



Part 55: The Great Harvest and the Wise Church
Matthew 9:35-37

“Jesus went throughout Israel, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.’”
Matthew 9:35-37

I. God’s Mission—My Mission

This text tells us three critical things about God and the mission to which he has recruited us:

- A. Jesus’s appeal represents a clear view into the compassionate heart of a seeking God, and more than anything, it reveals the compelling core of his being: The lost matter to him and redeeming them is his highest priority. It’s his mission; it is the *Missio Dei*!
- B. A ripened harvest of human souls will spend eternity somewhere — either heaven or hell. Again, being Lord of the harvest, the ingathering of these unsaved souls is God’s primary business.
- C. God desires to bring every disciple into the field to do the harvesting of souls. That means soul winning is Greenwood Community Church’s mission, that is, its members individually and collectively.

Put another way, as Elton Trueblood noted, “winning souls is not a professional job for a few trained people but is instead the unrelenting responsibility of every person who belongs to the company of Jesus.”

II The Harvesting Business of Soul Winning—Two Key Phrases

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who wins souls is wise.” (Proverbs 11:30)

A. The first phrase, “tree of life,” is used outside of Proverbs only in Genesis and Revelation.

1. Genesis tells us that God created the tree of life for sinless humanity, but sin cursed it into perpetual dormancy.
2. Revelation tells us that God restores the tree of life in the age to come for redeemed humanity and gives perpetual access to its healing properties.
3. Proverbs tells us that between Eden and Eternity, God uses righteous humanity as that “tree of life,” mainly through the life-giving power of our words.

B. The second phrase, “win souls,” is familiar yet not used in scripture other than in Proverbs. The concept is strong in the New Testament, and vague in the Old, but the phrase is absent. Adding to its uniqueness, it isn’t used here of traditional evangelism. Rather, it has two meanings:

1. It meant to capture, as when an army conquered and occupied a city.
2. It meant to influence others to the path of righteousness.

III. Entering the Great Harvest

A. How are we to enter the harvest to influence and capture souls to righteousness? Here are several ways:

1. Influence happens through persuasion: Through the irresistible guidance of a reasoned opinion.

For example, many parents today are afraid to be “too directive” with their children. But Proverbs 22:6 says, “Direct your kids onto the right path, and when they’re older, they won’t leave it.”

Results of a recent survey on parental persuasion: Where both parents were faithful and active in church, 93% of the children in those homes remained faithful to church as adults. When it was just one parent who was faithful and active, it dropped to 73%. When both parents were regular in attendance but not active, only 53% of kids stayed engaged as adults. And when both parents were lax in attendance just 6% of their kids stayed faithful as adults.

Josh Billings said, "To train up a child in the way they should go, travel that way yourself once in a while."

Enter the harvest by sharing your insight and exerting your influence to win souls to righteousness.

2. Influence happens through example: Through an attractive lifestyle.

Proverbs 2:20 says "Follow the steps of good people." Titus 2:10 says that by our godly example we can "make Gospel of God more attractive." Are your steps worth following? Is your personal example make the gospel more attractive?

Examples of an attractive witness: Matthew 5:16 says it is by intentionally doing good deeds in public view. 1 Peter 3:15-16 says it is by engaging in reasonable, respectful, and calm conversations. 1 Peter 3:1-2 says it is by quietly demonstrating purity and reverence in daily behavior. So, as Henry David Thoreau said, "Others will believe what they see. Let them see."

Enter the harvest by using your example well to win souls to right living!

3. Influence happens through investment: Through the generous and intentional use of money.

Proverbs 3:27-28 says, "Don't walk away if someone deserves help...when the money's in your pocket."

In Luke 16:9, Jesus says, "use worldly wealth to gain friends...[someday] they'll welcome you into your eternal home."

Without apology, Jesus is saying we are to use our money for what is eternal — winning souls. Jesus turned water into wine; he has no problem turning worldly wealth into saved souls. If you want an unbeatable ROI, then invest in the great harvest!

Enter the harvest by generously and intentionally investing your wealth to win souls.

IV. A Final Word on Soul Winning

A. Proverbs 11:30 assigns benefits to the soul-winner, not just the soul saved. Typically, we focus on the benefits that come to the convert: peace with God and eternal life. However, the focus here is exclusively on the soul winner. And they're called wise.

B. Why is the soul-winner wise. Three reasons:

1. Soul winning is wise because of the joy it brings. Not only is God's heart blessed but so is ours. In Luke 15:5-6 Jesus says, "Celebrate! I've found my lost sheep! There's more joy in heaven over one sinner's rescue than over those who need no rescue."

The one who wins souls is wise — and very happy.

2. Soul winning is wise because it exerts our greatest impact on eternity. James 5:20 says, “Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.” Spiritual influence is one of the few things that survives the crossover from earth to eternity.

The one who wins souls is wise — and eternally influential.

3. Soul winning is wise because it bends the trajectory of our future. Daniel 12:3 says, “Those who are wise will shine like heaven’s brightness and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”

V. A Strategy for Entering the Harvest

A. Investigate: Take the initiative to learn about your church’s outreach opportunities. Moreover, consider what evangelistic opportunities are in your neighborhood, school, club, or place of work. Consider your personal world as a mission field and look for ways to have spiritual conversations. As Martin Luther said, “Every Christian has the duty to be a missionary to their neighbor.”

B. Invest: Engage locally and give globally. Invest to gain eternal friends. Consider where God is directing you to resource soul winning efforts.

C Intercede: Begin to pray, “God, here I am, send me into your harvest?” Consider where God is calling you to enter the harvest — then just do it.