

2026-09-06 Small Group Guide

Small Group Guide

Based on the Sermon: "The Tug of War -- Labor in the Harvest"

Mark 6 and Matthew 9

Overview

This sermon challenges followers of Christ to move beyond passive belief into active participation in God's kingdom. Drawing from the sending of the twelve disciples in Mark 6 and Jesus' call to pray for workers in Matthew 9, the message confronts the gap between calling ourselves Christians and actually living as the church in the world.

Key Takeaways

Jesus looked at crowds of harassed and helpless people and felt deep, gut-level compassion. He calls us to see the people around us the same way. Before sending his disciples out, Jesus told them to pray for workers -- meaning the act of praying that prayer puts us in a position to be the answer.

Faith is not merely belief. It is belief that moves us to action. Where faith is absent, even God is limited in what he can do through us.

God calls ordinary, imperfect, often unprepared people to do work that is beyond their own ability -- so that the result points back to him.

Sowing generously -- in time, effort, witness, and resources -- leads to a generous harvest. Sowing sparingly produces very little.

The harvest is already out there. The shortage is not people who need Christ. The shortage is workers willing to go.

Discussion Questions

Opening

The sermon was delivered on Labor Day weekend. When you hear the phrase "labor for God," what is your honest first reaction -- eagerness, guilt, exhaustion, something else? Why do you think that is?

The pastor described writing an "ought-to biography" -- a list of things we know we should do but keep putting off. Without sharing anything too

personal, can you relate to that concept in your spiritual life?

Digging Into the Text

In Matthew 9, Jesus sees the crowds and feels deep compassion -- described in the sermon as a gut-level, breath-stealing response to human need. When was the last time you felt something like that toward someone who did not know Christ? What did you do with that feeling?

Jesus tells his disciples to pray that God would send workers into the harvest -- and then almost immediately turns to them and says, "You go." The pastor noted that praying that prayer puts you in a position to be the answer. Does that change how you think about that prayer? Does it make you more or less willing to pray it?

In Mark 6, Jesus sends the disciples out with almost nothing -- no extra food, no money, no backup supplies. What do you think he was trying to teach them by stripping away their resources before sending them out? What would it look like for us to trust God in a similar way?

The sermon pointed out that in Nazareth, Jesus could do very few miracles because of the people's lack of faith. The pastor asked: "Is there any part of your life that God is not able to use because of your lack of faith?" How would you honestly answer that question?

Second Corinthians 9 promises that whoever sows generously will reap generously. The pastor applied this not just to money but to time, effort, witness, and service. In which of those areas do you tend to sow most generously? In which do you tend to sow sparingly?

Personal Reflection

The pastor described American Christianity as something that "takes pieces that fit" and is not the same as what we see in the book of Acts or the teachings of Christ. Do you agree or disagree? What evidence do you see in your own life for either side of that argument?

Mark Grantham, mentioned in the sermon, responded to receiving a new set of lungs by immediately looking for ways to share Christ with the people around him in the ICU. What would it take for you to have that kind of instinct -- to see every situation, even a hard one, as an opportunity for the gospel?

The pastor said that people who have been changed by Christ are often recognized by those who knew them before -- and that if the people around you are not noticing a difference, it may be worth asking whether the shades are pulled on your light. How does that land with you?

Application and Challenge

The sermon suggested a simple practice: when you are at a restaurant, in a waiting room, at a lake, or anywhere in public, ask God, "Who here is part of the harvest?" Have you ever tried something like that? What would it take to make it a regular habit?

The pastor mentioned asking waitstaff if there is anything the group can pray for before a meal. Some people find that easy; others find it deeply uncomfortable. What is one small, concrete act of witness or service you could commit to doing this week -- something that stretches you even slightly beyond your comfort zone?

Practical Applications for the Week

Pray the harvest prayer. Using Matthew 9 as your guide, pray that God would send workers into the harvest -- and hold that prayer open, asking him whether he is calling you to be part of the answer in any specific way.

Look up. Choose one regular activity this week -- a meal out, a grocery run, a workout -- and intentionally look at the people around you, asking God if there is someone he wants you to notice, encourage, or speak to.

Review your ought-to list. Spend ten minutes writing down two or three

things you have felt God nudging you toward but have not yet done. Bring one of them to your group next week and share what step, however small, you took.

Examine your sowing. Honestly assess one area -- time, money, service, or witness -- where you have been sowing sparingly. Ask God what it would look like to sow more generously in that area, and take one concrete step in that direction before the group meets again.

Closing Thought

The pastor closed with this reminder: the disciples were sent out imperfect, undertrained, and underequipped -- and they drove out demons, preached repentance, and healed the sick. God has never waited for perfect people to do his work. He is looking for people who are willing. The question this week is not whether you are capable. The question is whether you are willing.

Suggested Closing Prayer

Ask one group member to close in prayer, or use this as a guide: thank God for the grace that makes any of us part of his harvest to begin with, ask him to stir genuine compassion in each group member for those who do not know him, and invite him to make each person willing to be a worker -- even in small, uncomfortable, or seemingly insignificant ways -- in the week ahead.