

When Mother Teresa visited Australia. A young new recruit to the monastery in Australia was assigned to be her guide and “go-fer” during her stay. The young person was so thrilled and excited at the prospect of being so close to this woman. He dreamed of how much he would learn from her and what they would talk about. But during her visit, he became frustrated. Although he was constantly near her, he never had the opportunity to say what he wanted to Mother Teresa. There were always other people for her to meet.

He watched all that she did but was still frustrated. Finally, her tour was over, and she was due to fly to New Guinea. In desperation, the person had an opportunity to speak to Mother Teresa. He said to her, “If I pay my own fare to New Guinea, can I sit next to you on the plane so I can talk to you and learn from you?” Mother Teresa looked at him. “You have enough money to pay airfare to New Guinea?” she asked. “Oh, yes,” he replied eagerly. “Then give that money to the poor,” she said. “You’ll learn more from that than anything I can tell you.”

The problem was the young person wanted to be with her rather than to simply learn by doing.

Jesus taught His disciples by doing.

Jesus takes them out with Him. This part of the story kicks in at verse 35: “Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.” He continues to heal “every disease and every affliction.” Now, its important to note there were about 200 villages in Galilee, and it says that Jesus went through *all* of them. Imagine what he encounters over and over again. There were those who put their faith and trust in Him and those who rejected Him.

Jesus was impacted and filled with compassion by what he saw. Verse 36 says, “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Something deep within Jesus’ is stirred, and he views the crowds of people as sheep—helpless

and harassed. The shepherd's job is to get the sheep from where they are to where they are supposed to be without their getting maimed and eaten along the way.

There's a true story that tells us the reason sheep need a shepherd: it is said that sheep may be a bit *dumb*.

Hundreds of sheep followed their leader off a cliff in eastern Turkey, plunging to their deaths while shepherds looked on in dismay. Four hundred sheep fell 15 metres to their deaths in a ravine in Van province near Iran. Fortunately, the first 400 broke the fall for the other 1,100 animals that followed. They survived. Shepherds from a nearby village neglected the flock while eating breakfast, leaving the sheep to roam free. The loss to local farmers was estimated at \$74,000.

One sheep wandered off a cliff and 1,499 others just followed along. Can you picture it?

The people Jesus encountered had plenty of people leading them astray, telling them what to do. They were bad shepherds. They had the Pharisees giving them rules of how to live. But the Pharisees offered religion without mercy, rule without grace. Powerless and lifeless religion.

Back in the time of the prophet Ezekiel he warned the Jewish leaders saying: "You have never protected the weak ones or healed the sick ones or bandaged those that get hurt. You let them wander off and never look for those that get lost. You are cruel and mean to my sheep. They strayed in every direction, and because there was no shepherd to watch them, they were attacked and eaten by wild animals. So my sheep were scattered across the earth. They roamed on hills and mountains, without anyone even bothering to look for them. (Ezekiel 34:4–6).

Jesus is likening the Pharisees to the Jewish leaders that Ezekiel rebuked.

Jesus then goes on in verse 36: to say **“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.”**

Now, I am not a farmer, but I know there’s a window when a grain is ripe and during that window workers must gather the grain. Jesus is saying that there are only a few workers. I have heard stories recently of farmers unable to get the help they need to harvest because of the restrictions with corona virus. Fruit pickers unable to travel from state to state. Fruit and crops rotting as there are too few to harvest!

There is a sense of urgency in Jesus words. Crops left to stand become food for locusts. They go rotten. Jesus is talking to His people and asking “Where are the harvesters for these crops?”

We might expect Jesus to commission the twelve disciples—to say, “Get on your feet and harvest the ripe grain.” **But instead he tells them to get on their knees:** “Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Jesus tells them to pray.

John Dixon, a well known Australian theologian, historian & Anglican minister, met Jesus through a woman named Glenda who taught his Scripture class in school. Glenda invited John and his classmates into her home every week to teach them about Jesus. Not only did she teach them through her words, but she showed them with her actions that no matter what they had done or how bad they had been, God loved them and so did she. She knew the boys all came from non-Christian homes, and explained that Jesus was Lord and that he had died on the cross and risen again for our sins. After about six or eight months, about five of the youth became Christians—They really surrendered to Christ’s lordship and accepted his mercy. John said, three of us from that one Scripture class are now full-time evangelists and pastors.

Years later, John wrote, “as I was starting out in my own ministry and trying to experiment and explore new modes of ministry and reaching people, I thought, *I’ll go to Glenda and ask her what her secret was.* Since several of

us had become Christians through her influence, I figured she must have had some strategy. I went to her fully expecting her to tell me about some program she implemented or some particular way she had of sharing the gospel. Without batting an eye, she said, **“Prayer.”** John said, I was really disappointed. For a guy who loves creativity and innovative thinking, “prayer” sounded boring to me. But she said, “That year a bunch of us who taught Scripture decided to make it a year of prayer—just to plead the Lord of the harvest to do something special. And we did. By the end of the year, there you all were, confessing Jesus.” For an activist like me, said John that was a powerful lesson: that, in the end, the harvest is God’s. It’s not mine—it’s not my creativity, it’s not my skill—it’s God’s. We just have to bring our ministry to God and cry out to him to bring people to faith.

Glenda and the other Scripture teachers did exactly what Jesus tells his disciples to do here in Matthew 9: **Pray to the Lord of the harvest. Are we praying? I know some of us are.**

In Matthew 10 verse 1: “He called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.” In verse 2: it names the twelve apostles
“ In verse 1, Jesus uses the word “disciples,” and in verse 2, he calls them “apostles.” The word *disciple* means learner— student. The word *apostle* means one who is sent. The students of Jesus are now being sent out with a message. Over three years, they learnt from Jesus what to do and now they are being sent. Learning by doing.

Pray to the Lord of the harvest!

At a rough high school. There was only one Christian teacher and a very small number of Christian students. Mr. David Bunton, was a Christian who taught industrial arts.

Years after Mr. Bunton left his position, dozens of his former students became believers. Many have entered the ministry and become pastors and missionaries.

One of the Christian students tracked down Mr. Bunton, who is now 70 years old and retired. He was stunned and choked with emotion when they told him of the many students who came to faith since he had taught at that high school.

They wondered how his influence had brought such a harvest. He told them that many times he had prayed softly over his classes as he sat back in his desk and watched them work. The only common point of spiritual connection the students shared was that they were prayed over by their teacher.

Pray to the Lord of the harvest!