

Cultivating Relationships, Strengthening Connections
#2: The Plentiful and the Few
September 15-16, 2007

^{9:35}Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

^{10:1}Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. "These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. ⁹"Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—¹⁰no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for workers are worth their keep. "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at that person's house until you leave. ¹²As you enter the home, give it your greeting. ¹³If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. *Matthew 9:35-10:14 TNIV*

Introduction: Last week, we learned that Jesus cultivated relationships with a chosen few in order to strengthen his connections to a lost world. Let's look more carefully at this strategy so that we might understand how we can cultivate relationships in order to strengthen ministry connections and "Ignite Passion for Jesus Christ."

- I. Jesus and the Plentiful (Matthew 9:35-38)
 - A. Jesus' ministry to the masses was extensive and wholly inclusive: he went through all the towns and villages and healed every sickness and disease. B. However, it is interesting to note that Jesus began by teaching in the synagogues of the places he visited, where those who heard him could understand his ministry and identify with his faith. C. Jesus had tremendous compassion for the crowds. D. However, Jesus addressed his disciples first in order to multiply his ministry and reach the crowds. E. Though the harvest was plentiful, Jesus noted that the workers were few (the 80/20 rule).
- II. Jesus' and the Few (Matthew 10:1-14)
 - A. Again, we read in Matthew's words (as we did in Mark's) that Jesus chose just twelve very similar men as his "small group" of apostles. B. Considering the inclusiveness of his ministry, Jesus' instructions to the twelve were remarkably exclusive.
 1. Go to the Jews; avoid the others (for now).
 2. Proclaim the kingdom of heaven ("one way").
 3. Give freely . . . to these people.
 4. Never buy your way in.
 5. Stay only with "worthy" people.
 6. Offer your peace only to the deserving.
 - C. Don't worry about those who will not listen to you. C. Considering accounts like the woman at the well and stories like the good Samaritan, how can we reconcile this exclusivity with Jesus' inclusive mission?
- III. The Few and the Many
 - A. Jesus knew that he could not create a church that would strengthen relationships to the plentitude of lost people until he had taught them to cultivate relationships among themselves. B. Counter-intuitively, Jesus' strategy for harvesting the plenty was to cultivate the few.

Conclusion: These simple lessons from Jesus' ministry help us understand why we must cultivate relationships with a few fellow believers in order to strengthen connections to the many who are lost.