

the **Call to Follow**

living the way of Jesus in the world



GOD'S WORLD:
Journeying Locally and Globally in Partnership

SESSION 5

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OVERVIEW

As God's desire for a new creation continues to energize each of us and our Christian communities, we find ourselves participating in an exciting, dynamic movement of God's Spirit in our world.

The next stage of our global discipleship journey focuses on the work of CBM around the globe and in Canada, establishing and energizing partnerships between and among churches and Christian ministries. At this point, however, our imaginations remind us that what we identify as "global" and "local" are relative terms. Members of a church in Kenya will describe their world as "local," and define the Canadian church situation as "global." What is crucial in partnership is that both partners see each other as equally important in God's Kingdom. Each has much to learn from the other, and each can contribute to helping the other follow and serve Jesus more effectively. CBM models and encourages a Christian identity that bridges local and global spheres through mutual commitment, strategic planning, patience and humility, faithfulness and respect for one another.

The role of CBM in local and global partnerships is to facilitate ministry similar to that of the Apostles Paul and James in the book of Acts. James, who was a key leader in the first church in Jerusalem, and Paul, who spearheaded the global advance of the gospel in the Ancient Near East and beyond, held two crucial meetings that required what we might call a global ministry strategy. The first was the famous council of Jerusalem (recorded in Acts 15), and the second was on the occasion of Paul's return trip to Jerusalem where he would enter and speak in the Jewish temple (recorded in Acts 21). Both meetings involved multiple issues, but here we highlight how these two leaders made collaborative and creative decisions. They needed each other and worked together to communicate the good news in unique locations requiring wisdom and sensitivity. In so doing, they modeled global discipleship.

In the Jerusalem council, the leaders of what we might call the “local” church in Jerusalem – under James’s chairmanship – discuss and decide to endorse Paul’s gracious approach to “global” evangelism with Gentiles (non-Jews) outside of Jerusalem and Israel. They did this by agreeing that Paul should not require Gentile Christians to keep certain Jewish customs that would be required of Jews in Jerusalem. What James was doing was supporting Paul’s vision and ministry in a global setting and respecting his knowledge of the Gentile culture.

In the conversation in Acts 21, however, the two apostles face a challenge on the “local” front. Here Paul revisits Jerusalem and wants to enter the temple, where there is a high sensitivity to keeping Jewish customs. Before he does, James asks Paul to submit to a Jewish purification ritual in order to gain a more effective hearing within the temple culture. Paul does so, respecting James’ vision in order to promote “local” discipleship. Each man respects the fact that the other is doing valid ministry, following Jesus faithfully. They are able to help each other minister globally and locally because their concerns are for the good of others, and the expansion of God’s Kingdom.

James and Paul together model a thoughtful, trusting relationship and creative ministry strategy, under the Spirit’s guidance. As a result, the commitment to salvation, mercy and justice are equally upheld in the interests of an integral message of good news. Each respects the other and makes adjustments to allow God’s message to have greatest impact. This is an early, simple example of how global and local partners work creatively and collaboratively – submitting to each other’s wisdom under God. CBM models and facilitates such respect between multiple centres of influence, so local churches and our global partners can work together in following Jesus.

Wherever you find yourself today – in a historic congregation in Atlantic Canada, a new church in rural Rwanda, a politically active congregation in the heart of El Salvador, or a family-friendly church in suburban Saskatoon, you are linked in space and time by the Holy Spirit – your primary identity is with a family that God has called to work and minister together.

Following Jesus in the way we have described – whether as individuals or collectively as a church – is not easy. It involves following the way of Jesus, which is about “emptying” ourselves of unhealthy ambition in favour of serving others. The first Christians in the New Testament would never have glamorized the Christian life as a form of self-fulfillment, or described it as a nice way to stay busy.

Jesus himself said: If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it. As we choose to follow Jesus we all need to count the cost, which can and does take many forms. With that, we can also anticipate the promise of new life – as individuals, our churches, and the people we serve in the name of Jesus.