

Get ready for the harvest

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In June 2004 God elbowed me into attending a course for eight days called “Acts 29” by R. Bruce Carlton. It was on planting house churches. It changed the landscape of my heart. It sharpened my mind and my senses to ‘the harvest’ – which is all around us. As I began that course I had a deep, deep sense that this was a pivotal moment in my life. I wrote in my journal, ‘This is the first day of the rest of my life.’ When I finished the course I knew that I had to make ‘equipping the saints to bring in the harvest’ my primary focus.

A few months ago I was reading again John 4, the story of the woman at the well. Years ago I had met Jesus through this story. But this time I saw, as never before, (funny that!) that it was about a harvest in Samaria. After the woman had run back to the village, Jesus talked with his disciples about the food that sustains him.

“My food is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life.....I sent you to reap what you have not worked for....” V 34-38

The harvest Jesus saw was the townspeople streaming out to hear his words. They would shortly become believers. Jesus was already ‘feasting’ on this harvest, and was urging his disciples to see it right in front of them. This grabbed me deeply. There is a harvest all around us. Jesus is saying to us also, ‘Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. I send you to reap what you have not worked for....’ These words came so strongly to me. They felt so urgent, that I am convinced that we, his people, must be ready for a harvest.

Matt.9:35-38 has always motivated me because this plea comes out of Jesus’ earnest compassion for the people. He sees their need, he feels deep compassion, and he requests serious prayer. He has strong feelings, and he uses strong words. His word for prayer is to plead or beg.

“Plead with the Lord of the Harvest to send - to thrust out - workers into his harvest field.”

Most people I’ve talked to about reaching unbelievers have said they are sowing, but not doing much reaping. They admit they can’t quite believe they will reap. What would happen if we really *expected* to reap a harvest, in our street, in our home, this year? What if we were *ready* to reap a harvest in our area? Our prayers would change, our lifestyle would change. We would have our ears and eyes open for the slightest opportunity.

Out of these experiences, and the many books on evangelism I devoured at that time I am anticipating the joy of reaping. Are you? The key that I found in doing the training was simplicity. One or two people, using the principles of Scripture, and faith in what God is doing, can reap a harvest and make disciples, which is the core of what we are to do.

Psalm 126:5-6 – tells us “Those that sow in tears, will reap with songs of joy.” Do you ever ‘sow in tears?’ Has your heart been broken over those who do not know the joy in Jesus you do?

4 reasons to pray for our neighbours

For most of us, our lives are very full. Jobs, family, relatives, friends, colleagues, church responsibilities, home maintenance, training, hobbies, gardens, sports and recreation fill our days.

But where we live is part of God’s plan. Even if you did not ask the Lord for his direction when you chose to live there, God intends for you to be a doorkeeper to his presence and his power in the street

and neighbourhood where you live. Everywhere we, his people are, is both a sacred place and a mission centre.

Secondly, we are assigned to be priests for every area of our influence. “*For you are a kingdom of priests...*” (1 Peter 2:9) The responsibility of a priest is to take the needs of others into the holy place before God and speak to him on their behalf. We delight in being free to come to him for ourselves, but that is only part of what ‘priesthood’ means. We need to take upon ourselves the names of people whom God has given us influence with or responsibility for, and bring them regularly to God’s throne. We are priests for our street and our workplace. Will you ask the Lord to put on you a priestly prayer garment? When you enjoy his presence, will you remember to take others with you into that holy place and present their needs before God?

Thirdly, God wants all to be saved, to come to know him and enjoy his favour. We have no idea who will receive him or who will reject him. So we cannot be selective about who we should share his love with. Everyone deserves an opportunity to know him. His Shepherd heart aches for all who are lost.

Look at Luke 15 – the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son. Why did Jesus tell these three stories? What are the common elements in these stories? The longing of the one who searches. The joy when they find.

SELAH! Think about your nearest neighbours just now for one minute.... Picture their home, their faces.... and say to yourself, “God wants _____ to come to know him. The Lord is searching for _____ because he/she is so valuable to him.”

As you see your work colleague or your neighbour or their house let this thought run through your mind, “God wants you to come to know him. Jesus died so you can enjoy the favour of God.” I guarantee your heart will begin to ache with his concern and you will find yourself open to the voice of the Spirit prompting you as to what you can say and do about it. This is how truth changes us inwardly.

Fourthly, in your street there are people hungry to know God. Not sure about this one? Don’t you think that in 100 people there would be two or three (or more?) who are seeking God, or curious about him? Around 33 houses have, on average, 100 people in them. What if you walked up and down your street, or your part of it, and counted out 30 or so houses? Then you said to yourself, “In this area there are some people hungry to know God – and God is longing to meet them – and I can help them meet him.” Try it – and I will guarantee that your heart will become hungry to find who they are. Then you’ll begin to wonder how you can connect them to the Father who seeks them.

What will it take?

1. *Conviction about the commission.* Jesus commanded his disciples, “Go into all the world and make disciples.” (Matt.28:19) As we go about our daily lives, into our world, making disciples should be our aim. Being convinced about the commission means we will be asking the Lord “Who, where, how can I be doing this?”
2. *Compassion for the lost.* It was the compassion of Jesus for the people who were ‘like sheep without a shepherd’ (Matt.9:36-37) that moved him to plead with the disciples “therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the Harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.” We will need his eyes, his compassion, his longings.
3. *Confidence in the Word.* Jesus talked about the Word of God as a seed that falls on soil. This picture is so helpful for us. As we share the Word in some form with those around us, it has its own life and power to open their eyes and lead them to Jesus. Our words can be empty. The Scriptures are full of the life of God – they are living and active and able to produce spiritual change. We need to be convinced of this.

4. *Cultivating an openness to the Spirit.* Methods of prayer or witnessing have a limited value. The ways that God uses to bring people to himself go beyond any programme or method. The Spirit knows all things, and can lead and direct us in our desire to lead others to the Lord. We cannot do this spiritual work without his leading, prompting, wisdom and insight. It is vital we cultivate an ability to hear Him.
5. *Continuing in prayer.* It is easy to be enthusiastic in prayer for a time, and then lose our steam. A commitment to continue in prayer, even if we take a break now and then, is vital. No prayer is wasted, as we plead the promises and declare his purposes. Combining worship and prayer will give us staying power.
6. *Changing the spiritual climate.* We are often very aware of the works of darkness or the ways of the world influencing our area. We need to be convinced that as we pray and praise, the spiritual climate will change. We have the ability to do that, as we call down the rule of God. We are the lightening rods, the sweet fragrance of Jesus, gardeners... whatever picture you like to use. Our work of prayer and our celebration of his presence can wonderfully change the climate to one of openness to God.
7. *Changing anything to be available to God.* There will be a cost to being used by God in this way. We will need to create time and find energy for more prayer and more availability to our neighbours. We may need to change our budget so we can buy resources for seekers and new believers. Our heart needs to say "Whatever it takes God... I am ready."

Get ready for the harvest that is all around you. May the Lord of the Harvest be delighted by our willingness and our faith.

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