingdom.” The kingdom of God belongs to them.

This understanding of the “son of peace” being a believer in the gospel message is secured by the language of “if they receive you” (Luke 10:8) and “if they “do not receive you” (Luke 10:10). “‘Receive’ is used elsewhere with respect to welcoming and receiving God’s word (8:13), Jesus (9:48, 53), Jesus’ followers (vv. 5, 48), and the kingdom of God (18:17).”⁴³ Matthew also employs the language of “whoever receives you receives me” as a reference to those who believe the gospel message about Jesus (Matthew 10:14, 40-41).

How were the disciples to respond to towns who did not “receive them?” Jesus said they were “go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.” In other words, they were to declare judgment upon that town. The town had rejected the gospel of salvation and needed to be warned that judgment was coming for them. In Luke 9:5 Jesus gave the Twelve the same instruction, “And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.” We see Paul follow this instruction after being persecuted and driven out of the area by the Jews in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:51).

⁴³ Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1971.

Finally, Matthew's language adds to our understanding of Jesus' instructions to the Twelve, and the seventy-two, when he recorded Jesus saying, "And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you (Matthew 10:11-13)." It is our contention that the "worthy" person, and the "worthy" house, is the person, or house, who receives the gospel. It is a synonymous way of referencing the "son of peace." This is clearly how this term is used throughout Matthew. You are not "worthy" to be a disciple of Jesus if you love this world more than him and refuse to bear your cross (Matt. 10:37-38). Further, those who paid no attention to the invitation to the wedding feast given by the sent servants of the King, in Jesus' parable of the wedding feast, were not "worthy" for the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14).

The phrase "son of peace" is not a description of an unbeliever who has been prepared for the gospel. It is a description of someone who, upon hearing the gospel preached, receives the gospel, and thus "peace" belongs to them. This POP is not someone who will slowly discover the gospel as he leads a Bible study in his home. The POP is not a spiritually interested unbeliever who is hospitable, and who will lead other unbelievers in the process of discovery. The "son of peace" is someone to whom reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ belongs.

What about Acts? Is it correct to say that Cornelius, Lydia, and the Philippian Jailer were POPs? No, a cursory reading of those passages (Acts 10 & 16) in their contexts makes it clear that the DMM idea of POP is nowhere to be found. In Acts 10 Peter was sent to Cornelius prophetically as an important development in the revealing of the mystery of Gentile inclusion in the gospel of the Jewish Messiah. This explains Peter's vision of all things being clean. Further, this is why we see the debates that occur within the church over Gentile inclusion in Acts 11-15. Peter did not lead a Discovery Bible Study in Cornelius' home, nor did he ask Cornelius for help in facilitating a study. Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius and all present. Cornelius' only role was as one who was taught. They became believers, received the Holy Spirit, and were baptized. They were then taught for some time. Cornelius was not a generic, spiritually-interested person whom Peter used to gather friends and family for a Bible study facilitated by unbelievers. Cornelius is a Gentile God-fearer who knew the OT and who received the gospel preached to him.

In Acts 16 Paul was sent in a vision to Macedonia. When he arrived in Philippi he went to the river to look for "diaspora Jews" who might be meeting for worship. Paul met a woman, named Lydia, who believed the Gospel Paul preached. The Lord opened her heart to listen to Paul's sermon. She was then baptized prior to the church being established in her home. This again is not the story of a spiritually-interested person whom Paul used to gather other unbelievers to facilitate a Bible study.

The same holds true for the Philippian Jailer in Acts 16. He came to the prison cell of Paul because of the commotion from a supernatural earthquake that threw open the prison doors. He feared for his life that Paul may have escaped. When he discovered Paul was still present he asked how he could be saved. Paul preached the gospel to him. Then they went to his house and Paul taught the word to them and baptized them. The pattern we see in every one of these passages is not the pattern argued for by DMM. In every case, the gospel was preached by the missionary. Those who received the gospel were baptized and instructed by the missionary. There is no evidence of groups of unbelievers meeting in the home of a particularly "spiritually-interested" person, as that unbeliever leads them in a Bible study. Inasmuch as DMM is

predicated upon the POP, it is crushed under the weight of its own error in understanding the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles.

Discovery Bible Studies

What are Discovery Bible Studies (DBS hereafter)? What role do they play in DMM as a methodology? Is the approach to DBS biblical? DBS is the tool prayerfully placed into the hand of the POP in an effort to facilitate OBD among an unreached people group. These components when combined with prayer by a missionary team form the general approach of DMM. As Trousdale wrote, “In the context of Disciple Making Movements, we have seen that the best tool to teach obedience is Discovery Bible Study (DBS).”⁴⁴

In DMM, the missionary, upon finding the POP, would facilitate a DBS among the family and friends gathered by the POP. The missionary does not teach. Trousdale puts it clearly, “Don’t preach or teach. Help the group to discover by themselves and to obey the truths in the Bible.”⁴⁵ The Watsons add that in DBS, “there is a minimum DNA required for groups to replicate past the first generation.”⁴⁶ That DNA includes the following: Prayer, Intercession (praying for the needs of folks in the group), Ministry (helping with needs of the group or the community), Evangelism / Replication, Obedience, Accountability, Worship, Scripture, Discovery, and Group Correction. Thus, in DBS you have groups of unbelievers meeting to participate in these activities. The goal is that when they become devoted followers of Jesus, are baptized, and formed into a church, not much really needs to change.

DBS works on the conviction that unbelievers can study, understand, and obey scripture without an outside teacher. They need only the Holy Spirit. Trousdale exhorted his readers, “Do not teach or preach; instead, facilitate discovery and obedience. When people are simply exposed to the Scriptures, God will reveal the truth to them.”⁴⁷ The Watsons provide a similar encouragement,

When working with lost people, we have to avoid falling into the role of explaining Scripture. If we do, we become the authority rather than allowing Scripture to be the authority. If we are the authority, replication is limited by our leadership capacity and the time we have to teach every group. Consequently, shifting from Scripture being the authority to the teacher being the authority will keep groups from replicating as they should. This is a hard shift to make. We love teaching. It makes us feel good. We know the answers and want to share that knowledge with others. But if we want to disciple people who look to Scripture and the Holy Spirit for answers to their questions, we can’t be the answer-people. We have to help them discover what God says to them in His Word.⁴⁸

Additionally, DBS assumes that unbelievers can evangelize other unbelievers. The Watsons asserted the following, “Did you know that lost people can evangelize? Well, they can if you

⁴⁴ Trousdale, 106 .

⁴⁵ Ibid, 192.

⁴⁶ Watson & Watson, 145.

⁴⁷ Trousdale, 106.

⁴⁸ Watson & Watson, 149-150. Emphasis mine.

keep it simple enough. Evangelism, at its core, is sharing the Gospel with someone else. When working with lost people, they don't know the whole Gospel. That is totally okay. We just want them to share the story they just heard with someone who wasn't in the group."⁴⁹ Unbelievers lead the study. Unbelievers obey the commands of scripture. Unbelievers evangelize the lost. It is the job of the missionary to pray, find the POP, and facilitate DBS.

Are there not concerns that these groups will fall into error? What does the missionary do to protect the DBS group from error? The Watsons answer, "That said, groups still need to be disciplined. In other words, they need to be taught how to study the Bible together, how to discover what God says through His Word, how to change their lives to obey God's Word, and how to share Bible passages with friends and family. Groups don't do these things naturally; they have to be disciplined into them so that they become as natural as breathing."⁵⁰ This guidance, however, by the missionary is not to be teaching or correcting. The Holy Spirit will correct them.⁵¹

A question immediately arises for the missionary candidate: "Can lost people actually read passages from the Bible, internalize the message, and agree together to obey God in whatever that passage shows them?"⁵² Trousdale answers in the affirmative arguing that the Muslim peoples whose stories his book records discovered and obeyed God's will through a group like that.⁵³

In a system that depends upon OBD, it is necessary that we begin with the obedience of unbelievers to the commands of Jesus. This is true with the DBS groups above all. The Watsons repeat, "As we said before, obedience is a critical element of Disciple-Making Movements. It has to be present even at the small group level, even with groups of lost people."⁵⁴

Is DBS biblical?

We are not asking, "Is it biblically permissible to gather unbelievers and teach the Bible to them?" Yes. Undoubtedly. The question is whether the Lord and his Apostles ever commanded or provided an example of Christian ministers facilitating a group of unbelievers to interpret scripture, obey scripture, and evangelize other unbelievers without the instruction of a Christian minister who has been sent in the power of the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel and teach the Word? Are we instructed to assume unbelievers, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, will self-correct in doctrinal error as they learn to read the Bible? The answer is an unequivocal, "No."

The Old and New Testament evidence against these methodological assumptions of DBS is so overwhelming and univocal that it is admittedly difficult to know where to begin. Perhaps, it is best that we begin with a few simple observations. First, man's need for a teacher is seen before our fall into sin. The LORD had to instruct Adam and Eve in the Garden. Admittedly, they were taught directly by the LORD and not a human teacher. Second, after the fall into sin, the LORD saw fit to reveal his will to our fathers by the prophets in a variety of times and ways (Heb. 1:1). Third, the LORD provided men to lead his people throughout the Old Testament. The Old Testament offices of prophet, priest, and king assume that without leadership and instruction

⁴⁹ Ibid, 146.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 143.

⁵¹ Ibid, 151.

⁵² Trousdale, 44.

⁵³ Ibid, 44.

⁵⁴ Watson & Watson, 148.

the people would wander from truth and godliness. Fourth, in these last days God has spoken to us in his Son (Heb. 1:1-2 cf. John 1:1-2). The Lord Jesus was a teacher. He was a Spirit-filled teacher. He instructed his disciples. He corrected his disciples. Fifth, the Lord Jesus provided apostles and prophets as the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). These prophets and apostles revealed God's will. They taught and corrected. They preached, argued, exhorted, and declared the word of God in boldness. Sixth, the Lord Jesus also provided elders, pastors and teachers. The role of the pastor / elder is to teach sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. He is to feed God's flock, bind up the wounded, and seek the lost (Eph. 4:11 cf. 1 Tim. 3:1ff, Titus 1:9, 1 Peter 5:1-3).⁵⁵

When the Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit upon the church at Pentecost we saw the Apostles go forth preaching and teaching. We never see them looking for unbelieving POPs to facilitate such activity. Throughout Acts, Luke described the activity of the Apostles with, "verbs of teaching, proclaiming, refuting, reasoning and persuading (which) require hearers to understand, think, reason, consider and examine."⁵⁶ ***There is simply no evidence of any character in the Bible being commanded to, nor providing the example of, facilitating a self-corrected, untaught, Bible study. Further, there are no examples of the apostles, nor any other leader, employing unbelievers in the work of evangelism.***⁵⁷ Sadly, DBS is simply an unbiblical and untenable tool built upon the sandy foundation of OBD and POP.

Conclusion

It is our settled conviction that DMM fails at the most critical point: its unbiblical foundation. Further, the components of DMM crumble under even minimal biblical scrutiny. We do not commend DMM to missionaries we train as a viable option.⁵⁸ We thank God for the missionaries who have given their lives to the cause of Christ. We grieve that so many have been encouraged to embrace a methodology that is fundamentally flawed. We confidently trust the head of the church, Jesus Christ, to correct this trend. We believe that Christ will build his church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.

Christ has given the gift of cross-cultural missionaries to his church for the purpose of evangelism and teaching in fulfillment of the Great Commission with the goal that churches are planted among every ethnically-linguistically distinct people group. They are sent from their local churches by the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. They need to be fully prepared to proclaim the gospel clearly in the language and culture of an unreached people group. We believe they are able to reach the necessary level of language fluency and cultural awareness required to speak as adults to the people group to whom they have been sent.⁵⁹ We believe they need to be prepared to suffer in the pursuit of making Christ known among the

⁵⁵ I am leaving out the office of "evangelist" for the sake of brevity. Further, I am assuming that the "elders" and "pastors and teachers" are holding the same office.

⁵⁶ Alan J. Thompson. *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan* (New Studies in Biblical Theology) (Kindle Locations 935-936). Kindle Edition.

⁵⁷ The notable exception to this is Judas Iscariot. I am certain that isn't the character upon which DMM hopes to build their case.

⁵⁸ We do prepare our students to navigate the missions world graciously as they interact with those who have embraced this method.

⁵⁹ Our team includes many missionaries who have done this successfully and planted healthy churches.

nations. We believe they must be committed to being among that language group for as long as it takes to finish the task of planting a healthy church. We believe they are accountable for making sure the gospel word is communicated clearly and understood well by the people as they evangelize, teach, and appoint as indigenous leaders to govern the church after their departure.

In the pursuit of this glorious vocation, Radius exists to come alongside the church in preparing her candidates for such glorious and weighty work. We do not know where the Holy Spirit will blow, but we know he will. We are not aware of whom Jesus will save, but we know he will. We are merely those who revel in the eternally glorious privilege of naming Jesus among all people groups as we long for that great day when we will join with every tribe, tongue, and nation to sing, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever! Amen.”⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Revelation 5:13