

Discipleship Displays - God's Persistence

You have worked hard all spring and summer.

The days are now starting to cool.

The hours of sunlight are shrinking.

Things desperately need to be done.

Your crop is ready.

You have cultivated, sown, weeded, protected, prayed for rain.

The time is right, the crop is ripe.

It must be brought in.

It is time to harvest.

The crops are begging to be harvested.

They are groaning to be removed from the field.

They are about ready to explode.

But you have no workers.

Everyone you thought could help is busy chasing bigger pots of gold.

The people you have are too few.

They are already stretched and over-worked.

How would you feel?

God has experienced that frustration ever since the time of Jesus.

Every generation has encountered a harvest that is ripe.

And every generation repeats the same chapter of history.

The harvest is ready, the workers are few.

But it is not just heads of grain that are perishing in God's fields.

Eternal souls, every day, are slipping into hell - why?

Because those of us who should be harvesting are chasing pots of gold.

We are looking after our needs ahead of God's needs.

Why do we sit complacently by and allow that to happen?

Why am I too busy to stop and share Jesus with the harvest field?

Jesus knows why and He makes no apology.

It is the lack of prayer within the church.

The Head and body have become severed.

There is a disconnect between us and Jesus.

We do not share the same passion because we do not pray.

In Matthew 9:37 Jesus points out the labor crisis in His harvest.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."

In verse 38 He commands the disciples to pray for more workers.

"Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

Are you praying?

Are you praying for workers in the harvest?

"Talk to me and catch my vision for the spiritually hungry.

"I'm not willing that any should perish."

That is why Jesus died on the cross.

"I want to shut the doors on hell.

"I know how to do it.

"Just ask me to supply workers."

That has always been the remedy.

The remedy is intentional prayer.

Intentional prayer is the key to resolving this crisis.

"If my own people will humbly pray and turn back to me and stop sinning, then I will answer them from heaven. I will forgive them and make their land fertile once again. (2 Chron. 7:14 CEV)

When the Early Church was passionate about prayer thousands came to Jesus.

And yet it seems it did not take long for that passion to cool.

James wrote to the same church, **"You do not have because you do not ask."** (4:2)

Obviously people who chose to be part of the church were not praying.
Are we so much different?

Lethargy in prayer is not new to the church.

When we pray God moves people's hearts.

When we pray God awakens their souls.

When we pray God is able to use people's circumstances to bring them into His kingdom."

We know all this.

So why don't we pray with that intensity for the lost?

I We are **SELF-SUFFICIENT**.

The Church has so much going for it in society today.

We have buildings.

We have affluent adherents.

We have good medical systems.

We have sophisticated equipment.

We have well-trained leaders.

Prayer is not important because we think we can survive on our own.
Self-sufficiency is deadly to a church and to God's Kingdom.

Notice what happens in verses 27-30.

Two blind men discover that Jesus' walked right past them.

What is their reaction?

Do they say, "Oh that Jesus we do not need Him"?

Do they stay begging for alms while muttering, "Jesus, He's way overrated"?

No! They struggle to their feet.

They stumble along the road side.

They are calling out to Jesus "Have mercy on us Son of David!"

They cry out to Him incessantly.

There is not a moment's peace.

They are praying constantly for Jesus to do something.

There was no self-sufficiency here.

Their prayer life reflected how desperate they were for Jesus to act.

They could do nothing.

Jesus was their only hope.

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

Jesus did not say, "With dynamic leadership, the finest facilities, the perfect programming, and the latest methodology you can grow without bothering Me."

He made it clear that only through Him can true effectiveness be found.

"The branch's one job is to abide, stay connected, communicate.

If the branch will abide, the vine will do all the work through it."

The branch has nothing in itself.

It cannot be self-sufficient.

Without the vine it will die.

Yet we think we can be a fruitful congregation without prayer.

Self-sufficiency is a lie of Satan.

Let us plead with Jesus for workers and start with me.

II A second reason we do not pray is we are **SELF-SATISFIED**.

We are OK just the way we are.

We are big enough already.

Why complicate it by bringing in the harvest?

It would mean a tighter squeeze in our pews.

It would mean more mess in the building.

It would mean we actually have to make contact with the world.

It would mean strangers in our midst.

It would mean talking to someone I don't know, even loving them.

It would mean having to make adjustments to how we manage ourselves.

Why pray if it means the Church is going to grow?

Jesus encountered people who were not interested in change.

They were called Pharisees.

They decided there was something corrupt about Jesus.
There was something evil about Him, this prince of demons.
They weren't about to let Him upset their predictable world.
They had a good thing going in their religion.
They were not about to depend on Jesus for anything.
They would never pray for the lost.

Through prayer, burden for those living separated from Jesus is developed.
Hearts are changed as intercession occurs.
The motivation to minister increases.
Prayer stretches us to love in a world-sized way.

III The third reason we do not pray is we are **SELF-SERVING**.

We are more concerned for ourselves than for others.
We are looking after ourselves ahead of the lost.
Jesus was moved to compassion when He saw the crowds.
What was it that moved Him so deeply?
He saw that they were not being cared for.
No one cared about them.
They were like sheep without a shepherd, harassed (vs. 36).

What does it mean to be harassed?

This is a word of great intensity.
When we see what Jesus sees we cannot be self-sufficient.
We cannot be self-satisfied.
We cannot be self-serving.
What did Jesus see?
He saw below the surface.

I think the best way to describe this is by a volcano.

We never see the most intense point of the volcano.
We see the effect of that intensity: lava flow, spewing ash, and smoke.
The effects are nothing compared to the point of origin below the surface.
Below the surface the heat is so intense that everything melts down.
It is a bubbling, seething, churning, burning liquid.
The pressure is building, and it eventually blows its top.
That is what Jesus was looking at in the crowds around Him.
They might have looked fine on the outside.
But inside they were at the point of eruption.
Deep inside an intense battle was raging.
They were literally broken up, smashed, pulverized, wrecked, dissolved.
They had been reduced to an empty shell.
There was nothing holding them together.
There was no foundation, nothing solid.
No strength because Satan was ravaging their lives.
He was eating them from the inside out.

Jesus is pleading with us, "Pray to the Lord of the Harvest."
Psalm 142 captures this hollowing out and what changes that life around.