

Pastor Steven J. Cole  
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship  
123 S. Beaver Street  
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001  
[www.fcfonline.org](http://www.fcfonline.org)

## HELP WANTED

Matthew 9:35-38

By

Steven J. Cole

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Evangelism, Lesson 1

## Help Wanted Matthew 9:35-38

I am launching this series on evangelism because I have been burdened for a long time about how few we see as a church coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ. I often wrestle with the question, "What kind of impact are we having on this godless city?" While we are commendable in our emphasis on world missions, it seems to me that we are weak in outreach to our own "Jerusalem."

I feel that I am most at fault in this problem. While I try to preach the gospel often from the pulpit, I am not a good example in personal evangelism. For more than 40 years, I have prayed that God would use me to lead others to Christ. I've gone to training seminars and read many books on the subject. I pray for my neighbors, that I could see them come to Christ. But I often fail when opportunities to share Christ come up. I usually think of what I *could have said* about two hours too late!

Also, I'm so busy with the work of the church that I lack contacts with lost people. But even when I have tried in the past, my attempts at evangelism have been colossal failures. But I want to keep trying. So this series is not just for you. It's especially for me.

I'm going to begin by focusing on our *motivation* for sharing Christ with others. In subsequent messages, we'll look at the *message*, and then at the *method*. Regarding *motivation*, if we want to be effective channels for the good news, we need to ask God to give us the heart that Jesus had for lost people. We see His heart in Matthew 9:36, "Seeing the people, He felt compassion on them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus goes on to say that the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few; thus (v. 38) the disciples should pray for the Lord to send workers into the harvest.

C. H. Spurgeon said that verse 38 weighed on his heart more than any other text in the Bible! He said that it haunted him perpetually (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Pilgrim Publications], 19:466). So I pray that this simple message will haunt us:

We need to see as Jesus saw and feel as Jesus felt  
so that we will do as Jesus did.

Verse 35 gives us a summary of Jesus' ministry at that time (almost identical with Matt. 4:23). He was going through all of the villages, teaching, proclaiming the gospel, and healing every kind of disease and sickness. Then, verses 36-38 report a specific incident on one of those occasions, when Jesus saw the crowds, perhaps as they approached Him, felt compassion for them, and then gave this charge to His disciples. The first lesson is...

1. We need to see as Jesus saw.

Presumably, Jesus and the disciples saw the same scene: the approaching crowd of people. But Jesus saw them with different eyes than the disciples did.

A. Jesus saw the great need of lost people (9:36).

Probably there was nothing unusual about the crowd that approached Jesus and the disciples that day. There may have been a few more sick and disabled people than in a normal crowd, but no more than there had been on previous days. But the disciples probably thought, as they did on another occasion when the needs were overwhelming (Matt. 14:15), "Send them away!" But Jesus saw them differently and He felt compassion for them.

Years ago, some researchers decided to find out if seminary students are Good Samaritans. They met individually with 40 ministerial students under the pretense of doing a study of careers in the church. Each student was instructed to walk to a nearby building to deliver an impromptu talk into a tape recorder. Some were told to talk on the Good Samaritan parable, while others were told to talk about their career concerns.

Meanwhile, the researchers planted an actor along the path who, as a seminarian approached, groaned and slumped to the ground. They found that more than half of the students walked right on by! The researchers noted, "Some who were planning their dissertation on the Good Samaritan, literally stepped over the slumped body as they hurried along." (Cited by William McRae, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts* [Zondervan], p. 54.)

Probably your first reaction to that story, as mine was, is to think, "How could these students be so hard-hearted as to ignore this hurting man? I would never do that!" But my hunch is that those students represent most of us. They were so preoccupied with themselves and the immediate pressure that they faced (to deliver a talk) that they did not see the obvious need of this man in their path. And so they did not stop to help him. They did not see him as Jesus would have seen him. How did Jesus see people?

*Jesus saw lost people as distressed.* The word means "troubled" or "vexed." It points to the load of problems that people apart from Christ bear. Do you ever look carefully into people's faces when you're in public? If you do, you'll see a lot of distressed, troubled people.

*Jesus saw lost people as dispirited.* The word means, "downcast" or "thrown down." It points to the utterly helpless and forsaken condition of people who are lost in sin without the Savior. Philip Keller, in *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* [Zondervan], describes how sheep can get turned over on their backs and not be able to get up by themselves again. Such sheep are called "cast" or "cast down" sheep (p. 60). These sheep flail at the air with their legs, but they can't get back on their feet without the aid of the shepherd. Left in this condition, helpless and vulnerable to their enemies, they will die after a few hours or days.

What a picture of sinners apart from the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ! Outwardly, they may look calm and comfortable. They may be successful in worldly terms. But Jesus sees their hearts before God. They're "legs up," unable to extricate themselves from their sin. They are downcast or dispirited. They may look normal outwardly, but inwardly they are, as Paul describes them (Eph. 2:12), without "hope and without God in the world."

*Jesus saw lost people as sheep without a shepherd.* The Jewish religious leaders should have been shepherding these people, pointing them to God. But instead they were self-righteous and self-seeking, looking down on the common people as sinners (John 9:24-34). They were fleecing the flock, not shepherding them with compassion (Ezekiel 34; Matthew 23). They viewed the people as a bother. But Jesus viewed them as sheep needing a shepherd.

Years ago there was a heart-rending story in the news (cited by Charles Hembree, *Fruits of the Spirit* [Baker], pp. 25-26). A young father, James Lee, shot himself in a tavern phone booth. Minutes before he had called a reporter and told him that he had sent the paper an envelope outlining his story. The frantic reporter tried to trace the call, but it was too late. When the police arrived, the young man was slumped over with a bullet through his head.

In his pockets was a child's crayon drawing, much folded and worn. On it was written, "Please leave in my coat pocket. I want to have it buried with me." The drawing was signed in childish print by the man's daughter, Shirley, who had died in a fire five months before. The father had been so grief-stricken that he had asked total strangers to attend his daughter's funeral so she would have a nice service. He said there was no family to attend since Shirley's mother had died when the child was two. And so when he called the reporter just before he took his life, Lee said that all he had in life was gone and he felt so alone.

When we hear a heart-breaking story like that, we all would respond, "I would have shown love to that lonely, hurting man!" And we would—if we could have seen his need in time. But, hurting people do not wear neon signs blinking, "Love me! I'm hurting!" We probably have hurting people here every week. Do we step over them on our way to talk with our friends? Or, do we see them as Jesus saw these people, as distressed, dispirited, and as sheep without a shepherd?

B. Jesus saw the great harvest of lost people (9:37).

He said, "The harvest is plentiful." This was an important concept that Jesus wanted His disciples to grasp. On another occasion, after speaking with the Samaritan woman by the well, He told the disciples (John 4:35), "lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest." He repeated it again as He sent out the seventy for ministry (Luke 10:2). And He told the fearful apostle Paul to go on preaching in Corinth, explaining (Acts 18:10), "for I have many people in this city." There was a harvest waiting to be reaped. The harvest doesn't depend on our techniques, but on God's sovereign purpose. He has planned a harvest and He calls us to get involved as reapers.

We practically deny the truth of Jesus' words whenever we think (I am often guilty of this!), "He wouldn't want to hear about Christ!" "She would be offended if I talked to her about spiritual things!" How do you know that? Jesus said that the harvest is plentiful. It's God's job to open hearts to the gospel (Acts 16:14). It's our job to go into the harvest field and seek to reap a crop.

So Jesus saw the great need of lost people. He saw the great harvest of lost people. Also,

C. Jesus saw the great need for workers for the harvest (9:37b).

"The workers are few." Jesus has changed metaphors here. First, He used the metaphor of sheep. But, now, it's a harvest. These two metaphors show two sides of the matter: The sheep and the shepherd show man's need met by God. The good shepherd seeks out lost sheep and ministers to them. The harvest and the workers show God's "need" met by man: God uses saved people to save other people. (This insight is from G. Campbell Morgan, *The Analyzed Bible* [Baker], pp. 124-125.)

Jesus' viewpoint is that of a farmer who has a great crop ready for harvest, but he doesn't have enough reapers. It's an interesting picture, isn't it? On the one hand, the Lord will accomplish all of His purpose, which includes the salvation of His elect (Eph. 1:3-11). And yet, at the same time, He has chosen to save lost people through those whom He has already saved. He could have used angels, who probably would have been more competent than we are. But He chose to use us! And so the plentiful harvest means that there is a need for more workers.

Here's the kicker: If you are one of Jesus' sheep, He wants you to see yourself as a worker in His harvest. It is not by accident that the very next thing in Matthew's gospel is for Jesus to summon the twelve and appoint them to ministry. Up to this point, Jesus has done all of the ministry while the disciples have watched. But now He gets the disciples involved.

And if you're thinking, "But I'm not called into full-time ministry," you don't understand. The workers in the Lord's harvest are not just those in so-called "full-time" ministry. Rather, they are those who have tasted of God's salvation telling others of what He

has done for their soul. Or, has often has been said, it is one beggar telling another beggar where he can find bread. Jesus wants you to open your eyes and see the great harvest around you so that you will be a worker reaping souls who need the Good Shepherd.

So to be like our Savior, we need to see as Jesus saw: the great need of lost people; the great harvest of lost people; and, the great need for more workers in the harvest of lost people. Seeing as Jesus saw will lead us to the second step:

## 2. We need to feel as Jesus felt.

Note the link in verse 36, "Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them...." The Greek verb translated, "felt compassion," is used frequently of Jesus in the Gospels. It is related to a noun meaning, "inward parts," or, as we might say in the vernacular, "guts." Deep down inside, Jesus felt for these people. He didn't angrily blame them for the mess that they were in, although He could have done so. Rather, He felt compassion for them.

Do we feel compassion for sinners, or do we shrug and think, "It's their own fault"? I read about a bold pastor who began his sermon, "I'd like to make three points today. First, there are millions of people around the world who are going to go to hell. Second, most of us sitting here today don't give a damn about that." After a long pause, he continued, "My third point is that *you* are more concerned that I, your pastor, said the word 'damn' than you are about the millions going to hell." (*Reader's Digest* [May, 1979], p. 127.) That was a tricky way of showing how we get so worked up about the trivial and are indifferent about the significant. We should feel as Jesus felt about lost people.

Years ago, a woman missionary went to Tunis in North Africa, where she tried to reach Muslims for Christ. She met with little success, as often seems to be the case in Muslim countries. But she persisted, above all trying to love those to whom she witnessed.

One Muslim boy came to her home every week for English lessons. As she taught him English, she tried to tell him about Jesus, but he was unmoved. Finally, the summer before he was to go away to the university came, and he dropped his English sessions. One day, just before his departure, he came to say goodbye to the missionary for the final time. They had tea together and she told

him again of the love of Jesus. But while he was polite, he was adamant in resisting the gospel.

At last, he bid farewell and headed down to path through the garden, leading to the outside gate. Here he stopped and looked back and he saw his teacher standing in the doorway looking after him with tears streaming down her face. He could resist no longer. Her tears conquered the rebellion in his heart. He returned up the path and into her living room, where he trusted in Christ as His Savior (told by James Boice, *The Gospel of John* [Zondervan], p. 771).

While I am not one to show tears easily, people can sense whether you care about them or not. If they feel your love, they will be more inclined to listen to your message. We need to see needy people as Jesus saw them. And we need to feel compassion for them as Jesus felt.

### 3. We need to do as Jesus did.

What did Jesus do? He ministered to people's needs and He prayed for more workers.

#### A. Jesus ministered to people's spiritual and physical needs.

Ministry is not a "stained-glass" word that applies only to those called into "professional" Christian work. "Ministry" means "service." Every Christian is called to serve Christ. He has given you unique gifts and opportunities. You are to take what He has given you and use it to serve those with whom He has put you in contact.

Matthew summarizes Jesus' ministry by three things (9:35): He was teaching, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and sickness. Not everyone is gifted to teach publicly, but in private conversation you should be able to teach others what God has taught you from His Word. If your friend makes a comment about God or Jesus or eternal life that is contrary to Scripture, you can use the opportunity to say, "Why do you think that? Would you mind if I shared what God's Word says about that subject?" So you serve by teaching.

Again, not everyone is called to preach the gospel publicly, but every believer should be ready when the opportunity presents itself to tell others how they can have their sins forgiven and go to

heaven (1 Pet. 3:15). I'll share more about the message of the gospel next week. But in briefest form it is: We all have sinned against the holy God and we deserve His punishment. No amount of good works can pay our debt. But in love, God sent His Son Jesus to bear the penalty that we deserved. We must turn from our sins and trust in Jesus as our sin-bearer. God gives eternal life as a free gift to all who trust in Jesus. Learn some verses and some illustrations to go with each of those points and you can minister to everyone's greatest need, to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus also healed the sick, which authenticated His claim to be the promised Messiah (Matt. 11:2-6). While no one today has a gift of healing on a par with Jesus or the apostles, we can pray for the sick and know that sometimes God will heal them. We can minister to people's physical needs in practical ways (Matt. 25:34-40). If we do as Jesus did, we will minister to people's spiritual and physical needs.

#### B. Jesus prayed for more workers.

Maybe you're thinking, "Wait a minute! The text does not say that Jesus prayed for more workers. It says that He commanded the disciples to pray for workers." True! But Jesus didn't command the disciples to do something which He Himself had not done. Luke (6:12-13) tells us that before Jesus called the twelve apostles, He spent the entire night in prayer. Surely, in part He was asking the Father for workers for the harvest.

But whether He prayed for more workers or not, you cannot dispute that He commands us to pray for more workers. Do you do that? Do you pray that the Lord would raise up and send out workers from this church? Maybe they will serve in the ministries of the church here locally. Maybe God will send them to another culture or country with the gospel. But in some mysterious fashion that I do not understand, God works through our prayers. If we all prayed for more workers, maybe we would have more people wanting to serve than we had openings for service! That would be a unique problem, wouldn't it!

But let me warn you: Praying for workers for the harvest is dangerous business! Many years ago a well-known pastor named Dr. Legters was walking down the street with \$50 in his pocket. He

met a missionary home on furlough who said, "Dr. Legters, I think it's providential that we met. We're having an urgent prayer meeting at the church and we'd love to have you join us."

Dr. Legters was a somewhat brusque man and before they went to prayer he said, "Let's not pray out of ignorance. Let's pray out of intelligence. What exactly do you need?" The missionary replied, "We have an urgent financial need for \$50." Dr. Legters said, "Fine, let's pray."

They prayed all the way around the circle and when they got through one missionary said, "I don't feel that we've really laid hold of the Lord in this. Let's pray some more." So, they prayed around the circle the second time. The third time around, Dr. Legters said, God spoke to him. He said, "Legters, what about the \$50 in your pocket?" So he stopped a woman in the middle of her prayer and said, "Hold it! God answered your prayer." He pulled out the \$50 and laid it on the table.

When he told about this, Dr. Legters pointed his finger at the congregation and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, it is a dangerous thing to pray!" (Told by Howard Hendricks, *Elijah* [Moody Press], p. 50.) It still is! If you pray for workers for the harvest, God may tap you on the shoulder and ask, "What about you? Will you be a worker in My harvest?"

### Conclusion

What is our motive for getting involved in evangelism? Our motive is the great love of our Savior, who came to this sinful world, who saw the great needs of lost people, who felt compassion for them, and who served them with the good news of salvation. If you have experienced that salvation, then you're one of His workers in His harvest. He wants you to see as He saw, to feel as He felt, and to do as He did. Love lost people for Jesus' sake.

## Application Questions

1. How can we become more sensitive to the needs of others? What practical things can we do to grow in this way?
2. How do we show compassion to needy people without creating an unhealthy situation where they become dependent on us? What guidelines apply here?
3. Often lost people seem to be fairly “together.” How can we make an opening for the gospel with people who don’t seem to sense their need for it?
4. How can a Christian know whether God is calling him/her into “full time” Christian work?

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