

Pastor's Devotional
February 25, 2018

Read Luke 10:1-12

Until recently, I glossed over this passage. When I served settled churches, reading about Jesus sending out 72 disciples on a mission trip was interesting, yet it seemed irrelevant. Other than sending youth on mission trips or missionaries to far-away places, I invested most of my energy into preparing our disciples to welcome the guests who came to us.

Now we dream of a less settled church. We strive to be more like the early church—personally participating in God's mission to bless lives. Now passages like this one jump off the page! Not that we are literally to go "ahead of [Jesus] to every town and place where he was about to go." While we marvel at the courage of door-to-door evangelists, our neighbors have surely heard about Jesus. A huge need in our time is for unbelievers to see Jesus embodied authentically in people they know. It's true that some disciples are called to "go" to a "Samaria" or "the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Years ago Jesse and Jann were called to Fellsmere and Lynn to an under-resourced neighborhood. Unless you've discerned such a call, it's more likely that God is sending you to people near to you. We don't have to go far to find needy people. Middle-class and affluent neighborhoods may not look like missional fields, yet many of the inhabitants are relationally, emotionally, and spiritually needy.

Wherever the Spirit sends us, Jesus' instructions provide intriguing missional insights:

1. *"The harvest is plentiful."* This is great news! We don't sell people on Jesus—the Holy Spirit gives the growth. Our role is to till soil and help with the harvest.
2. *Expect to feel vulnerable*, as "lambs among wolves," not taking "a purse, or bag or sandals!" Jesus really wanted his disciples to discover how God shows up as they serve. Provision would come along the way. We'll always feel vulnerable when we share the life and love of Jesus. But we'll never "go" if we wait till we feel ready.
3. *Find a place to "stay."* Jesus wanted the 72 to stay in a village after they were "welcomed" into a house of "someone who promotes peace." Jesus said "stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you...do not move from house to house." God's mission would be advanced as disciples receive from people open to Jesus.

Why remain focused on one group? Because God works powerfully through relationships. The best way to advance God's mission is to give attention to a realistic number of people, then we can learn names, hear stories, and when possible, scatter seeds. We will have more impact by building relationships with twenty-five than in performing random acts of kindness for hundreds.

In our culture, many unbelievers are convinced that Jesus is a myth and Christians are fake. Hanging out with them allows unbelievers to get to know us. Hopefully they will glimpse the grace of Jesus at work within us, despite our sins and weaknesses. Accepting their hospitality cultivates mutual respect and fosters trust, softening hardened soil to the seeds of the Gospel.

Wherever you are sent, keep your eyes open for a person of peace, someone who doesn't yet follow Jesus, yet welcomes your friendship and seems open to faith. When you pray, ask the Spirit to anoint you with the peace of Christ and to guide you as you interact with others. Strive to be perceived as a person who is unrushed and welcomes interaction. If serving the poor, get to know them personally. In your neighborhood, take walks, especially dog-walks☺. Observe verbal and nonverbal communication. Sometimes a person of peace will invite you into his or her life quickly. Other times, the welcome will come slowly but surely.

Strive to "stay" in relationships with people of peace. Lynn and I are truly enjoying our friendships with neighbors who welcomed our invitation to eat in our home. Of course, when they suffer, we share their burdens, but there is joy in that also. We rejoice when God uses us to cultivate blessing in their lives. Friends, it pays to stay!