

An Honest Portrayal of the Harvest Field

Part 1: Principles and Promises

Luke 6:10:1-9

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for May 1, 2022

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After years of teaching and equipping, Jesus now prepares some of His most faithful disciples to go out and preach the gospel to towns across Israel, proclaiming the coming of the Messiah and performing miracles in His name. But Jesus did not send them without a realistic expectation, a clear focus, and specific instructions for them to complete their mission. He offers the same principles and promises to us as we embark in the mission fields all around us today.

Near the end of World War II, a plane carrying 24 members of the U.S. military crashed into the dense New Guinea jungle. Only three survived and their condition deteriorated; they were soon suffering from gangrene and starvation. Here they were stranded deep in a jungle valley known for the cannibal tribes who lived there.

A daring rescue attempt was needed, and it did succeed.

The army tapped a special battalion of 66 men, trained as a parachute unit. Their battalion leader was told to recruit 10 volunteers from his unit, including two medics, to parachute into that dense jungle and guide the survivors out.

It was a dangerous assignment. When their lieutenant colonel stood before his men and told them what had happened, he informed them that he needed 10 volunteers to form a rescue squad. But then he gave them an honest portrayal of what they were going to encounter.

First, he said, the area they'd be jumping into was marked "unknown" on the map; it was uncharted territory. Secondly, he told them the jungle valley was so thick that it would be the worst possible drop zone; they might not get past the trees. Third, if they survived the jump, the tribes who lived in that valley could prove hostile and life-threatening.

When he finished, he paused and then asked for volunteers and all 66 men stepped forward.

Adapted from Mitchell Zuckoff, *Lost in Shangri-La* (Harper Perennial, 2012), p. 213

How's that for a recruiting strategy?

Life will be difficult, there won't be much rest along the way, and the natives will be hostile to your message; but there are people in that valley dying—they need rescuing.

This happens to be the training manual for 72 men who have just been appointed to risk their lives and their fortunes for the sake of the gospel.

But before they take off for the jungle out there, Jesus is going to give them, and us to this day, an honest portrayal of the mission.

If you take your Bibles and turn to Luke chapter 10, you'll find the training manual. In fact, the Lord's training session will take up nearly half of this chapter.

And as you turn there, let me tell you rather frankly, the church had better begin to recruit along these lines. The church needs to communicate an honest portrayal of what it means to live and serve Christ faithfully, even in the valley of death and danger and difficulty.

I'm afraid the recruiting strategy of the church today sounds more like entering a retirement village than joining a rescue mission.

The truth is, we're moving into areas today where the map is marked

“unknown.” This is uncharted territory. The drop zone where you're placed might be difficult and the villagers you encounter are growing more hostile to your message and even your presence.

What the Lord has to say in these next 20 verses is packed with truth for today.

This is an honest portrayal of the harvest field today.

Now there's too much in these 20 verses to cover in one sermon. I'm going to take us through this passage in two sermons.

Now verse 1:

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

Luke 10:1

If you're newer in the faith, you might not know that by the end of Jesus's ministry, He had at least 500 or more close followers, according to 1 Corinthians 15:6. The apostle Paul calls them brothers. Jesus appeared to these men after His resurrection. When the church was created in Jerusalem, we're told in Acts 1:15 that the apostles were working closely with 120 men.

Adapted from Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p. 267

We aren't given any biographies of these early pioneers who were the first to

parachute in, so to speak, on this rescue mission.

These 72 men here in Luke 10 remain anonymous to this day. We're never given their names. Here they are, about to be appointed by the Lord and sent out as official representatives of Christ, and yet their names aren't mentioned anywhere in the annals of church history.

Which is another way of saying, there are no big names here.

R. Kent Hughes, [Luke: Volume 1](#) (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 376

Just normal people. In fact, men with less than three years of training by the Lord. Where did they come from? Who were they?

One author suggested that among this number would be men who had been healed—blind men and lepers. These men would have had nowhere to go after being healed. They would not be allowed to reenter Jewish society or be employed. For many of them, their families had died or moved on; they had lost their contacts and their homes. Besides, they had been healed by a man the religious leaders are now openly oppose.

Ivor Powell, [Luke's Thrilling Gospel](#) (Kregel, 1965), 247

Jesus was not being followed by celebrities; He was being followed by servants. Volunteers who were willing to lay down their lives for their Commander and Chief.

You'll notice here in verse 1 that the Lord will send them out two by two. This not only provided encouragement through

companionship, but it also fulfilled the Old Testament's requirement that two witnesses were needed to provide valid testimony.

Mark Straus, [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1](#) (Zondervan, 2002), p. 411

The timeless principle that I want to draw from this verse—even though we have hinted at some already—is found in this word **appointed**. **The Lord appointed 72 others.**

Here's the principle:

God has appointed you for a place, and He's appointed that place for you.

Luke writes in verse 1:

*After this the Lord
appointed seventy-two
others and sent them on
ahead ...*

Luke 10:1a

The word **appointed** refers to someone appointed to an office.

Fritz Reinecker & Cleon Rogers, [Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament](#) (Regency, 1976), p. 169

Jesus wasn't just moving lives around; He wasn't throwing them to the wind; no, they were part of His divine plan and everywhere they canvassed was according to His divine appointment.

They were divinely appointed for that place and that place was divinely appointed for them.

This is true today, not just for them, but for you.

You're not just moving into some incidental neighborhood or workspace; you're not just getting out of bed in the morning and heading off to some random school or random job or random place to buy your groceries. You might be in a hospital bed or a board room, at the kitchen sink or in front of students.

You have been divinely appointed by God for every divine appointment in life.



Where has God placed you to minister?
Who has God placed in your life to minister to? What are some practical ways you can do that this week?

And the more you and I recognize that we're not just going through life in some random series of circumstances, or mundane events—that this isn't just our life, that this life has been appointed to us by God—the more we will understand that **life is not an accident, we happen to be on assignment.**

There's another principle that emerges here, here it is:

There's always more to do than you can accomplish.

Verse 2 is a very well-known verse where Jesus said to them:

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few."

Luke 10:2b

That's a nice way of saying, "Fellas, you're not going to be able to finish this job by yourselves. It's bigger than you are. In fact, you don't even know how big it will be—it happens to be global."

There's more to do than you can accomplish!

The potential will always be greater than the participants.

To put it in practical terminology, you will always need more volunteers!

I have yet to hear of a church role or a parachurch ministry role that has a waiting list for volunteers. Whether it's serving at a camp or in the choir, teaching 2-year-olds or coaching T-ball.

In fact, if you've begun serving in some ministry, it won't take long before you realize there's more to do than you can do. Evidently being out of breath is a part of serving the Lord; you can't begin to finish everything.

Does that mean you start praying for an easier role?

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13* (Victor Books, 1989), p. 111

No, but Jesus *does* say to start praying, and notice the prayer request in the last part of **verse 2:**

"Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to

send out laborers into his harvest.”

Luke 10:2c

Your number one prayer request is going to be for more laborers in the harvest field.

Which means everyone can be involved in the harvest field. You might not be able to go anywhere or give very much but this is for all of us; we can all pray, which happens to be priority number one.

And by the way, this prayer is encouraging to these 72 men and to us to this day. We're praying to the Lord of the harvest, which means He in charge of the entire operation.

As one author put it, "He's freeing these 72 men from the burden of being successful." We are simply to pray to the Lord of the harvest. What does that mean?

That means He's in charge of the harvest; He determines the timing of the harvest; He determines how big the harvest will be; He determines who is sent where; And He's the one who sends them; and He determines how much fruit there will be in the harvest.

Which means you don't need to stay awake at night worrying whether your efforts will be successful or not; God is ultimately in control of the harvest; all we must do is pray to Him to send them into the harvest field and in the meantime obey His call in our own lives.

As China Missionary leader Hudson Taylor used to say, "And when we obey God, the responsibility rests with Him."

Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission* (OMF International, 1986), p. 31

He is the Lord over this global harvest field, and we just get the privilege of being divinely appointed to it, even if we do get out of breath from time to time.

In this training session, before these 72 men hit the road, Jesus gives them an honest portrayal of the harvest field.

Here's another principle from their training manual:

Obedience to Christ will not automatically make your life comfortable.

He says here in verse 3:

“Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.”

Luke 10:3

Wait, what? Stop right there. Lord, would you repeat that instruction?

Strap on your parachute, I'm sending you down there where cannibals live.

Okay—I'm out.

Did you notice that Jesus did not say, "I'm sending you out as sheep"; that would be bad enough. Sheep don't hang around wolves either, but at least they can run.

No, Jesus says, “I’m sending you out and will be like little lambs surrounded by wolves. Little lambs can’t run very fast—if at all. They don’t stand a chance.

They’re dead meat—literally.



What are some of your expectations you had when you first became a Christian of how your life on earth would be? How have those expectations changed as you have matured as a Christian?

Jesus is warning these men of severe opposition, even persecution. In fact, signing up for this rescue mission was potentially signing their own death warrant.

That’s because lambs don’t last very long among wolves.

But the most important words Jesus wants them to hear are not necessarily the words **lambs** and **wolves**, although I’m sure they heard those words.

The most important words in this text are these four words, **“I am sending you as lambs among wolves.”**

I am sending you!

That’s another way of saying, “You’re will not be alone.”

You see, their defenselessness will remind them daily of their dependence. If they live or die, it will be by His appointment and only by His permission, because He sent them. And because He sent them, no one can stop them unless by His own divine appointment.

May I remind you that Jesus will eventually go before them and show them what it means to become a lamb surrounded by wolves; the Lamb of God who will be slaughtered—crucified—according to divine appointment.

But Jesus is giving these men an honest look at what it means to live for Him.

Obedience to Christ will not automatically make their lives comfortable.

You will face opposition. You’ll get into trouble when minding your own business and just doing a good job; sometimes you may get in trouble because people know you’re a Christian, because you won’t follow the crowd, because all you did was try to be helpful.

This truth reminded me of a pastor who tried to be helpful; I was sent this humorous news clip just this weekend from someone in our church family; the news item has the title, “Just Trying to Help.” A pastor was walking down the street when he noticed a small boy trying as hard as he could—standing on his tiptoes—to reach the doorbell at a house across the street. The pastor walked over and placing his hand kindly on the boy’s shoulder, leaned over and gave the doorbell a solid ring. He looked down and

smiled and said, “Now what, little man?” and the boy responded, “Now we run.”

How many of you played ring and run as a child? You need to be in church!

Here’s another principle as you keep an honest view of the ministry in mind:

The Lord is just as interested in developing your walk as He is in you delivering the word.

Notice the traveling instructions beginning here in verse 4:

“Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.”

Luke 10:4

The Lord’s comment here ***to greet no one on the road*** sounds to us like He’s telling them to never say hello to anyone. “Don’t smile at anybody, just keep your head down and your feet moving.”

It’s helpful to understand that the culture of greetings in the Lord’s day usually involved a meal; it could involve the giving and receiving of hospitality (meeting and conversing with a variety of individuals and extended family members); it could involve hours or even days of interaction (Judges 19). So what Jesus is saying here is for these men to not get caught up in the long, extended greetings of the day. They are certainly to be polite, but they are to press on!

Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2012), p. 262

And there is this element of urgency and dependence on the Lord. Notice again the specifics: *don’t carry your moneybag* (wallet), *your knapsack* (a suitcase), or an *extra pair of sandals*.

This wasn’t about not having enough time to pack; this wasn’t about trying to look poor and needy. In fact, this wasn’t just about delivering the gospel; this was about developing disciples. This was a developmental field trip where they would learn to trust the Lord for everything.

They weren’t to pack a toothbrush; they had no money for a room along the way, no food or water.

Listen, every meal would be an answer from God. Every cot to sleep on would be a minor miracle of God’s providential care.

They were to develop that sense of what Hudson Taylor called a God-consciousness. A conscious awareness that God was consciously aware of them.

Hudson Taylor, whom I mentioned earlier, served Christ in China for 50 years. On one occasion, he was visiting the states and was expected in New York to speak. He was taken to the train station by a local pastor, who planned to surprise Hudson with the train ticket he had purchased for him the day before. Once they arrived at the train station, he casually asked Hudson if he had purchased his ticket yet and Hudson calmly said he didn’t have the money to purchase it. With that the pastor produced his ticket and gave it to Hudson but said, “If I had not purchased this

ticket yesterday, you wouldn't have made it to New York, *but you still came to the train station*—that's amazing faith on your part . . . **how did you know what would happen?**" Hudson said, "I didn't know . . . but my Father knew."

Taylor, p. 452

You see, when you're serving the Lord, it's easy to become more interested in what God is doing through you than what God is doing for you, and then miss what He does.

Those moments when you say, "Wow, my Father knew." What a wonderful promise.

And for these men, something of what God was going to do did indeed involve a place to stay—**notice verse 5:**

"Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!'"

Luke 10:5

This word *eirēnē* for peace reflects the Hebrew concept of shalom. It's more than just saying, "Peace to you," it's more like a benediction than a greeting. You're saying to that household, "May God be with you."

Bock, p. 997

Now verse 6:

"And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you."

Luke 10:6

In other words, some will believe the message of peace, and some won't; some will receive your benediction and share it with you and others will refuse it in the end.

Now there's another principle I want to draw out here from the next verse that says a lot about our attitude toward people, here's the principle:

Don't forget that people you encounter are to be served, not used.

Verse 7:

And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house.

Luke 10:7

Now it doesn't seem like these disciples would remain in one village for very long. For one thing, they could easily wear out their welcome.

Benjamin Franklin wrote rather realistically—and humorously—on the subject of hospitality when he wrote—evidently from experience— "After three days, fish and house-guests begin to stink," then he added, "sometimes it doesn't take three days."

David Walls & Max Anders, [Holman New Testament Commentary: I & II Peter, I, II, III John, Jude](#) (Holman, 1999), p. 248

Jesus instructs them here not to go find a nicer house if you get a better offer; don't

move up the ladder, so to speak, as you stay in this village.

This principle also helped the disciples avoid another problem: where people in the village might begin to compete for their attention. After all, they will be healing and performing other miracles.

Barton, p. 270

This would put their home on the map, so to speak. And then again, other people could feel left out, that their home wasn't good enough.

So, you can see how this simple principle avoided so many problems; the wisdom of God was obvious: stay in the first house that offers you hospitality.

Make this one house your base of operation. So long as they invite you to stay on.

Here's another principle that follows:

Expect your personal comfort zone to be stretched in ways you *didn't* expect.

Notice verse 8:

"Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you."

Luke 10:8

Oh man, that's a tough verse to obey! Wherever you land, and whatever home offers you hospitality, eat whatever they're cooking. You can only pray they're using a menu from Cracker Barrel.

Mashed potatoes, grilled chicken tenderloins, green beans—which is the only vegetable worth eating—apple cobbler and ice cream, take me to that home!

But what if you get there and they're cooking liver and onions and lima beans? ***Eat what is set before you.***

That redefines persecution!

I mentioned some time ago that little poem our missionary mother taught us four boys as we traveled to the homes of our supporters, this verse must've been where she got it from, you remember, it went like this:

Where He leads me, I will follow,

What He feeds me I will swallow.

That'll work on the mission field, and it'll work in your own dining room with your own kids.

Look, here's the point: there are a lot of people who think serving the Lord will be an extension of life as they know it, they'll do what they want, enjoy what they want, eat what they want—no, no; expect to have your comfort zone stretched to new limits.



What is a comfort zone you have been holding onto in your life? Are you willing to let go of that comfort today if God asks you to? Why does God ask us to stretch our comfort zones when we serve Him?

Now some New Testament scholars see in this text the implication of eating unclean or non-kosher Gentile foods, we can't be sure from this text.

But by the time you reach **Acts chapter 10**, Jews and Gentiles will be free to eat from the same menu.

There's one more principle that I want to highlight, principle number 7:

Make sure you reflect any praise and glory back to God.

Now verse 9:

"Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"

Luke 10:9

This phrase uses the perfect tense, indicating a lasting effect. In other words, these miracles indicate that the King is near while the fullness of the kingdom is still future.

Swindoll, p. 263

Isaiah the prophet had declared that the healing of the sick was a sign of the dawning of the kingdom of God.

Straus, p. 412

It's near! We're representatives of the king of that coming kingdom.

And you can just imagine the excitement in these villages over these disciples, these miracle workers. The blind can see, the lame can walk; people with cancer cured; the disabled, cured; the paralyzed up and walking without pain, and on and on and on.

The village leaders would want to meet them; the crowds would want to honor them; invitations for housing and meals would follow.

So, notice carefully what the 72 are to say while they are healing: **"The kingdom is near!"**

In other words, this isn't about us, this is about the kingdom of God. This is about the fact that the King is near. This is the power of the King. This is a taste of His kingdom.

The King is near; it's all about the King.

Any and all accolades are to be deflected and then reflected back to God.

For to Him alone belongs the glory, honor, and praise.

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