

# LifeGroup Study

Date: July 2, 2023

Text: Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8

Theme: Alignment...with the God of the Harvest

## Belong

- Have you ever "harvested" anything? Describe your experience!
- Discuss the process by which a seed is planted, grows, and is harvested.
- Share any stories you might have of gardening or farming.

## Believe

Read Matthew 9:35-10:8. This passage is the closing of a collection of miracle stories and discipleship sayings. Matthew uses the same phrase to introduce this section (4:23) as to close it (9:35), "Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness."

The crowds who follow Jesus are harassed (weary, troubled, bewildered, despondent) and helpless (scattered, prostrate, thrown to the ground). Matthew compares them to sheep without a shepherd. This is a significant simile because Israel had been compared to sheep without a shepherd several times in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 34:5-6, 1 Kings 22:17). The religious leaders were supposed to be the shepherds of the people but they were failing. They had no compassion on the people (see the "woes" in chapter 23).

Jesus however does have compassion...a word that means "to be moved in the inward parts." It is this same compassion that drives him to heal and feed the crowds (14:14) and the blind (20:34). Jesus is the Good Shepherd for all people.

- Are we, as the church, shepherding lost and broken people with compassion or are they merely a bother to us?

Matthew then shifts the metaphor from sheep and shepherds to crops and harvesters. The crowds are likened to an abundant and ripe field ready for harvest; however, there are not enough field hands to bring in the harvest. For a farmer this would be a great tragedy. How much more for the Lord of the Harvest?

The disciples are commanded to pray that God would send out laborers into "his" harvest. The verb translated "send out" is a strong term, meaning to "thrust forth." In this context it speaks of a strong push to get workers into the field. These laborers must warn people of coming judgment and call them to repentance (from *The Life Application Commentary*).

Watch what you pray for because God just might use you to be the answer! That's what happens in 10:1ff. Jesus calls twelve out of

the many who were following him. This number twelve connects Jesus' saving work to God's work in the past...as does the fact that Jesus sends the twelve out only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Matthew calls these disciples "apostles" ...the only time this word appears in any of the Gospels. While a disciple is a learner, an apostle is one who is sent out under the authority of another... though the term can simply mean "one who is sent." Jesus outlines the work of these apostles...the very same work he himself had been about:

- Proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven has come near (is at hand).
- Cure the sick
- Raise the dead
- Cleanse the lepers
- Cast out demons

- How is our mission similar to the mission that Jesus began?
- How does God prepare the hearts of people for harvest? What does that process look like?
- What does it mean that we are sent out with the power and authority of Jesus?

## Become

Evangelism is God's work accomplished through our willing hearts and lives. God prepares people and is in charge of helping people grow and bear fruit.

Our task is to:

- Live a life yielded to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit so that we have a witness to share. Without this we lack both the passion and the content for our witness.
- Listen for the Spirit's prompting (call) to be sent out in daily life.
- Tell others what we've experienced (not preach doctrine or try to get people to come to church).
- Stay in relationship with people God longs to draw near...because evangelism is most often a relational process and not an event.
- Let God handle the rest.

**Prayer...** Father God, give us willing hearts and lives so that your work can be accomplished through us. Give us both passion and content for proclaiming your good news. Teach us how to listen for your prompting. Instruct us how to tell what we have experienced in Jesus' name. Amen.

# Devotionals: Daily Walk on the Rock

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## Day 1: Monday—The Sower Needs Good Seed

Jesus, in our Matthew 9 text, sends his 1st Century disciples (and us) out into the world to preach the good news of the kingdom and minister to those in need. Jesus refers to those who are sent as workers in his harvest field. Jesus, in Luke 8:11, describes the seed to be planted; Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, explains how laborers work together in the field. The Romans 5:1-8 text takes us deep into kingdom truths. As you read the Luke, 1 Corinthians, and Romans texts, ask yourself, "What is the seed to be planted; what is the good news of the kingdom?" Consider memorizing Romans 5:8. Enumerate and then thank God for each of the gifts mentioned in Romans 5:1-8.

## Day 2: Tuesday—Amazing Gifts: Amazing Grace

Read Romans 5:1-8. To help understand the "therefore" (5:1), look back and read 3:21-26 and 4:3-8,23-25. Jesus is the bridge over the chasm that sin creates between sinful people and God, who is holy and just. Jesus paid the price for our redemption; there is nothing we can add to what he has done (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). The relationship with God, broken by sin, is restored; we are justified and reconciled. Even faith is a gift (Hebrews 12:2a). As you read Romans 8:24-25; 15:13; Ephesians 1:7-8; 2:8-9,14a; Colossians 1:19-20; and Titus 3:4-7, pray the Scriptures will give substance to your understanding of the amazing gifts of peace, hope, and grace. Worship God!

## Day 3: Wednesday—Rejoice in the Hope of Glory and in Suffering

It's easy to "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2), but how do we respond to Paul's next words in Romans 5:3-5. Paul writes to Christians in Rome; the reality is that life in Jesus is glorious, but it is also difficult. Jesus said this would be so, and Paul has lived it. Read John 12:24-26; 16:33; 17:13-19; Philip-pians 1:12-14,18-21; 2:17-18; 4:4; and Hebrews 12:1-3. Romans 5:5b tells us how we can rejoice in suffering; God pours love and God's Spirit into our hearts and lives. Consider that our joy in the midst of tribulation is a witness to the world the truth of the gos-pel. Nehemiah said, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (8:10). Pray it will be so in you.

## Day 4: Thursday—Teaching, Preaching, Healing

In Romans 5, we heard the good news that we can have peace with God through Jesus Christ. In our Matthew text, we see Jesus

teaching (instructing), preaching (proclaiming), and healing, and then sending his disciples out to do the same. As you read Matthew 9:35-10:8, notice Jesus' compassion. What grieved Jesus' heart as he observed the people? Consider that the miracles, evidences of Jesus' compassion, also point to something beyond themselves (*for insight, see John 2:11; 6:10-13,26-35; 11:1-6,14-15,25-26,40-44*). Sometimes the people longed for Jesus' gifts/miracles, but they didn't want to receive Jesus, the ultimate GIFT. Pray you will desire Jesus above all else.

## Day 5: Friday—Sent with Authority

As you read Matthew 9:35-10:8, notice Jesus' authority and then how he gives authority to his disciples. The men are named (10:2-4); each is important (*also see Revelation 21:14*). These were com-mon men, yet Jesus gave them authority, power, and much respon-sibility (Matthew 10:7-8; 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2:1ff). The miracles they were to do in Jesus' name would authenticate the message they preached; their compassion would help people understand God's heart (*see also Matthew 5:16,43-48*). We also are blessed so that we may bless others. Pray about your call.

## Day 6: Saturday—Aligned with Jesus' Call

Read Matthew 9:35-10:8. Why do you think the disciples were sent first to the "lost sheep of Israel" (10:6)? What observations did Jesus share about the people of Israel (9:36)? Do you recall Jesus demonstrating care for those who were not Jewish (Luke 7:1-10; John 4:7-15)? Read Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; and Romans 1:16-17. We, too, are called and sent. Do you testify with your words and witness with your life to family, neighbors, and cowork-ers? Have you shared Jesus beyond your "Jerusalem and Judea" (Acts 1:8)? Pray the Spirit will lead you.

## Day 7: Sunday—"Freely You Have Re-ceived, Freely Give"

God is an extravagant giver; we cannot out-give God! Ponder this as you read Matthew 10:7-8; Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 9:12-15; and James 1:17-18. Now recall Peter's denial of Jesus (John 18:15-18,25-27) and Jesus' restoration of Peter (*read John 21:15-19*). In response to Jesus' questions, Peter affirms his love for Je-sus. But note how Jesus tells him he is to demonstrate this love! Peter's outreach to others will authenticate the love he professes. Ask yourself if your words and actions align with your profession of faith and love and with Jesus' call for you to bless others. Pray that you will give with the same love and abandon with which Jesus has given to you.