

“Becoming Good Shepherds”

Matthew 9:35–10:4

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(Prodigal Sunday)

I. Sheep without Discipleship

When Jesus sees the crowds, He sees sheep without a shepherd. They are:

- Harassed and helpless (ESV)
- Weary and scattered (NKJV)
- Bewildered and helpless (NET)
- Distressed and dejected (CSB)
- Confused and aimless (MSG)
- Distressed and dispirited (NASB)
- In distress and cast down (Hart)¹

Sheep without a shepherd are humans without discipleship.

II. A Harvesting Church is a Discipling Church

Jesus wants laborers for His harvest. He wants disciplers for His sheep. We see four steps.

A. Compassion (9:36)

How do we gain Jesus' heart for the shepherdless? While vv. 35–38 concludes the miracle narratives (Matt 8–9), they also introduce His next sermon on mission (Matt 10). That this sermon follows the Sermon on the Mount is significant. Compassion is part of conforming to Christ's likeness.

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| The First Sermon Enables the Second |
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¹ David Bently Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation*, second edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017). Kindle. The Legacy Standard Bible follows a very similar translation.

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| <i>The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7)</i> | Enables | <i>The Sermon on Mission (Matt 10)</i> |
| Christ's <i>likeness</i> | | Christ's <i>labor</i> |
| Christ's <i>word</i> | | Christ's <i>work</i> |
| Becoming a disciple | | Making disciples |
| Living Jesus' commands | | Giving His compassion |

B. Prayer (9:38)

This is the second of three times Jesus will give us a specific prayer in Matthew.

1. *The Lord's Prayer*: "Pray then like this... Our Father..." (6:9f).
2. *The Prayer for Laborers*: "Pray... to send out laborers" (9:38).
3. *The Prayer for Alertness*: "Pray that you enter not into temptation" (26:41).

Jesus does not call for a mission meeting but for a prayer meeting.

Frederick Dale Bruner. Prayer meetings need not be unusual meetings; every Christian gathering, particularly those gathered around the exposition of the Word and the administration of the Supper, can have a healthy prayer-meeting component. Do we have too much singing and too little praying and communing in contemporary church gatherings?²

C. Power (10:1)

There is an important order in the text:

1. *Calling*: "He called to Him His twelve disciples..."

² Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*. Volume 1: *The Christbook*, revised and expanded edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 450. Kindle.

2. *Equipping*: “... and gave them authority.”

Where Christ appoints us, He empowers us. By calling the harvest “plentiful” (v. 37), Jesus indicates a work nearly finished by God.³ God has the *power*; He needs the *people* who will gather what He has grown.

D. Community (10:2–4)

Disciples are almost always referred to in the plural.⁴

Michael Wilkins. That the plural form is normally used expresses an important point: individual disciples are always seen in conjunction with the community of disciples, whether as Jesus’ intimate companion or as the church.⁵

Out of many disciples, Jesus appoints twelve to be His apostles to lead His church.⁶ Comparing each list of twelve in the Gospels and Acts, an order seems to emerge.⁷

- *The Leader.* Peter is the first not *over* but first *among* the apostles.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 40. Kindle. The singular never occurs in Mark, only on Jesus’ lips to teach about discipleship in Matthew and Luke (Matt 10:24, 25, 42; Luke 6:40; 14:26, 27, 33), and only four times in Acts where it refers to an individual (9:10, 26; 16:1; 21:16). John uses the singular most frequently, but always in reference to a particular person (John 9:28; 18:15, 16; 19:26–28; 20:2–4; 21:7, 20, 23, 24).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The number may be seen as representing God’s restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel.

⁷ Compare Matthew 10:2–4, Mark 3:16–19, Luke 6:13–16, and Acts 1:13. See Wilkins, 150f.

- *The Triads*. Peter, Phillip, and James (the son of Alphaeus) head sets of four.⁸
- *The Partners*. Matthew's list establishes couplets within the twelve.

Only in the Church can we form such discipleship-relationships.

III. Disciple Like a Shepherd (Psalm 23)

Jesus establishes His church to provide discipleship for the shepherdless.

A. Defining Discipleship: Christological Orientation

But what do we mean by “discipleship”?

Discipleship develops a Christological orientation of one's entire life so that their entire person assumes His likeness (i.e., theosis).⁹

- The duration is one's entire life: from conversion to death.
- The scale is one's entire being: spiritual and physical (cf. 10:1, “spirits... disease”).

In other words, discipleship is more *transformation* than *information*.

T. W. Mason. Discipleship was not matriculation in a Rabbinical College, but apprenticeship to the work of the Kingdom.¹⁰

⁸ Though the three they head have differing orders, these maintain their position as named first, fifth, and ninth (respectively).

⁹ Wilkins, 41, offers this definition: “Discipleship and discipling mean living a fully human life in this world in union with Jesus Christ and growing in conformity to His image.”

¹⁰ T. W. Mason, *The Teachings of Jesus: Studies in Its Form and Context*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 239–240, quoted in Wilkins, 93.

B. Illustrating Discipleship: The Good Shepherd (Psalm 23)

The best model of discipleship is the Good Shepherd.¹¹ Psalm 23 moves in three phases:

1. *Rest and Restoration* (vv. 1–3). The weary, harassed and distressed sheep find pasture.
2. *Companionship and Courage* (v. 4). The dejected and confused sheep find a partner.
3. *Communion and Sonship* (vv. 5–6). This is the goal of discipleship.¹²

To disciple is to shepherd the way God shepherds us.

Who will you disciple?

Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us; for You are good and You love mankind. Amen.

¹¹ Is it an accident Jesus likens the crowds to sheep having no shepherd?

¹² Perhaps the first is found in the church (“pastor” comes from “pasture”), the second in the relationships we form in the church’s community, and the third in God, whom we grow in through the church and community.