

The Fields Are Ripe for the Harvest

Leader's Bible Study Guide

John 4:35

Sponsored by Lutheran Hour Ministries and based on the
2003 International Convention Theme: "The Fields Are Ripe for the Harvest"



Lutheran Hour
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An Introduction to Our Lessons

For nearly two decades the United States existed in a world of unprecedented peace. The nightmare of the Vietnam war had ended. The Berlin Wall had been torn down, ending the tension between the East and the West that was so aptly described as the cold war.

That peace has been shattered. First came the tragic events of September 11, 2001, with the destruction of the World Trade Towers, part of the Pentagon, and the plane that crashed over Pennsylvania. But that was only the beginning. Next there were the anthrax scares. We went to war against the Taliban in Afghanistan in an attempt to search out and destroy Osama bin Laden, the ringleader of terrorism. Then there was the Beltway Sniper in the Washington D. C. area. Violence continues in the Middle East with Palestinian suicide bombers and retaliation by the Israelis.

One thing has not changed. The fields are still ripe for the harvest.

The question becomes, “How do we do ministry in a world that is frequently punctuated by violent acts?” In part, the answer is that we must always be aware of the world in which we live. Evil and the results of evil surround us. One of the results of evil is violence. Violent acts affect us, but we cannot let them have a negative effect on us. The main thing to remember is that we cannot ignore them or pretend they never happened. Sometimes we need to get involved with the consequences of evil and not sit by as spectators. Permit me to illustrate:

“In the strait between the upper and lower peninsulas of Michigan, an ore boat was struck in a collision and sank. Several years later, a salvage vessel was sent to raise this sunken ship. The salvage steamer had a huge prow and forward structure, and after a diver had gone down and fastened cables under the sunken ship, water was pumped into prow of the salvage vessel until it was brought down almost to the level of the water.

“The cables binding it to the sunken ship were made very tight. Then the water in the salvage ship’s hull was slowly pumped so that her buoyancy lifted the sunken ship and made it possible for the salvage boat to steam a few hundred yards toward shore until her load struck bottom again. This process was repeated time after time until finally the sunken ship was so near the top of the water that air chambers could be floated alongside to hold it up and float it away. Slowly, not all at once, but relentlessly involving itself, this salvage vessel carried through its rescue operations. At no less cost than allowing itself to be buried repeatedly in water over its sunken hull could the salvage ship lift its prize to the surface.”

—Douglas V. Steere, *Dimensions of Prayer* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997), 6.

In a similar way, Jesus made it possible for souls to be harvested. He became like us in all respects apart from sin. He lived a perfect life for us under the law, something we could not do. Then He died for us to pay for the evil we are and do. But He didn’t stay dead. He rose again to life to assure us of our forgiveness and the promise of a life that would last forever. In other words, He got involved with this world. He didn’t sit idly by saying that there was nothing that He could do. He took action. Now He expects us to take action as laborers in fields that are ripe for the harvest.

The lessons in this study are designed to help move Christians to active work in the ripening fields. The themes are:

LESSON	TITLE
Lesson One.....	Whose Harvest Is It?
Lesson Two.....	The Good Old Days Are Now
Lesson Three.....	Sowing the Seed
Lesson Four.....	A Matter of Urgency
Lesson Five.....	The Big Picture
Lesson Six.....	Change Is Inevitable
Lesson Seven.....	The Field Is All Around Us
Lesson Eight.....	Ministry Is an Action Word
Lesson Nine.....	Nurture in the Harvest
Lesson Ten.....	Christianity Is Not a Spectator Sport
Lesson Eleven.....	Praying for the Harvest
Lesson Twelve.....	Paying for the Harvest

As always, these lessons come to you in two packets. One is the Student Bible Study Guide, and the other is the Leader's Bible Study Guide. They are designed to be covered in approximately one hour. However, the degree of discussion may shorten or lengthen that time.

This study has been designed for use in small groups and led by someone from within the group. Spiritual growth and increased knowledge will take place through discussion and Bible study. The leader may be the same person throughout the study, or the leadership role may be shared within the group. Whoever the leader is, it is important that the leader be an attentive listener and ensure that all participants have an opportunity to contribute.

We encourage the leader to consider the following before leading the session:

- DO pick the lesson most appropriate for your particular situation.
- DO NOT assume that you need to go through the lessons in any particular order.
- DO assign the lesson in advance. Participants will be better served if they are prepared
- DO print out the Scriptural references. Doing so will save time.
- DO NOT force anyone to read out loud. Ask for volunteers.
- PLEASE DO NOT merely read the material word for word. These lessons are intended to guide your discussions.
- If your group is pressed for time, PLEASE DO GIVE OUT the Leader's Guide. By doing this you will facilitate discussion more quickly.

Although each lesson has a different theme, they all share a common format. They are: Opening and Introduction; Bible base and discussion; Challenge; Closing Thoughts and Prayer.

Lesson One: Whose Harvest Is It?

The ancient Greek mathematician and philosopher, Thales, gave some of the most significant advice ever uttered. He said simply, “Know yourself.” That advice may be simple, but it is profound. We live in a culture greatly influenced by what is known as postmodernism. Simply defined, postmodernism tells us that there are no absolutes in life. Anything goes. People forget who they are and what their role in life is. Worse, they forget that all that they have and all that they are comes to them as a gift from God. That means that the harvest is God’s as well.

PRAY: Dear Lord Jesus, You are the Lord of the harvest. Send us Your Holy Spirit to guide us in this study. Use that same Holy Spirit to empower and equip us to be willing workers in the harvest. Remind us always that we are workers in the harvest. The harvest is Yours. Our congregation is Yours. We are Yours. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: A few years ago, on a routine visit to a Soviet collective farm, a Russian commissar demanded of one of the laborers in the fields: “How was the crop this year?”

The laborer responded, “Oh, we had a fantastic harvest—many, many potatoes. So many potatoes, in fact, that if you piled them up to the sky, they would reach the foot of God!”

The commissar scolded, “There is no God.”

The laborer retorted, “There aren’t any potatoes either.”

—As told by Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, *Imprimus 20* (December, 1991), 1.

If there is no God, there is never a harvest. Since we see harvests every fall, the logical conclusion is that there must be a God. As workers in the harvest, part of our task is to reveal to other people who God is and what He has done for them.

BIBLE BASE: Please read Luke 12:13-21.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. Why did the man ask Jesus to order his brother to divide the inheritance?

First, he wasn’t paying attention to what Jesus was saying. Second, his personal affairs were more important than spiritual affairs. Third, he felt he was being manipulated by his brother who was older, who would have received two thirds of the inheritance, and who may have had to liquidate property to divide the inheritance.

2. Did Jesus know Himself?

Of course He did. He knew He was a Judge, because all authority had been given to Him. He also knew that His place to judge was not in civil disputes but in the spiritual realm.

3. What did Jesus identify as the source of the problem?

He said to beware of greed. Remind the participants that covetousness is not merely to want something. Rather, it is to want something so badly that one will stop at nothing to get it.

4. Note how many times the rich man uses the terms I and my in the parable.

Verse 17, three times. Verse 18, five times. Verse 19, two times.

5. To whom did the rich man think the harvest belonged?

He thought the harvest belonged to him alone. For him, there was no God. There was no gratitude. In fact, he acts as if the abundance of the harvest was somewhat of a bother.

6. Is being rich sinful?

Of course not, riches are a gift of God. Riches, or money, are morally neutral. Riches become sinful when we believe we have earned them entirely on our own or that we somehow deserve them. There are many examples of rich people in the Bible. A few examples are Abraham, Job, David, and Solomon. Participants may have other examples.

7. Whose harvest was it?

Obviously, the harvest belonged God. He is the creator and preserver of this world. All that we are and all that we have come to us as gifts from God. The rich man placed all of his planning on the here and now. His emphasis was on physical well being and pleasure alone. There was no place for God in his life.

8. Why did God require his soul?

God required his soul, because God demands the souls of the unjust and unbelieving. The souls of the righteous are already committed to God.

9. To whom would the inheritance belong?

No doubt the heirs would quarrel about it. Remember that this parable was told in response to a man's request for Jesus to order his brother to divide the inheritance. Participants may have examples of families that have quarreled over estates. They may also have some examples of families that handled the estates very amicably.

10. What does it mean to be rich towards God?

First, remember that there is nothing wrong with wealth. Being rich toward God involves the spiritual aspect of our lives. It involves faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. It leads to pardon, peace, and joy, things for which there can be no price tags.

CHALLENGE: Participants discuss ways that they can become richer toward God and how they can help others become rich toward God.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: Sixties British rock star Cliff Richard, once called the bad boy of pop and too sexy for television, became a devout believer and disciple of Jesus. Back in the '70s, he visited missionary outposts in the Sudan and refugee camps in Bangladesh as part of a mission trip for Tear Fund.

In *Which One's Cliff?*, his book about his conversion to Christianity, he tells how the first morning, "I must have washed my hands a dozen times. Whenever we stopped, I made a beeline for the communal tap or the well. I didn't want to touch anything, least of all the people. Everyone in those camps, even the babies, was covered in sores and scabs.

I was bending down to one little mite, mainly for the photographer's benefit, and trying hard not to have too close a contact, when someone accidentally stood on the child's fingers. He screamed out, and as a reflex I grabbed hold of him, forgetting all about his dirt and his sores. I remember now that warm little body clinging to me and the crying instantly stopped. In that moment, I knew I had an enormous amount to learn about practical Christian loving, but at least I started."

—Cliff Richard, *Which One's Cliff?* (Bath: Chivers Press, 1986), 178-179.

It is God's harvest, because He loves the unlovable. As workers in the harvest, we also must learn to love the unlovable.

CLOSING PRAYER: Father in heaven, we thank You for loving us. Help us to love others as You have loved us. Give us willing and faithful hearts as we work in Your harvest. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Lesson Two: The Good Old Days Are Now

You have often heard people reminisce about the good old days. They refer to simpler times when the streets were safe, and you didn't have to lock your house at night. They refer to the days before traffic jams, forced bussing, inflation, and when a person's word was their bond. There is some attraction to those simpler times. However, the good old days are now. We live in a complicated world, but it has its advantages. We live in the days of joint replacements, laser eye surgery, high speed dental drills, computers, the Internet, and microwave ovens. Communication is incredible. Information transfer is lightning fast.

PRAY: Dear Lord, help us to see the good in the modern conveniences we have. Help us to see them as gifts that have come from You. Help us to use all the modern methods of communication to proclaim the Gospel to every corner of the world. Send us Your Holy Spirit to embolden us to step out into the world as Your ambassadors. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: The spirit of swaggering independence that America has long prided itself on is belied by our everyday existence in the postmodern age. Interdependence, not independence, is what now defines our lives and lifestyles.

Catholic theologian Lawrence S. Cunningham illustrates our dependence on each other from his own experience: "I sit at my word processor (assembled here in the USA with chips made in Japan) in a pair of Levis sewn in Mexico while wearing a British brand of sneakers (Reeboks) which, a discreet tag inside informs, were manufactured in South Korea. For lunch, I will eat a salad made from vegetables grown in South Florida which were harvested by a vast army of contract workers who are Hispanic or contract workers from the Caribbean. The ordinary circumstances of my not uncomfortable life, in short, are dependent on a large number of people who are alien to me in culture, language, and economic status."

—*Catholic Prayer* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 152-153.

Independence is a myth often perpetuated. Our dependence is our lifeline to survival, especially our dependence on God for all things spiritual and physical.

BIBLE BASE: Please read Matthew 13:1-9; 36-43.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. The sower in this parable did not have modern farm machinery. What kind of equipment did he use? Plows were pulled by teams of oxen. Often, the plows were made of wood, but sometimes of iron. After the land was plowed, a type of wooden harrow was pulled over the ground to provide receptive places for the seed. There were no furrows. Seed was scattered by the broadcast method. Remember, the land is extremely rocky.

2. Why did some of the seed fall on the road?

There were no fences. The paths or roads were the boundaries of the fields.

It would be impossible for seed on the road to germinate, because the soil was firmly packed.

It is natural for the birds to eat it.

3. What was so bad about the rocky places?

Some of the large rocks in Palestine lie just below the surface. The soil is warmer there, so the seed would germinate there more quickly. However, because the rocks are so close to the surface, there is no place for the tap root to go to get moisture. Thus the plant does not survive.

4. Why do the thorns grow so quickly?

Because the tilling process is so primitive, the roots of the thorns and thistles are not killed. The thistles have a head start. They grow quickly and crowd out other plant life.

5. How can a single seed yield up to 30, 60, or 100 times as much?

Wheat or barley, the likely seed sown here, produce multiple stems. Each stem has a separate head on it. Thus, the yields Jesus mentions here are more than attainable.

6. Jesus interprets the parable. How does it apply to the church today?

The road represents people who hear the Word, but Satan snatches it out of their hearts. The rocky soil represents those who receive the Word with great joy. Great things are expected from them. Something goes wrong. Their hearts are crowded. There is no substance. The thorns and thistles represent those who hear the Word, but the world is too attractive and more important. The good ground represents those who mature in their faith and reproduce by making more disciples.

7. Why are the good old days now?

We have technology as a tool. Just as modern farmers have modern farm equipment, the Gospel can be proclaimed through, radio, television, the Internet, and e-mail. Think of what the Apostle Paul could have done if he had all these advantages.

8. What is the key to Gospel proclamation?

It is the audience. Jesus said, "He who has ears, let him hear." Notice all the times He talks about the audience hearing the message. Therefore the message must be proclaimed effectively so that people hear.

THE CHALLENGE: Participants are to discuss ways that they can be more effective in proclaiming the Gospel personally through modern communication techniques.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: One of the best ways to begin formulating your personal mission statement is to ask yourself some questions such as:

1. What do I believe?
2. What have I done uncommonly well?
3. What is my passion?
4. What needs exist in the world that I would like to meet?
5. What are the "should haves" that have trailed me through the first half of the game that I really care about?
6. How could my story and God's larger story connect?
7. In what type of activity or work do I feel most comfortable?

—Bob Buford, *Game Plan* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 105.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, help us to open up our eyes to see the opportunities You present us to proclaim the Gospel creatively. Then open up our hearts to embrace those opportunities and take advantage of them. We pray in Your most holy name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Lesson Three: Sowing the Seed

Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (John 12:24).” His point was simply this: for seed to grow, it must be sown. It will never grow if it is stored in the bin. It has to die to germinate. Out of that death comes abundant life.

PRAY: Almighty God and Father, You created the world by the power of Your Word. You are the source of all growth. Send us Your Holy Spirit as we study the Word so that we will grow spiritually. Then empower us to sow that Word so that it will reach the hearts of others so that Your kingdom of grace will continue to grow. Help us to be a blessing to others. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: After the Malden Mills factory in Lowell, Massachusetts, burned down during the 1995 Christmas season, owner Aaron Feuerstein continued to pay workers’ salaries and benefits until a new plant was built. In the new factory, worker productivity reportedly improved by 25 percent and quality defects have dropped by two-thirds. Although some of the gains are attributable to newer equipment, Feuerstein believes it’s a direct result of the good will of our people. San Francisco’s Thanksgiving Coffee Company invests a share of its revenues in community development among the Central American villages that grow its beans, ensuring loyal suppliers and reasonable prices during times of small harvests.

—Bennett Daviss, *Profits from Principle*, *The Futurist*, March 1999, 30.

The owners of these two companies have discovered the benefits of sowing the seeds of good will. They are reaping an abundant harvest. Congregations often say they are interested in evangelism, i.e. sowing the seed. A good way to tell how interested they really are is to look at their budget for evangelism. It has often been observed that congregations spend less than one percent of their total budget for evangelism. Members don’t realize that they are not as interested in sowing the seed as they say they are.

BIBLE BASE: Please read Mark 4:26-34.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion; fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. What is the Kingdom of God?

The Kingdom of God is His rule of grace on earth as it is administered through Jesus Christ. It can also be defined as the visible church. In the visible church there are flaws. Believers and hypocrites exist side by side. Hypocrites are non-believers who pretend to be Christians. Remember, Jesus said that this is what the visible church is like. Originally, at creation, it was perfect.

2. Who is the one who sows the seed in the parable?

The one who sows the seed is Jesus Himself. Remember, this is a parable (an earthly story with a heavenly or spiritual meaning). Because it is a parable, Jesus is reducing the mysteries of God into simple terms we human beings can understand.

3. Why does Jesus say that the soil produces the crop by itself?

The seed that is sown is the Word of God. The sower goes to bed night by night with absolute trust that the seed will grow. This shows Jesus’ absolute trust in the Word. The Word is always excellent. It will always grow. Today, the Word needs no assistance in growing from people. The role of people is simply to sow the seed. The Word will take care of itself, because it is from God.

4. How are we to understand the harvest?

Every individual believer is involved in this parable. The harvest comes at the end of the believer's life. According to God's inscrutable wisdom, He knows when every believer, by faith, has overcome the cares and lusts of the world and has the peace that cannot be understood. Then the sickle is commissioned. It is time for that believer to be called to heaven. That is why there is no such thing as an untimely death for a believer. God calls believers home at exactly the right time.

5. In the next parable, what is the mustard seed? Here also the mustard seed is the Word of God.

Please note that Jesus did not say that the mustard seed is the smallest seed in the world. That contradicts science. The mustard seed was the smallest of the seeds that his audience used to plant in their gardens. Mustard seeds were harvested and used as condiments for food much in the same way it is today. His audience was aware of the growth of the mustard seed.

6. How are we to understand the phenomenal growth of the mustard seed?

The growth is the growth of the visible church. It started with one seed, Jesus. He was sown into the ground literally at His death and resurrection. From almost insignificant beginnings, the visible church is world wide.

7. What are the birds of the air?

They are hypocrites, non-believers, who have attached themselves to the visible church. They have their own reasons and seek their own benefits. They find shelter and safety in the visible church. Don't try to identify them. Often, they are such good actors that they appear to be better than weak believers.

8. Why did Jesus use so many parables?

Unbelief does not understand parables. Parables do stick in people's minds. In the future they could be understood after people come to faith in Jesus.

CHALLENGE: Participants are to identify ways that they can become personally involved with sowing the seed.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: David Watson was one of the most effective Christian leaders in Great Britain. He served as pastor in a local church and lead many evangelistic and spiritual life missions throughout England and around the world. He became the instrument for leading many to faith in Christ and for leading Christians to deeper growth in the Lord.

Watson developed cancer and died in 1984, still in his early 50's and in many ways at the peak of his ministry. When the announcement of his death appeared in the newspapers, it ended with the phrase, "The Lord Reigns." Watson wanted to make it clear that his death was no frivolous accident that caught God by surprise. God was still reigning even on the occasion of his death.

—Thomas D. Lea, *Homiletics*, 1998.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord of the harvest, use us in Your church to sow the seed of the Word over and over again so that it will grow in the hearts of others. When the time comes for us to be harvested, call us out of the kingdom of Your grace into the kingdom of glory where we will reign with You for all eternity. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Lesson Four: A Matter of Urgency

Jesus was a great believer in deadlines. In fact, He imposed them upon Himself. He gave Himself three years to save the world from evil, certainly not a great deal of time to accomplish so lofty a goal. Because He never procrastinated, He marched single-mindedly to the cross, never wavering in His journey. He did it for the joy that was set before Him, the joy that He derived from knowing all the names of people that were written in the book of life. He expects us to work in the harvest with the same sense of urgency that He demonstrated.

PRAY: Dear Lord Jesus, give us a spirit of urgency as we work for You in the fields that are ripe for harvest. Send us Your Holy Spirit to give us the courage to speak Your Word boldly to all those whom we encounter. Use that same Spirit to help us become examples of efficient Gospel proclaimers. Keep us from putting that proclamation off until tomorrow, for we know that tomorrow may not come. In Your Name we pray, Lord Jesus. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: Belai Hossain, 17, suffers from nerve damage, an occasional effect of arsenic. His gait is crooked, and his arms are bowed like a set of parentheses. His mother died [two months earlier], and now he himself wonders what hard days lie ahead in his remnant life.

He listened as his father described her death. “Her fingers began festering, and she had them removed,” said Maqbal Hossain, “then she got this cough. There was a burning sensation all over her body, especially the elbow joints. The sores never went away. These hurt her terribly.” There is no treatment for the poisoning. Doctors say, however, that if a person stops drinking the arsenic at an early enough stage, physical decay can be arrested.

“We know what causes the damage, and we know what to do about it: provide safe water,” said Dr. [Allan] Smith the epidemiologist, “We just need to do it.”

—Barry Bearak, *Death by Arsenic: A Special Report; New Bangladesh Disaster: Wells That Pump Poison*, *The New York Times*, November 10, 1998, A1.

There are no shortage of proposals to solve the problem in Bangladesh. However, most of the solutions, even the simplest, have failed. Some of the solutions are even more dangerous than the arsenic. So people continue to suffer and die.

BIBLE BASE: Please read Luke 10:1-11; 17-20.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion; fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. Why did Jesus send out the Seventy Disciples to the cities and towns where He was headed?
Jesus was going into new territory. He was on His final journey to Jerusalem, a journey that would take Him east of the Jordan River. The thirty-five pairs of workers were to announce to the people that Jesus was on the way to visit them. Jesus had a sense of urgency, because He knew the deadline was fast approaching.
2. Why did Jesus tell the seventy not to pack a bag or greet people on the way? Jesus was instilling a sense of urgency in them. They needed no baggage, because Jesus would take care of them. They were not to waste time in idle talk with others on the way. They were to announce that Jesus was coming and nothing else.

3. Why did Jesus instruct them to stay in the house that invited them and eat what was set before them? Jesus was sending them into an area of mixed population. The food set before them may not always be kosher. This was not to be an obstacle to them. By going from house to house, they would appear to be looking for better accommodations. That would give offence. Jesus could not tolerate that.
4. What was the task of the seventy on their journey? Jesus gave them His divine authority to perform miracles. They were to heal the sick and to tell people that the Kingdom of God had come near to them. That is only a summary of the Gospel they were to proclaim. The miracles got the attention of people. Once they had their attention, the seventy could tell the people where they derived their authority.
5. Jesus gave instructions about what to do if they were rejected. Why did He do that? It was possible that whole towns would reject the message. They were not to waste time there. Hence the symbolic shaking of the dust off their shoes. It was a testimony that the Gospel had come right to their doorway, but that the message had been rejected.
6. What was the attitude of the seventy when they returned? First, it appears that they were not gone long. Second, there is no note of failure or discouragement. Third, they were impressed at what had been accomplished through them.
7. Jesus said that He had seen Satan fall from heaven. Why? Satan had been stripped of his power. He could not do as he chose any more. His defeat took place at the beginning of Jesus' ministry when He was tempted for forty days. Because Jesus did not succumb, Satan was limited in what he could do.
8. Why did Jesus tell them not to rejoice that Satan obeyed them? It was dangerous to rejoice over power over Satan. That could lead to pride and pride can lead to the false notion that they could somehow merit their salvation.
9. What did Jesus tell them to rejoice about? He told them to rejoice that their names were written in the Book of Life in heaven. That means that they had been justified by God's grace and accepted as His children. They were God's elect.

CHALLENGE: Participants are to place an empty chair in their group to be occupied by its next member. Discuss who that member might be and strategies to fill that chair.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: "The greatest mission field we face is not in some faraway land. The strange and foreign culture most American evangelicals fear is not across the ocean. It's barely across the street. The culture most lost to the Gospel is our own—our children and neighbors. It's a culture that can't say two sentences without referencing a TV show or a pop song, and that can't remember what it was like to have to GET UP and change channels. It's a culture more likely to have a body part pierced than it is to know why Sarah laughed. It's a culture that we stopped evangelizing, and have instead declared a culture war upon."

—Dwight Ozard in *Prism* (July/August 1996), quoted in *Christianity Today*, March 2, 1998, 62.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord of the harvest, we ask You to send workers into the harvest. Send us, O Lord. We know we are surrounded by opportunities to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus. Send us Your Holy Spirit to give us the words and the courage to proclaim that message. Help us in our group to invite more people to share our next Bible Study with us. All these things we ask in the Name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lesson Five: The Big Picture

One difficulty that seems common to many congregations is people who major in the minors. That is, often, people get so bogged down in the details of the tasks that need to be done that the big picture is lost. It happens when congregational leaders, at a strategic planning meeting, spend time talking about how often they need the cleaning service to come in. That is majoring in the minors. The most important task for leaders in congregations is to see the big picture and to keep the congregation headed in the direction where its planning has aimed it.

PRAY: Almighty God, Everlasting Father, at the creation of this world You showed You had a plan for Your creation. When evil came into the world, You had a plan to deliver Your human creatures from that evil. You sent Your Son. He saw the big picture. It was the cross. Through the cross, He delivered us from evil. Help us to follow Your example and keep the big picture in mind for us, our congregation, and the lost. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room.

“What’s the rumpus about?” he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity’s unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.” After some discussion, the conferees had to agree. The notion of God’s love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eight-fold-path, the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Jewish covenant, and the Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God’s love unconditional.

—Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 45.

BIBLE BASE: Please read Matthew 3:1-12.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion; fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. Who was John the Baptist?

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus. His father, Zacharias, was a priest. John could have followed his father’s footsteps into the priesthood, but God had other plans. He called John as a prophet. The scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees never questioned the authority of John’s Baptism.

2. What does it mean to repent?

To repent literally means to turn around and go the opposite direction. When it comes to the repentance of sin, it means to turn away from the sin you are doing it, stop doing it, and turn to God for forgiveness.

3. Why did John tell people to repent?

He told them to repent, because the Kingdom of God was near. That Kingdom is God’s rule of grace here on earth that He administers through Jesus Christ. We are partakers of God’s Kingdom. The Old Testament Kingdom looked forward to Christ’s first coming. The New Testament Kingdom looks back to Christ’s first coming and forward to Christ’s second coming in glory.

4. Matthew quotes Isaiah the prophet.

Why? John the Baptist was the only prophet who was predicted by other Old Testament prophets. John's ministry is predicted by Isaiah. By quoting Isaiah, Matthew also underscores the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. Isaiah's prophecy was not a wild guess. The information was given to him by the Holy Spirit. Thus the prophecy had to come true.

5. Why is John's appearance and manner described?

His appearance was a sermon itself for those who made personal comfort most important in life. His appearance was similar to Elijah who was prophesied to return (Malachi 4:5). In fact, Jesus calls John the second Elijah (Matthew 11:13 & 14).

6. Why does John refer to the Pharisees and Sadducees as a brood of vipers?

He calls them a brood of vipers, because they had not repented, yet they still wanted to be baptized. The reference to the viper goes back to the original sin when Eve was tempted by the serpent. They probably stood aloof from the rest of the people because they thought they were better.

7. What does John mean when he talks about the axe at the root of the trees?

He's talking about the big picture. This is a reference to the second coming of Jesus in judgment. John's prophecy is compressed. John didn't have the luxury of the perspective of time. It appeared to him that the second coming would be immediately after the first coming.

8. What did John mean when he said that the one coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit?

John was talking about the Pentecost event. John's baptism was not devoid of the Spirit, but there was little Spirit activity before the redemptive event. Pentecost was the final mark of the redemptive activity of Jesus.

9. What is a winnowing fork?

A winnowing fork is used in the threshing process. After the straw has been trampled by the oxen, the fork is used to toss the straw in the air. The chaff will blow away and the grain will drop to the threshing floor. This is a reference to the final judgment.

CHALLENGE: Participants are to discuss ways that they can avoid majoring in the minors. Challenge them to start another small group in the congregation to help establish the big picture.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: Symptoms of a bureaucratic congregation:

1. Decisions are invisible—nobody knows where they are taken.
2. Too many tasks are started and not enough finished.
3. Nothing can be done without checking with a host of other people
4. There is nothing really creative taking place—bureaucracies polish, not invent.
5. Small problems are seen as major hurdles.
6. There is tension between leadership and followership.
7. Deadlines become more important than quality.
8. The congregation is reactive rather than proactive.

—John Finney, *Church on the Move: Leadership for Mission* (London: Daybreak, 1992), 108-109.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, You have the big picture. While You rarely used the term grace, You spoke of it often in parables about a Samaritan who showed grace and about a father who showed grace to his Prodigal Son. Help us to see the big picture of Your plan of salvation by grace through faith in You. Then use us to proclaim that message. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

Lesson Six: Change is Inevitable

To state that change is inevitable is to state the obvious. Air travel today is much more cumbersome than it was before September 11, 2001. You know that if you have ever been searched before boarding an airplane. We cannot escape change. The fact that we are one day older today than we were yesterday is evidence of change. Surprisingly, however, some people don't like change and refuse to accept change. Realistically, there is only one thing that does not change. God does not change, nor does His love for us.

PRAY: O God, who never changes, help us to accept the change that is constantly occurring all around us. Then change our hearts by the power of Your Holy Spirit. We know that the Gospel changes hearts. Use that Gospel to give us a burning desire to proclaim it to others so that they will know of Your love and forgiveness. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: Change has, of course, always been what we choose to make it, good or bad, trivial or crucial. Take, for instance, the one word "change" and consider how we use it. How many other words are asked to do so many things?

Change is part of life (a noun universal). There is a change in the arrangements (a noun particular). Please count your change (a noun metaphorical). Please change this wheel (a verb transitive). I will not change (a verb intransitive). Where do I change trains (a verb metaphorical)? She is a clever change agent (an adjective).

Where the same word is used to describe the trivial (a change of clothes) and the profound (a change of life), how can we easily distinguish whether it is heralding something important or not? When the same word can mean "progress" and "inconsistency," how should we know which is which?
—Charles Handy, *The Age of Unreason*, (Harvard Business School Press, 1990), 7.

That said, the only question that remains about change is, "How are we going to handle it?"

BIBLE BASE: Please read Acts 14:8-18.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. What changed while Paul was in Lystra? The man who had never walked changed. First he had a change of heart. Paul saw that he had the faith to be healed. Whether Paul saw something in his mannerism or he said something, it is impossible to tell. Nevertheless, Paul saw the change. Then the man's disability changed. For the first time in his life he was able to walk.
2. What did not change in Lystra? The hearts of the people who lived there did not change. They ascribed the miracle of healing to their own belief system. When people are convinced about what they believe, they don't want to change.
3. Why was Paul called Hermes? Hermes was the messenger and spokesman for the gods. Paul was the main preacher while on his missionary journeys. Therefore, it was natural for him to be so identified. Barnabas was thought to be Zeus who was the chief god. Greek legends held that Zeus and Hermes appeared bodily in nearby Phrygia (Ovid, *Metamorphose*, VIII, 626).

4. Why did Paul and Barnabas tear their robes?

It was a Jewish sign of grief. Actually it was the tunic that was torn. It was the article worn closest to the body, similar to a long T-shirt-like garment. Both hands were used to grip the neck line and the garment was ripped downward. The torn flap communicated the wearer's grief and shock.

5. Why was it so important to stop the people from sacrificing to Paul and Barnabas? If Paul and Barnabas had not stopped the sacrifice, they would have accepted the credit for the miracle. They could not allow that to happen. They had to give the credit to Jesus. After all, that's why they were in Lystra in the first place, to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus.

6. How did Paul turn them away from their belief?

He drew a sharp contrast between false gods, and the Living God (Psalm 19:1). Worship of false gods never accomplishes its purpose. It is the Living God who is the creator and preserver of the world. Even nonbelievers understand that they receive benefits from God.

7. Is there other evidence besides creation that God exists?

Paul pointed out that God's existence could be deduced simply from the fact that He does not destroy nonbelievers. Paganism should never have come into existence. It is still God's intent for all people to change and to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:4).

8. How can we emulate Paul and Barnabas in 2003?

We can become change agents. This is done through the proclamation of the Gospel that changes the hearts of people.

CHALLENGE: Participants are to determine whether they like or dislike change. Identify things in your congregation that need change, and other things that are not important to change.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: In speaking at the 200th anniversary of a church, Frederick Buechner spoke of how the building had been remodeled over the years. One of these new additions was a steeple with a bell in it. In place and newly painted, something extraordinary happened in the history of that church. An agile Lyman Woodard stood on his head in the belfry with his feet toward heaven.

No one knows anything more about Lyman Woodard than that act. But that is all one needs to know. For in that one wild, crazy act, the whole mission of that church was dramatized: When Jesus Christ is really Lord, everything gets turned upside-down, goes topsy-turvy.

The early Christians walked on the wild side. They were known as those who turned the world upside-down.

—Frederick Buechner, *The Clown in the Belfry*, 115-116.

Whether we call it renewal, regeneration, change, transformation, revolution, renovation, or makeover, change is still change.

CLOSING PRAYER: Renew us, O eternal Light, and let my heart and soul be bright, illumined with the light of grace that issues from Your holy face. Make us more effective change agents in Your church through the proclamation of Your Gospel. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Lesson Seven: The Field Is All Around Us

Sometimes people can't see a forest, because their view is obstructed by all the trees in front of them. At other times people get stuck in a conceptual framework that leads them to believe that mission fields are somewhere out there, that is out of reach for them personally. Nothing could be further from the truth. The field is all around us. That is particularly true in this new century with modern methods of communication and transportation. Our conceptual framework needs to be updated. We need to see the panorama of the forest before we become concerned with individual trees.

PRAY: O Lord, open our eyes to see the vastness of the mission fields that lie at our feet. Send us Your Holy Spirit to open our hearts and give us a burning desire to reach the lost and the erring with the precious Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Remind us that we live in the midst of the field. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: Senior snowbirds who migrate south to McAllen, Texas to escape the cold northern winters have organized into gleaning crews. They clean up just-harvested fields of produce that would otherwise be left to rot.

Half of what they glean is shared with other seniors. The other half is donated to the poor, for more than one-third of the year-round residents in this rural area live in poverty. Thanks to the efforts of these senior gleaners, hundreds of tons of produce have been gathered and redistributed to those in need. One cannot help but be reminded of the hymn verse: "Let none hear you idly saying, 'There is nothing I can do,' while the souls of men are dying and the Master calls for you. Take the task He gives you gladly, let His work your pleasure be; answer quickly when He calleth, 'Here am I, send me, send me!'" The field is all around us.

BIBLE BASE: Please read John 4:5-42.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion; fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. What was unusual about the woman's arrival at the well?
First, she came alone. Women always went in groups to the community well which was often outside the village. Second, she came at noon. It was customary to do such a chore early in the morning or in the evening when the temperature was cooler. The conclusion is that she was an outcast.
2. Why did the woman treat Jesus and His request so rudely? There was real hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Samaritans were total foreigners. Prayers were said in synagogues asking God not to let them into heaven. They were cursed publicly and never accepted as proselytes (see 2 Kings 17:24-33 on the origin of the Samaritans and their religion).
3. The woman refused Jesus' request. What did Jesus offer in return? He offered her living water i.e., spiritual life. Jesus knew His request would be refused. He used the opportunity to provoke a discussion about life. He did not treat her as other Jews would have. He demonstrated that Gospel proclamation should never be selective.
4. Why did the woman want the living water? She wanted the living water because she wanted to forgo the embarrassment of going alone to draw water at noon. She was thinking only about herself and her physical needs.

5. When her personal life was exposed, what did she do?
She changed the subject, much as people do today when a sensitive area of their life is exposed. She wanted to talk about religion.
6. Why did Jesus tell her that she worshiped something she didn't know anything about?
The Samaritans had mixed the worship of the God of Israel with pagan worship (see again 2 Kings 17:24-33).
7. Why did Jesus tell her that salvation was from the Jews? Salvation is from the Jews, because they were God's chosen people. They were not chosen because they were special. They were chosen because God decided it would be through that race of people that He would send the Savior. In the Old Testament, the only way for Gentiles to be saved is to come into contact with Jewish believers (e.g. Naaman the Syrian general, 2 Kings 5:1-14).
8. What did the woman do after she came to faith in Jesus?
She proclaimed the Gospel to the entire village. This was a powerful demonstration for the Apostles because they would have had the same attitude about Samaritans as other Jews. Jesus was never selective in the proclamation of the Gospel.
9. Why did Jesus tell the Apostles to look at the fields, because they were ripe for harvest? Jesus knew that they could not see the forest for the trees. The harvest was all around them, but they had no idea. The Apostles needed to adopt the same attitude as Jesus had, namely that the Gospel must be proclaimed to all people no matter what their background or national origin.

CHALLENGE: Participants are to identify groups of people in their community to whom they had never proclaimed the Gospel. Identify strategies that would be effective in reaching those people.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: In Detroit, an urban mission called *Joy of Jesus* ran a very successful job-training program that specialized in placing welfare recipients who had multiple barriers to work—the hardest cases. The governor of Michigan, John Engler, was so impressed with the organization that he offered to fund it through a secular intermediary organization, with certain conditions: There could be no more morning prayers or intensive Bible study. The program soon fell apart. “After running four twelve-week training sessions under the new rules, we realized it just wasn't working without the Bible study,” Kevin Feldman, the director of development for *Joy of Jesus* said, “so we gave the money back.”

Was *Joy of Jesus* proselytizing, or was it simply sharing workplace wisdom culled from the world's most famous self-help manual? Is Tillie Burgin proselytizing when she asks people if they would like to join Bible study while she is offering to pay their bills? She claims not. “We don't jam our faith down anyone's throat,” she says. “If they don't want to do Bible study that's fine. We still love them.” —Joe Klein, *In God They Trust: Washington faces a new challenge: Should it let the churches take over the inner cities?* *The New Yorker*, June 16, 1997, 48.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, lead us to the lost and the erring who are right next to us in our neighborhoods, cities, and towns. Help us to follow Your example of proclaiming the Gospel to all people without being selective in that proclamation. Use us individually to bring people to You and to our congregation to nurture their souls. In Your Name we pray, O Lord. Amen.

Lesson Eight: Ministry Is an Action Word

“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he had immediately forgotten what kind of person he was (James 1:22-24).”

In other words, ministry is an action word. The word “minister” is a Latin word. It can be either a noun or a verb. As a noun, it means servant. As a verb, it means to serve. You cannot be involved in ministry and be idle.

PRAY: Dear Lord, You proved that You are a God of action when You became a human being to save us. You did for us that which we could not do. You took our sins upon Yourself in order to purchase our forgiveness. Use us as Your instruments to become involved in an active ministry to seek out the lost and erring to tell them what You have already done for them. In Your Name we pray, Lord Jesus. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: My uncle was the head of Parks and Recreation for one of the largest cities in the country. It's a demanding job managing thousands of employees. Several years ago, he asked the leaders of his local church how he could become more involved. They asked him to serve on the Pastor-Parish Relations committee, one of the most important tasks in any church. He also served on the building committee and even became a trustee. As he talked, I noticed that the church never seemed very interested in the job my uncle managed most every day of his life: A job, which often impacted several million people. My uncle was asking for a ministry, and the church put him on a committee.

What about you? God has called you for a ministry. Do you know what it is? How should the church help? Committee work is important, but there is so much more.

—Larry Davies, *The harvest is great: The workers few, Sowing Seeds Devotion*, March 22, 2001.

BIBLE BASE: Please read Matthew 25:31-46.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. Why does Jesus refer to Himself as the “Son of Man?” The term, Son of Man, always singular and never plural, refers to His human nature. It does not mean that He is descended from some man, but that He has the nature of man. He is the Word made flesh. The term was coined by Jesus Himself, and is derived from the usage in Daniel 7:13, 14.
2. Jesus talks about coming in glory. What does that mean?
When Jesus came for our redemption, He came in humility as a helpless baby. When He returns, He will have the glory that is rightfully His as the only begotten Son of God. That glory will be affirmed by the royal court of holy, powerful angels who will accompany Him. The righteous judge will pass out judgments from His royal throne. The whole world will be summoned to the trial.
3. It almost appears that Jesus is giving salvation as a result of what people did. Is that true? No. While it is true that the works are mentioned in the final judgment, their mention is not because they have earned any reward. Rather they are mentioned because they are the evidence in the trial. They are the evidence of the underlying faith of the person who is saved.

4. Who are the righteous?

The righteous are those who have God's verdict in their favor. The Judge has pronounced them free from guilt. Their righteousness is derived only from their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

5. Why didn't the righteous remember the deeds that Jesus ascribed to them? Their question shows how far from their minds was the concept of earning their salvation. The glory they received for doing what they thought was so little seemed impossible. They kept no record of their works, and trusted solely in God's grace for their salvation. Note how Christ the Judge is bringing out the truth.

6. Those on the left are cursed. Why? They are cursed because they did not have faith in Jesus. Therefore Jesus did not know them. Neither did He find the evidence of their faith in the deeds that they were supposed to have done.

7. The lost claimed they never had the opportunity to serve. What did that indicate? It indicated that they were blaming Jesus. The righteous aided each other for Jesus' sake. The lost denied both Jesus and His followers and acknowledged neither. While they were living they saw the righteous only as people whom they despised and even antagonized.

8. Is it possible to have faith and not do the good deeds about which Jesus spoke? No, it is not possible to have faith and not do good works. "Faith, if it has no works, is dead (James 2:17)." If you have faith, you cannot stop yourself from doing the things that Jesus wants you to do. That's why ministry is an action word.

CHALLENGE: Participants discuss what their faith in action looks like. Discuss ways to demonstrate faith more effectively.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: No matter where you go, people's needs are all the same. They all need the Gospel. Fraser Valley Baptist Church in Fraser, Colorado, found a marked niche for the Gospel when they established a ministry at a local laundromat. Fraser's population of only 500 people swells during the ski season. More than one million vacationers visit nearby Winter Park Ski Resort. Some 5000 service industry personnel are employed to handle the annual winter influx. Church people hand out coupons to seasonal workers. These coupons can be redeemed for a free wash, including laundry detergent on laundry night. FVBC typically spends about \$150.00—roughly ten per cent of their monthly budget—in one night of laundry ministry.

It's a win-win situation. Since Monday evenings are the local laundromat's slowest time, the ministry guarantees them a profit on an otherwise slow business day, and FVBC gets a chance to give practical help and build relationships with an itinerant population on neutral, non-threatening turf. When people ask, "Why are you doing this?" they are off and running with the Gospel.

—Connie Cavanaugh, *Believe it or not Churches, On Mission*, September-October, 1999, 13.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, help us to let our light shine so that other people may see who we are by what we do. Send us Your Holy Spirit to empower us and equip us to take the action that needs to be taken to do ministry. Give us insight to recognize the need for the Gospel that surrounds us. Move us to fill that need with proclamation. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

Lesson Nine: Nurture in the Harvest

In the King James Version of the Bible, Ephesians 6:4 is translated, "...bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The Greek word that is translated to the English word nurture is translated to the word discipline in most modern versions. In fact, discipline is a more accurate translation. What does discipline mean? It can mean punishment, but that is not the correct meaning in this context. It also means an orderly or prescribed conduct or pattern of behavior, i.e. self-control. It further means to train others in a way that self-control is learned. These are the definitions with which we will operate in this study.

PRAY: Lord of the Harvest, You discipline us to keep us in faith in You. Help us to be disciplined workers in Your harvest. Help us to go about our work in an orderly and prescribed manner that will make our efforts on Your behalf most effective. In so doing we will be Your willing instruments who bring more people into the harvest through Your Word. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: What is the Bible's ultimate purpose, to bring exhilaration and delight to you and me? No. It is to bring us back to God. The one who made us who wants us back in fellowship with Him. He has something in mind for us to do. The Bible is a love letter to the whole world, but it starts with the person who opens it and reads it. It is the message of a Father pleading with His children. It is not some strange vibration out of the cosmos, nor is it a mystical distillation from the zodiac. Its purport is, "Come home son. Come home daughter." And it ends with the promise of the Holy Spirit, that He will stay with us, will never decamp in rough terrain, and will bring us at our journey's end back to the loving Father who made us and the Jesus who saved us.

Here is where the joy enters: That welcoming party will be accompanied by a joy so exquisite in richness that nothing on earth or in heaven can compare with it.

—Sherwood E. Wirt, *Jesus, Man of Joy* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1999), 69.

BIBLE BASE: Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. This is another parable about the Kingdom of Heaven. What is that Kingdom?

The Kingdom of heaven is God's rule of grace here on earth as it is administered through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus begins the parable by saying that this is what the Kingdom has become like.

Before sin came into the world, the Kingdom was perfect. After sin, we see what the Kingdom, i.e. the visible church has become like.

2. What are tares?

A more modern name for tares is darnel. Darnel is a noxious weed not fit for human consumption. It is a grass-like weed that is virtually indistinguishable from wheat or barley in its early stage of growth. When it matures the difference can be readily seen.

3. The slaves recognize the darnel first. Why were they surprised? They were surprised because they assumed the owner had sown excellent seed. Because the enemy worked at night, his activity was undetected. There was no reason to expect that something was wrong.

4. Why did the land owner not let them pull out the darnel?

To pull out the darnel at this point would damage the whole harvest. The root systems of the weeds would have been intertwined with the grain. The slaves had an undisciplined approach to the problem. That's why they were slaves. The land owner was more disciplined. He had a plan. The slaves would work his plan.

5. What was the land owner's plan?

He would give special instructions to the reapers at the time of the harvest. The darnel would be most easily recognized then. So the reapers were to gather the darnel into bundles. Then they would be burned. By burning them the darnel would never have the chance to germinate and reproduce. The good grain would be threshed and stored in the barn.

6. How does Jesus interpret the parable?

He explained that the man who sowed the seed is the Son of Man (on Son of Man see lesson titled, *Ministry Is an Action Word*). He further explained that the enemy was the devil and the field is the world. The good seed are the sons of the Kingdom. That is significant, because sons are legal heirs entitled to an inheritance. The inheritance is eternal salvation. The bad seed are the sons of the evil one. They, too, will have an inheritance. Because of their rejection of God's grace they will be doomed eternally.

7. What is the harvest?

The harvest is the end of the world. Thus, the reapers are the angels who operate under God's instruction. The separation of the sons of the Kingdom and the sons of the evil one will not take place until the end of the world. Until then they will exist side by side.

8. What are the implications of coexistence with evil? Christians must be very disciplined with their dealings with the sons of the evil one. Evil affects all people, so we must be very careful when associating with evil. Another implication is that we don't have to look far to find someone who needs to hear the Gospel of Jesus. We are surrounded by them. We must also remember that we are not the reapers. We are the proclaimers.

CHALLENGE: Ask participants to develop an action plan to invite one unchurched family to worship or another congregational related activity in the next thirty days.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: The chairman and CEO of Home Depot is said to have told this story at a business conference: Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning the lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle: when the sun comes up, you better start running.

We all have a mission in life. Sometimes we don't realize that, and at other times we don't think we really have one. Richard Bach writes, "How can you tell if your mission on Earth is completed? If you are alive—it isn't."

CLOSING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help us to recognize the evil around us so we are not lured by its temptation. Help us to be disciplined in our approach to the proclamation of Your precious Gospel, for only in sharing it with others will Your harvest be maximized. Send us Your Holy Spirit to keep the light of faith kindled in our hearts burning brightly so that others will see that light and glorify You. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Lesson Ten: Christianity Is Not a Spectator Sport

There seem to be more and more news reports these days decrying the level of obesity in the United States, especially among children. Diet is blamed. The experts claim children are eating too much junk food and not enough fresh fruits and vegetables. However, there is another problem. Children spend too much time watching TV and playing video games instead of exercising. They have become couch potatoes. Christians can become couch potatoes too. It happens when they sit on the sidelines and watch, instead of exercising their faith. Worse yet, they criticize others for the way they exercise their faith in the congregation.

PRAY: Almighty Father, we thank You that You are a God of action. When sin came into this world, You did not sit idly by and do nothing. You developed a plan of action, and then You worked the plan by sending Your Son, Jesus, to suffer and die for our sins and rise again for our forgiveness. Send us Your Holy Spirit to inspire us to action. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: It's a story I hear every year, but not one I enjoy—men and women injured or killed in this dangerous occupation of farming, their crops left standing in the fields, neighbors and friends gathering to bring the harvest for the widows and children.... These farmers knew what they needed to do. No discussion was necessary. Moreover, there wasn't time for niceties. After all, their own fields needed attention, and when the crops are ready for harvest, the crops are ready for harvest.

My clue came from the men and women who stepped out of the grain trucks to hand the young widow and her children the receipts for the grain they'd taken to the storage elevators. Their affection for the widow was obvious, but not demonstrative. The grizzled and sunburned workers were clearly having a hard time looking into her eyes and accepting her gratitude. The mood seemed to be that no thanks were necessary. This was not, I sensed an obligation, or a gesture of sympathy, or pity, or even love. For the good people of this rural American countryside, the harvest of the widow's crops was as organic as a heartbeat, as much a part of life as breathing.

—CBS Reporter Robert Welsch, *Neighbor Harvest, Successful Farming Magazine*, September 1998.

BIBLE BASE: Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 5:13-20. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. What did Jesus mean when He called us the salt of the earth? All believers possess what Jesus bestowed on them in the Beatitudes (see Matthew 5:3-11). Faith makes salt. Salt has an effect on food, but it is not food itself. It adds flavor. The sinful world is seasoned by people of faith.

2. How does salt lose its tastefulness?

In nature salt doesn't lose its tastefulness. The very idea is ridiculous. Jesus uses this figure to make a point. Remember, salt is faith. The Christian, who loses his faith, and thus his wholesome effect on the world, is worse than the person who never had faith at all.

3. What does it mean to be the light of the world? Light is the antithesis of darkness. Christians are like little moons that reflect the light of the Son. The moon has no light in and of itself. Its light is derived from the sun. The moon can't help but shine. The same is true of Christians.

4. Jesus extends the figure of light to a city on a hill and a lamp. Do they mean the same things?
Yes, the figure of light is extended through these examples. He speaks of Christians corporately and individually. Christians as a body cannot be hidden. Nor can they be hidden individually. Jesus lighted us for a purpose, that is, to let our light of faith shine.

5. What are good works?

Good works are not merely nice deeds. Good works are generated by faith. Therefore, only Christians can do good works. Since good works are a display of faith, nonbelievers cannot do good works. The greatest good work is to tell others of the love of Jesus. Then they may come to faith. Through that newly generated faith they glorify God.

6. Why did Jesus say that He had not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets?

The Pharisee had corrupted the interpretation of the Bible. The Sadducees only accepted the first five books of the Bible. Jesus pointed out that the entire Old Testament was important. Therefore, don't add to it and don't subtract from it.

7. How does one set aside or annul the teachings of the Bible?

Please note that Jesus is talking to disciples here. Disciples or believers set aside the Word through ignorance, wrong interpretation, manipulation, selfishness, or ulterior motives. Thus those who are least in the Kingdom of God are those who set aside portions of the Bible. The greatest in the Kingdom of God are those who include the full counsel of the Word of God.

8. Why did Jesus tell the disciples their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees?

The scribes and the Pharisees cultivated a reputation of keeping the law scrupulously. However, theirs was a manufactured, outward righteousness. There was no inward righteousness. True righteousness is the righteousness of faith. It is possible for the disciples to surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees because disciples relied on Jesus to save them while the scribes and Pharisees relied on themselves.

CHALLENGE: Ask participants to discuss ways of letting their light of faith shine for the people with whom they work or recreate.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: In a devotional in *The Upper Room* (June 14, 1984), E. Paul Hovey tells of a little boy who regularly played near a mission compound and was befriended by the missionary. One day, the boy asked the missionary, "Do you recognize me?" Surprised, the missionary replied, "Why, yes, of course." The boy explained, "I've become a Christian, and I didn't know if you would know who I was." He expected that since he felt so changed within, his appearance must be transformed as well.

The Christian Gospel is an invitation with an R.S.V.P. at the bottom, states John Finney in *Christ on the Move: Leadership for Mission* (London: Daybreak, 1992), 35. Jesus always asks for a response. You've got to say yes. No one can say yes for you. Every invitation to God's party comes with an R.S.V.P.

CLOSING PRAYER: O Holy Spirit, You have called us by the Gospel and enlightened us with Your gifts. Keep us from being spectators. Inspire us and equip us to be active in the demonstration of our faith in Jesus so that the Father may be glorified. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Lesson Eleven: Praying for the Harvest

A commonly seen automobile bumper sticker states, “As long as there are tests, there will always be prayer in schools.” That statement is both accurate and axiomatic. It points out that when people are desperate, they turn to God. When a Christian’s life is going relatively well, prayer is less important than when things are not going quite so well. We take prayer for granted. Most of the time, we pray only for ourselves. Some of the time, we pray for friends and loved ones who are in need. Seldom do we pray for the harvest of souls.

PRAY: Lord of the harvest, open our eyes to see the magnitude of the harvest. We beg You to send workers into the harvest, not only professionally trained workers, but send us as well. Show us that we are the workers that You wish to send. Use us as Your instruments to proclaim Your Gospel into every corner of the world. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: In David Alec Wilson’s biography of Carlyle there is the story of old Scottish farmer David Hope. In Hope’s locality the harvests were late and often hard to save, when all day rains continued week after week, and gain or loss for the farmer depended on intervals of a day or two, ‘during which the moments are golden.’

On one such morning old David was in haste to be afield. The breakfast porridge was speedily dispatched. Then as the Bible was opened for family worship, somebody came in crying, “Such a raging wind has risen. Will drive the stooks into the sea if let alone!”

“Wind?” answered David. “Wind canna get at straw that has been appointed mine. Sit down, let us worship God.”

—Wilson, Carlyle (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1923-27) I, 34.

It is simply a matter of priorities. Jesus reminds us to seek Him and His Kingdom first and foremost. Then all the rest of our needs will be met.

BIBLE BASE: Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 9:35-10:8. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. Why was Jesus filled with compassion when He saw the multitudes?

The casual observer would never have seen what Jesus saw. When Matthew tells us that Jesus was filled with compassion, he means that Jesus was viscerally moved. Jesus’ compassion always moved Him to compassion. Jesus saw people who were spiritually helpless. Moreover, they had no one to care for them. Hence they were described as sheep without a shepherd.

2. What two great facts did Jesus point out to His disciples? The harvest was great. The workers were few. The harvest Jesus saw was all those in whom the work of God’s grace succeeds. The number of those who would be saved is large. God has put the harvest in Jesus’ hands. So far He had only the Twelve. He would need many, many more workers to gather in the harvest.

3. What did Jesus exhort the disciples to do? He exhorted them to pray. He wants them to join them in His concern for the harvest. He has already trained the Twelve sufficiently to work with Him, so now He exhorts them to pray about the harvest.

4. What should from Jesus' command to the disciples?

We should learn that we are to be involved in working with Jesus in the harvest. Our prayers will not save the harvest. The harvest will be done without our prayers. However, our prayers show that we are united with one mind with Jesus concerning the harvest. God uses our prayers in conjunction with His will because of His grace toward us. We pray. God responds.

5. How did Jesus involve the Twelve in the harvest?

Jesus gave the Twelve His own power and the authority to exercise it. They would have power over unclean spirits. In addition, He gave them power to heal people from all kinds of diseases and sicknesses. The bestowal of this power on the Twelve reveals His deity.

6. Why did Jesus name the Twelve Apostles? There is a difference between Apostles and disciples.

Everybody who believes in Jesus is a disciple, including us. Jesus selected twelve of those disciples and commissioned them as Apostles. They became His duly empowered representatives or ambassadors. They had an immediate call from Jesus, so the names were listed because their inspired record would constitute the doctrinal foundation of the church.

7. Why did Jesus tell them to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel? The house of Israel

constituted the sheep who ought to be part of the flock. They were perishing spiritually. The house of Israel is an Old Testament expression for God's Chosen People. After the resurrection, there would be time to expand the church to the Samaritans and the Gentiles.

8. Why did Jesus tell the Apostles to give freely? The Apostles were told to give freely, because they

received freely. The power to work miracles was already bestowed on the Twelve. They were not charged for it. It was a gift of God's grace. They were not to charge others in the exercise of that gift. This mandate applied to the entire ministry of the Apostles for the rest of their ministry.

CHALLENGE: Ask participants to make a list of harvest workers for whom to pray. The list may include missionaries, pastors, teachers, elders, deacons, or anyone else they know involved in ministry. Then encourage them to pray for them.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: There are some churches that attempt to shine a faint and fractured penlight of brightness out into the darkness by proclaiming, "We want to be your friend," or "We make friends," or "This is a warm, friendly fellowship." These congregations are often surprised when this faded message fails to attract others in out of the dark.

But it's that very message that is the problem. Friendship is not what people are looking for in a church; they're not looking for friendliness; they're not looking for friends. This culture would have the church adopt as its mission We Make You Happy. But the mission of the church is not to make people happy, or to help people feel good about themselves. It is to glorify God and be a director toward eternity.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, You have told us to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers into the harvest. We ask You this day to give us willing hearts to respond to the call that comes from You. Help us to respond as Isaiah did, "Hear am I Lord. Send me! Send me!" In Your Name we pray, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Lesson Twelve: Paying for the Harvest

Most people, upon seeing the title of this lesson, “Paying for the Harvest,” probably think that here is the place where the pitch for giving money to Lutheran Hour Ministry comes. If that’s what you think, then you will be disappointed—or relieved. God’s harvest is costly indeed, but He paid for it Himself with the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son. We become part of that harvest because of our faith in Jesus. That faith transforms us from being enemies of God to being His redeemed, restored, forgiven children. Now we are empowered by God’s love to respond to that love by loving others.

PRAY: Lord of the harvest, thank You for making us part of Your great harvest. We know that there is nothing that we can ever do to deserve to be part of Your harvest, because You have bought us with a price. We can only humble ourselves in gratitude, and ask You to make us Your instruments as laborers to proclaim the harvest good news to others. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: When the wheat harvest begins for Kansas farmers, custom harvesters have been cutting wheat for months. “You start in the south and work your way north,” Vernon Kuehn, custom cutter from Edgerton, Kansas, said. Kuehn has been involved with custom harvesting since 1938, when he and his father started cutting crops for hire. He now custom harvests for his hometown.

Kuehn said improvements have been made since he first started cutting. “Them old combine seats are real hard,” Kuehn said. When Kuehn started harvesting with his father, there were several hardships. Few hotels existed, and they were expensive. Spending the night in or under the grain truck was common, and horse trough or creek baths were not unusual. “Custom cutting can also be dangerous,” Kuehn said. “In western Kansas you’d have to watch out for prairie rattlers and be sure to carry your snake kit along,” said Kuehn.

—Lisa Wolters, *Custom harvesters provide alternative for farmers*, Kansas State Collegian, kstate-collegina.com.

BIBLE BASE: Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 28:1-10. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. Why did the angel roll the stone away from the tomb? The angel did not roll the stone away from the tomb to let Jesus out. When the angel opened the tomb, it was already empty. When Jesus rose, He had a glorified body. With such a body not limited by space or time, He could pass through the solid rock wall of the tomb. The empty tomb was proof of the resurrection.
2. Were there any witnesses to the resurrection? No, there were no human witnesses to the resurrection. However, there were many witnesses to the resurrected Christ.
3. Why were there guards at the tomb? The Jews placed a guard at the tomb, because they were afraid that the disciples would tamper with it. They never thought to guard the tomb against Jesus. No guard could stop the resurrection.

4. Why did the angel tell the women not to be afraid? Sinful human beings are always afraid when in the presence of holiness. The angels are holy messengers sent from God. They say only what God tells them to say. So the message telling the women not to be afraid came directly from God Himself. Moreover, once the women were told not to be afraid, their fear disappeared. Whenever God gives such a command, He always gives the ability to obey. Their fear had to be eliminated because fear gets in the way of believing.
5. Why did the angel invite the women to see where Jesus' body had been lying? It was important for the women to internalize that Jesus had truly risen. Once inside the tomb, the women saw what John described in chapter twenty of his Gospel, i.e. the linen wrappings undisturbed and still in the shape of a human body, although deflated, and the head cloth wrapped up by itself. This was the empirical data that proved that Jesus was alive.
6. How did the angel reinforce what the women had just seen? The angel told the women that Jesus was not there. While the women never told the angel whom they were seeking, the angel knew because God revealed to him what he would encounter. Furthermore, the angel stated quite clearly that Jesus had risen.
7. What did the women encounter after they left the tomb? They encountered Jesus Himself. His first words to them took the form of a greeting. He allowed them to touch Him so that they could determine without a doubt that He was really alive.
8. What instructions did Jesus give the women? He told them to tell His brethren to get ready to meet Him in Galilee. They were to communicate to the Apostles that He was alive.
9. Why is the resurrection so important to our faith? St. Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "...and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless...." The resurrection of Jesus is the receipt that God holds that proves that Jesus paid for the harvest with His blood. Without the resurrection the Christian faith is empty and hollow. With the resurrection we have the assurance of sins forgiven and an eternal salvation.

CHALLENGE: Ask participants to give examples of ways that they can respond to God's love that He demonstrated to them in the resurrection of Jesus.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: Traveling the mountain roads in West Virginia, a man came to a section where they were repaving the highway. The only way he was allowed to navigate the construction was to wait for what is called a Pilot Truck to come and show the way through the mess and confusion. And on this pilot truck was this sign, both identifying what it was and what its mission was to be:

PILOT TRUCK FOLLOW ME

Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me, the song goes. Our job as ministers is not only to point people to the pilot but to follow Him in spirit and in truth. Jesus has no truck. He uses us.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, we pour out to You our deepest, heart felt thanks for the grace You have given to us. You demonstrated Your power over death in Your resurrection. Through that resurrection, You also demonstrated that You have power over our death. Send us Your Holy Spirit, we pray, to keep our faith in You burning brightly so that we will receive as the out come of our faith the salvation of our souls. In Your Name we pray. Amen.