

The Laws of the Harvest

Here is the good news! We are living in the day of unprecedented revival, evangelism and church growth. Over 150,000 people are coming to Christ daily, and 3,500 churches are being planted every week.

Here is the bad news. It's happening everywhere except in North America. We are the global exception.

70 - 80 % of Americans are unchurched.

85 % of churches in the United States are either plateaued or in decline.

From 1988 to 1998, no county in the United States saw an increase in the number of Christians.

Over 8,000 churches in North America are closed every year.

Something has gone wrong with the Harvest!

In this series, we are going to focus our attention on the spiritual harvest. We are going to look closely at two passages of Scripture in which Jesus gave us his most extensive teaching on the harvest. Through these scriptures we will seek to discern the "Laws of the Harvest."

John 4:27-38

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor." (NIV)

Matthew 9:35-38

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Before we look at the laws, we must identify three awarenesses and two realities in these passage...

- The three awarenesses: (1) The awareness of human need
(2) The awareness of redemptive mission
(3) The awareness of divine purpose

- The two realities: (1) The harvest is ripe.
(2) The harvest is great.

LAW #1: THE LAW OF PERCEPTION

John 4:35, *Open your eyes...*
Matthew 9:36, *When Jesus saw the crowds...*

We will never reap a harvest that we do not see.

Jesus saw the harvest. The disciples did not.

The disciples were earth-bound in their perception. They only saw things on the surface.

Many in our churches have tunnel vision. They are blind and insensitive to the needs and ministry opportunities around them.

As a result, we have churches full of spiritual dullness, personal unhappiness, unfulfilled lives, and numerical stagnation.

We must begin to pray for the eyes of Jesus.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he saw people.
When the disciples saw the crowds, they also saw people.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he saw shepherd-less sheep.
When the disciples saw the crowds, they only saw people.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he saw a harvest that was ripe.
When the disciples saw the crowds, they only saw people.

Three things that blinded the eyes of the disciples (and which blind our eyes as well)...

1. Preoccupation with our own needs.

89% of church members said that the church exists to meet their needs and the needs of their families.

Only 11% said the church exists to reach lost people.

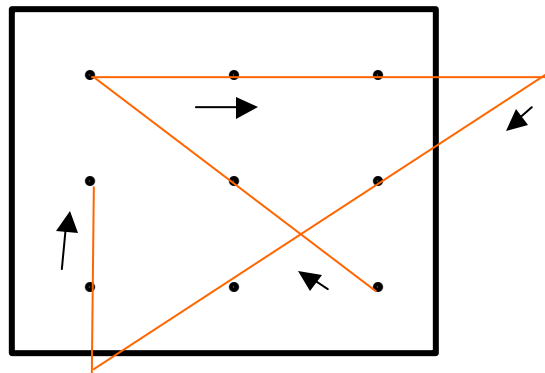
2. Prejudice -- Building walls instead of bridges

3. Conventional Thinking

A paradigm is a pattern through which we view life. It is the model by which we live.

Draw four straight lines connecting all the dots without lifting your pen.

You can only do this
If you draw "outside
the box"



Reflect...

1. What blinds the eyes of the people in your church?
2. What steps can be taken to open their eyes?

LAW #2: THE LAW OF PLANNING

John 4:35, *Look*.

The Greek word is *theaomai*.

It means to look attentively, to contemplate, to give careful attention to detail.

The synonym for *theaomai* is the Greek word *theoreo*, from which we get our word theory.

In order to reach our harvest, we must fully understand it and plan strategically for it.

There are three key words that the church must understand as we study our harvest...

1. Culture
2. Change
3. Contextualization

In order to begin to think strategically about the harvest we must understand...

1. Our content -- The message of the Gospel which does not change.
2. Our context -- The arena in which this message is to be proclaimed, which is always changing.

Contextualizing the Gospel is a bridge-building process based on strategic thinking.

It will require a "whatever it takes mentality"

1 Corinthians 9:19–23, *Even though I am free from the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people...I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Message. I didn't just want to talk about it. I wanted to be in on it!* (Message)

Contextualization means "whatever it takes."

This is what Paul did on Mars Hill in Acts 17.

His strategy in Athens was different from his strategy in Corinth, and this strategy was different from his strategy in Caesarea.

A different audience requires a different strategy.

The ultimate example of contextualization is the Incarnation.

John 1:1, 14, *The Word was God...and the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.* (Message)

Jesus was a master at presenting truth in the language of his culture. He was receiver-oriented, putting his message into the context of people's lives.

Reflect...

1. What's the last method or program your church changed in order to be more relevant to your culture?
2. How well do you understand the culture of the unchurched in your city or community?

Pray for spiritual sons of Issachar to be birthed in your church...

1 Chronicles 12:32, *From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders of the tribe with their relatives. All these men understood the temper of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take.* (NLT)

LAW #3: THE LAW OF PRAYER

Matthew 9:38, *Ask the Lord of the Harvest.*

Prayer is essential to reaping the harvest because we are dealing with spiritual realities.

Jesus said, "Without me, you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

Prayer enables us to have a supernatural worldview.

Prayer is a channel between our personal, physical world and the supernatural realities that surround us.

The more we pray the more our horizons expand, and the more we come to expect from a supernatural, miracle-working God.

Praying for the harvest helps keep the church focused on its mission.

Acts 4:31, When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were meeting. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly. (NIV)

Look closely at Paul's instruction to two churches about prayer...

Colossians 4:2, 3, Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ...Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should. (NIV)

2 Thessalonians 3:1, Pray for us. Pray that the Master's Word will simply take off and race through the whole country to a groundswell of response... (Message)

A church that is not praying to the Lord of the Harvest will not be effective in reaping the harvest.

Reflect...

1. What are the three most crucial prayer concerns relating to your harvest should your church be praying about?
2. What are you currently doing to reach your harvest, that if the Lord doesn't help you, you will not be able to accomplish it?

LAW #4: THE LAW OF PEOPLE

Matthew 9:37, *The workers are few.*

Jesus said that one of the things that was limiting the harvest was a lack of workers.

A brief lesson in church history...

From 30 A.D. to 300 A.D., the message of the Gospel spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.

A great decline in evangelism, spirituality and church health began in 313 A.D.

The Edict of Milan changed the church from an army to an audience over night.

The Church led the continent of Europe into the Dark Ages.

It would not be until 1200 years later that the Reformers would begin to pick up the pieces.

The Goal of the Reformers was to return the word of God and the work of God to the people of God.

The biblical doctrine of the priesthood of every believer was rediscovered.

The church that effectively reaps the harvest rejects the clergy - laity dichotomy and embraces the fact that every believer is a God-ordained minister of reconciliation.

We need a new Reformation which will produce effective strategies of implementing the biblical theology of the laity.

The future of the church is directly linked to the future

ministry of the laity.

THE TALE OF TWO CHURCHES	
THE CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION	THE CHURCH AS AN ORGANISM
Clergy is at center stage.	Christ is at center stage.
Laity are spectators.	Everyone is a minister.
Maintenance focused	Mission focused
Caretaker Model	Shared Responsibility Model
Focuses on an omni-competent pastor.	Focuses on the multi-gifted people of God.
Top down motivation	Bottom up motivation
The church is restrained.	The church is released.

In order to reap the harvest, churches must move to a one people one ministry mentality.

We must have a new understanding of what it means to be the people of God.

The laity are the one people of God, and the one people of God are all called to the one mission of the Church.

Every believer is a priest. Every believer is called. Every believer is a saint. Every believer is gifted.

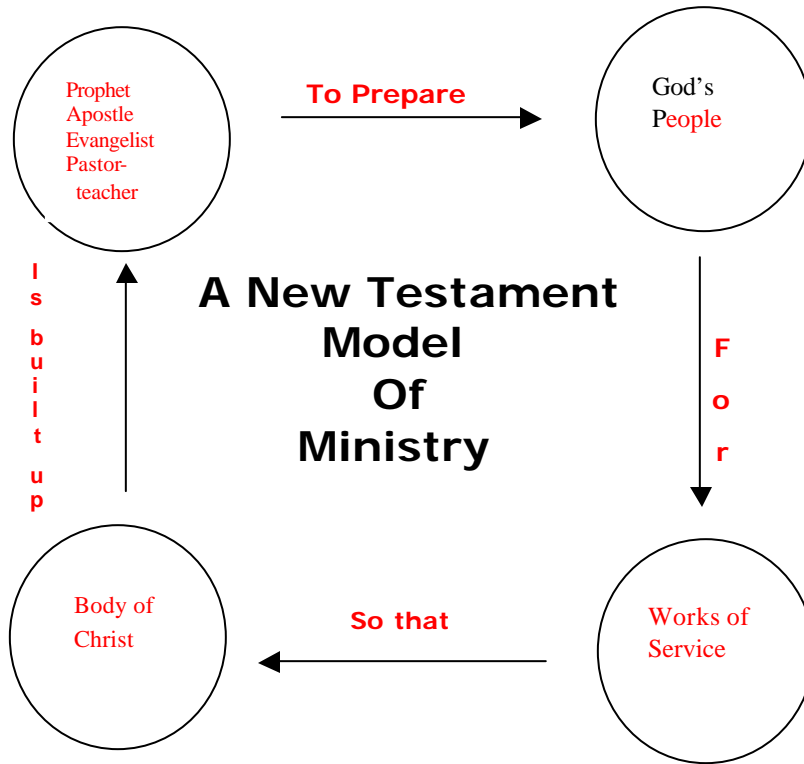
The ministry does not belong to the "clergy." It belongs to the people of God.

Churches that are reaping the harvest have are discovering the untapped resources of the people of God.

The ministry is not some special trust given only to the ordained clergy. It is a trust given to a group of people gathered as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

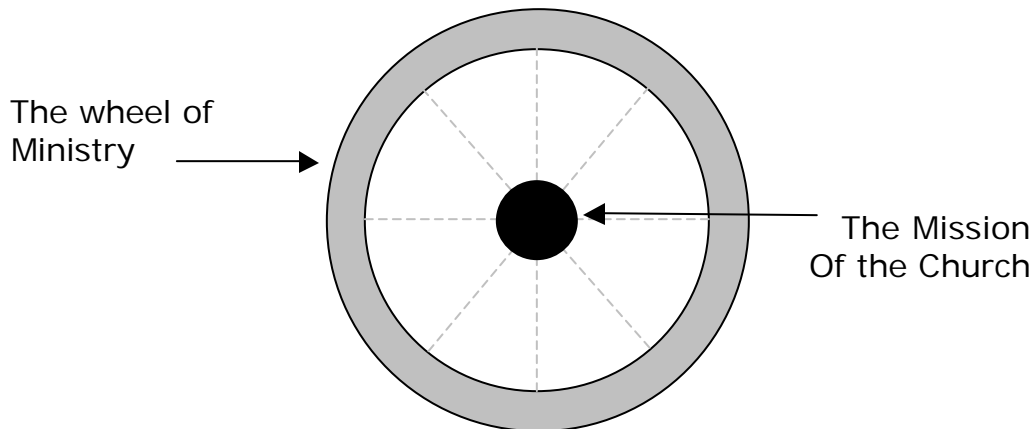
The New Testament job description for pastors and church leaders must be rediscovered.

Ephesians 4:11, 12, It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.



The ministry is for all who are called to share in Christ's life. The pastorate is for those who possess the peculiar gift of being able to help other men and women and women practice any ministry to which they have been called.

■ Elton Trueblood



The wheel does not turn until it is connect to the mission by spokes.

The creation of a spoke: Leadership development and mobilization.

Commitment	Teaching Opportunity	Learning Experience	The Ah Ha!
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Cast Vision Create hunger Hands on Experience Growth & Development

Reflect...

1. How much of the "ministry" is done by the people of your congregation and how much is done by your pastor or staff?
2. Do you have intentional equipping, gift-evoking, passion-releasing programs in your church? Are you creating spokes?

LAW #5: THE LAW OF PLANTING AND REAPING

John 4:37, One sows and another reaps.

This law simply means that there is no harvest without the work of planting seed.

There comes a point in all of study about the harvest when we must leave the classroom and go into the fields.

The common understanding of ministry is...

Study --- Discuss --- Do

The New Testament understanding of ministry preparation is...

Study --- do --- discuss

or

Ready --- fire --- aim

Reaching men and women in the harvest is a process that involves four key activities...

1. Plowing

Hard ground must be broken up.

Serving opens doors and hearts.

We cannot win men's souls if we have never won their hearts.

2. Planting

Psalm 126:6, He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

3. Watering

The seed is watered by prayer and continued serving.

4. Harvesting

Harvesting techniques differ according to the culture and the Spirit's working.

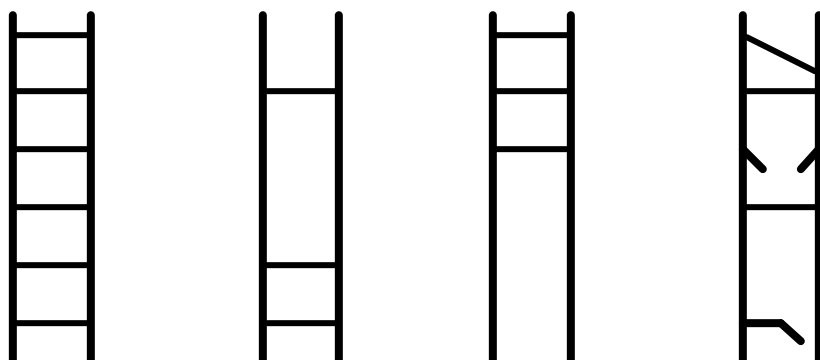
In the 21st Century, conversion typically occurs as the end of a process rather than simply an event.

Conserving the fruit of our harvest will require intentional discipleship.

The goal of reaping the harvest is not converts but disciples.

Discipleship is about spiritual growth and spiritual formation.

The Intentional Discipleship Steps of a Church



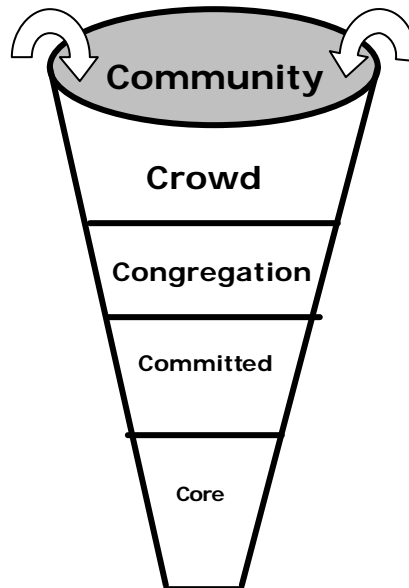
In order to be successful in discipleship, a church must have a working definition of a disciple.

Three marks of a disciple according to Jesus...

1. Growing knowledge and obedience John 8:31
2. Growth in community and love John 13:35
3. Productivity John 15:8

A disciple is a fully devoted follower of Jesus whose life is characterized by consistent obedience, loving relationships, and productive service.

The Four Levels of Discipleship in the Church



The effective disciple-making church will have bridges between each of the levels.

The Great Commission Gives not only gives the mandate of discipleship but also the method of discipleship.

Matthew 28:19, *Go and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching** them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

Baptizing implies conversion and incorporation into the community of faith.

Discipleship will require teaching that leads to transformation not just information.

Reflect...

1. Is my church actually involved in the harvest in some way?
2. Do we have an intentional program of discipleship at the various levels of spiritual maturity?

LAW #6: THE LAW OF PARTNERSHIP

John 4:38, *Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefit.*

John 4:36, *The sower and the reaper may be glad together.*

No single church can accomplish this task alone.

The healthy church is a church that builds strategic Kingdom relationships with other churches and ministries.

There is no room for jealousy in the Kingdom of God.

We are in competition, but not with other churches. We are in competition with the attractions of the world.

In every city and in every community there is only one church.

The harvest has been greatly weakened by churches and pastors who are not in harmony.

Listen to Jesus' words on strategic partnerships.

Mark 9:38-40, Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.

Listen to Paul's words on strategic partnerships.

1 Corinthians 3:4-9, When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I prefer Apollos," aren't you acting like those who are not Christians? Who is Apollos, and who is Paul, that we should be the cause of such quarrels? Why, we're only servants. Through us God caused you to believe. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. My job was to plant the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God, not we, who made it grow. The ones who do the planting or watering aren't important, but God is important because he is the one who makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work as a team with the same purpose. Yet they will be rewarded individually, according to their own hard work. We work together as partners who belong to God. You are God's field, God's building--not ours. (NLT)

Reflect...

1. Is there a church in your city or community that you secretly harbor jealousy toward?
2. Are you actively seeking to build strategic partnerships with other churches and ministries and do you regularly pray for their success?

LAW #7: THE LAW OF PAIN

Matthew 9:36, They were harassed and helpless.

The harvest is the ripest where the pain is the greatest.

How Jesus described the pain...

The harassed: People who are troubled, worried, and exhausted.

The helpless: People who have been knocked down and can't

get up, lying prostrate like a drunk or a dead man from a mortal wound.

What is the cause of such pain?

They are sheep without a shepherd. There is no one to lead them. There is no one to feed and protect them.

They are separated from God.

The pain is mounting in our culture.

Broken homes...Broken dreams...Broken lives...Broken spirits

People are longing for freedom, for a sense of meaning in their lives, for security, for forgiveness, for wholeness, for happiness and hope.

The church has been called to bring lost (misplaced and oppressed) people into a community of health and healing.

The church that reaps the harvest will be one that understands the pain and is willing to be a healing community.

It has identified the key pain of its city or community.

It has developed programs that address these felt needs in order meet the real need.

It is open to hurting people.

It takes the initiative and goes looking for them.

Jesus saw and understood the pain, and his ministry touched the spiritual and the social/physical needs of people.

Reflect...

1. Can you identify the three greatest felt needs of people in your city or community?
2. Does your church offer any program that address these needs?

LAW #8: THE LAW OF PASSION

Matthew 9:36, *He had compassion on them.*

John 4:34, *My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work*

Reaping the harvest is not just a matter of the head. It is also a matter of the heart.

We will do none of the things we have discussed until we feel it deeply.

The word "emotion" contains the word "motion." We must be moved by our compassion.

Jesus was nourished by his passion, not just food.

If there is one thing that pierces the Savior's heart with unutterable grief, it is not the world's iniquity, but the church's indifference.

■ F. B. Meyer

A passionless church is an unhealthy church and will not reap the harvest.

Revival is the only cure for the lack of passion.

A revival is a visitation from God that brings life to believers who have been spiritually asleep and restores a deep sense of God's presence and holiness.

Revival restores to full health the spiritual life of the church.

Revival is... A new beginning of obedience

A new attitude of humility

A new closeness to God

A new devotion to Christ

A new infilling of the Holy Spirit

A new passion for the work of God

From 2 Chronicles 7:14, we can discern the five hindrances to revival.

2 Chronicles 7:14, If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land.

Hindrance #1: The refusal of the church to accept responsibility.

Hindrance #2: A Spirit of pride

Hindrance #3: Prayerlessness

Hindrance #4: Wrong priorities

Hindrance #5: An unwillingness to change.

A healthy church is a contagious church. People are connected to God through contagious people.

Reflect...

1. Does your church reflect a passion for God that is contagious?
2. What would it take for your church to experience revival? Where do you begin?

Identifying Your Harvest Priorities

Indicate which Laws of the Harvest need the most attention in your church. Number them from 1 to 8, with one being the most urgent need of attention and 8 being the least urgent.

_____ The Law of Perception

Our church is aware of that there is a harvest around us.

_____ The Law of Planning

Our church understands our harvest field and has strategic plans to reach it.

_____ The Law of Prayer

Our church has an active prayer ministry, interceding for the harvest.

_____ The Law of People

Our church has intentional ways of mobilizing believers for involvement in the harvest.

_____ The Law of Planting and Reaping

Our church is intentionally sowing seeds in our field and has intentional discipleship in place to preserve the harvest.

_____ The Law of Partnership

Our church has a positive relationship with other churches and ministries in our community and is intentionally involved with them to reach our harvest.

_____ The Law of Pain

Our church has identified the felt needs of those in our community and have programs to help address these.

_____ The Law of Passion

Our church has a passion for Jesus and his work and is alive in the power of the Holy Spirit.