

MATTHEW 9:35-38 WHILE WE WAIT

“Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘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.’”¹

Jesus commanded His followers, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20]. We learn this Great Commission early in our journey as followers of the Saviour. Without question, we hear messages instructing us how important it is to obey this command to disciple others. However, too many of our churches fail to disciple people. It is fair to say that most Christians have never knowingly brought another person to faith.

Jesus also taught His disciples to be concerned for those who were hungry. This is a criterion for distinguishing the righteous from the unrighteous when the returning King of Life judges the nations. “Before [the King] will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked, and you clothed me, I was sick, and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave me no food, I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me’” [MATTHEW 25:32-45].

Our world has more than 4.5 billion people who are without Christ—these individuals are lost and in danger of eternal damnation. We have lost the concept of what it means to be lost within the modern assemblies. We are not convinced that unsaved people will die and go to hell. We console ourselves that our children are just fine, though they have no heart for the things of God and they are indistinguishable from the world. We are not disturbed that our neighbours and our colleagues are lost.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Worse still, is the fact that we aren't disturbed by the condition of the hungry and the hurting of our broken world. More than a billion people are on the edge of starvation. We have relegated this teaching to the realm of the social gospel, as though it was of scant importance. Conservative Christians ridicule the liberal churches because they no longer call the lost to repentance so they can feed the hungry; liberal Christians condemn conservative churches because they are focused on the sweet bye-and-bye while neglecting the nasty now-and-now. James has written, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that" [JAMES 2:14-16]? How else can we understand James' words except to censure our focus on what brings us ease at the expense of serving the Master? Giving a few dollars to the Food Bank or to a missionary cause will not suffice!

How do we begin to fulfil the Master's will? The answer may surprise you. Jesus was in the midst of His Galilean ministry, Jesus was busy teaching and responding to the charges of the religious leaders. He was answering hard questions asked by both those who seriously wanted His answer and those who wanted to trip Him up. He was declaring the Good News of the Kingdom of God. He was healing those who were injured and those who were demonised. Thus, we read, "And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction" [MATTHEW 9:35]. It is at this point that we read what appears to be a throw away line: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" [MATTHEW 9:36].

Of course, Jesus had compassion. Of course, Jesus was concerned for the crowds. The Master saw the crowds and He was touched by the deep needs of those masses. Matthew is rather graphic in his description, "They were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." What do we do when we see the masses as Jesus saw the masses? Why, we organise the congregation, of course. If we were writing this account, we would have Jesus saying, "Peter, do you see that individual over there. He needs to hear the message of life. Go to him. Andrew, don't stand around, get over to that person who is obviously hurting. James, what are you waiting for? Do I need to point out the need of salvation?" And so it would go, as we organised the disciples to begin to do something.

Did you notice that this is not what Jesus did? It is not that fulfilling the Great Commission is not important—it is! However, Jesus' first command was for the disciples to pray. What is more surprising still, is that Jesus did not tell these men to pray for those who were milling about without purpose and without leadership—Jesus told the disciples to pray for themselves. Jesus said that the first priority was to pray that "the Lord of the harvest" would "send out labourers into His harvest." In short, Jesus was commanding His disciples to pray that they would be sent out into the harvest.

Now focus! We need to emphasise this truth that has been neglected for far too long—the disciples were not to pray for harassed and helpless people to come to them; the Master was concerned that *the disciples should pray that they would go to the harassed and helpless people!* According to Jesus, multitudes are waiting to hear, and our most urgent need is to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send our Christians into the harvest field.²

² I was first alerted to this insight reading an article by David Platt, "The Radical Experiment: One Year To A Church Turned Upside Down," Sermon Central, Oct 18, 2010, <https://www.sermoncentral.com/pastors-preaching-articles/david-platt-the-radical-experiment-one-year-to-a-church-turned-upside-down->

PRAYER IS THE FIRST PRIORITY — If we who are Christians will fulfil the will of the Saviour, we will be busy as we wait. We will not be idle, because the model God has provided is productive work. Jesus said, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” [**JOHN 5:17**]. God rested on the seventh day, but He was not idle. Likewise, while there awaits a rest for the people of God, that rest has not been provided yet. Therefore, we are to be engaged in the Lord’s work. Just as the nobleman who distributed wealth to his servants in a parable Jesus told, so we have received the Gospel, and we are commanded to “Engage in business until [He] comes” [**LUKE 19:13**]. I cannot stress enough that the first priority of business for the people of God is prayer. If we will fulfil the will of the Master, we will pray for labourers for the harvest.

In the early days of my service before the Master, I was greatly influenced and tremendously encouraged through the writings of A. W. Tozer. I have every book he wrote that is immediately available. His writings provide excellent insight into God’s character; I commend what he has written as devotional reading for any Christian. That godly man often stressed that a Christian’s first responsibility was to be worthy of bearing the Gospel. His statement was, “Our first responsibility is not to make converts but to uphold the honor of God in a world given over to the glory of fallen man.”³ Grab that thought! The first responsibility of the child of God is to be holy. Focus on one’s personal relationship with the Lord God before attempting to call others to Christ. We are prone to reduce this charge to an either/or proposal; however, it is a both/and situation. The order in which we perform our responsibility is critical. Christ must be first; and God’s glory must always be the goal for which we reach.

Perhaps we do not pray because we realise that prayer is hard work. We have each experienced opposition from the evil one when we tried to pray. Isn’t it strange that if there is to be an interruption in our day, it will occur just as we are trying to pray? We will be praying and one of the children rushes in with a question that she just can’t delay—something serious, like, “Why are the dogs digging up the garden?” The phone will have been silent all morning. Then, just as we begin to pray, the phone rings. Telemarketers! We dismiss them and turn to pray again when the phone again rings. A friend who just happened to be think about us. Determined to pray, we turn off the ringtone on the phone, only to have a neighbour ring the doorbell to ask if we have any bottles to donate to the hockey bottle drive. The wicked one knows we are about to engage in spiritual warfare and he will not allow us to do this without opposition.

Our minds are active, perhaps overactive; they flit from one thought to another, and just as we determine that we will pray, our minds begin to work overtime. It is almost impossible to remain focused on what we are asking of the Father. The story is told that John Wesley on one occasion learned of a man who boasted of his prowess in fervent prayer. Since that man had boasted in front of Wesley, the godly preacher offered the one who boasted, “If you can pray for five minutes without stopping, I’ll give you my horse.”

The man immediately dropped to his knees and began to pour out the most ardent petitions imaginable. He stormed Heaven with his pleas for a space of about three or four minutes. Suddenly, he paused and asked Wesley, “Does your offer include the saddle?” Prayer is hard work. Our minds conspire against us to ensure that we are readily distracted so that we cannot pray as we know we should.

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³ A. W. Tozer and Harry Verploegh, **The Size of the Soul** (WingSpread, Camp Hill, PA 1992) 97–101; cf. A. W. Tozer and Anita M. Bailey, **God Tells the Man Who Cares** (WingSpread, Camp Hill, PA 1992) 102–105

Again, we struggle to know what we should pray for. Paul has written, “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” [ROMANS 8:26-27]. How can a Christian go wrong when it comes to prayer? We have Christ interceding before the Father and we have the Holy Spirit interceding in our hearts. There is no possibility of static or creation of a word salad. The Spirit of God searches the heart. Let us ensure that we focus our heart to pursue the will of the Master! The Spirit will ensure that our request is precisely what is required. When He has finished, the Master will present the petition to the Father; and the Father always does what the Son asks.

I note a truth concerning prayer that is sometimes overlooked when we struggle to pray. ***The more we pray, the easier it becomes to pray.*** Every follower of the Christ will pass through periods when praying is difficult. These are the times that we must guard ourselves against despair and discipline ourselves to persevere. We must confess our loss of desire to the Master, even as we ask Him to restore the joy of His salvation. It is at such moments we can learn from David when he had sinned so egregiously against the LORD and against his own subjects.

David had betrayed the righteous God. He had surrendered to his own perverted desires. That surrender had, in turn, brought about the death of a good man. And it wasn't merely a death, David had arranged for Uriah to die at the hands of God's enemies. David had actively engineered Uriah's death so that the king could hide his own wicked, vile and sinful acts. The sin of one of God's children is always exposed in God's own time. We cannot hide our sin; it is not a question of whether we will be exposed, it is an issue of when we will be exposed. The Lord sent His prophet, Nathan, to confront the king and to announce God's judgement on him. Immediately, upon Nathan's exposure, David confessed and repented.

When he was confronted by God's prophet, David prayed,

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.”

[PSALM 51:7-12]

Focus especially on the twelfth verse:

“Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.”

[PSALM 51:12]

You know how miserable you feel when you try to pray, and you can only *say* prayers. You long for intimacy with God, and the reason you long for that intimacy is because you experienced it in the past—you know what it is to be loved by God and what it is to love God. You remember the times when you could come to Him, crying out your fears, your frustrations, your deepest yearnings. You recall how the Father always received you, comforted you and then directed your gaze to that which was best for your good and for His glory. You remember the acceptance you experienced as you were in His presence, and you long to again know His love. Now, all you experience seems to be condemnation and censure.

You need to hear again the sound counsel provided by Isaiah.

“Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,
or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;
but your iniquities have made a separation
between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden his face from you
so that he does not hear.”

[ISAIAH 59:1-2]

When you see this gracious invitation from the LORD God, it is less a rebuke than a call to repent, to turn again to the God who loves you. The Apostle of Love encourages us when he writes, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” [1 JOHN 1:9]. This, then, is the divine call issued to all who know the Risen Son of God. Has prayer become tedious, a labour because you are spiritually exhausted? Confess your exhaustion and look to Him, asking that He restore you. Don’t invent some sin just so you have something to confess; it is enough to confess that your heart is not right before Him and that prayer has become toil for you. Ask Him to restore the joy of His salvation. He will hear and He will answer.

EMULATE CHRIST IN YOUR WITNESS — All alike are called to life in the Son of God. I urge you to recall an incident recorded from the days of Jesus’ ministry in the flesh. In Mark’s Gospel, the account that provides us with Peter’s perspective of the Master’s service during His days in the flesh, we read, “As he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners’” [MARK 2:15-17]. Jesus did speak to the elite, but He delighted to call those whom the world despised—and the outcasts responded with joy!

On another occasion when Jesus pushed back against the complaints of religious leaders, He said, “John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds” [MATTHEW 11:18, 19].

On another occasion, as Doctor Luke sets the scene for yet another confrontation between religious leaders and the Son of God, he observes, “The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them’” [LUKE 15:1, 2].

I believe we can readily establish that Jesus went to where the sinners would be found! He didn't hesitate to be with sinners, individuals considered to be detestable within that ancient society; and when He was with them, He served them, teaching them and calling them to life. I don't say that Jesus went into the bars in order to drink or to watch the strippers; He did, however, go to the sinners in order to call them to repentance and to show them mercy. We dare not imagine that we must never sully our hands by working with the broken of society. We are never more like the Master than when we lift the fallen and encourage those who are discouraged.

Jude, half-brother of our Master, urged Christians to be willing to get their hands dirty in the hard work of discipleship. He wrote, "You, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh" [JUDE 20-23]. "Have mercy," "snatching them out of the fire," "show mercy." These commands anticipate that we who follow the Risen Saviour will be engaged with a fallen world. We will get our hands dirty lifting soiled souls so that Christ can cleanse their lives.

There aren't many wicked sinners coming to the church house to hear the preaching of the Word—and that is a shame! Perhaps that was the case several decades past, but it is no longer the case in our contemporary world. They are out there, lost and dying without God and without hope in the world. We must go to them and we must compel them to come to Christ.

Jesus addressed this matter with a parable that you may recall. The Master had been invited to dine at the house of a Pharisee one Sabbath. During the time before the meal was served and throughout the meal, Jesus was watching the way in which guests jockeyed in order to be seated in the places of honour. As was so often the case, the Master seized the opportunity to instruct those who would listen. He said, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" [LUKE 14:7-11]. What Jesus said wasn't particularly surprising, but it is generally ignored, even to this day.

Not content to let the moment pass without nailing the issue down, Jesus continued by speaking directly to the man who had invited Him. "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just" [LUKE 14:12-14]. Jesus had just redirected the attention of those who heard Him to life beyond this moment. They were challenged to look toward Heaven.

One of those who was reclining at the table with Jesus exclaimed, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God" [LUKE 14:15b]! Maybe the man was sincere, but it seems just as likely that he thought it sounded right, so he would say it. After all, he would appear to agree with the spiritual perspective Jesus was presenting. It would likely put this man in good standing with other Pharisees, because it was not likely that other than Jesus there were any present who were not Pharisees.

At this point, Jesus told a parable that is apropos to the message. “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So, the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’ And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet’” [LUKE 14:16-24].

What a powerful indictment of the Pharisees! What a powerful indictment of contemporary Christendom! As I review life among the churches of Canada during my years of service here, such attitudes were more common than I could ever wish. A man came to our church in a city in the Lower Mainland. He was obviously injured in his mind; his dress and his speech betrayed a hard life. When I asked how he had found us, he named the name of a large church in the city and said, “The Pastor there said this would be a better fit for me.” We were glad to receive him, though his presence placed significant demands upon us as a young congregation. This wasn’t the first time, nor would it be the last time, that such a thing happened in a congregation I was pastoring.

We had a family in a church in more recent days come to the services. Again, when I inquired how the family had found us, the man named the name of the largest church in the community, saying, “The pastor there told us to come here since this is an ‘entry-level’ church.” I don’t know what that pastor meant by that statement, but I do know that this family was welcomed. They proved to be a blessing despite proving quite needy of pastoral attention.

In this community, I’ve had church members come to me complaining that some who presented themselves for membership needed to go somewhere else because “they aren’t the right kind of people.” I’ve heard complaints that some were not the proper race, not the proper social status, not pleasant to sit beside. I’m telling you that professed followers of the Risen Saviour need to hear His words that instruct His people to “compel people to come in.” We need to remember that those who are to be compelled are not people nice folk consider desirable.

I’ve told before of our first foray into the church world when I began to seek Christ. Lynda and I had just moved to a major city where I would be entering medical school. She had just been saved, and I began to read the Bible (always a dangerous proposition). We attended a large church near our home. I had an afro at the time and a scraggly beard; I wore a sweatshirt with the sleeves cut off and raggedy blue jeans with tennis shoes. It was no doubt rather scandalous dress in those days, more indicative of a class of rebellious youth than what the upper middle-class would wear.

The message that morning happened to be delivered by a substitute for a substitute. The pastor was on holiday and the substitute who had been secured was snowed in by a freak snowstorm in Colorado. Thus, a young seminarian from a nearby city had been secured to bring the message to this large congregation. I’m pretty certain the people got far more than they bargained for. My goodness, but he was fiery! He commented in the message that he had driven past this church a couple of Sundays prior, and then began to tell the people what he had observed as he drove past.

He saw a child, a little black girl, who had fallen off her bicycle, skinning her knees. That little child was sitting on the steps of that big church building on a Sunday morning as the people streamed past as though she didn't exist. Crying and in obvious pain, the child was ignored as the good people rushed past her so they could get their special seat in the auditorium. That young preacher excoriated the congregation for their obvious lack of compassion and for what he saw as unholy attitudes more in line with the Pharisees than with followers of the Christ. I was excited as no sermon had ever excited me to that point! I wasn't even a follower of the Saviour at that point, but I recognised the truth when I heard it!

After the service, a rather distinguished looking man approached us and asked if we were visiting. Well, it was obvious that I wasn't part of that congregation. We told him that we were new in town and that I would be initiating studies at the medical school. At this revelation, he began his sales pitch, telling me what a fine church this was. He was clearly distressed with the message we had heard because he apologised for both the message and the preacher. He invited us to come when their preacher had returned from vacation. He assured us that their preacher would never embarrass people like this young man had done.

I haven't always been meek and mild as I am today. I have been known to be fiery in the past. Hearing this abject apology, I narrowed my eyes to a slit, looked at him intently and said, "If you need to apologise for someone speaking the truth as did that man, then we are obviously in the wrong place. We won't be back." I know, I know, you would not expect me to be blunt like that. I was embarrassed for that man. Perhaps I have been overly optimistic in my expectations of churches, but I do expect that people will be more important than perception!

"Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled," was the command of the Master. If we will honour Him as Master of life, we will bring those whom society has determined to be unworthy of the message of life. All about us are individuals in need of the message we hold. I witness new faces in our community representing ethnic communities that have not been seen among us before. We should be compelling them to come to the House of the Lord. There are many "up and outers" who came to this region for the work that was available. They may or may not have found the work, but in the process found themselves addicted to drugs or alcohol. Are we willing to inconvenience ourselves to invite them and make them welcome? There is another aspect of Jesus' words that merit attention.

A HARVEST IMPLIES PLANTING — This is the surprising aspect of Jesus instruction—we are not called to go out from our various assemblies anticipating that we must engage in the laborious toil of preparing the soil and planting and then waiting for long periods of time. This is not at all what we anticipated. Jesus taught His followers to pray for harvesters! We are taught to pray for labourers who are prepared to gather the sheaves! There is a harvest awaiting the harvesters! The Master has called us to anticipate a harvest—*now*!

So very often preachers have presented sermons urging people to work hard preparing the soil, watering the seed and then waiting patiently for the harvest. To be certain, we must perform these tasks before there is a harvest. However, preceding us in the Faith were godly men and women who performed these onerous tasks, just as we are to be continually engaged in preparing the soil, planting the seed and watering the seed that we've planted. However, because it is a continuous process, the harvest of past labours awaits our attention *now*. I am not saying that we never engage in preparation of the soil or that we never engage in planting seeds in anticipation of a harvest; I am saying that long before we engage in any outreach, God's Spirit has preceded us! God's Spirit has already prepared hearts to hear the message of life.

Wherever the Master may send His servant, there will always be some who are prepared to receive the message of life in Christ the Lord. Our preparation must always include the obedience that includes praying that God will thrust forth labourers because there is a harvest awaiting the people of God. Certainly, there is a need for missionaries in distant lands because there is a harvest that must be gathered before it is too late to gather in the crops.

When Jesus had revealed Himself to the Samaritan woman at the Well of Sychar, the disciples returned from their task of securing food for the evening meal and urged Jesus to eat. He declined, saying, “I have food to eat that you do not know about” [JOHN 4:32].

Naturally, the disciples were surprised and wondered whether someone had brought Him food. Knowing what they were thinking, the Master spoke again, reminding them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” [JOHN 4:34]. However, He wasn’t finished with the instruction they needed, instruction which we also require if we will fulfil His will. Jesus continued by saying, “Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour” [JOHN 4:35-38]. Focus on that THIRTY-FIFTH VERSE: “Lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest.” We don’t need to pray for planters and waterers, we need to see with God’s eyes that the harvest is ready.

Let me ask the hard question of parents, “Are you praying for someone to go to the mission field? Have you released your children so that should God call them, they can go without fear that you will hold them back?”

Others, perhaps someone who is retired and has the ability to go, or perhaps a younger person who will commit herself or himself to being on mission with God, needs to see that Christ’s call to the Twelve is a call to each of us. Has God called you? Are you in a place that when He calls you will hear His voice? We should be asking God to thrust out harvesters from our own congregation.

However, there is an aspect that could be overlooked. When Jesus was giving final instructions to the disciples before His ascension into the Glory, He said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” [ACTS 1:8]. The disciples were to begin their work of harvesting in Jerusalem. Then, moving outward from that initial point of testimony, they were to anticipate going into Judea and Samaria. Only after they had testified in these familiar places were they to go “to the end of the earth.”

Your Jerusalem is here—your own home, the community in which you live and work. Your Judea is this immediate area, the region in which we share a common culture and within which we move with confidence because it is familiar. Our Samaria will be the surrounding areas in which the culture will not differ greatly from that with which we are familiar. Long before we endeavour to go to the end of the earth, we need to lift up our eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. We have not saturated our own community, and this is a small community. There are people among us who have never heard the message of life.

People grow up in this area—this area—without ever hearing the message of life. Beyond that, God is continually bringing the world to us, as people from the Philippines, from India, from Pakistan, from Syria, flood into this region. We have not yet reached all of them. There is a harvest waiting for us, and we have not gone to our own Jerusalem.

I know that hidden peoples live all about us, people that have not yet heard the message of life. Throughout this Peace Region are native reserves on which men and women live and die without ever hearing the message of life. We see many of these native people on our streets each day, though they are often invisible to our eyes as we hurry about our daily tasks. The world has come to us as our government brings in refugees and as people born in other lands to fill the jobs created by our booming economy. I meet people from around the world as I purchase groceries, pause for lunch or for refreshments, or as I seek out services in this, my home community. Many of these people whom I meet each day have never heard the message of life.

It is to our shame that anyone could live in this Peace Region without having opportunity to hear that God loves them. I am well aware that we provide radio and Internet outreach, but more important than anything else we might ever do, a personal witness is required if we will successfully penetrate darkened hearts with the light of Christ. Has the Master ceased calling His people to go to nearby peoples? Has He called you to carry this message to those lost and stumbling into eternity without hope and without God in the world?

I would be embarrassed to go into the presence of the Saviour without a single soul to my credit. I long for each one who hears this message to become an instrument of God's grace to others. Perhaps it will be a member of your family for whom you have prayed. Give yourself to bombarding the Throne of Grace, pleading for God to permit you to be His instrument to bring that someone to faith in the Son of God.

Perhaps it is a neighbour, a friend with whom you speak day-by-day. She has no relationship to the Master, and yet, she respects you. Are you willing to jeopardise your relationship in order to point her to life in the Risen Saviour?

Perhaps it is a colleague at work who is struggling with some serious problem in his life. He trusted you enough to ask what you thought of his situation. Have you told that man of Christ who saves and who equips each one to live as victors in the midst of this dying world?

I'm urging each one to determine that on that day when you enter Heaven, you will enter bringing another with you. I'm urging you to ask the Saviour to use your words, to use your gentle witness, to bring that one to faith. Do not be surprised when you ask the Master to send out harvesters, if He should send you. Amen.