



“Working the Harvest”
Luke 10:1-24

Idea: Believers have been commissioned to participate in the great harvest taking place among their neighbors and the nations.

Intro: A summer drive through the countryside can be breathtaking. I really believe it is hard to find a more beautiful landscape on earth than row crops set among the rolling hills of Virginia. When you are driving through such a scene with the beauty and symmetry of the corn and bean fields and the backdrop of an old barn and a silo, do you ever wonder how those crops got there? The question probably never occurs to you because we all know that the corn and beans did not plant themselves. No, a farmer is behind it all. We know that a few months early that farmer disced the field, planted the seed, fertilized it, and prayed for rain. We understand that the symmetry of the rows is the handy work of the farmer. And we recognize that the growth of the crop is the work of God. The harvest that will take place later is the culmination of a joint exercise between God and the farmer. You see the farmer planted the seed, and God gave the increase. Such should be the case for Christians and churches when it comes to the gospel.

One Sunday, a pastor began his sermon in this way, “I would like to make three points today. First, there are billions of people around the world who are headed to a devil’s hell. Second, most of us sitting here today do not give a dang about it.” After a lengthy pause he continued: “My third point is that you are more concerned that I, your pastor, said the word *dang* in church than you are about the billions of people going to hell.”

According to R. C. Foster, “Jesus said, ‘Go,’ but the church through selfishness and indifference has refused to obey. We try to substitute ‘write,’ ‘send,’ or ‘give,’ for ‘go.’ We try to salve our conscience by turning over the task of ‘going’ to someone else and giving languidly for their support. Of course, we must send where we cannot go. But because we can’t go across the world does not excuse us for refusing to go across the street.” Going to people who are spiritually dead and condemned in sin is what all believers have been commissioned to do. Elton Trueblood magnifies this obligation we all bear. He said, “Evangelism is not a professional job for a few trained men, but it is instead the unrelenting responsibility of every person who belongs, even in the most modest way, to the company of Jesus.” So, this morning as you drove onto this campus and walked the halls of this church building, did you wonder to yourself, “How did all these people become followers of Jesus Christ?” Well, we may not know the specifics of each story, but we do know that no one came to Christ on their own. In each situation, there was the work of God’s Spirit coupled with the work of believers who planted the seed of the gospel. And today, there is spiritual life and transformation taking place because of this beautiful partnership in the gospel.

Are you partnered with the Lord and working in this way because you have answered His call on your life simply as a Christian? You see, the Great Commission was not given to “professional Christians.” It was

issued to all Christians. I love Ian Murray's take on this truth. He said, "There is not the slightest hint in the New Testament that evangelism is the special prerogative or responsibility of office bearers. We are to be burdened for men's souls not because any office requires it of us but because we are Christians." As we move into the tenth chapter of The Gospel of Luke, we find Jesus appointing and sending out seventy-two more gospel preachers. As you might remember, at the beginning of chapter nine, Jesus commissioned and sent out His twelve disciples. These men, except for Judas Iscariot, will become the apostles who establish the church. They will hold that office. In our passage today, Jesus is sending out common people. They hold no official office, but they will be sent out by the Lord with the same power, authority, and message as the Twelve had been. Jesus is sending them to work the spiritual fields just like a farmer works the fields on a farm, so I want us to look at working the harvest.

Read Luke 10:1-24.

Inquiry: There are three scenes in Luke 10, which illustrate three ministries of every Christian. In our passage today, we see that believers are Christ's ambassadors, sent to represent Him in this world. They sow the seed of the gospel and reap in the spiritual harvest. Next Sunday, we will see that believers are also neighbors who look for opportunities to show mercy in the name of Christ (10:25-37). Then, Lord willing on Easter Sunday, we will see that believers are worshipers who long to listen to God's Word and commune with Christ (10:38-42).

Whether we are in the harvest field, on the highway, or in the home, our highest privilege and our greatest joy is to do the will of God. In our passage today, Jesus commissioned and sent out seventy-two other believers ahead of Him. Some of your Bibles may say "seventy" instead of seventy-two. The difference comes from the manuscripts that the different translations used. It really does not matter which reading is correct. Although some scholars do see the number seventy as a reference to the seventy Gentile nations of the world listed in Genesis 10. So, one might view the seventy as gospel pioneers, taking the gospel to the larger world.

Jesus sends them out in pairs to go and prepare every town and place where He is about to go. In harvest terms, the seventy-two were to go and cultivate the spiritual soil in thirty-five or thirty-six locations between Galilee and Jerusalem in preparation for a spiritual harvest. They were working the harvest, so let's see what we can learn about working the harvest in our culture today.

1. Know the condition of the field and pray.

The farmer understands how important it is to know the condition of the field that he is working. A field may have rocks or stumps in it. The soil may lack certain nutrients necessary for particular crops. It is possible that a field could have low areas that hold water. The different conditions determine how the farmer approaches the planting and harvest process. In a similar way, Christians who desire to faithfully partner with the Lord in gospel work will do well to remember how important it is to know the condition of the field in front of them and pray.

Read Luke 10:2.

Jesus' words here lead us to consider that the first great work of Christian evangelism is done on our knees in prayer. In many ways, prayer is not something that precedes gospel work; it is the gospel work. Jesus' use of a harvest word picture reveals the difficulty of the work He is sending the seventy-two to do. Farming is not for the faint of heart. It is work, hard work! What is amazing about this verse is that Jesus does not tell them to pray for an easier path. No, He makes the point that where they are going is exactly where they need to be because there is a harvest awaiting them. Instead, Jesus instructs them to pray to the Lord of the harvest for more laborers to join them in the great work. So, the problem is not that there is nothing to harvest. "*The harvest is plentiful.*" The problem is that there are not enough laborers to effectively work the fields and bring in the full harvest. There are not enough faithful Christians doing the work of telling people about Jesus and calling for them to respond.

These words of Jesus call us to know the condition of our fields and pray. What are conditions of our Powhatan and metro-Richmond fields? The North American Mission Board estimates that 75% of North America is spiritually lost and unchurched. There are a little over 30,000 people living in Powhatan. This means that 22,500 people are lost and unchurched. There are approximately 1.4 million people in metro-Richmond, which means 945,000 of them are headed to a devil's hell. They are dead in their sins and trespasses. They are cut off from Christ and in darkness. Among these numbers there are people from all over the world, from every economic stratum, and from all belief systems. The problem, however, is not whether they will believe and be saved. *"The harvest is plentiful."* The problem is that *"the laborers are few."* Therefore, we dare not pray for an easier job. No, we need to earnestly pray for more workers in the field. We need more gospel preaching churches and more evangelistic Christians. Many hands make lite work.

What would keep Christians from praying for more gospel workers to go into the fields? I believe the answer is a fear that God would prompt them to leave their perch as a spectator and go to work as a laborer. This work, as we all know, is not easy, which bring us to a second thing to learn about working the harvest.

2. Know the difficulties in the field and remain steadfast.

Verses 3-15, lay out the difficulties the laborers would face. When you think about the farmer's work, it is demanding, but it can also be dangerous. The seventy-two were being sent out into enemy territory (10:17). They were going out as lambs among wolves (10:3). The mission they were on was urgent. There was no time to be weighed down with supplies or chitchat on the road (10:4). They were commissioned to go as an ambassador of peace (10:5). Thankfully, Jesus indicated that some of the people would welcome and receive them. Others, however, would reject them. Unfortunately, for the people who did reject the gospel the judgment of God would remain over their lives.

Like we learned in the sending of the Twelve, in these verses, we discover principles for gospel ministry rather than a prescription for gospel ministry. In other words, the specific instructions given by Jesus applied uniquely and exclusively to the seventy-two disciples. They are not a pattern for all times. We are not to read the Lord's words and understand them as instructions for how to pack and plan for our next overseas mission trip. We know this because of Jesus' later words to His disciples in Luke 22:35-36, which are a reversal of what is said in Luke 9 and 10. These instructions given just before his betrayal and crucifixion become the pattern for gospel ministry.

We should, however, expect difficulties. While the harvest is plentiful, there will be many people who reject the gospel message and us as the messengers of it. While working the fields, trusting God to provide will constantly be a test. It will seem at times like no progress is being made, provisions are light, and persecution is mounting. On top of these difficulties, let us add one more. As we labor in the gospel, watching people reject the grace of Christ will be heartbreaking. These conditions should not be a surprise to us. They are part of the conditions of field. Therefore, we must know these difficulties and remain steadfast.

We may be hesitant to pray for more laborers because God will lead us to join the work. Rather than shying away, may we join the work and be steadfast in it regardless of how hard it is.

3. Know your role in the field and share.

The farmer's main enterprise is the sowing of the seed. Now, there is a lot of things that work in conjunction with the sowing of the seed. But if the seed is never planted, then nothing else matters. As a faithful gospel proclaimer, verbalizing the message of salvation to those who desperately need to hear it is the role we play in this spiritual harvest. Sometimes as we share the gospel, the work we are doing

is plowing the field in a person's heart. It is preparing that ground for future work. Someone else comes along, and the Holy Spirit uses he or she to fertilize and further prep the soil. Another person plants the gospel seed that takes root. Still another person waters it with the Word. Finally, someone else has the privilege of reaping the harvest of those gospel seeds. Everyone involved in the work has a part in the harvest.

In verse 16, Jesus prepared the seventy-two for the difficulties that awaited them. He wanted them to remain steadfast in their calling and commissioning. Part of this preparation was to help them understand they were messengers with a message. Their role was to speak the gospel because as they preached the message and the people heard it, they heard from Jesus. Likewise, when rejection did come, they would understand the rejection was a rejection of Jesus and the Father and not a rejection of them.

Christian as we seek to live out our commission today, we need to know our role in the harvest field and simply share the gospel. It is literally the only thing we are responsible for doing. While we only have one task, it is incredibly critical to the harvest. When we fulfill our duty, Jesus through the work of the gospel changes lives.

4. Know what to celebrate in the field and rejoice greatly.

We read of a threefold joy in verses 17-24. Warren Wiersbe describes it as the joy of service (vs. 17-19), the joy of salvation (vs. 20), and the joy of sovereignty (vs. 21-24). As you might imagine, when the seventy-two returned they were overjoyed by the victories they had experienced. Jesus had given them power and authority to heal, to cast out demons, and to preach the Word. They had successfully done all three in Jesus' name (vs. 17).

As the seventy-two faithfully worked the fields, Satan's power and influence diminished (vs. 18-19). Jesus watched as his authority was snuffed out through the gospel work of His followers. The disciples were right for rejoicing in their gospel service. Jesus, however, moderated their joy. That is to say, He balanced it. It was good and right for them to rejoice in all the good work they did, but there was something even greater to rejoice over. Jesus said, *"rejoice that your names are written in heaven"* (vs. 20). This rejoicing should have precedence over the joy of service. Christians, we should never get over our own conversion to Christ. We should never forget what our lives were like before Jesus stepped into them. Remembering how good and gracious the Lord has been to us will make us all the more passionate about evangelism because we will want others to know what we have come to know.

The third part of this threefold joy is that of God's sovereignty in gospel work. Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit (vs. 21) and the work of illumination. Verse 22 might be alarming to you. The idea that God reveals Himself to some and not to others is hard to swallow. The burden of the text, however, is on verse 21. Jesus rejoiced that God had made the gospel known to those who believed. The picture is made of eyes being opened and sight being granted. This spiritual sight comes through humble and simple faith. It is not the wise and strong who see and believe on Jesus. It is the ones who look to Jesus through simple, childlike faith. In all of this, God is sovereign in salvation. He has promised it, accomplished it, and offering it. The prophets saw glimpses of this great salvation, but Jesus' disciples had the privilege of seeing it firsthand (vs. 23-24).

Conclusion: This summer as you are driving through the beautiful countryside of Powhatan, Amelia, Goochland, or really any rural area in Virginia and see the symmetry of the row crops remember that those plants did not get there by accident. A farmer was behind it. He disced the field, planted the seed, fertilized it, and prayed for rain. It was his handy work coupled with God's power. The growth of the crop is the work of God. Therefore, the harvest that will come is the culmination of a joint exercise between God and the farmer.

The farmer planted the seed, and God gave the increase. Such should be the case for Christians and churches when it comes to the gospel.

May we know the condition of the field and pray for more laborers. May we know the difficulties in the field and remain steadfast. May we know our role in the field and share the gospel. And may we know what to celebrate in the field and greatly rejoice in the Lord's power to save.

Christian, how do you need to apply these four things in the field you are working? If you are not a Christian, do you sense the Lord working the field of your heart? Would you respond in faith and repentance to the gospel today?