

Sermon Summary

This sermon is part of Grace Church's series *Teach Us to Pray*, which looks to Jesus as both teacher and model for prayer. The central conviction is that prayer is not optional for the Christian life; it is as essential as breathing. Drawing on Eugene Peterson's insight, the sermon emphasizes that if the church misses prayer, it misses nearly everything—but if it learns to pray, lives are transformed. Prayer is the primary place where believers connect with God, are shaped by Him, and are invited to participate in His mission.

The sermon focuses on Matthew 9:35–38, where Jesus travels through towns and villages teaching, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and affliction. Matthew presents Jesus as one who both announces and demonstrates the kingdom of God. As Jesus encounters the crowds, He is deeply moved with compassion because they are “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” This compassion is not superficial pity but a deep, visceral response that moves Jesus at the core of His being.

From this moment of compassion, Jesus teaches His disciples how to respond to the brokenness of the world. Rather than telling them to organize, strategize, or immediately act, Jesus commands them to pray: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” This command shapes the sermon’s three main movements.

First, **compassion moves us to prayer**. When confronted with suffering—whether global crises, social division, addiction, or personal family pain—our natural responses may be despair, apathy, or judgment. Jesus shows another way. He sees people not as problems or projects, but as vulnerable sheep in need of care. When believers feel overwhelmed by the pain and chaos of the world, the proper response is not disengagement but prayer rooted in compassion. Just as hunger during fasting is turned into prayer, the ache we feel when we see brokenness should also be turned into prayer.

Second, **prayer moves the mission forward**. Jesus’ instruction to pray surprises many because prayer is often undervalued. Yet Jesus calls His disciples to pray because prayer is powerful. God has chosen, in His sovereignty, to accomplish His mission through the prayers of His people. Scripture consistently shows that prayer precedes mission—from the disciples praying before Pentecost to the church in Acts 13 fasting and praying before sending out Paul and Barnabas. Church history echoes this truth, illustrated by the Haystack Prayer Meetings of 1806, where five college students’ prayers sparked a global missionary movement. Prayer is not symbolic; it actively advances God’s work in the world.

Third, **prayer moves us into the mission**. Immediately after commanding His disciples to pray for laborers, Jesus sends them out to do the very work they had been praying about (Matthew 10:1). This reveals that praying for the harvest is a “dangerous prayer.” When believers ask God to send workers, they should not be surprised when He sends them. Jesus reframes the pain of the world not merely as tragedy, but as opportunity—a harvest ready to be gathered.

Importantly, Jesus does not instruct His followers to pray that He alone would do the work. Instead, He commands them to pray that God would send laborers. Often, believers ask God to do things He has already commissioned them to do. Jesus invites His people to be co-laborers in His mission. This calling extends beyond the original twelve, expanding to the seventy-two, the early church at Pentecost, and ultimately to all believers today.

The sermon concludes by challenging listeners to consider that the inner promptings they feel—to speak, serve, or act—may be answers to someone else's prayer. God may be sending them into moments of ministry as part of His response to prayers for the harvest. Praying like Jesus will not only advance the mission but will also move believers out of comfort and into active participation in God's redemptive work.

In summary, the sermon calls the church to become a praying people—moved by compassion, confident in the power of prayer, and willing to be sent. Through prayer, God both advances His mission and transforms His people into active participants in bringing the good news of Jesus to a hurting world.

Grow Group Questions

On Sunday, we looked at Matthew 9:35-38 as Jesus taught His disciples about prayer. We want to take time to consider the big lessons from this text, as Jesus is still teaching us how to pray. Our main three points from Sunday were: Compassion moves us to prayer, Prayer moves the mission forward. Prayer moves us into the mission. Let's dig a little deeper together.

1. Have someone pray as you open your time together. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide and lead the conversation.
2. Many people learned how to pray as young kids. What are some things you learned that were either helpful or unhelpful? What lessons were intentional and unintentional?
3. Read Matthew 9:35-38 out loud. What stands out to you? What questions come to mind?
4. The context of Matthew 9 is a season of Jesus proclaiming the Kingdom and demonstrating the Kingdom (Matthew 9:38). Take a moment to scan the chapter and think about the stories of lives transformed by the power of Jesus. In His journey, Jesus is stuck to the heart with a deep compassion for the many people who are hurting and lost.
 - A. Why is it significant that Jesus describes these people as sheep? What ways do we sometimes view people who are hurting in our day and age (ex. People experiencing homelessness, those afflicted by addiction, those living in poverty, those in prison, etc.)?
 - B. How can we grow in our compassion for this in our city and the world that are lost and broken?

- C. What is the greatest need each human experiences?
- 5. Jesus lets this compassion move Him to invite His disciples to pray for the harvest.
 - A. How is Jesus able to view the needs of broken humanity as a harvest of opportunity?
 - B. Why do you think that Jesus calls us to pray first, before we move to action or planning?
 - C. What obstacles get in the way of us turning our compassion into prayer?
- 6. Jesus call to pray is a surprise to many.
 - A. Why do many people hold a low view of prayer?
 - B. Does Jesus ask us to pray to keep us busy, or do you believe that it plays a critical role in His work in the world? Can you think of examples or stories of the role prayer has played in God's mission?
 - C. Do your prayer feel earnest or do they feel ho-hum? How can you develop an earnest passion for praying for God's mission in the world?
- 7. Jesus also surprises us by commanding us to pray that He would send (or compel) labourers into the harvest.
 - A. Why do we often ask God to do things that He has asked His people to do?
 - B. How does knowing that He is the sovereign Lord of the harvest shape the way we pray?
 - C. What area of the world, or area of need, do you see that does not have enough harvesters? Take a moment to pray that God would send labourers into these harvest fields.
- 8. In response to His call to prayer, He then sends the 12 (and in Luke 10:72) disciples to do the same work that He was doing (proclaiming and demonstrating the Kingdom).
 - A. Why does praying for more labourers often result in us feeling compelled to co-labour with Jesus in His mission?
 - B. Have you every had the urge to share the Gospel, or meet a need through good work?
 - C. How would it shape your response to know that you might be the very answer to a prayer that someone else in the world has prayed to the Lord of the Harvest?
- 9. Finish this time with prayer and ask that God would stir a passion in your heart for prayer and also for His mission on the earth.