

LABOURING FOR A LIFETIME



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MIKE TRENEER

NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2017

“The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out labourers into his harvest field.”

Matthew 9:37-38

NAVIGATORS
— LEAD ON —

WHAT IS A LABOURER?

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Introduction

Matthew 9:35-38 (NIV)

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Jesus describes the need for “labourers” ... workers in the harvest

- Notice that he describes the harvest as plentiful not as easy!
- See also John 4:27-38 “One sows and another reaps” and the idea of teamwork and playing our part
- See people as Jesus sees them. “I tell you open your eyes and look” John 4:35
 - o “When he saw the crowds ...” Matthew 9:36
 - o To look at the world around us with all its brokenness and to recognize that people are harassed and helpless (Ecclesiastes 4:1-3)
 - o But to see, through the eyes of Jesus, to see with compassion and faith, a harvest to be reaped.
- Our Navigator vision, to see “workers for the Kingdom next door to everywhere”

Paul uses the same Greek word (“ergates”) when he urges Timothy to strive be a “worker” who knows how to use the Word of God skillfully and with integrity to help others.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15

But Paul more often uses the word “fellow worker” (Gk “sunergos”) stressing that we are working together for the advance of the Gospel. See for example: Romans 16:3,9,21; Philippians 4:3;

Colossians 4:7-18: Notice the different people and contributions of those Paul mentions by name. Labourers, Workers for the Kingdom, come with many different personalities, gifts and contributions.

- Most are local labourers, people who serve live out their faith in Jesus in their natural networks of friends and family, representing Jesus in their local community and their place of work.
- Some are local leaders who take responsibility to gather and encourage local labourers
- Some are pioneer missionaries like Paul and Aristarchus
- Some are gift income supported workers like Tychicus who are available to focus on supporting and encouraging the ministry of others in different locations (**Mobile Alongsiders**). People need encouragement all their lives!

The importance of Paul's exhortation to Archippus:

- *Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord."*
Colossians 4:17

The inspiring example of Epaphras: **Colossians 4:12-13 , Colossians 1:6-8**

- *Epaphras, who is **one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus**, sends greetings.*
- *He is **always wrestling in prayer for you**, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.*
- *I vouch for him that he is **working hard for you** and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.*
- *You heard (the Gospel) and understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it **from Epaphras**, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*

WHAT IS A LABOURER?

Colossians 4:2-6: Paul's exhortation to the labourers in Colossae.

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

- **Our prayers:** *Devote yourself to prayer*
- **The example of our lives:** *Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders*
- **The love and grace we show:** *Let your conversation always be full of grace*
- **Our message:** *That you may know how to answer everyone.*

The power of prayer:

- Pray for labourers: Matthew 9:37,38
- Pray with other labourers: Acts 4:24-31
- Pray as a labourer for those around you: Colossians 4:12

See for example: Ephesians 1:15-18; 3:14-19; Philippians 1:9-11 Colossians 1:9-12

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us ...

Ephesians 3:14-20

LABOURERS LIKE JESUS

BECOMING LIKE JESUS

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The Power of Example

- **Matthew 5:14-16** *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

- **1 Thessalonians 1:5** *"our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake."*

- **Be wise** in the way you act towards outsiders
 - o "Actions speak louder than words!"
 - o "The medium is the message" (Marshall McLuhan)
 - o Hearing the Gospel is vital but our behaviour and our character can seriously undermine our message (see Romans 2:17-24)
 - o "What you do shouts so loud I can't hear what you say."
 - o Jesus Himself taught us to judge a message by the messenger Matthew 7:15-16

- **Make the most of every opportunity**
 - o Colossians 3:17 *Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*

LABOURERS LIKE JESUS

Be wise in the way you act towards unbelievers: an instructive illustration!

- **1 Corinthians 10:27-11:1**
- Engage with unbelievers with freedom. (v 27)
- Be alert to how they perceive and understand your behavior. (v 28-30)
- Be careful about your motives. (v 31-33)
 - o Do everything for God's glory
 - o Don't seek your own "profit"
 - o Seek the salvation of "many"
- Consciously follow Jesus' example (v 11:1)

For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

2 Corinthians 2:15

What does it mean to be "*the aroma of Christ*"

... to be like Jesus, to follow His example in the way we act toward people?

- **Think and act holistically: Engage with the whole person**

Isaiah 61:1-3 Jesus' commission clearly combines ministry of word and deed

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me

- o ***to preach good news** to the poor. He has sent me*
- o ***to bind up the brokenhearted,***
- o ***to proclaim freedom** for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,*
- o ***to proclaim** the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God,*
- o ***to comfort** all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—*
- o ***to bestow** on them a crown of **beauty instead of ashes**, the oil of **gladness instead of mourning**, and a garment of **praise instead of a spirit of despair**.*
- o *They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.*



- **Respect: the dignity and value of every person**

Revelation 3:20 *“Behold I stand at the door and knock ...”* If the Lord of the universe can stand at the door and knock then we also need to understand the need to *“show proper respect to everyone”*
1 Peter 2:17

- o *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do **this with gentleness and respect*** 1 Peter 3:15
- o Matthew 8:5-13 Jesus communicates respect for the centurion

- **Compassion: recognize the pain and brokenness of people’s lives**

Matthew 9:36 *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

How can we be *“the aroma of Christ”* and develop a Christ-like character and attitude?

- **Romans 8:28,29** Recognize and embrace that this is what God is doing in our lives through all that happens to us!
- **Galatians 5:22,23** Keep in step with the Spirit allowing Him to fill us and produce His fruit in our lives
- **2 Corinthians 3:18** Keep looking at and reflecting on the glory of Jesus
- **Philippians 2:1-5** Consciously work at displaying the attitude of Jesus, putting others before self, in our day to day lives.
- **Colossians 3:10-17** Practical every day guidance to how we *“put on the new man which is being renewed ... after the image of the Creator”*



COMPASSIONATELY IN THE HARVEST

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The Power of Love:

- **1 Thessalonians 2:8** *We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*

- **Matthew 9:36** *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

- **Mark 1:41** *Jesus and the leper "Filled with compassion Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man."*

- People can tell whether you love them!

- The great longing of human beings is to be loved and we are indwelt by the Spirit of God whose fruit in our lives is *"Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."*
Galatians 5:22,23

- **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** *Love is patient, love is kind.*



The Example of Jesus: Jesus meets the woman at the well John 4:4-26

Reflecting on the compassion of Jesus as a “worker in the harvest.” Jesus entered her world. He came to her, to where she could meet and understand Him. He entered the middle of her life, her questions and confusions, her village, her relationships.

Compassion seeks to “enter” the circumstances, the thoughts and feelings of others.

John 4:4-6 The gift of his physical presence

- With each person Jesus encounters, (consider the examples of Peter, Mary and Martha, Zacchaeus, etc.) in entering their worlds he gave them “the home side advantage”.
- Too often we are in cloistered isolation and the only way we can communicate is for people to come onto our turf where they feel uncomfortable and ill at ease

John 4:6-7 The gift of his humanity (his willingness to be dependent).

- The meeting point with the woman at the well (and with all these others) was his humanity, this was the starting point of his communication with her.
- *“Therefore when Christ came into the world he said ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired but a body you prepared for me’”* Hebrews 10:5
- He asks her help (Will you give me a drink?)
- He embraced the limitations of His humanity
- The danger for us of wanting to walk three feet off the ground, to be less than human. Or to be so busy trying to be everywhere that we end up being nowhere, trying to communicate with everyone and end up communicating with no one.
- Instead accept the limitations of our humanity and allow it to work for us to really engage to really enter the world of others.
- To engage with people we need to see our common humanity as the place to meet.

COMPASSIONATELY IN THE HARVEST

John 4:9 The gift of His humble, gracious acceptance of her:

- This is the King of Kings and Lord of Glory engaging a Samaritan woman at her well on her terms.

Read John 4:10-15 The gift of His intentionality:

- Jesus deliberately chooses to enter dialogue with her using ideas that enter her frame of reference, her thought patterns, her concerns and questions.
- The understanding gap: How could she understand what he was talking about?
“If you knew the gift of God ...”
- The credibility gap: How could she possibly be expected to believe who he is? *“If you knew who is talking to you”!!!!*

John 4:16-25 The gift of His real concern about her life, His flexibility and His persistence:

- Asking to meet her husband!
- His willingness to enter her discomfort, to point to her need, to press into the turmoil and brokenness of her life.
- He doesn't insist on following His plan for the conversation! He lets her change the subject but remains focused on the end He is leading her towards.
- The persistence and clarity with which He moved to help her accept and believe
- Be clear about our ultimate aim so that we are relaxed about being diverted from our immediate agenda

John 4:26 The gift of His clarity:

- The Golden moment!
- Colossians 4:4 *That I may proclaim it clearly as I should*
- 2 Corinthians 4:2 *By setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God*

RIGHTLY HANDLING THE WORD OF TRUTH

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Paul's example: *And pray for us, too:*

- *that God may open a door for our message*
- *that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ*
- *that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. . . .*

Paul's instruction: *Let **your** conversation be:*

- *always full of grace,*
- *seasoned with salt,*
- *that you may know how to answer everyone.*

RIGHTLY HANDLING THE WORD OF TRUTH

“That you may know how to answer everyone”

- Doing the hard work to be able to answer people’s questions with the Word of God
- **2 Timothy 3:16-17** *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*
- **2 Timothy 2:15** *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

Why is it so important to become “a worker who correctly handles the Word of truth”?

The Power of God’s Word

- **Jesus** Himself describes His own commitment to speaking the Word of God
John 12:49-50 *For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.*

The parable of the sower: **Luke 8:11** *This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.*

- **Paul** describes his ministry among the Thessalonians
1 Thessalonians 2:13 *And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.*

His solemn exhortation to Timothy

- **Paul** exhorts Timothy to “preach” the Word
2 Timothy 4:1,2 *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.*

- **Peter** stresses that it is the seed of God's word that brings people to new birth
1 Peter 1:23-25 *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.*

How does one become "a worker who correctly handles the Word of truth" so that we know how to answer everyone?

- By getting to know the Bible:
 - o Reading the Bible
 - o Studying the Bible
 - o Memorizing important verses
- It means living the Bible:
 - o Meditating on it. (What did it mean to the original hearers and how does it speak to life today?)
 - o Applying the Bible to our lives 2 Timothy 3:10
- By avoiding arguments and being kind and patient as we share God's word
 - o People need to hear the Gospel but they also need to see it and experience it in the way we share it.
- By taking the risk and "sowing" the Word of God into the lives of people as we have opportunity.
 - o Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 *"Cast your bread upon the waters ... give portions ... sow your seed ... for you do not know which will prosper ..."*
 - o Colossians 4:2-6 *"Pray ... be wise ... make the most of every opportunity ... let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."*