

# The Fields Are Ripe for the Harvest

Student 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  
Ministries®

## 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:

<b>LESSON</b>	<b>TITLE</b>
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?

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2. Did Jesus know Himself?

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

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

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

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6. Is being rich sinful?

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7. Whose harvest was it?

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8. Why did God require his soul?

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9. To whom would the inheritance belong?

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

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**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?

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

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3. What was so bad about the rocky places?

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4. Why do the thorns grow so quickly?

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

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

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7. Why are the good old days now?

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8. What is the key to Gospel proclamation?

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**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 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. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. What is the Kingdom of God?

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

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

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4. How are we to understand the harvest?

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5. In the next parable, what is the mustard seed?

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

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7. What are the birds of the air?

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8. Why did Jesus use so many parables?

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**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?

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2. Why did Jesus tell the seventy not to pack a bag or greet people on the way?

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3. Why did Jesus instruct them to stay in the house that invited them and eat what was set before them?

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4. What was the task of the seventy on their journey?

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5. Jesus gave instructions about what to do if they were rejected. Why did He do that?

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6. What was the attitude of the seventy when they returned?

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7. Jesus said that He had seen Satan fall from heaven. Why?

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8. Why did Jesus tell them not to rejoice that Satan obeyed them?

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9. What did Jesus tell them to rejoice about?

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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, people often 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?

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2. What does it mean to repent?

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3. Why did John tell people to repent?

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4. Matthew quotes Isaiah the prophet. Why?

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

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

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

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

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9. What is a winnowing fork?

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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?

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2. What did not change in Lystra?

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3. Why was Paul called Hermes?

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4. Why did Paul and Barnabas tear their robes?

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5. Why was it so important to stop the people from sacrificing to Paul and Barnabas?

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

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

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

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**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?

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2. Why did the woman treat Jesus and His request so rudely?

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3. The woman refused Jesus' request. What did Jesus offer in return?

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4. Why did the woman want the living water?

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5. When her personal life was exposed, what did she do?

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6. Why did Jesus tell her that she worshiped something she didn't know anything about?

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7. Why did Jesus tell her that salvation was from the Jews?

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8. What did the woman do after she came to faith in Jesus?

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9. Why did Jesus tell the Apostles to look at the fields, because they were ripe for harvest?

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**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?”

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2. Jesus talks about coming in glory. What does that mean?

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3. It almost appears that Jesus is giving salvation as a result of what people did. Is that true?

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4. Who are the righteous?

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5. Why didn't the righteous remember the deeds that Jesus ascribed to them?

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6. Those on the left are cursed. Why?

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7. The lost claimed they never had the opportunity to serve. What did that indicate?

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8. Is it possible to have faith and not do the good deeds about which Jesus spoke?

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**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:** 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 at our journey's end, He will bring us 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:** Please read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for 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?

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2. What are tares?

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3. The slaves recognize the darnel first. Why were they surprised?

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

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5. What was the landowner's plan?

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6. How does Jesus interpret the parable?

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7. What is the harvest?

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8. What are the implications of coexistence with evil?

**CHALLENGE:** Participants are to develop an action plan to invite one unchurched family to worship or to 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 the dangerous occupation of farming. Crops are left standing in the fields. Neighbors and friends gather and bring in the harvest for the widows and children. These farmers knew what they decided 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: Please read Matthew 5:13-20.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for 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?

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2. How does salt lose its tastefulness?

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3. What does it mean to be the light of the world?

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4. Jesus extends the figure of light to a city on a hill and a lamp. Do they mean the same?

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5. What are good works?

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

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

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

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CHALLENGE: Participants are 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 a 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:** Please read Matthew 9:35-10:8.

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

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

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2. What two great facts did Jesus point out to His disciples?

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3. What did Jesus exhort the disciples to do?

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

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

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6. Why did Jesus name the Twelve Apostles?

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

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8. Why did Jesus tell the Apostles to give freely?

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**CHALLENGE:** Participants are 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.

**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 Ministries 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, and 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, [kstatecollegina.com](http://kstatecollegina.com).

**BIBLE BASE:** Please read Matthew 28:1-10.

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

1. Why did the angel roll the stone away from the tomb?

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2. Were there any witnesses to the resurrection?

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3. Why were there guards at the tomb?

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4. Why did the angel tell the women not to be afraid?

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5. Why did the angel invite the women to see where Jesus' body had been lying?

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6. How did the angel reinforce what the women had just seen?

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7. What did the women encounter after they left the tomb?

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8. What instructions did Jesus give the women?

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9. Why is the resurrection so important to our faith?

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CHALLENGE: Please give examples of ways to 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.

