

## Grow Out: Outreach Pays Attention

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Key Focus: *Jesus paid attention to people.* John assisting; Daniel online; Newcomer Lunch; coming up = MS small groups & Homecoming; journals now available  
Jesus went to them whether they were in big cities or tiny villages. He taught, preached, and healed. He met people where they were. Jesus had compassion for them. He told His disciples to pray for the laborers to go to work. We live in an attention-deficit society. We have so much noise going on that it is easy to disconnect from others. COVID-19 did not help our isolation. It's disconcerting to see a family of four seated in a restaurant with all heads down paying more attention to their devices than to each other. Technology is only a symptom of our deeper problem—not paying attention to the people we are with. Prayer is paying attention to God. It involves being quiet. It is a move away from our own agenda into another's. Poor listening skills and habits break down trust. Teams do not perform well when they do not listen to the coach and their teammates. A failure to listen, to hear, and to heed instructions often results in poor decisions, errors, and hurt feelings. As the saying goes, *Two ears—one mouth.* We should listen twice as much as we talk.

APPLICATION: How well do you pay attention to others? Do you tend to look at a screen instead of the person you are talking to? Do a word study on "listen" and "hear." The Bible has a lot to say about paying attention. Here is a link: <https://www.biblegateway.com>

Two questions people are asking: (1.) What's going on with the UMC? (2.) When will you retire? I'd tie the two together. I anticipate there will be a separation of some sort in the UMC. I would like to help lead Asbury through this process. We do not have any dates. We have a Transition Team that has been meeting for over a year to help us with these two questions. Jeff Wilkie chairs the Transition committee. Several who are involved or have been involved in past governance are also serving. The Transition Committee has secured the services of a retired UMC pastor, Jim Ozier, who has a consulting business. Jim has spoken at Asbury before COVID. He helps Bishops make recommendations for our appointments. Our Bishop, who makes the appointment, has endorsed Jim in this role with us. We do not have an internal candidate on our pastoral staff. We have an excellent pastoral team, who will need to be in a supportive role to help the new pastor be as effective as possible. Asbury will continue to be Asbury. The Lord will provide for us in these matters. Please maintain a calm, non-anxious presence. Paul told the Philippians: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* (4:6-7)

Jesus came with a Magnificent Story. Matthew 5-7 = The Sermon on the Mount (teaching). Then chapters 8-9 are action packed: 3 healings: a leper, a centurion's paralyzed servant, Peter's mother-in-law; then He calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee & cast out a demon.

More healings happen in chapter 9: another paralytic, Jairus' daughter, a woman with an issue of blood, two blind men, & another who is mute.

Here is our text: Matthew 9:35-38 *And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

Note what Jesus did: He began by teaching them in the synagogues. Then He proclaimed (preached). Teaching & preaching are different. Teaching is about instruction. Preaching is teaching, too, but it has an important distinction – asking for a response. The Greek word for preaching is “*kerusso*.” It’s what a herald does for a king. Think of a town crier coming out & yelling, “*Hear, ye! Hear, ye!*” The messenger delivers a message.

Jesus’ energy was solely focused upon communicating the Kingdom of God. This was his one essential: “*Seek first the kingdom of God & His righteousness & all these things will be added unto you.*”

Jesus was trying to reach people who were living with shrunken stories. There were 2 types of these stories:

1) The religious leaders had shrunken stories. They were preoccupied with non-essential things like washing your hands, how far you could walk on the sabbath, etc. They were full of non-essentials. These religious leaders were proud, self-righteous, judgmental, & mean. Instead of helping people, they harassed them.

2) The harassed/helpless people & shrunken stories, too. They were like sheep w/o a shepherd. They were anxious, afraid, angry, lost, & hopeless. They needed direction & guidance.

Jesus **paid attention** to them. He also came with **compassion**. The word means “gut wrenching.” His heart broke for them. (Makes me think of how Jesus feels today about Afghanistan.)

We look at Matthew 8-9 and think, “*They should be in the hospital,*” but public hospitals didn’t exist until the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (and Christians started them). But the spirit of hospitality was very much present.

*Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.* Romans 12:13

*Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.* Heb 13:1-2

*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling* 1 Peter 4:8-10

“**Hospitality**” comes from two Greek words: “**phili**os” + “**xeno**s.” It literally means a “**love of strangers**.” We could include, friends, strangers, neighbors, enemies. Those who are Republicans (or Democrats), those who have been vaccinated (and those who haven’t been), those who wear masks (and those who don’t). We are looking for the spirit of hospitality = paying attention + compassion.

Jesus was limited by His physical body. He could only be in one place at a time. He needed disciples to multiply His ministry. While they couldn't be as effective as Jesus, they could be in more places. He needed them to engage in the Kingdom of God. He told them to pray for laborers.

Matthew 10:1-8 (**The Message**) *The prayer was no sooner prayed than it was answered. Jesus called twelve of his followers and sent them into the ripe fields. He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives. This is the list of the twelve he sent: Simon (they called him Peter, or "Rock"), Andrew, his brother, James, Zebedee's son, John, his brother, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, the tax man, James, son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon, the Canaanite, Judas Iscariot (who later turned on him). Jesus sent his twelve harvest hands out with this charge: "Don't begin by traveling to some far-off place to convert unbelievers. And don't try to be dramatic by tackling some public enemy. Go to the lost, confused people right here in the neighborhood. Tell them that the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons. You have been treated generously, so live generously.*

If I were to ask you, "Will you follow Jesus?" and you said, "Well, I'm not good enough," I'd tell you that you will never be good enough – nobody has ever been good enough. If Jesus could use these guys – He can use you and me. There is one catch: They trusted and obeyed Him. We must, too.

#### What am I asking you to do? Be a Harvest Hand

- 1.) **Pray.** Align with Him for His purposes. Open your heart to Him. Just as what Jesus modeled with the disciples, "Pray for laborers" ....and then tells them they are the answer to their own prayers, so that is with us. Our prayers should be, "Lord, where do you want me to go?"
- 2.) **Pay** Attention to people. Show hospitality – we have some opportunities here (Lauren Brown's picture/phone #). 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 *"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."*
- 3.) **Participate** in a Magnificent Story small group. Buy the book (CLC). Join/start a group (we can help you with this). We did this in 2004 with "Purpose Driven Life" that was one of the best things we've ever done. Invite someone to be in worship on Sept. 5<sup>th</sup> to hear James Bryan Smith, the author, preach.

*"Hi Tom, this past Sunday Joanne asked me to purchase 2 copies of The Magnificent Story book. She wanted to give them to 2 ladies in her McDonald's coffee group. These ladies do not attend Asbury but are members of other churches. When I went to buy the books, with a \$20 in my hand, I was told that the books had already been paid for by another Asbury member. Today when Joanne delivered the books to the 2 ladies, 3 more ladies in the group asked for copies. Joanne & her 5 friends have now set up weekly meetings beginning in September to discuss the book. So, this Sunday I hope to buy 3 more copies. I think this is a perfect example*

*of what you have in mind in bringing this program to our church. The blessings provided by whomever funded these books are being spread beyond the walls of Asbury. Kent J. Miller”*