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LifeWay Family Bible Series for June 1

An urgent summons for evangelistic field hands

Matthew 9:35-38; Romans 10:14-15; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

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When Jesus looked upon the multitudes in Matthew 9:35-38, his heart was moved with love and compassion. He pictured the crowds of people as a flock of sheep—hopeless, helpless and exhausted. He also pictured an abundant harvest—a huge, overripe field of grain that needed to be gathered in.

What is Jesus' diagnosis as he looks out at the cities, towns and neighborhoods of Texas? He still observes a multitude of helpless sheep and a field of overripe grain. And perhaps, most importantly, he still challenges his people to pray for laborers to harvest the overripe field.

Jesus says in Matthew 9:37, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.” Why does this situation persist year after year? Church attenders are many. Seminars and conferences are many. Programs are many. Evangelistic laborers are few. Why is there a shortage of evangelistic field hands?

First, the devil attacks God's people at the point of laboring f



or Christ. Try to imagine the impact of a church if every member was a dedicated laborer for Christ. Try to imagine the impact of a church if every member, upon leaving the sanctuary each Sunday, went out into the world with the consuming desire to make Christ known to others. The impact of such a labor force would be immeasurable.

The devil knows this, and thus, this is where he concentrates his efforts. He leads Christians to bicker among themselves over internal issues, so they will lose their focus on the external issue of people living and dying without Christ. He leads Christians to spend their time on many good activities, while they leave the very best activity undone.

The most effective source of power to counter-attack the devil is prayer. Jesus said in Matthew 9:38: "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." The battle in which Christians are engaged is a spiritual battle, and a spiritual battle must be fought with the spiritual weapon of prayer. God's people can pray Satan's efforts to retard the growth of evangelistic laborers will be overcome. Jesus implies that if his people will pray this prayer, he will answer their prayer by raising up more laborers.

A second reason there is a shortage of evangelistic field hands is that there is something inherently unpleasant about the idea of being a common laborer. People by nature want to be supervisors, managers, directors or executives, but not common laborers.

The word "workers" in Matthew 9:37 is the word for "field hand." It refers to an agricultural worker. In the physical realm, the world does not get fed unless the field hands do their work. In the spiritual realm, the world does not hear about Christ unless the spiritual field hands do their work.

Romans 10:14-15 says plainly, "How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"

The spiritual grain is ripe. It must be brought in. Somebody must harvest the crop. Christians must decide there is nothing humiliating about being the one who brings others to faith in Christ.

A third reason there is a shortage of evangelistic field hands is that Christians fail to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers. If Christians doubt prayerlessness is a major reason for the shortage of spiritual laborers, let them ask themselves: "What place does the prayer for spiritual workers occupy in our lives? Do we pray for evangelistic laborers?"

It is interesting to observe how Christians tend to treat the basic Christian disciplines. Instead of reading the Bible, they read books about the Bible. Instead of praying, they worry. Instead of laboring for Christ out in the world, they soothe their consciences by thinking or even saying, "That's why we pay the preacher." Instead of praying for evangelistic laborers and participating in evangelistic harvesting, they occupy themselves with ecclesiastical busywork. Jesus' solution seems too simplistic-pray!

Two things will happen when Christians pray for evangelistic laborers. First, God will respond by raising up laborers. He will answer their prayers, because he desires far more than anybody to bring in the harvest. Christians must remember the harvest is comprised of people for whom Christ died. It is truly God's harvest.

Second, as Christians pray for laborers, their own hearts will become

stirred to be some of those laborers. The love of Christ will compel them to go and share him with others (2 Corinthians 5:14). They will regard every human being from a spiritual point of view—that if anyone comes to faith in Christ, they will receive God's forgiveness and become brand new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16,17). They will joyfully assume the role of ambassador for Christ—boldly speaking the message of reconciliation that “God made Christ who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Question for discussion

Do you agree with these reasons for more Christians not being more involved in the harvest, or do you have other suggestions?

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.