

Harassed and Helpless, but not Hopeless
Matthew 9:36-10:8
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In my (almost exactly) eight years as a pastor, I have never been more tempted to plagiarize than I am tonight. Yes, pastors do plagiarize, apparently a lot of them, including the pastor of the largest church in the world. At a seminar, Dr. Cho, pastor of the world's largest church in Korea, was asked during a question and answer time, "How do you put your weekly messages together? They are so powerful!" He said, "Honestly, I have never given an original message in all my years of ministry here at Yoido Church. Each week, I preach word-for-word messages from either Billy Graham or W.A. Criswell from Dallas First Baptist Church. I can't afford to not have a home run each weekend when we gather. I don't trust my own ability to give completely original messages." By the way, I plagiarized that story. Word for word.

I am not saying I would be in good company by plagiarizing tonight, but I am sure I could hit a homerun, not because the prose I would steal would be so dazzling, but because the source material I have in mind so accurately reflects tonight's passage from Matthew, that I am truly not sure I could share anything with you more explanatory, insightful, or meaningful. And in light of our summer's emphasis on discerning God's vision for the direction of our ministry, it would serve us well if I did plagiarize what I have in mind, since the wisdom of the

author from whom I would steal, is meeting us exactly where we are. So here is what I am going to do: I *am* going to share someone else's words, word-for-word, but since the esteemed Kennon Callahan does not specifically relate his ideas to tonight's passage, it will be my task and contribution tonight to help you see that Callahan's ideas are indeed Biblical.

The book from which I would like to borrow liberally is Callahan's "Twelve Keys to an Effective Church; Strategic Planning for Mission." The truth is that it is a sort of simply-written, how-to, "guru" book that offers, and I quote: "A proven program for church renewal that has brought new vitality to thousands of congregations," but the reason I like it so much is not because it has brought "new vitality" to any of my congregations, but because it has brought "new vitality" to my understanding of the ministry to which God is calling me, and us. But before I turn to him, let me start with Jesus, who is the one who truly brings "new vitality" to life itself.

Tonight's passage from Matthew is a transitional moment in the story, a moment to catch one's breath after the amazing Sermon on the Mount and a series of even more amazing healings and exorcisms. Matthew takes this moment to establish the future of Jesus' mission, to remind us, before we get caught up in the drama of the climactic end of Jesus' life, that Jesus has bequeathed to us, his followers, all the power he showed in his brief time with us. Remember that these Gospels were written to people who were still following decades later, and

Matthew is keen to motivate them, by showing the roots of their ministry together. It is rather like the way children love to hear the stories of their birth, like the child in the story I read to the children. They are reminded in that retelling of the love their parents have for them. Matthew relives for them the moment of that inheritance of power and ministry as Jesus sends out those first twelve, giving them authority to cast out unclean spirits, and to cure every disease and every sickness. Jesus' mission has become theirs, and it has become ours, for it was their willingness to follow, and our willingness to follow, that placed them close enough to hear that first call, and keeps us close enough to hear today's call. It is the proximity of our faith that opens our ears to the call to address human hurts and hopes, the very essence of Jesus' ministry, and that of all who would claim the authority he gives us.

Callahan's "Twelve Keys to an Effective Church" really does have twelve key areas a church can work on, but it is one specific key which he believes takes precedence over all the others. The first Key, and fear not, it will be the only one under discussion tonight, is what he calls having "Specific, Concrete Missional Objectives," a fancy way of saying that you identify and intentionally address specific human hurts and hopes in your community. That phrase, "human hurts and hopes," is the center of all Callahan's work, just as it was for Jesus. What did we read in tonight's very first verse? That "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and

curing every disease and every sickness.” Jesus was addressing their hopes with visions of the Kingdom of Heaven fulfilled and he was addressing their hurts as he healed their minds, bodies, and spirits.” It is perhaps the most basic way to think about what we should be about as disciples. Who doesn’t need hope? Who doesn’t need healing? Everyone has a hope. Everyone has a hurt. Christ knew that. Christ acted on that. Christ knew that we have aspirations for peace and happiness. Christ knew we have broken hearts and broken ankles. But knowing is not enough. He acted, and then called others to act too. He was concrete in his ministry. He was specific in his ministry. He was missional in his ministry, taking it to where those human hurts and hopes resided. Never did Jesus expect people to come to him. Always he went to them. Human hurts and hopes.

It is these human hurts and hopes, and the longing God gives us to address them, which drive mission. We will get nowhere without passion, or at least compassion. Verse eleven: “When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Harassed and helpless. That sounds a lot like hurt and hopeless. And yet, hurt and hopeless is not the end of the story. From Jesus’ compassion comes his passion, a passion he shares with his disciples: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” He puts the burden of his compassion on the disciples’ hearts, and pushes them to ask God where they can serve. It may be a foregone conclusion that God will give

them something to do, but it is a useful spiritual discipline to ask God to send you.

“Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.”

It is the connecting with this passion that moves us to ministry, that lets it grow within us until we have no choice but to act. Callahan puts it this way: “First, I am convinced that God places specific longings to help in each human heart. That is, within each person are specific affinities to share help toward given human hurts and hopes to which they are attracted because of their deep longings towards them. Secondly, God shares concrete strengths and resources to enable the helper to be reasonably effective in mission. That is, God is the provider of the competencies and capacities that enable a person to share help with those individuals who have a human hurt and hope commensurate with the helper’s own specific longings. Thirdly, God helps us discover persons with similar longings and strengths. Fourthly, God’s action in the world helps us to see that a specific missional outreach is timely and important. Lastly, God calls us to invest our longings and strengths in this life’s pilgrimage in competent, compassionate, committed, and courageous ways.” Tonight’s story shows Jesus doing all these things Callahan attributes to God: He places longing on their hearts, and he shares with them his authority over all that made those sheep harassed and helpless. He pulls together a group of people who see in him their own hopes fulfilled and hurts healed, and puts God’s urgency on their hearts. He calls them to invest of themselves in specific ways: “Go, proclaim the good news, ‘The Kingdom of

heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.” Now, those are some “specific, concrete, missional objectives,” brought to life by those who had come to share Jesus’ passion for the harassed and helpless.

As we as disciples, as we as a church, try to get closer to identifying just what “specific, concrete, missional objectives” we are called to undertake, in other words, what is God’s vision for us? the question we must start with, the question your vision discernment leaders are trying to provoke in you is this: “What specific human hurts and hopes do you have longings to help with?” And this is the lovely way Callahan describes for getting at that longing. He says, “A useful way to discover you own longings to help is to think through what specific hurt or hope keeps you awake at night upon occasion. That is, in those moments when you are seeking to fall asleep but can’t quite do so because you are preoccupied with some person and their hurt and hope, what is the shape of that hurt and hope and who is the person you long to help? That will give you a clue as to where your longings are. A further clue can be discovered as you think about those occasions when you were driving down the road or waiting somewhere and your mind drifted to a given person and their hurt or hope...Missional objectives start with a longing to help, and people sometimes discover that longing to help as they lie awake at night, restless and disturbed. Mission starts with people like you and me. When a human hurt or hope becomes compelling for three to five people who have discovered common longings and strengths, a missional objective has come into being.” Can’t

you just see Jesus camping under the Galilean stars, lying awake at night, thinking of the harassed and helpless he had seen on the road that day? Can't you just see the disciples reviewing their day and finding that shared longing, and seeing their shared strengths? That's where we start. And where we end up, God only knows, but it will be the place God wants us to be.

I want to conclude with the end of Callahan's chapter where he speaks of Living Legends of Help because I believe that is where God wants us to end up. This is what he says: "Churches that share effective missional outreach with one or more specific human hurts and hopes become legends on the community grapevine. They become, in that community, the church that helps people with a given hurt and hope. They become the church that helped John and Mary. They become the church that helped Susie. They become a legend because they become participants in effective mission. Regrettably, too many churches have developed the grapevine reputation of being interested in getting more members and more money so that they can do the maintenance things that need to be done with their buildings and programs. Regrettably, too many churches have become merry-go-rounds of programs and activities that focus on simplistic and petty understandings of life. A church that genuinely and authentically becomes a church of the Good Shepherd develops, much to its surprise, a legendary character on the community grapevine. It becomes the church that is more interested in helping than being helped. It becomes the church that is more interested in loving than being loved. It

becomes the church that is more interested in giving than getting. It becomes one of the distinctive churches in the community—a church that gives itself away in effective missional service. Ironically enough, people seek out churches who give themselves away. People stay away from churches whose only interest is self-interest. Those churches that are effectively in mission tend to be stable and growing congregations. This is not because their interest is in being stable and growing. No, it is because their interest is in sharing effective mission. When people have specific hurts and hopes, they are amazed and surprised to discover a congregation that is genuinely interested in being of help to them.”

“When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Then Jesus summoned his disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of just twelve of his disciples: Lisa, Barbara, Richard, Torre, Cathi, Leslie, Tim, Barry, Brenda, Ann-Marie, Scott, and David. These twelve, and all the rest, he sent out with the following instructions. “Go nowhere but among the English-speaking community of Costa Rica. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons, but most of all, meet the human hurts and hopes you encounter in your journey.” And as we do, may God make each of us, and ECF as a whole, living legends of help. Amen.