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(Continuation from 09/11/13)

THE RADICAL EXPERIMENT ONE YEAR TO A LIFE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

(Matthew 9:35-38)

The primary problem that hindered Jesus' ministry as He taught, preached, and healed in Palestine is the primary problem that hinders it today: **the workers are few.**

These workers should not be confused with the angelic harvesters mentioned in Matthew 13:39 and Matthew 13:49. These are rather the *ergatēn*, who are identified by the same term in Matthew 10:10 as the twelve. Nor are the *ergatēn* sent into the vineyard (Matthew 20:2) necessarily identified as harvesters. They work in the field headed for harvest; and that is what our Lord is calling the disciples to do.

Even as the Son of God, Jesus could not reach all the people that lived even in His own country or His own lifetime. The first part of His training method, therefore, was to give His disciples the insight that the need for the gospel to be brought to a world headed for judgment far surpasses the outreach of those who are seeking to minister it.

Who can reach the lost, hell-bound world of sinful, hurting people who need to hear and accept the gospel? Who will tell them of their plight and show them the way of escape? Who will share with them Jesus' love and compassion and power? Who will warn them of the false shepherds that lead them deeper and deeper into darkness and hopelessness?

In his own days on earth Christ's workers were few, and they are still few today. The first need in His ministry is for workers, and one of the most important things those workers must understand is that their numbers *are* few and that they can be increased only by God's provision and power.

After right motives are established in compassionate concern to reach the lost for Christ, God's people need to look at their world as Jesus looked out at the multitudes in Galilee and over the city of Jerusalem. We need to observe the people around us as Ezra observed his fellow Israelites on the way from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 8:15) and the way Nehemiah inspected the walls of Jerusalem before he began to rebuild them (Nehemiah 2:13).

The next step in Jesus' method is prayer. His disciples are to beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest. Christ's workers are to pray for more workers.

The Lord of the harvest is a title of God that represents His role as judge. The Lord of the harvest is the Judge of the unsaved who will stand before Him in the last day and be condemned to hell, and we are to beseech Him to send workers to lovingly warn them, so they may be a part of those harvested to eternal glory.

The Christian's first responsibility is not to go out and start working as soon as he sees a need but to come to the Lord in prayer. Waiting on the Lord is a crucial part of serving Him. Before the disciples had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost they were not prepared to witness for Christ, and He therefore instructed them **“not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, 'Which,' He said, 'you heard of from Me'”** ([Acts 1:4](#)). Before they embarked on their ministry in **“Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth,”** ([v.8](#)) they were to stay where they were for a while. And in the upper room where they were staying, **“with one mind [they] were continually devoting themselves to prayer”** ([v. 14](#)).

It is interesting and significant that Jesus did not command the disciples to pray for the lost, although that is certainly appropriate (cf. [1 Timothy 2:1-8](#)). Their first prayer was to be for the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers into His harvest.

It is possible to pray regularly for the salvation of a loved one, a neighbor, a friend, or a fellow employee and to let our concern stop with our prayer. But when we earnestly pray for the Lord to *send* someone to those unsaved people, we cannot help becoming open to being that someone ourselves. It is possible to pray for someone's salvation while keeping them at arm's length. But when we sincerely beseech the Lord to send someone to witness to them, we place ourselves at His disposal to become one of His workers in that ministry.

Not long ago a friend of mine spent a couple of weeks in South Korea, a country that has seen explosive Christian growth in recent years. Over the last century, some estimate, almost half the population in that country has come to Christ. Church leaders there have been intentional about pointing to the power of God in prayer as the reason they have seen such widespread spiritual awakening.

My friend was staying in a hotel, and one morning around four o'clock, he was awakened by a loud noise outside. He staggered over to the window and pulled back the curtains to see a stadium filled with people. He wondered, What kind of sports do Koreans play at four in the morning? Frustrated, he crawled back into bed and tried to sleep through the noise coming from the stadium crowd across the street.

Later that morning he went down to the hotel lobby and asked the manager what kind of sporting event had been going on in the stadium. The hotel manager responded, “Oh, sir that was not a sporting event. That was the church gathered for prayer.”

You and I live in a culture where we gather in stadiums and around televisions for hours at a time to watch guys run around a field with a pigskin ball in their hands as they try to cross a white line. We express enthusiasm, emotion, and affection for football and other sports, and it begs the question, what would happen in our culture if the church prayed with such passion? What would happen if Jesus dominated our affections more than the superficial trivialities that garner our attention? What would happen if we spent hours before God praying on behalf of the church, the lost, and the poor around the world?

Of course, your Radical Experiment does not have to start in a stadium. It can start in your living room or prayer closet. Anyplace can be the place you begin to connect the practice of prayer with the purpose of God in the world.

But back to my question: can you and I as individuals really pray specifically for the whole world? The answer is yes.

Years ago I was introduced to Operation World, an invaluable book by Patrick Johnstone that has revolutionized my prayer life more than any other book outside of the Bible. This book contains detailed information on every nation in the world, including statistics on the religious makeup of every country, updates on gospel work in every country, and prayer requests for every country. It also includes a prayer guide that you can follow, and over the course of a year, you will pray specifically and intentionally for every nation in the world. The book has a corresponding children's version for use in families, and all the information in the book is available free online (www.operationworld.org).

Let me introduce you to Ben and Jennifer, two of the many parents in our church who use this resource to lead their families to pray boldly for the purposes of God to be accomplished in the world. They gather every evening with their two children, ages four and two, to pray specifically for different countries. Night after night their lives are being exposed to the present work of God in the world, and their hearts are being formed by the passionate desire of God for the nations. In Jennifer's words, "God is opening our eyes to the specific needs of peoples around the world. It is changing our family every day and preparing us for our part in his mission."

Prayer is not flashy and probably doesn't even seem radical, but consider church history. Just a century ago the prayers of one man, Evan Roberts (1878– 1951), precipitated a revival in Wales in which an estimated hundred thousand people came to faith in Christ in a matter of months. The effect reached far beyond Wales, though. A global movement began among the people of God, and ordinary Christians began scattering to the nations. In the years that followed, the Christian population in Indonesia tripled. In India, the Christian population grew sixteen times faster than the Hindu population. All around the world the nations witnessed the outpouring of God's Spirit.

Prayer can lead to effects far beyond what we can imagine. What can your prayer do, as it is empowered by God? Just imagine.

So the first facet of the Radical Experiment is to pray for the entire world in one year. I'm daring you to intentionally, specifically, audaciously pray for God's purpose to be accomplished around the world.