

# The Harvest and the Harvesters<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—MARCH 15

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** John 1:40–46; John 4:28–30; Luke 24:47–53; Acts 1:6–8; Matthew 9:36–38; Luke 15.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘When you bear a lot of fruit, it brings glory [praise] to my Father. It shows that you are my disciples’ ” (John 15:8, NIV).

**IN MANY WAYS THIS WEEK'S STUDY IS THE SECOND PART OF LAST WEEK'S LESSON.** Last week we discussed how Christ trained spiritual leaders for preaching the kingdom of God. This week we will discuss why the principles (important rules) and methods that Jesus used must remain the same for the Christian's preparation today.

In other words, theories (unproved ideas) about modern leadership training must never replace the foundation that Christ Himself laid. This is because whenever overexcitement takes the place of spiritual growth, the results are shallow (not deep) in spiritual life. Additionally, whenever winning souls is done for the sake of numbers instead of for truly changed lives and spiritual growth, then the mission (work for God) fails. Training leaders to put on a grand show instead of preparing them for spiritual warfare is inviting trouble. True evangelism<sup>2</sup> and disciple-making are based on (1) an understanding of our sinfulness, (2) true and heartfelt sorrow for sin, (3) our full spiritual surrender, and (4) the great desire to spread God's message to others.

1. harvesters—people who gather harvests or crops.

2. evangelism—the spreading of the gospel.

**SUNDAY—MARCH 16****BEGGARS' BREAD (John 1:40–46)**

Before He left the earth to go to heaven, Christ was concerned about His disciples. He had selflessly served them and deeply loved them. They would not be left and forgotten. Jesus Himself had to return to heaven. But the Holy Spirit was commanded to give the disciples the spiritual closeness that they had enjoyed in Jesus' presence.

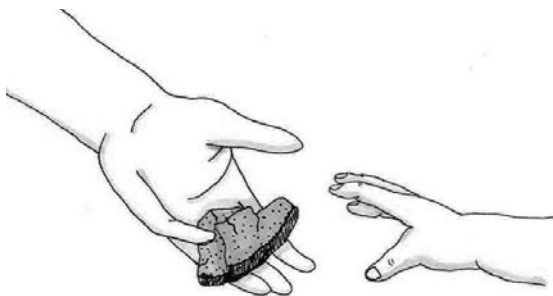
Christ's teaching about the Spirit's work was so valuable that John devotes several chapters to it. One important part was the Spirit's testimony (witness) about Christ. With the Spirit's leading, Christ's disciples would testify (witness) to the world about Jesus' ministry (work). God could have commanded angels to preach the gospel without help from humans. But God chose sinful, erring (mistake making), humans for this holy duty.

**Read John 1:40–46; John 4:28–30; John 15:26, 27; and John 19:35, 36. What do these verses teach us about the ways that humans and God work together in winning souls?**

Evangelism has often been described as “beggars telling other beggars where to find bread.” Andrew certainly did well here. The writings of his brother Peter were one day to be included in the Bible. And Peter's ministry (work done for God) was recorded in Acts. Christ even included Peter

among his three closest fellow workers. It is also true that those honors never went to Andrew. But Andrew received special recognition because he followed Christ's simple instruction to lead people to Jesus.

How many of God's chosen servants, leaders in evangelism, administration, and leadership have been introduced to Christ by faithful disciples who have long been forgotten? These disciples were not famous themselves. But think how crippled God's work might have been if these not-so-famous disciples had not faithfully witnessed about Jesus. After all, Christ prepared His disciples for more important work by first offering them simple duties that they could do. The Samaritan woman (John 4), Philip, and Andrew, for example, show the power of simple testimonies and heartfelt invitations. We all are called to do the same.



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**MONDAY—MARCH 17****WHEN JESUS ENCOURAGED PATIENCE (Luke 24:47–53)**

**Read Luke 24:47–53; Acts 1:6–8; and Acts 16:6–10. Why was wait-**

**ing for the Spirit necessary? What was the Spirit's work in the outreach plan of the early church? What encouragement might modern believers get from Paul's experience when facing frustration? What lessons about patience and God's timing can we find in these verses?**

Through lecture and example, Jesus taught His disciples patience. When on earth, Jesus struggled with prejudice,<sup>3</sup> misunderstanding, and attacks against Himself. But He continued His work patiently. Such patience came because Christ was fully dependent upon God's Spirit. Jesus understood that if His disciples did not have this patience and dependence, the gospel work would be in danger of failure. But if His disciples learned this lesson at the beginning, then their future ministry would be sure to have heavenly rewards. So, when He left the earth to go to heaven, Jesus' command was "Wait."

Christ desires that modern believers learn this lesson well. If overconfident Christians are unwilling to wait for the Spirit's leading, they can embarrass themselves and God's kingdom.

The apostle (teacher and leader) Paul made ambitious plans to enter Bithynia. But even headstrong (stubborn) Paul was sensitive to God's leading, and he accepted the Spirit's warning. Instead, the apostle willingly received the Spirit's command that

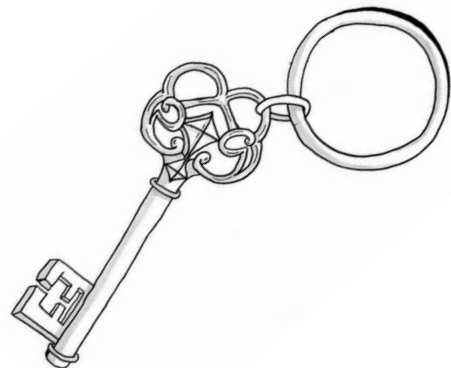
sent him to Macedonia. Many miracles followed his efforts there. If Paul had been too stubborn with his plans, then the European mission might have been put off for a long time.

**How can our anxious spirits be calmed so that we patiently wait for the Spirit's leading? What useful things should modern believers do while trying to develop such patience? What does patient, prayerful trust show about our relationship with God?**

## TUESDAY—MARCH 18

### USING AUTHORITY (Mark 6:7–13)

**Compare the following verses: Mark 6:7–13; Matthew 16:14–19; Matthew 18:17–20; Matthew 28:18–20; and John 20:21–23. What do these verses tell us about the kind of authority that Jesus' disciples had? What does this mean for us today?**



**“I will give to you the keys to the kingdom of heaven.”**

3. prejudice—hating a person because of his or her skin color, religion, or sex; not liking a person because he or she looks different or does things differently.

“Peter spoke the truth which is the foundation of the church’s faith. And Jesus now honored him as the representative of the whole body of believers. Jesus said, ‘I will give to you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. What you lock on earth will be locked in heaven. What you unlock on earth will be unlocked in heaven.’” (Matthew 16:19, NIV).

“‘The keys of the kingdom of heaven’ are the words of Christ. All the words of the Holy Bible are His and are here for us to learn. These words have power to open and to shut heaven. They announce the conditions [requirements] upon which men are received or rejected [refused]. So the work of those who preach God’s Word [the Bible] is a taste of life unto life or of death unto death. Theirs is a mission carrying eternal results.”  
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 413, 414.

As the Father commanded Jesus, so Christ commands His disciples. Through the Spirit, the Father filled Christ with His power. Through the Spirit, Jesus also fills His disciples with God’s power in an amount that is equal to their earthly duties. No follower should fear that Christ has not given them enough power. Every skill, talent, and strength necessary has been given.

Sometimes human leadership fails to recognize the principles involved. Whenever leaders give duties to others without giving them the power needed to get those tasks done, failure is to be expected. The disciple then fails to be a good worker.

Jesus’ example speaks with great power here. If anyone ever had the right to withhold authority and give commands, Christ certainly did. Instead, Jesus filled others with authority. He then commanded them to work outside of His presence. His influence was His instruction and the examples of His life. He taught His disciples in this way, and He sent them to minister (work for God) and witness.



The keys of the kingdom of heaven are the words of Christ.

### WEDNESDAY—MARCH 19

#### LABORERS FOR THE HARVEST (Matthew 9:36–38)

**What important message can we learn from Matthew 9:36–38 for ourselves today that will help with the task ahead of us?**

The spiritual harvest overflowed. But harvesters were few. Heart soil had been prepared. Spiritual seed had been planted. Proper care had encouraged unbelievable growth. And ripened souls awaited harvesting. But where were the harvesters? This was Jesus’ message. To communicate it, He used simple,

easily understood word-pictures to try to encourage those involved in His work.

Sometimes Christians hold their fellowship with other believers too dear, causing them to stick more closely together than they should. Then they blindly overlook worldly seekers who are ripened for harvest. Perhaps they do not realize their responsibility for dying souls, so they busy themselves with church duties, worldly responsibilities, church building improvements, and other worthwhile projects. Of course, these are good things. But evangelism is a necessity. Well-meaning members sometimes question the value of evangelism. Or they say, “Pastor, this evangelism stuff is all right, but do we not need programs for people who are already in church?”

This is a fair question. But a person must also ask, “When did Jesus ever complain about the shortage of grain keepers?” Instead, “give Me more harvesters” was His prayerful plea.

**How can we find the right balance between ministering to the needs of those in the church and accomplishing our outreach work?**



**The harvest is ready; who will harvest it?**

## THURSDAY—MARCH 20

### LOST AND FOUND (Luke 15)

Through teaching and personal example, Jesus taught His disciples to mix with sinners—even ones who were looked down on, such as prostitutes (people who use sex for pay) and tax collectors. How else would they disciple the whole world? Jesus’ teaching often focused on (paid attention to) these sinners. He thought of them as “lost.” This shows how merciful Christ was. He might have recognized them as “rebellious [fighting against authority]” (they certainly were) or “depraved [sinful].” Instead, He chose the word *lost*.

*Lost* does not carry the same negative meanings that are held in those other words. This is because we should not criticize fallen souls. Instead, we should follow Christ’s example and describe them as lost. *Lost* is a loving description. This is because this word puts the responsibility on the finders. Negative words drive lost people away. But gentle language suggests acceptance and an invitation for a friendly relationship. So, we must be careful about the language we speak. And we should be careful about the words we think. This is because our thoughts will greatly influence our attitudes (feelings) toward others.

Throughout the Gospels,<sup>4</sup> Jesus encourages believers to become finders. He wants us to love and to reach

4. Gospels—the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

out to the lost, no matter what they have done or what kind of lives they live.

“This is the service that God has chosen—‘To set free those who are held by chains without any reason. Untie the ropes that hold people as slaves. Set free those who are crushed. Break every evil chain. . . . Provide for the needs of your own family.’ Isaiah 58:6, 7 [NlrV]. We must see ourselves as sinners saved only by the love of our heavenly Father. When we do, we will have tender pity for others who are suffering in sin. We will no longer meet misery and repentance [turning to Christ] with jealousy and criticism. When the ice of selfishness is melted from our hearts, you will be in sympathy with God, and you will share His joy in the saving of the lost.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 210, 211.

**Study Luke 15. What important message comes through in all these parables?<sup>5</sup> What should this message say to us about what God thinks about the lost and what our responsibility to them is?**

### FRIDAY—MARCH 21

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Last Journey From Galilee,” pages 488–496, “Who Is the Greatest?” pages 436–440, in

*The Desire of Ages*; “The Training of the Twelve,” pages 17–24; “The Great Commission,” pages 25–34; “Pentecost,” pages 35–46; “The Gift of the Spirit,” pages 47–56, in *The Acts of the Apostles [Teachers and Leaders]*.

“The disciples felt their spiritual need and cried to the Lord for the holy blessing that was to make them ready for the work of soul saving. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves only. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world. And they claimed the power that Christ had promised.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 37.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What principles from Christ’s training methods should modern teachers of disciple-making use? Imagine what such training would look like in your church.
- ② In Thursday’s study, we looked at the question of language and how language is used. Think through the kind of words that we, as Seventh-day Adventists, often use. We might understand the words in a certain way. But think about how others who are not familiar with our words might understand those words. In

5. parables—very short stories that teach a lesson or truth.

what ways might we need to be more careful about how we choose words, especially with the people we are trying to reach?

③ Think more deeply about the example we studied earlier about “one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread” (read Sunday’s lesson). How does this so perfectly show what witnessing and outreach are all about? Why is it important that we not forget

that example and what it means?

④ What about your local church? Is it more focused on (aware of) itself and its own needs or on outreach? How can a focus on (an awareness of) outreach help the church? Or, to explain it another way, if your church were more focused on witnessing and outreach, might it be less concerned about its own needs? How might outreach itself solve those needs?