

Special Note: SHARE the Kingdom

We have emphasized that we must be continually learning to submit more fully to our King in our attitudes and behavior. We have also noted that our King will help us grow to be like him through his Spirit who lives in us and will be merciful to us when we fall short of his ways. And we have emphasized that God is hard at work in many different ways to change the world. We do not change the world by our own power and insight. Still, God has chosen to use us as workers and given us some important roles in growing his kingdom. This week we begin to explore and learn those roles.

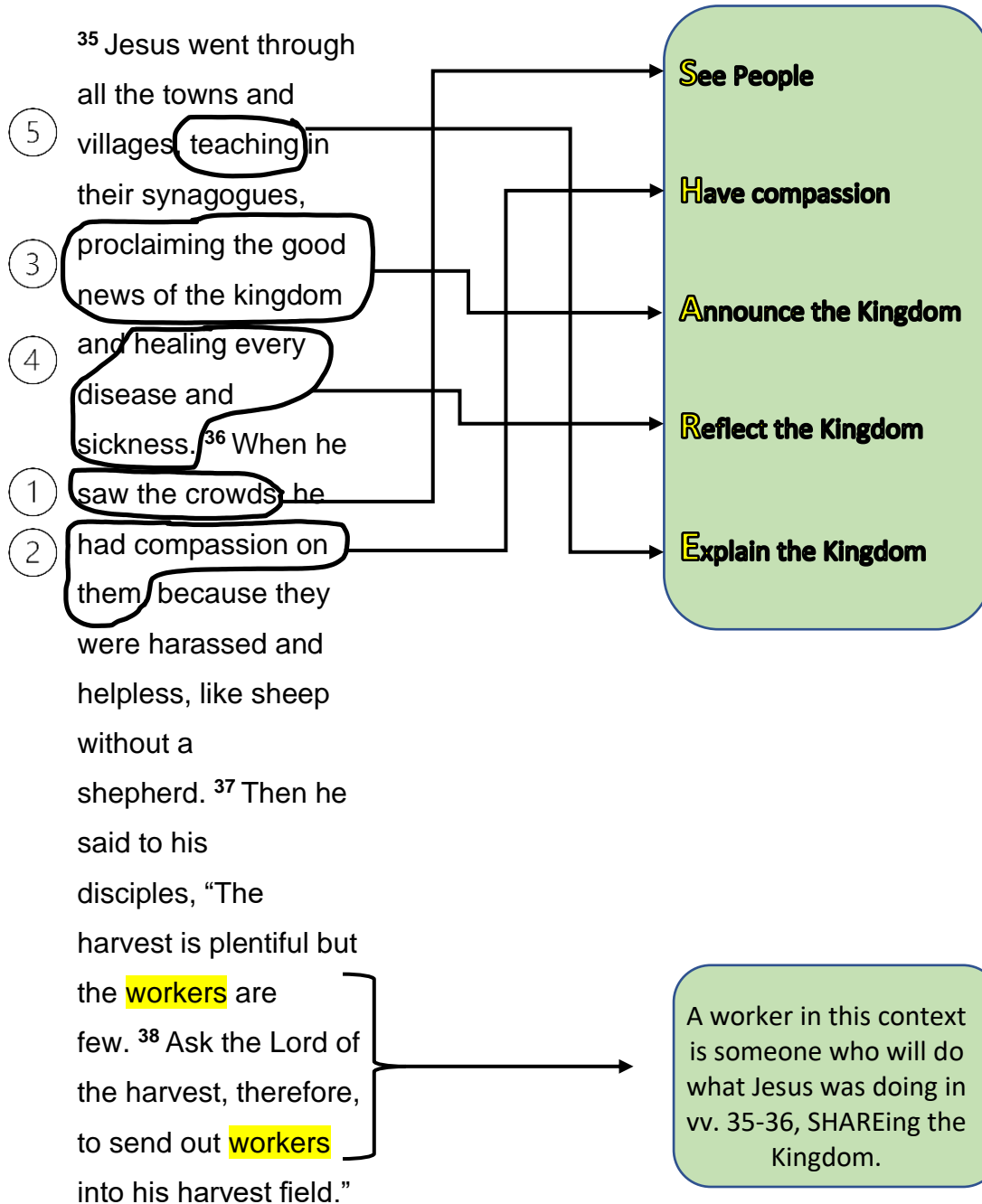
We've also noted that being a worker in God's kingdom means doing what Jesus did. Our key passage (Matthew 9:35-38) indicates five key aspects of Jesus' work. Jesus **S**aw people, **H**ad compassion on them, **A**nnounced the good news of the kingdom to them, **R**eflected the truth and reality of the kingdom through his life and deeds, and **E**xplained the nature and way of life in the kingdom.

The meaning of **S**eeing people and **H**aving compassion on them is fairly obvious. **A**nnouncing the good news of the kingdom refers to speaking the message to people who are not yet believers or followers. We sometimes refer to this as evangelism. I describe Jesus' healings and other ways of helping people as **R**eflecting the Kingdom because that is one important purpose in helping others. We sometimes refer to this as service or benevolence. I refer to Jesus' teaching about the nature and way of life under God's rule as **E**xplaining it and also as **E**quipping people for it. I sometimes even phrase it as "Explaining/Equipping the subjects of the kingdom," with a dual meaning for "subjects." We explain the subjects (topics) of the kingdom and equip the subjects (servants) of the kingdom. We may refer to this aspect as spiritual formation, equipping or edification.

We will use the acronym SHARE to learn and focus on these five aspects of Jesus' ministry (see p. 32). It is an appropriate term for reaching out to change the world because when Jesus equipped the twelve and sent them out, he told them, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). We, too, have freely received many blessings and gifts from Christ, and we, too, are called on to freely share those with others.

I think you will learn the acronym automatically, but you may want to work on it some now. I hope you will begin to pray and think in terms of going on a mission every time you leave your house. Your mission is to **SHARE** the kingdom. You will almost always have the opportunity to **S**ee people and **H**ave compassion on them. Sometimes the Lord will give you the opportunity to **A**nnounce, **R**eflect, or **E**xplain the Kingdom as well.

SHARE the Kingdom



Matthew 9:35-38

1. Take a moment to close your eyes and actually visualize some of the trouble, chaos, sin, disorder, and lostness of people around you. When you get some actual images of this in your mind, then picture yourself standing at your front door or the door to your garage, about to go out for the day. Commission yourself out loud that your real work is to SHARE the kingdom while you are out there. Then pray and tell God you want to make yourself available to him to SHARE the kingdom anytime and way he wants you to. Finally, jot down a few impressions about what you visualized and felt as you did this exercise.

4. Seeing People

God has called us to be co-workers with him (2 Corinthians 6:1). Jesus pointed out that the harvest is vast and workers are needed (Matthew 9:37). So this week we begin training for the actual work of changing the world like Jesus by growing the kingdom of God. We begin with the **S** in the SHARE acronym, **Seeing** people.

Before you go any further, though, skip to the end of this section and notice the practical applications for this week. That way you will know what you are working toward. You can also take minute to decide on a time before our next meeting when you can actually do those applications. Beginning with this lesson, the applications will be such that it will be increasingly important to start your work early so that you have time to complete them.

Noticing People

There are two senses in which we want to see people. First is the basic sense of simply noticing people. At a surface level we notice people constantly. Yet we may not see them deeply enough to qualify as actually seeing them as people. Sometimes we see bank tellers, clerks, and waitresses but don't see them as human beings. I know I can get so task-oriented that I zero in on whatever my business is at the moment and hardly notice the people I interact with. I sometimes reduce people to mere functionaries who are needed for whatever my business is. Sometimes we

get into a mode in which it wouldn't affect us very much if the people were replaced by machines, as long as the machines could function efficiently. (Maybe automated telephone answering services at businesses are my just punishment for failing to see people as human beings back when they used to answer the phones!)

JoAnn Jones told the story in Guideposts of a pop quiz her professor gave during her second year of nursing school. She breezed through the questions until she read the last one: "What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?" She thought surely this was some kind of joke. She had seen the cleaning woman several times, but how would she know her name? JoAnn handed in her paper, leaving the last question blank. Before the class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward the grade. "Absolutely," the professor said. "In your careers you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say hello." JoAnn later reflected, "I've never forgotten that lesson. I also learned her name was Dorothy."

In truth, everyone we see every day is a human being, made in the image of God. As such they have great value, even though God's image in them is distorted, as it is in all of us. You may have heard sermons or classes which emphasize that our value is not dependent on what we do or how we look. Neither is theirs. Everyone we see is a human being and is valuable in God's eyes.

One of the keys to being a faithful and effective worker in the kingdom is to realize we are always on call as God's servants and that his work is more important than whatever errand we may be running. That's why I want to encourage us to remember each time we leave our house that we are going out to SHARE. The corollary to this is that whatever function a clerk or waiter may serve for me is also secondary in importance. God may be bringing one of his servants (us!) together with an open-hearted searcher, as he did in Acts. So we need to look past our personal business and the function the other person serves and instead notice them as people.

If we will also see people in the second way that Jesus did, we will be all the more ready for any work God may have for us to do with them.

Assessing People as Jesus Did

The second aspect of seeing people is that we must learn to assess them as Jesus did. To assess is to evaluate the nature, quality or ability of someone or something. Here I am referring only to evaluating people's *nature*, not their quality or ability. Going back to our key passage, Matthew

gives us the important information that the people Jesus saw had several noteworthy characteristics. Specifically, "... they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Hearing what each of these key words has to tell us is an important part of our training as workers.

"Harassed" means vexed, troubled, or annoyed. In context this probably refers especially to the kinds of problems Jesus had encountered in people in the two chapters leading up to this statement. That would include people suffering from disease, danger, demons, and sin (Matthew 8-9).

It is important to know that harassed is passive in its grammatical form. These people were *being* harassed. They were not doing the harassing (active), nor were they harassing themselves (reflexive). Well, actually they may have been doing both of those things, but that's not what Matthew was describing by what he wrote. Rather, Matthew pointed out that something was *being done to them*. They were *being* harassed. This was, in fact, the work of the devil (Acts 10:38; 1 John 3:8). These people were *being victimized* by Satan, and so are all the people around us every day.

Our worldview may lead us to believe that illness, pain or trouble simply "happens," but that is not the biblical world view. According to Jesus, and other Scriptures inspired by the Spirit of Jesus, many troubles and problems in the world originate with Satan. In Scripture, all of the following are specifically attributed to the Evil One: deception, filling people's hearts to lie, disguising himself, lying, schemes and snares, temptation, touching people so as to cause them to sin, enslaving people to sin, destruction, blinding people's minds, keeping people in darkness, taking away the word, disabling people physically, sending demons into people, oppressing people with illness, inciting betrayal, sifting people like wheat, outwitting people, tormenting people, hindering Christians from getting together, sowing weeds among good seed, waiting for an opportune time, throwing people in prison, murder, and death. Satan definitely harasses, troubles, and annoys people.

We need to realize that Satan also has a kingdom (Matthew 12:26). He is a tyrant who rules ruthlessly and savagely. He is not merely an annoying little twerp who sits on our shoulders whispering obviously bad advice. Rather, Scripture describes him as a fully armed strong man, the prince of this world, and the god of this age. His mission is to steal, kill, and destroy. He does so directly, and he also deceives, captures and enslaves numerous followers to do his bidding. Together, Satan and his prisoners afflict great trouble on the world.

The fact that we have isolated, labeled, described, and can even predict and treat many of these vexations does not change the fact that they

originate with the Evil One. Thoroughly describing his weapons and learning to predict how he will use them does not change the fact that they are indeed his and he is the one using them against us. One might even say the study of disease and medicine is a study of some of the typical ways Satan vexes human beings. That Satan lies behind the evils in the world is vital to understanding Jesus' work to establish God's kingdom. If this is not clear to you, please read: Luke 13:16; Acts 10:38; Hebrews 2:14-15.

Jesus' mission was to establish and grow an alternative kingdom, the Kingdom of God. God sent Jesus to deliver people from the domain of darkness and transfer them into the kingdom of his beloved Son (Colossians 1:13-14). Though people are harassed by Satan at every turn, they do have a choice. There is another King available to rule their lives. As we train to be workers in Christ's kingdom, it is important that we see that the people we reach out to are being harassed by his rival, the prince of darkness, and in need of deliverance.

Occasionally in everyday life, people have the wisdom to recognize a person's bad behavior is due to something else going on. For example, maybe we notice that a person is more sensitive than usual and it's because they are having problems at home. Psychologists describe more extreme examples of this as "acting out." The phrase refers to a destructive or self-destructive behavior such as fighting, stealing or drinking that is done as a (poor) way of expressing painful emotions like fear or anger. If psychologists and even regular folk recognize that some of people's bad behaviors are due to other things going on with them, can't we recognize that one reason for people's bad attitudes and behavior is Satan is harassing them?

This is not to excuse or justify people's sins. Elsewhere we read that people bring much trouble on themselves as well. The point is simply that we need to recognize that every person we meet is being troubled directly by Satan and his followers in some way and degree and needs our help.

2. In what ways is Satan harassing you right now? In what ways is he harassing other people you know?

The people Jesus saw that day were also "**helpless.**" The word means helpless, dejected, or thrown down. They could not overcome the ways the Evil One was harassing them. Thankfully God has allowed us to discover some ways of resolving some of these problems today, especially some physical ailments. Other problems still elude us, to be sure, and I don't think we will ever solve them all. For example, death is the last enemy to be destroyed, and it will be destroyed by resurrection, which is a work of God. So, even though we have more resources than people had in the first century, we are still helpless against some of the physical works of the Devil.

Other weapons of the Tyrant, like deceit and sin, have definitely not been eliminated. Even people who have been forgiven of their sins by Jesus may still struggle with power of sin in their lives. Those outside of Christ are almost completely helpless. Remember, the Bible compares sin to slavery (John 8:34; Romans 6:16-21; 2 Peter 2:19) and refers to people being taken captive (Acts 8:23; 2 Timothy 2:26). We noted above that Satan is compared to a Strong man who takes "possessions" (people) into his house and under his control (Luke 11:21-22). They cannot escape on their own. All these indicate the ongoing power of Satan in the world.

3. What have you seen or experienced that most clearly illustrates people's helplessness against Satan.

People are also like "**sheep.**" Sheep are extremely vulnerable, and the danger of predators is real. Sheep are also easily swayed to go in unhealthy directions. They will sometimes follow the sheep that is walking immediately in front of them even if that heads them toward danger. This is an even greater concern when you realize that the sheep we follow are sheep themselves, harassed by Satan, and helpless to overcome him. The more you understand about sheep, the more you realize it's not particularly flattering that God compares us to them.

4. Do you know people who are "sheepish?" ☺ In what ways are they like sheep? Do you detect any sheep-like qualities in yourself?

There's more. The people Jesus saw that day were not only sheep but were also "**without a shepherd.**" Shepherds guide, protect, and provide for their sheep. The Bible also uses the word shepherd figuratively to describe leaders of various kinds, including prophets, kings, and the Lord. The exact phrase "sheep without a shepherd" is used to describe the situation God's people would have been in after Moses died, if God had not raised up Joshua to take his place (Numbers 27:15-23). The phrase is also used in prophecy to describe the armies of Israel after they lost their king in battle (1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chronicles 18:16). Apparently the phrase in Isaiah 13:14 is describing the armies of Babylon as having lost their king as well (see context).

So sheep without a shepherd are people without a leader. Sometimes the reference is specifically to people without a king. Though the people in Jesus' day had Caiaphas, Herod, Pilate, and Tiberius Caesar available, they still did not have the leader or king they needed. Yet the One they needed stood among them. He was the "ruler" who had come from Bethlehem and who would "shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord" (Micah 5:2, 4; Matthew 2:1-6).

5. What shepherds are available to people today? Who / what kind of people do the sheep of today tend to follow? Do you think the leaders we have available are worthy? Who do you follow?

So God's word says the crowds of people Jesus saw were harassed by Satan, helpless to overcome him, and like sheep without a shepherd. Do you agree? Does that sound right to you?

In the case of many people we see, this description is obviously correct. People today are still suffering all kinds of trouble that ultimately can be traced back to Satan, even if the people are partially complicit in their trouble. The many addictions we see today are ample evidence of people's helplessness in the face of the Evil One. Inadequate, misguided, and corrupt leaders abound nationally and locally. More personally, the way people follow their friends, media trends, and their own personal desires also indicates how deficient we are in good leadership. Does the ability to act, sing or throw a ball really qualify a person to be a good life coach? Do actors, musicians and athletes usually live exemplary lives?

Other people do not have such obvious problems. They are either handling life much better or they appear to be. I don't think every non-Christian is down in the dumps, but when you get to know people better, most everyone seems to be vexed by something. Maybe it's a less obvious physical ailment or a troubled family relationship. Others may just hide their issues. You've probably known other people who were plagued by all sorts of difficulties and issues but who hid it well for years until one day it all came spilling out. If there are exceptional non-Christian people who do not have any issues at all, I'd be surprised. But it's nothing to worry about. There are plenty of broken people with whom we can SHARE the kingdom.

Don't forget, too, that Jesus said there was a plentiful **harvest** in the crowd of broken people he saw that day (Matthew 9:37). Perhaps not every last person was open to being harvested into God's kingdom, but many of them were. Remember, people who are suffering difficulties often more easily see and admit their need for God (cf. Luke 4:18-19; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; James 2:5). So it is important that we also assess people as open to God or at least potentially open to him. The fact that they aren't beating down the doors of our church buildings does not change this. Not being open to our understanding and practice of church, doesn't equate to be closed to God altogether.

Jesus' reference to a harvest suggests that people's ultimate need is spiritual. The primary problem is not sickness, illiteracy, poverty, or poor government. Satan clearly works in all these areas to destroy people, and Jesus cares about these aspects of people's lives. Sometimes Jesus delivers us from such troubles, and when his kingdom is fully realized, all of them will be alleviated. Yet the primary need of people is spiritual. They need the Good Shepherd. They need to be harvested into the kingdom of God.

Jesus saw people, and if we want to change the world like he did, we will see them too. We will notice them and will also view them as he did. People are harassed by Satan and helpless to escape his clutches on their own. Like sheep, they are vulnerable and easily led astray. Nor do they have the leader they need for their lives. All this gives us opportunities to reflect and announce the kingdom of God and may well also give the victims of Satan's work a greater awareness of their need for God.

Practical Applications.

1. Go somewhere that people gather and watch them for a while. It could be a park, a mall, an airport, a coffee shop, or a business district. Then just sit or walk around for a half hour or so and concentrate exclusively on *seeing* people. Notice them and whatever you can about them. Then consciously assess some of them according to what we read in Matthew 9. Can you see any signs of Satan's **harassment**? (a cane, a scar, a limp, an expression, an attitude). Remind yourself of this person's **helplessness** to ward of Satan on their own. Do you see any signs of their "**sheep**-ness?" What **shepherds** might they be turning to? Do you think they could be part of the **harvest**?
2. Next time you are at church on Sunday, take a little time before or after the service to notice and assess people similar to #1 above. You may want to concentrate especially on guests or others you haven't seen before.
3. Try to develop this new practice: Anytime you leave your house, remind yourself that your real business and work is to SHARE the kingdom. You will almost always have an opportunity to See people, and God may have other work for you to do as well. Say a prayer making yourself available to him and asking him to keep you alert for any opportunity he may give you to SHARE (cf. #1 on p. 33).
4. In addition to the deliberate outing described in #1, and regardless of whether you remember to do #3, try to See people anytime you are out and about. Notice them and assess them as Jesus did.
5. Write down a few reflections after you have completed these tasks.