

## Help Wanted, Inquire Within

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I think maybe Jesus needed a manager. Someone to schedule his meetings and public appearances. Someone to get the greatest possible public relations bang out of every event. I could have done such a job. Just looking at how he spent his three years in the ministry, I can see the problems, and the potential, quite clearly.

Jesus was inefficient.

For one thing, he spent way too long getting up to speed. Jesus spent more time ministering in his own home area, Galilee, than anywhere else. He was familiar with Galilee. He was raised there, he knew these people, he was one of them. Many people assume that Jesus had a vast, sprawling ministry; but if I drive across an area the size of Galilee, it barely takes two hours. Galilee was only about 50 miles north to south, about 25 miles east to west. That's all.

And this, in spite of the advice I would have given him, had I been there at the time, was the area that Jesus decided to make his ministry target — his home mission field, we might say.

Galilee was a province of Israel. Israel was not even an independent nation at the time; it was a colony of the Roman Empire, and it was commonly referred to as Palestine. Palestine on a map was tall and narrow, with three provinces stacked up, one on top of the other: Galilee in the north, Samaria in the middle, and Judea in the south.

Concentrating on Galilee was not a good career strategy. In terms of regional and cultural biases, Palestine was upside-down from the United States today. American Southerners represent one stereotype, Yankees in the north represent another — we see these biases played out in movies and books; we see regional divisions all through American history, with northern and southern Senators duking it out in Congress and Vivien Leigh gunning down a Union soldier in *Gone With the Wind*.

Back in Jesus' day, Palestine was torn by exactly the same kinds of regional biases, except that the geography was upside-down. Judea was in the south, but it was like the industrial north in America today. Judeans felt they had the superior culture. Judea was the political center. Jerusalem, the New York City of that day, was there. The really big money was tied up in Judea.

Galilee was in the north, but it was stamped with some of the same stereotypes as Dixie. People in Judea felt that these Galilean people had an accent; they bore the burden of that stereotype about not being generally as highly educated or cultured as the Judeans.

Biblical historian Merrill Unger points out that the people of Galilee were “easily recognized by their dialect and tone.”

The disciple Peter learned this the hard way in **Mark 14:70**, waiting in the courtyard while Jesus was going on trial. Someone picked him out of the crowd as a follower of Jesus simply because of his Galilean accent.

People actually called the early Christians “Galileans” in order to put them down. The emperor Julian hated Christians; he called Jesus “the Galilean God.” Julian actually tried to abolish the use of the term “Christian” by requiring Christ-followers to be called “Galileans”!

This was the area to which Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, devoted himself! He had three short years to do his work, yet he spent most of it in the boonies. Even more disturbing is that by the time we get to **Matthew 9:35**, he’s not only spending his precious time ministering to the unrefined people of Galilee, but actually making sure he covers the whole region. He “**went through all the towns and villages,**” Matthew reports, not wanting to miss a single nook or cranny. William Barclay translates it as Jesus going “**on tour**” throughout Galilee.

In any case, he was crisscrossing the region, deliberately stopping everywhere. He did not hit only the densely populated areas. He did not seem to be too concerned with attracting huge crowds.

Why?

I hear the click of destiny’s clock — Jesus’ thousand or so days of ministry are slipping away — and he is frittering them away in the hapless little hamlets of Galilee!

Why? *Why?*

The answer is love.

He is there because of his love.

Because he is a Savior who is interested in *one person*.

Jesus is in Galilee — thank God — to find *me*.

This seemingly foolish “Galilee tour” is my own great hope — because of what it tells me:

I do not have to be part of a huge bloc of voters to get God’s attention.

I do not have to be part of a massive institutional church to be in God’s family.

I do not have to have my name on the membership rolls of some vast denominational operation.

I do not have to live in an upscale neighborhood.

I do not have to have an impressive address.

I do not have to be articulate.

I do not have to be educated.

I do not have to have all the proper social graces.

All I have to be is one human being, and Jesus is there for *me*.

I have a soul. I have an identity. He created me. He loves me.

And he will go to the ends of the earth to find me!

Jesus, after all, was the one who thought up the parable of the one lost sheep, in **Luke**

**15:** he said, in essence, “Look, if you’re a shepherd with 100 sheep and one gets lost, don’t you go looking for the lost one? You devote yourself to the one who’s lost, because the 99 are already safe!”

Jesus was beginning his final swing through his home state. This was his last shot at his own people. After this he would head south to Judea, and there he would die. He didn’t want to leave anybody out.

So he mounted “The Galilee Tour.” He went “**through all the towns and villages**” (**Matthew 9:35**). Big places. Small places. He didn’t distinguish between places that seemed important and places that seemed unimportant. He could dine at the Ritz, and he could hang out in front of the adult bookstore downtown. As far as Jesus was concerned, every lost person was equally lost. As far as Jesus was concerned, every needy person was equally needy.

Still, Jesus wasn’t wandering aimlessly through the area. Matthew points out that Jesus worked hard. In fact, as he was traveling around Galilee, he was “**healing every disease and sickness**” (**Matthew 9:35**).

Jesus was *not* just concerned about eternity. He was also concerned about the here and now. He was concerned about people’s immediate problems. When someone was in pain, Jesus hurt with them.

In every case, Jesus stopped and healed the pain — even though he knew it was just a temporary healing. He knew the day would come when they would hurt again. They would get sick again. They would get old. They would die. There would be a funeral. Their family would grieve. Their body would be buried.

Even knowing all of this, Jesus healed them. Always! “**Every disease and sickness.**” Long-term illness. Short-term illness. Hereditary problem. Something you caught from the drinking water. He made no distinction. He healed it all.

This tells me that Jesus cares about my pain. Yes, he may choose to grow me, mature me, through a certain problem or situation, instead of just healing me or solving the problem for me. But even in those situations, I have the joy — the peace — the confidence — of knowing that Jesus is with me *emotionally*. He cares for me. He aches where I ache. He grieves where I grieve. He loves me.

When Jesus scanned the horizon of his home state and saw the sheer number of needy souls, “**he had compassion on them**” (**Matthew 9:36**). He saw how life had beaten them down. He saw how ill-equipped they were to deal with their problems. He saw how clumsily they were searching for answers, and not finding any.

They were “**like sheep,**” his heart told him, but “**without a shepherd.**”

Of all the farm animals, farmers will tell you, there is no animal more inclined to get lost than a sheep.

When I was a child, my Uncle Johnny had a farm in New London, Ohio, and there he kept a flock of sheep. One might expect a certain romance to this: a flock of quiet, fluffy sheep grazing peacefully on a beautiful green hillside, and so on and so forth.

But no. Uncle Johnny’s sheep were kept in a muddy pen and a grungy barn.

As an evil eight-year-old boy, I came to make certain observations about Uncle Johnny's sheep: I could go out to the barn by myself, and I could play with those sheep like toys. I could clap my hands, and they would scatter — bleating and crying. I could give a sharp yell, and they would fall all over each other, going every which way, trying to get away. I could stamp my foot, they would jump and run in all different directions.

No matter how many ways I found to terrorize those poor sheep, they never wised up. They never figured out that I was harmless. They never tried to run away according to any kind of strategy; they were all over the map. I could have harassed them till they dropped from exhaustion, and they were helpless to respond any other way.

Now imagine this same flock of animals grazing out in an open pasture, as they did in Bible times. A crow goes over and squawks — the sheep scatter. A clap of thunder — the sheep scatter again.

Where are they going? They're clueless.

These are animals that urgently need leadership. They need a shepherd. If they don't have constant, careful shepherding, they're doomed.

That — but without the sarcasm — is how Jesus saw the people.

He saw them as helpless, shepherdless. Brimming with fear.

It broke his heart.

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Maybe, as his personal manager, his career handler, let's say I finally soften.

Maybe I see his interaction with the people, his deep love and care for them, and I cave in and say, "Okay, obviously your work isn't done. Let's stay on tour here a while longer. You were going to do three years of ministry; let's make it three-and-a-half."

Or maybe I say, "Okay, look, this one-on-one thing is too slow; it's inefficient. Just wave a magic wand and make everybody's problems go away."

But neither of these is Jesus' plan.

What's on his mind, as he sees that his time is running out, and he obviously can't get to everybody himself?

He thinks about you — 21 centuries in the future, watching this video.

He thinks about how to reach you.

He thinks about how to extend his work — his life, his love — forward through human history. So you won't be left out.

As time runs out, Jesus thinks about getting helpers. He thinks about duplicating his ministry in the lives of regular, ordinary people.

Here's what he says, in **Matthew 9:37**: "**The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.**"

He looks down through future history and his heart longs for people to come to him — to give themselves to him — so they can finally experience the peace they've been searching for.

Jesus longs for them to let him begin his life-giving work in them. Because he is so in love with people, he is eager for *the harvest!*

Palestine was an agricultural society; they had acres and acres of crops to harvest; and there were no machines.

Workers went out into the fields with scythes, big sharp curved knives, swinging the blade to cut the ripened heads off of the wheat.

It took hundreds and hundreds of workers.

And it had to happen fast, because once the crops were ripe, if you didn't harvest them in time, they would rot.

And all the investment in that crop would be squandered.

Jesus looked at the world full of needy people and he said, So many are ripe. Ripe for love. Ripe for compassion. They are at a point in their lives when they urgently need someone to "be Jesus" to them. It's time to harvest them.

Jesus sees weary, wandering, sheep-like people, and he doesn't envision a traditional "altar call."

His heart longs for me to be there, in that person's life, and love them in his place.

For a long time, evangelical churches have defined "witnessing" as explaining.

Explaining the Gospel. Explaining spiritual things. Getting people to understand spiritual truths intellectually.

But if I just love you — if the way I express my relationship with Christ to you is simply by loving you, and keeping on loving you, no matter what *you* are, no matter what *you* do — then my very natural and loving actions are my "witness" to you.

If it "witness" to you for any other reason — if it's not really about loving you — then my motivation is corrupt. What I'm doing becomes manipulation. I want to get a response out of you.

If I focus on love, I won't go wrong. If I focus on "getting someone saved" — getting them to recite a certain so-called "sinner's prayer" — then I can really make a mess.

Jesus sees a world full of people in need of authentic love. They're so needy, they're just primed for someone to come along and say, *Hey, let me help meet your need. That's what Jesus would do.*

Jesus decided not to do this by magic. He decided not to send some kind of cloud over the earth and put the entire human race into a spiritual trance to make them surrender their lives to him.

"I don't want robots," he says. "I want relationship. I want friends. I want family. That's why I created people in the first place. So I need harvesters. Go out into the harvest field, and reap what's ripe.

Millions of people are spiritually ripe — because their needs are so deep, and so serious, and so seemingly impossible to solve. But they need someone who knows Christ — who lives by Thing 1 and Thing 2, loving God by loving people — to love them.

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I can share my faith in God. I can tell people how I trust God. But loving them is more important than talking *AT* them.

My own personal truth is, when I have an opportunity to share my faith with someone, I usually make an excuse in my own mind. I bail. But there is no rule that says before I love someone like Jesus would have loved them, I have to hear an audible voice from heaven authorizing me to go ahead.

If God opens a door for me to meet someone's need and talk about how and why I've come to trust God with my life, I don't need a degree from a theological seminary.

I don't have to use any fancy theological phrases.

I don't need a formula or a step-by-step routine to go through.

I can just be myself; I can be pleasant, I don't have to be pushy. I can be concerned, I can be human. I can simply tell that person how I feel. Why I'm doing what I'm doing. What God has done for me. How it happened that I came to trust him with my life. And encourage them to trust him too.

If they're not going there, they'll tell me. And if I've expressed myself warmly, as a concerned friend, they're not likely to shut me out of their lives forever just because I expressed my way of thinking to them.

I can keep on loving them.

I can go on with life.

I have done what I could for the moment.

Certainly God will give me another opportunity, maybe with that person, maybe with another person.

Certainly the harvest field is big enough that I'm going to cross the path of another spiritually ripe person before very long.

What will God do through you, if you let him?

What will God do *in* you, if you let him?

Ask him.

See what happens!