

Harvest

Part 4

Luke 10:1-11 (NIV)

¹ After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.

² He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

³ Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

⁴ Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

⁵ "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.'

⁶ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you.

⁷ Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

⁸ "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you.

⁹ Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'

¹⁰ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say,

¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.'

Last week we looked at Jesus sending out 72 disciples on a mission trip that was part of what Jesus called the harvest. In sending these people out Jesus spelled out a number of mission principles:

Mission principles

1. *The harvest is a mission for all believers* - not just leaders or the gifted or talented
2. *The harvest is completed in Jesus* - because Jesus is coming to finish what you start
3. *The harvest is plentiful* – the world is full of people looking for God, many who don't realise that's what they are looking for
4. *The harvest presents opportunities and dangers* – Jesus sends us out as lambs among wolves – but for Hebrews lambs are the symbol of God's miraculous saving power
5. *The harvest is urgent* - this is God's plan to save people - if we don't help there is no plan "B".

Today we are zeroing on the central strategy of Jesus' harvest. Now we preachers believe that everything we preach is vital to the kingdom of God and to the church – and well – sometimes what we have to preach is something God really wants people to hear – and sometimes what we preach is just interesting or helpful – and sometimes it's kind of well - better luck next time. But today's message actually is vital because it is about the central purpose of why we are church and it has incredible significance for the future.

Now, we are talking about the harvest, we are talking about faith sharing and evangelism. Now one of the most baffling moments of my life was when I went to theological college and was told; we don't use the "E" word here, we don't talk about evangelism. I thought that was about the nuttiest thing I had ever heard. It was like telling a group of Engineers that we don't talk about numbers because they make us feel uncomfortable, that we'll build our bridges by guessing how long things are. Now there are lot of complex historical reasons why evangelism has fallen into disrepute in mainline churches, but I think the main reason is that *"it was a good thing, that got a bad name because it was done the wrong way."*

In the 20th century protestant church evangelism was a three part process in which we began by helping people understand the atonement; that is the process by which Jesus death cancels out sin, moving people into an acceptance of that understanding and then welcoming them as members of the church.

Understanding – Acceptance – Belonging

Now there are a lot of things wrong with this strategy but let's zero in on four main issues:

1. It is not biblical – this is not the way Jesus taught his followers to help people find God (*we'll talk more about this later*)
2. It gave Christianity a bad name – it reinforced perceptions in the wider community that Christians were uncaring bible bashers obsessed with the issue of sin, who talked about love but were forever arguing with people.
3. It wasn't effective – churches generally failed to make new converts
4. It gave Evangelism a bad name in the church – partly because people instinctively new that it was doing more harm than good and partly because it wasn't effective.

The consequences for mainline protestant churches was quite devastating. As a movement founded on the purpose of bringing people to God we were comprehensively failing in the work of the harvest. However this was not true of all denominations and especially this was not true of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches who had a very different way of doing evangelism that actually lined up better with the strategy which Jesus taught. Which very simply; was helping people experience belonging to God, developing understanding in relationship with God and moving into acceptance of God as Lord.

Belonging – Understanding - Acceptance

OK so with all that in mind let's get into the biblical strategy that Jesus taught his followers in Luke 10.

1. Live to bless

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' (Luke 10:5)

The disciples are moving swiftly along roads and thoroughfares in order to reach their objective which is to stop and spend time with people, something you cannot do when you are simply meeting people in passing. In this, Jesus is leveraging a culture of eastern hospitality. People loved to entertain strangers, it gave them

favour in the eyes of the gods and in an era without any kind of media a visitor provided both entertainment and news. What is really unusual in this passage is that Jewish people did not like to pop in, they did not like to enter the houses of the uncircumcised, because there was any number of ways they could become ritually unclean in a gentile household not to mention centuries old food prohibitions that were central to Jewish culture but which Jesus is now commanding them to disregard entirely for the sake of this mission in building relationships.

In essence what Jesus was saying is that when you meet people as my representative it is not about you it is about them. For that reason Jesus commands them to offer the traditional Jewish greeting of peace – shalom, when they enter a house. This word is a huge concept in the Jewish world, it covers a very wide sense of blessing including; the absence of conflict, safety, wellbeing, prosperity, completeness, wholeness, harmony, fulfilment and a strong desire that the one offering the blessing might have a strong and untroubled relationship with the recipient of the blessing.

Contrast this for a moment with the greeting I was trained to use by an evangelism team which was; *do you know what will happen to you when you die?* That greeting was designed to elbow me into a discussion about life after death and the atonement. In contrast; Jesus greeting was a prayer of blessing. My evangelism greeting assumed that I was a spiritually knowledgeable person looking for spiritually ignorant people to educate - and that is exactly how it sounded to people – disrespectful. Jesus greeting on the other hand begins with respecting, loving and blessing people right from the start.

To say peace to this house was to pray aloud. It was more than just a hopeful ritual greeting like have a good day. Jesus and his followers believed they were depositing a real heavenly peace, a real heavenly blessing in that household that would impact on those people for good. Jesus said,

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

I have seen this very thing happening in the ministry of our hearts of Love team in Zimbabwe. In the picture is Q, one of the leaders of the hearts of love team, distributing vegetables for families in need.



When Q or other members of the hearts of love team go into people's homes they bring a prayer of peace and I have seen that peace settle on the people they are visiting. I have seen something change in the atmosphere and seen smiles begin to grow on weary faces.



Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

In practical terms, what this meant for Jesus mission teams was they would meet someone in the town and get to chatting, and eventually as hospitality culture kicked in they would be invited to the home of their new friend. As they entered the home they would say aloud, "peace to this house" and they would say it in a way that their host could not mistake for a ritual pleasantry but would hear a sincere desire that peace would be in this house. The saying of such a blessing out loud was an act of faith, the faith and belief that they were representatives of God's kingdom and they were bringing to this house something of God's power of peace. Some people eagerly welcomed this and some people did not.

2. Love to respect

If a man of peace is there... (Luke 10:6)

The most important factor in evangelism and faith sharing is our general attitude towards people. Some years ago I became involved in a casual conversation with a guy at a funeral and when he found out what I did for a living it was like he suddenly discovered a bag full of snakes. Although he was desperately trying to be polite his whole body language, including some very spectacular eye-rolling, was screaming; you believe in God? - You must be a very stupid person, I have some magic beans why don't you buy my magic beans? I could sense his underlying attitude and people can sense yours. People will not want to develop relationships with you if deep down you feel that people who don't believe, are simply mad, bad or sad.

If a man of peace is there... (Luke 10:6)

What Jesus is getting at is the recognition that we are all created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), that we all possess something of the divine nature within us, that we are all worthy of being valued, that God's attitude towards the people in this world is deeply respectful, so much so that God will send his only Son into the world because of his love for the people in the world. What this means is that there is something good and godly in all people and we should expect to find people of peace in the world.

You see, the very worst attitude we can have, if we are trying to build relationships and share our faith, is any sense of superiority. For starters it's just not true. We are simply too flawed and messed up to have any illusions about our superiority, we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). Secondly any kind of sense of superiority, of judging ourselves better than ourselves is going to damage the mission of God. Jesus is absolutely crystal clear about this;

Matthew 7:1-3

¹ *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged.*

² *For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

³ *"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"*

Some people assume that the judgement we want to avoid is the judgement of God, and that is true in other passages, but in this passage the context is human relationships. Two people looking each other in the eye, seeing fault, and the judgement flowing both ways, destroying any hope for their relationship. The antidote to this problem is an authentic attitude of love, which if it is a true Godly love, will manifest as respect. Our attitude will be one of expecting to discover the touch of God's image in the life of a stranger. To expect that we will find people of peace. How do we discover that? Well we become vitally interested in people's lives, we ask questions, we explore the fascinating world that lies behind the eyes of the person in front of us. With this attitude we can move easily and naturally from the weather, football, and favourite overseas trips to what do you hope for in this world?

3. Be authentic

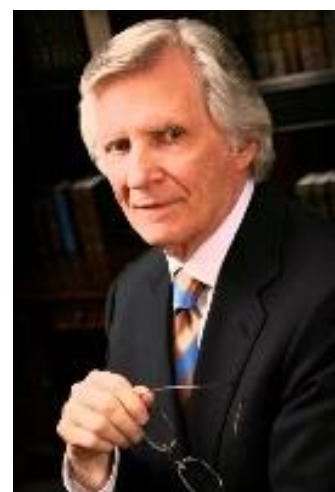
If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. (Luke 10:6)

That our peace will return to us means that the peace we carry has to be real, that it's not a pose, it's not something we put on, that it's not a Christian smile covering up a hidden agenda. You know that smile, the one on the face of the phone company service consultant when you first meet. A smile that says, I am very happy to meet you and I am extremely happy in my job. A smile that quickly disappears after I explain how much they have messed up my account. I then quickly learn that they are not really happy to meet me and they are not really happy in their job. They were just hoping that a happy face would buy my cooperation.

If we have an authentic peace from God, people will come to know that, particularly if they reject us. How we respond to that rejection will speak volumes as to the reality of our peace, because a deep down experience and conviction of God's peace is not subject to what people do. We will continue to love even if they tell us to take a long walk off a short peer, because our love and our peace comes not from our circumstances or their approval, but from our God – so we don't lose it - when it is rejected - it comes back to us.

One of my first encounters with this truth was reading the book; "the cross and switchblade"; that tells the true story of Pastor David Wilkerson's first five years in New York City, where he spent time with disillusioned youth, encouraging them to turn away from drugs and gang violence and to turn to Jesus. What grabbed my attention was the amazing way that Wilkerson loved these young men and women even when they turned on him both verbally and physically; there was one incident that particularly demonstrated this.

*"Nicky Cruz: You come near me and I'll kill you!
David Wilkerson: Yeah, you could do that. You could cut me up into a thousand pieces and lay them in the street, and every piece will still love you."
— (David Wilkerson, The Cross and the Switchblade)*



It is worth remembering that the gang leader Nicky Cruz, was profoundly transformed by Wilkerson's love and has been an evangelist for the last 60 years and founder of the organisation Teen Challenge where authentic love and peace is central to the contribution they make to the harvest. So what Jesus is asking us to do is to take the peace we receive from him and bless other people with that peace – with the emphases being on the other.



This is what Jesus is emphasising with these next instructions.

4. Say yes

⁷ *Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.*

⁸ *"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you.*

(Luke 10:7-8)

As we said, the Jews had lots of hang-ups about food and Jesus is saying this is not about you, for the sake of the harvest you have to lay that stuff aside. Which means in our context that if your new friend is currently hunting Pokémon's in their free time, something you think is absurd, you need to get interested. If they love listening to talk back radio that makes you want to scratch your ears off, find out from them what's so appealing. If they want to spirit dance in a sweat lodge, break out the loin clothes, be there with bells on – so to speak, get into their lives, let your first response be yes. Yes there are some things to draw the line at, when they pop all the car keys in a bowl and look at you expectantly that is not the time to say yes. The point is that none of this harvest stuff is about telling people to be like us. It's about genuinely, authentically entering into people's lives because when we do that, we then earn the right to be genuine and authentic in return.

Making our first response to be yes has to be more than just a technique to get in the door it needs to be a patient and consistent attitude of engagement. This is what Jesus means when he said;

Do not move around from house to house (Luke 10:7b)

Be patient and consistent because people really need and crave those qualities. In my early twenties I was part of the leadership of an annual camp for underprivileged children that was held at Bundeena in the September school holidays. One year I spent the week putting a lot of time into this one young fellow and it seemed to be going really well. Afterwards this boy came along to my church which was terrific and I had to work very hard finding ways to take credit for him joining our church without seeming to boast. Then after about a month, this kid came up to me, kicked me in the ankle and then left - and I never saw him again. Well later I had a bit of a prayer about this and asked God, what was wrong with that crazy kid and God very gently began to help me recognise a few things. That since he joined our church I had virtually ignored this kid. That when we were on camp I had given him heaps of my time, but when I went back home, where I had responsibilities and I was busy, well I had pretty much abandoned him. No one likes to feel that they are someone's project, because that means the relationship was not about caring it was about some other agenda.

Do not move around from house to house (Luke 10:7b)

Build relationships with people that are genuine, patient and consistent and lastly be ready for ministry, be ready to bring the power of God into people's lives.

5. Know God is good

Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'
(Luke 10:9)

God did not create ministry for church, he created it for people, because God is good. When we meet illness and suffering we have more to offer than just sympathy, we have the loving power of God. A couple of weeks ago Kathy Brocklebank shared that her doctor was a bit worried about a few lumps he had found and sent her off for a biopsy. Now our first response was sympathy and concern, Kathy had recently gone through an operation and treatment for bowel cancer and it just seemed awful that she would be under threat again. But after sympathy what rose up in us was this very strong sense that this is not what God wanted and we prayed about that and we were convicted that Kathy would be OK and praise God the biopsy's were completely negative. In the midst of your relationships with people, have confidence in God, pray for them when they are sick, pray with confidence and with faith. The answer to those prayers will not always be complete healing but there will be answers.

Lastly, give God his dew. Honour God's name, tell people God is at work in their life. More often than not the front part of their head, which is where people's mouths live will probably dismiss what you say, but the back part of their head will be considering, will be watching you and watching life. The Harvest is plentiful.

In conclusion

The most important and urgent thing that you can do with your life is to stop and build deep relationships.

1. Live to bless
2. Love to respect
3. Be authentic
4. Say yes
5. Know God is good

Next week we have a few more wrinkles to straighten out of this harvest blanket – we don't live in a hospitality culture and we really struggle with time – so how can we follow Jesus command and build these deep relationships? – That's what we will be looking into next week

This message has been about the purpose of the church – and being a people who are unified by a purpose draws us together, but what keeps us together, what helps us to belong, is the love of God. This morning we want to invite you to participate in a prayer of belonging. Would you please stand

I belong

From the very beginning we were purposed by our loving God to belong.

For this reason God made us blood relatives through the blood of Jesus, sons and daughters of the living God.

The Spirit overcomes our distinctions and our differences forming us into one family, drinking one Spirit.

Because we belong; we love and are loved.

Because we belong; we carry one another's burdens.

Because we belong; we suffer when others suffer, we rejoice when others rejoice.

Because we belong; we encourage one another, not giving up meeting together.

We remember that our belonging comes first and last from the heart of God;

We belong because we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

We belong to each other because we belong to Him.