

**A Straw Man Argument to Prove What God Shouldn't Do:
A Critique of Chad Vegas' "A Brief Guide to DMM"**
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Summary: "A Brief Guide to DMM" raises important issues, but consistently follows a pattern of taking quotations out of context, presenting a rewording of the quotation, then showing problems with the *reworded* version. The author also argues against unbelievers reading or trying to obey the Bible, unless mediated via "the instruction of a Christian minister," and neglects to address a most vital element of any ministry assessment, namely its fruit. Thus the booklet functions as an extended straw man argument and fails to address the most vital biblical concerns.

In "A Brief Guide to DMM," Chad Vegas expresses concerns about DMM (Disciple-Making Movements). Certainly any missiological approach being widely taught and practiced should be carefully assessed – not only from a biblical perspective, but also with honest evaluation of the fruit being borne – whether it bears the marks of healthy biblical discipleship. Sadly, Brother Vegas' approach, while raising important issues, attacks DMM in ways that seriously miss the mark of helpful Christian concern.

Consistent Use of Straw Man

The first and most glaring problem with Brother Vegas' approach: he consistently argues against something DMM proponents have not said. He does well to quote leading proponents of DMM, but he then consistently *rephrases* the content of the quotation, adding his own interpretation. He then shows the error of the person's view (as he has creatively interpreted it). This consistent use of straw man arguments gives the appearance that Brother Vegas presents a strong case, when in fact he often misunderstands or misrepresents.

Brother Vegas' first straw man shows up on pages 5-6. After quoting Jerry Trousdale's description of Jesus' approach to disciplemaking, Brother Vegas summarizes: "Jesus was revealing himself to the (unconverted and unbelieving) Twelve 'all those years'." The two words in parenthesis ("unconverted" and "unbelieving") don't appear anywhere in Trousdale's description. Trousdale had identified the fact that coming to deep faith in Christ normally involves a process. And certainly for first-century monotheistic Jews to recognize Jesus as the Son of God often required some process. For twenty-first century Muslims to come to saving faith in Jesus as the Son of God also normally requires some process.

What was taking place during the years of Jesus' earthly ministry? I suspect we could all agree that when Jesus first called each of his disciples they had: a) a prior belief in God as described in the OT, and b) an initial willingness to respond to Jesus' invitation "Follow me." One could argue that a disciple is someone who follows, thus in a real sense they entered the process of discipleship from day one. Then through ongoing relationship and receiving of additional truth they grew over time into more complete NT discipleship, including an understanding of Jesus' deity and his death as a payment for sin.

Brother Vegas, by inserting the words “unconverted” and “unbelieving” into his summary of Trousdale’s description, lays the foundation for a false dichotomy. He imports post-Pentecost clarity into the categories of “believing” vs. “unbelieving” described in the gospels. By laying this grid over the process of unfolding understanding described in the Gospel records he erases all nuance described in the Gospels: the process of various individuals coming to realize more and more of the truth Jesus was revealing. Brother Vegas then deals a death-blow to the straw man he has created with this summary: “it cannot be sustained that after years of obedience, as unconverted unbelievers, they finally converted to faith in Jesus.”

Brother Vegas continues: “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.” (6) On the face of it, this seems true. However it ignores the broader panorama of salvation history as described in the Bible as a whole. God spent thousands of years calling people to obedience before giving a *clear* revelation of salvation through Christ and command to be baptized in his name.

This does not deny that “God...announced the gospel in advance to Abraham” (Gal.3:8) or that God’s grace received by faith undergirded the law (Gen 15:6; Ex 19:4-8). But it recognizes that “the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24). NT proclamation of the gospel built solidly on centuries of calls for obedience. Taking a few weeks for chronological study through “Creation to Christ” passages has effectively brought large numbers of Muslims to saving faith in Christ. Ought we not to *rejoice* when a vital foundational understanding of the true nature of God, of sin, of the need for the blood sacrifice to forgive sin, etc. can be conveyed through a brief OT survey, in a few days or weeks of study?

Are God’s Word and God’s Spirit Sufficient to Bring Unbelievers to Christ?

I find it strange that Brother Vegas seems so concerned lest unbelievers try to obey God. It seems to me that whenever *anyone* reads the Bible and seeks to obey God based on what they have read, that’s a good thing. Granted, only the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit makes consistent and God-pleasing obedience possible. And an unbeliever’s attempts at obedience can never bring or earn salvation. But I want to ask Brother Vegas: “Do you consider it a *bad* thing if large numbers of Muslims, Hindus, atheists and others study the Bible chronologically, try to obey what they’re reading and then after a period of time come to saving faith in Christ?”

I believe Brother Vegas has partially answered this question by writing: “We are not asking, ‘Is it biblically permissible to gather unbelievers and teach the Bible to them?’ Yes.” However Brother Vegas apparently only favors unbelievers interacting with the Bible if mediated through “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.” (15)

Contrary to Brother Vegas’ position and the Council of Trent’s assertion (that to be properly understood, the Bible must be mediated through a human teacher), most Protestants through the centuries have agreed with the Westminster Confession of Faith concerning the perspicuity (clarity) of Scripture: “...those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not

only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.” (Chapter 1.7)

Direct access to God’s truth is one of the glories of the New Covenant. It was prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah, announced by Jesus and clarified by the writer of Hebrews. Jesus said “It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me” (John 6:45 NIV). Merrill Tenneyⁱ comments on this verse: “Verse 45 indicates that God would do his drawing through the Scriptures and that those who were obedient to God’s will as revealed in the Scriptures would come to Jesus.” Decades prior to any discussion about “obedience-based discipleship,” Tenney expounded Jesus’ teaching that God will draw people through the Scripture, and those who obey will come to Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews sounds a similar note in expounding the glories of the New Covenant. An extensive quote from Jeremiah includes this promise: “No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Hebrews 8:11 NIV). The Old Covenant required human mediators for full access to God but the New Covenant presents Jesus as the final and essential mediator. In this age, certainly the Spirit of Christ can use human vessels to convey God’s truth. Yet any attempt to limit the work of God’s Spirit and God’s Word by *requiring* a human mediator runs contrary to New Testament teaching.

Proponents of DMM believe that God’s Spirit can and does use God’s Word to touch human hearts, even apart from human mediatorial interpretation. Brother Vegas seems to believe God only wants to convey his Word to unbelievers via human mediators.

The NT Pattern: Filling in Gaps for Non-Jews

Returning to the issue of the command and pattern of the Lord and the apostles, I would note briefly some examples of their approach to *non-Jews* (those lacking any OT background concerning God, sin and salvation):

1. The Samaritan town, where Jesus “stayed two days” (John 4:40)
2. The Gerasene demoniac, who was not allowed to join Jesus, but was commanded to “‘Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him” (Mark 5:19-20a (NIV).
3. The summary of Paul’s short (and apparently insufficient) attempt to fill in biblical theological foundations for the pagans of Lystra (Acts 14:15-18).
4. Paul’s numerous days (over an unknown period of time) laying theological groundwork in Athens (Acts 17:17) before his recorded speech in which he informs listeners that God now “commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30b).
5. Paul’s initial ministry in Corinth, where he “stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God” (Acts 18:11). Western readers of the word “teaching” often envision one-way lectures in which one expert does all the talking. In reality, the teaching patterns of the NT were

more interactive, as Paul contrasts his style with the impressive rhetoricians of Greece: “I do not think I am in the least inferior to those ‘super-apostles.’ I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge” (2 Cor. 11:5-6a (NIV)).

Among Jews, Jesus and the apostles consistently built on a pre-laid foundation of OT understanding about the nature of God, sin, sacrifice, forgiveness, etc. Among non-Jews, Jesus and the apostles demonstrated a pattern of aiming to lay those essential foundations before calling for repentance and saving faith. At that time, most people did not have easy access to a copy of the OT Scripture, and the NT Scripture was not yet written, so more information needed to be conveyed orally. But the pattern of giving unbelievers opportunity to understand some basic OT teaching before calling for repentance and saving faith has solid roots in the New Testament.

Arguing Against Obedience

Brother Vegas writes: “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.”

I don’t know where Brother Vegas got the abbreviation “OBD.” In two decades of reading and interacting with CPM/DMM material and concepts, I don’t remember ever seeing or hearing it. Brother Vegas doesn’t cite any use of it from Watson or Trousdale (or anyone else). A search on the internet for “OBD obedience” brought up *nothing* related to DMM; mainly links such as “[Hounds Tooth Academy for Dogs](#).” Other than from Brother Vegas himself, I don’t know of anywhere obedience-based discipleship is “known as OBD.” Proponents of DMM consistently talk about the importance of making disciples who obey the Scripture. Brother Vegas, by reducing the concept to three letters, turns it into an object easier to attack. This functions as another straw man (or weakly represented man) attack.

However, much more seriously, Brother Vegas’ second *major* straw man comes after his accusation: “Major components of DMM are built upon a faulty understanding of the gospel, conversion, discipleship, and the church.” (3) He aims to substantiate this attack partly based on silence and partly based on an apparent contradiction in the writing of the Watsons.

Brother Vegas writes, “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? While the word ‘gospel’ is used often by DMM authors, it is difficult to find an actual explanation of the content of the gospel.” (7) Thus Brother Vegas *begins* by raising suspicion (“Is the gospel of OBD in any manner necessarily distinct from the biblical gospel?”) then encourages suspicion to remain because the DMM proponents have not written as much on this specific topic as Brother Vegas would like. An argument from silence is notoriously weak.

He then acknowledges, though, that the Watsons actually *have* described a series of Bible studies that leads people “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.” (7) Although the Watsons did not offer this sentence as a “comprehensive definition of the gospel,” Brother Vegas *claims* it as such on their behalf, for the purpose of his critique. He distinguishes within it “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.” He then complains that “There is not much definition given to any of these elements,” (7) which should not be surprising, since he took a quote out of context to answer his own desired question rather than grasping what the Watsons were intending to convey in the context of their book.

Brother Vegas then continues “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.” (7) As proof, he quotes Watsons’ statement: “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.” (7) This sounds problematic. However, a look at the context in *Contagious Disciple-Making* shows that Brother Vegas has again misrepresented Watsons by treating this sentence as something other than its intention in context. Watsons were drawing a contrast between a “doctrine-centered discipleship program” and an “obedience-centered discipleship program.” (*CDM*, 15) They were not intending to *define the content* of saving faith, but to explain the ongoing process of discipleship (in contrast to mere pew-sitting).

I will add a bit more context. Watsons wrote: “When a new disciple asks a question, my answer is always the same: What must you do to be obedient to Christ? I may have to help that person find the appropriate passages in the Bible to answer the question, but the question always remains the same. 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.” (*CDM*, 15) Taken out of context, the last bit it sounds problematic, as does “You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone” (James 2:24 (NIV)).

In fact, in Brother Vegas’ fourth paragraph attacking this “false gospel,” he admits: “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’.” (8) Rather than allowing another statement from the Watsons’ own book to clarify their intent, Brother Vegas launches a major attack based on *one* statement, then much later acknowledges a statement that could help to clarify.

In his next paragraph, Brother Vegas attempts some guilt by association (between his own misrepresentation of Watsons’ teaching and Roman Catholic doctrine). He writes: “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.” (8)

This summary is unhelpful in a number of ways:

1. Based on his interpretation of one sentence from the Watsons, Brother Vegas attributes this heretical view to (by implication *all*) “DMM proponents.” This is certainly a false accusation. Misrepresenting others’ views constitutes bearing false witness.

2. I will not attempt to speak for the Watsons, but almost certainly *they themselves* do not hold the view Brother Vegas attributes to them.
3. When Brother Vegas writes “essentially the same” he attempts to equate two things (tarring one with the negative baggage of the other) while simultaneously acknowledging that they are *not* in fact exactly the same.
4. His conclusion that “This is a complete rejection of the Protestant understanding of the gospel” is based on *his own interpretations*, not any statement the Watson have made that they reject the Protestant understanding of the gospel.

I suspect that a conversation with David Watson could have easily cleared up these points. But Brother Vegas has not taken the obvious step of direct communication with David Watson about this issue. After his charge of “false gospel,” he writes: “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.” (7) I suggest that in addition to “hoping and praying” (plus attacking in speeches and writing) Brother Vegas could take the additional step of writing or calling David Watson to ask for clarification. We have the technology easily at hand to facilitate good communication within the body of Christ.

Attacking what “seems” instead of what is

Brother Vegas concludes his section on obedience-based discipleship with this lament: “Sadly, those who hold to OBD seem to have adopted Rome’s understanding of faith.” (8) The word “seem” should serve as a warning light to careful readers that Brother Vegas is not critiquing the Watsons’ *actual* intended opinions or teaching. He is critiquing *his own extrapolations and interpretations* of the Watsons’ teaching. This kind of critique is much less helpful.

The same warning light should flash when reading this footnote: “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.” (note 14, p. 3, emphasis added)

In addition to noting that this is Brother Vegas’ *own* interpretation of the Watsons’ views, a couple other points seem worth noting about this passing attack.

1. The Watsons’ writings never claim to bring a restoration of “the original understanding of Christianity.” They focus on making disciples and related issues of ecclesiology, not the whole of Christianity.
2. I don’t believe the Watsons ever made a sweeping claim that “the church has lost its way” in a general sense. They limit their critique to specific issues, not (for example) the content of the creeds, as might be inferred from the wording of Brother Vegas’ accusation.
3. According to one website ([The Restorationist Movements: Groups of unrelated denominations](#)), “American restorationist sects” include these groups: “The Christadelphians, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Churches of Christ, The Community of Christ, The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS), Independent Christian

Churches/Churches of Christ, International Churches of Christ, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons).” Not *all* these groups are heretical, but many are. The list is dubious company with which to associate someone based on what “seems” to be their view on one issue.

4. Brother Vegas concludes the footnote by stating “it is not the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that.” Thus he simply plants the innuendo in the reader’s mind, then excuses himself from offering any evidence to support it. One would hope for higher standards of integrity from a Christian leader.

Person of Peace – the Reaching of Groups

Having concluded to his own satisfaction that obedience-based discipleship is on the same “false gospel” level as Roman Catholic theology, Brother Vegas moves to discuss the concept of the “Person of Peace.” He rightly identifies this as a key concept in DMM.

Not far into this section he asserts: “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.” (9) He then quotes from the Watsons: “In the Person of Peace strategy, the disciple-maker has one job— find the Person of Peace.”

Here again, Brother Vegas’ interpretation leaves much to be desired:

1. He again ascribes to all “DMM advocates” an idea based only on one sentence from the Watsons. Not every DMM advocate agrees with Watsons on everything. Biblical integrity requires speaking accurately about those being critiqued. Attacking a whole group based on one sentence from one person is an unhelpful and sub-biblical mode of communication.

2. Brother Vegas has again adjusted the quoted wording according to his interpretation. One could argue that in a literal sense, “really the only job” = “has one job.” However in the context of Watsons’ writings, the clear intent of “has one job” is not *literally* equal to “really the only job.” For example, on pages 133-134 of *Contagious Disciple Making*, the Watsons describe a variety of possible approaches for engaging with a community. “These engagement methods are as numerous as one’s imagination. We have had disciple-makers enter villages with a soccer ball and start a pickup game. Others have been itinerant salespeople of goods the area needs. Some have taken employment or worked on farms for their food. Meeting felt needs of education, medical care, safe water, and agricultural training have also been successful. Business that improves the local economy has been used successfully in many areas. The list is really almost limitless, and often these access opportunities require little or no financial investment. Make sure to listen to the community before rushing out to plan new engagement activities.”

Since Watsons have told their readers to “*Make sure to listen* to the community,” they obviously did not mean in a narrow literal sense that looking for a Person of Peace is “really the only job” of a disciple-maker. They meant (as Brother Vegas’ quotation continues, and even partially highlights in bold italicized font): “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.” (9) Effective

building of relationships and a variety of context-sensitive communication bridges are *not* excluded from a DMM practitioner's toolkit. Just traditional evangelism methods which (at least in Muslim and Hindu contexts) have often borne minimal or even counter-productive fruit.

3. After presenting his interpretive rewording of the Watsons' statement, ("really the only job of the missionary"), Brother Vegas adds: "Technically, they would argue..." This follows a pugnacious pattern already seen above. Rather than offering an accurately nuanced summary of a person's views, Brother Vegas presents an adjusted version of their statement (more problematic than the original) then *later* offers additional information which could have improved his original interpretation (but didn't). This method of presenting a fellow Christian's views is less than the best.

Brother Vegas next contends that "the central strategy of DMM...comes unraveled through proper interpretation of these biblical texts [Matthew 10, Luke 9 and Luke 10]." He then invests two pages attempting to prove (mainly based on the use of the word "peace" in Luke 10:6) that "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....The 'son of peace' is someone to whom reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ belongs." (13)

While some commentators (such as 18th century John Gillⁱⁱ) support or allow this possible interpretation, many others (such as D.A. Carson,ⁱⁱⁱ Leon Morris^{iv} and Walter Liefeld^v) take a different view. In fact two credible translations render Luke's phrase in a way that tends to *preclude* Brother Vegas' interpretation:

"If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you" (Luke 10:6 NIV).

"And if anyone of peace is there [someone who is sweet-spirited and hospitable], your [blessing of] peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you" (Luke 10:6 Amplified Bible).

It may be admitted that perhaps too much weight has been placed on a possible interpretation of the "person of peace" text in Luke 10:6 and "worthy person" in Matthew 10:11. Yet Brother Vegas' determination to resist DMM causes him to miss a vital distinction between traditional church planting approaches and the DMM approach yielding significant fruit among unreached groups. Something very significant happens when a believer finds among the lost a person who is sufficiently welcoming to open their household, extended family or local group of influence to the gospel messenger and his/her message.

Westerners tend to automatically aim for finding *individuals* who are open to the gospel and reaching those individuals (a perspective Brother Vegas brings to the text). However centuries of experience in hundreds of contexts has confirmed that among followers of other major religions (e.g. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism) the *best* fruit of the individual approach is usually a church or some churches consisting of a collection of individuals who didn't previously know each other and have been more or less cut off from their family and previous relationships. Churches such as this grow, at best, by addition. And the remainder of their people often become more determined than ever before to prevent Christians from converting anyone else away from their culture.

In contrast, when the gospel reaches a *group*, it immediately becomes an outpost of kingdom dynamics in the midst of that culture. It has potential to spread organically through networks of relationships. Instead of reaching people “one by one,” it reaches households and groups. A brief skim through Acts shows that out of about 33 descriptions of someone coming to saving faith, about 30 of those cases were *groups* rather than isolated individuals. A simple search of the word *oikos* in Acts and the rest of the NT reveals a distinct pattern of households coming to faith and then households functioning as churches. It brings to light group dynamics we may have overlooked, such as Jesus’ statement to Zacchaeus: “Today salvation has come to this *house*” (Luke 19:9, italics added). And promises we have tried to ignore, such as “They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (Acts 16:31 NIV).

The reaching of groups is clearly the norm in the NT, the mode of greatest gospel advance throughout church history, and the way the kingdom of God is spreading most rapidly right now around the globe. For many DMM practitioners, looking for “the Person of Peace” is another way of saying, “Aim to reach *groups*, not just individuals. Look for those people who open the door to reaching the *group* within their influence.” This missiological principle, rooted in NT patterns, doesn’t stand or fall based on anyone’s interpretation of Luke 10 or Matthew 10. Differences of interpretation of a few verses shouldn’t blind us to or distract us from a vital distinction between traditional evangelism (reaching isolated individuals) and DMM evangelism (reaching groups).

Misguided Attack on DBS

When Brother Vegas turns to the third main element of DMM he wants to address, he misrepresents the nature of Discovery Bible Studies. At the end of his second paragraph of description (on page 14), he quotes the Watsons’ statement: “there is a minimum DNA required for groups to replicate past the first generation.” He then lists: “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.” He then summarizes: “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.”

The first problem here is that Brother Vegas has again taken Watsons’ material out of context and thus misrepresented what happens in a DBS. When the Watsons elaborated on each of the elements listed, they described the *difference* between the way many elements function in a DBS (with unbelievers) vs. how they function in a group of believers.

For example, in describing prayer, they write: “we never ask lost people to bow their heads and pray....Instead, we introduce a simple question, ‘What are you thankful for today?’ Each person in the group shares. Later, after they choose to follow Christ, we say, ‘You remember how we open each meeting with the question, “What are you thankful for?” Now, as followers of Christ, we talk with God the same way. Let’s tell Him what we are thankful for.’” (CDM 145)

In describing the element of worship, they write: “You can’t ask lost people to worship a God they don’t believe in. You shouldn’t force them to lie by singing songs they don’t believe. Still, planting the seeds of worship into the group DNA is possible.” (CDM 149) Thus the Watsons carefully explain how to “plant the seeds” of DNA with activities that can honestly be done by lost people. And they explain how those activities are transformed when people come to saving faith in Christ.

Thus Brother Vegas misleads readers by saying “in DBS you have groups of unbelievers meeting to participate in these activities.” What we have, rather, is groups of unbelievers meeting to participate in activities that *can later easily become* prayer, worship, etc. To use the Watsons’ metaphor of planting seeds, it’s as if the Watsons have just finished planting corn seeds in a garden, and Brother Vegas triumphantly shows you that all you can see is dirt, and says, “This is what the Watsons claim is a garden full of corn!”

The second problem is the falsehood of Brother Vegas’ concluding sentence: “The goal is that when they become devoted followers of Jesus, are baptized, and formed into a church, *not much really needs to change.*” (14, italics added) This is not a claim that the Watsons or any other DMM advocate (to my knowledge) has ever made. This is Brother Vegas’ own misrepresentation of DBS. Obviously, when a person or group comes out of darkness into the light of saving faith in Christ, in a very real sense *everything* changes! Even the very same everyday activities take on a new meaning and purpose. As the Watsons described the process, the *seeds* (of DMM DNA) are planted in each Discovery Group. When people come to faith, those seeds can easily grow into the elements of a house church gathering. This organic process minimizes dislocation and maximizes potential for individuals and groups to be strongly rooted in Christ and his Word.

Confusion of Categories

Brother Vegas poses the very important and appropriate question: “Is DBS biblical?” (15) Sadly, he argues his entire case based on a confusion of categories. He proves that the *method* of having unbelievers facilitate a Bible discussion is not found in Scripture. Thus he proves that DBS is not “biblical” in the sense that it is not *described or mentioned* in the Bible. He thus concludes: “DBS is simply an unbiblical and untenable tool...” (16) However he builds on the ambiguity of the words “biblical/unbiblical” to claim that because this method is not *described* in the Bible it is thus *contrary* to biblical teaching.

A moment of careful thought leads one to realize that Brother Vegas’ argument applies *equally well* to altar calls, singing “Just as I Am,” distributing tracts, distributing Bibles, evangelistic concerts, using television, radio, internet, electronic social media, and many other methods commonly accepted as useful *means* of presenting the gospel to unbelievers. None of these are described or commanded in the Bible. They are “unbiblical” in the same sense that DBS is unbiblical.

By Their Fruits You Shall Know Them

The question that needs to be asked of any method for presenting God's truth to unbelievers is "Does this method (or means) effectively and accurately convey God's truth in such a way that unbelievers can respond as drawn by God's Spirit, and come to true saving faith in Christ?" This is not a new question. During the First Great Awakening, great numbers of people seemed to be coming to saving faith in Christ. Critics argued that much of the activity involved was unbiblical and thus not of God. Many people were becoming very emotional during services, some to the point of crying out, shrieking, fainting, or having convulsions.

The most famous preacher of the time and America's greatest theologian, Jonathan Edwards, responded to those concerns in his timeless essay: "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God." In that work, he stated emphatically that "the word of God is the principal means...by which other means operate and are made effectual."^{vi} He challenged detractors to focus *not* on particular means involved, but to evaluate whether God's Word was functioning as the central message and accomplishing its intended purpose: bringing people to true saving faith in Christ. We would do well to apply the same criteria in evaluating any means being used or considered today for bringing people to faith. Does it bring unbelievers face to face with God's Word in such a way that they can believe, come to saving faith and grow into maturity in Christ? Hundreds of thousands of healthy and multiplying churches around the globe testify that the answer to this question, concerning DBS, is "yes."

Brother Vegas begins his "Conclusion" (16) with the statement "It is our settled conviction that DMM fails at the most critical point: its unbiblical foundation." This assertion contains two fatal flaws:

1. He has only shown DBS to be "unbiblical" in the sense that it's not mentioned in the Bible. He has not even attempted to show (much less demonstrated) that the Bible *forbids* unbelievers to study God's Word and try to obey it.
2. By focusing his dispute on a few aspects of the DMM *method*, he has entirely missed the much more important issue: are Disciple-Making Movements a work of God or not? To begin to answer that question, I propose that Brother Vegas and anyone resonating with his concerns consider the criteria of Jesus, who said, "Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit....Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them" (Matt. 7:17-18, 20 NIV). The fruit of a teaching or practice is not the *only* evidence of its legitimacy, but it is a biblically valid and very important test.

For deeper insight into this, I propose turning again to the wisdom of Jonathan Edwards in expounding^{vii} the concept of evaluating fruit. In "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God," Edwards carefully enumerated things that are *not* signs that something is not from the Spirit of God (including that they are not mentioned in the NT). He then listed five biblical evidences that something *is* a work of the Spirit of God.^{viii} To summarize and paraphrase them briefly, they are:

1. When it raises their esteem of Jesus who was crucified and strengthens their conviction about the truth of the gospel: Jesus as the Son of God and the Savior; is a sure sign that it is from the Spirit of God.
2. When it operates against the interests of Satan's kingdom and sin; this is a sure sign that it is a true, and not a false spirit.

3. When it brings a greater respect for the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and divinity, is certainly the Spirit of God.
4. When we see that it operates as a spirit of truth, leading persons to truth, we may safely determine that it is a right and true spirit.
5. When it operates as a spirit of love to God and others, it is a sure sign that it is the Spirit of God.

I encourage Brother Vegas and anyone resonating with his concerns to read or reread (for example) *Miraculous Movements* and ask God's Spirit to make clear whether the movements being described there fit the distinguishing marks expounded by Edwards. For additional edification, I would encourage a complete reading (or rereading) of "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God," continually asking the Father "How does this relate to various phenomena taking place in our day?" I doubt that any fair comparison of Disciple-Making Movements with Edwards' criteria would support Brother Vegas' claim that DMM presents a "false gospel."

The most important question is not whether we agree on details of methodology. The most important question is whether Jesus is being glorified among the nations. The question is whether any given method and ministry effectively contributes to making disciples among all peoples. In these things I propose we follow the example of Barnabas in his assessment of the radical, out-of-the-box activity taking place among first-century Gentiles in Antioch: "When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts" (Acts 11:23).

Brother Vegas' concluding paragraph declares: "Radius exists to come alongside the church in preparing her candidates for such glorious and weighty work." (17) To the extent that Radius' preparation yields fruitful ministry completing the Great Commission we rejoice with him. His introduction says David Watson: "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." (1) Brother Vegas never questions the truthfulness of Watson's report, and numerous other reports from a wide variety of sources and independent assessments corroborate its truthfulness. So I ask: "If this is true, is it not a good thing? In fact is it not a *wonderful* thing? Should we not join the angels in heaven in rejoicing over the salvation of millions of souls?"

The Apostle Paul took a stunningly positive attitude toward gospel messengers with whom he disagreed: "It is true that some preach Christ....out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. (Phil 1:15a, 17b-18 NIV) In that case, the issue was different motives; in this case it's differences in methodology. Paul's own flexible approach to methodology exposed him to various attacks and accusations. As he explained to the Corinthians: "I have become all things to all people so that *by all possible means* I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:22b NIV, italics added).

I hope we can learn from the Apostle that the Lord's wisdom calls us to *rejoice* whenever Christ is preached, by whatever means.

ⁱ *The Gospel of John: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, p. 76

ⁱⁱ *John Gill's Exposition of the Bible*, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/luke-10-6.html>, accessed Oct 3, 2018

ⁱⁱⁱ *Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, p. 245-246

^{iv} *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 182

^v *Luke: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, p. 937-938

^{vi} In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, p. 264

^{vii} from 1 John 4:1

^{viii} *ibid*, p. 266-268