

“Many patients are coming into the ER with a disease caused by an unknown pathogen. A doctor studies this pathogen in order to create a vaccine against it. She discovers that the infectious agent is an intracellular bacterium and its cell surface is coated with humanlike proteins. Considering the mechanism of the pathogen, the doctor decides to generate a live-attenuated vaccine instead of a heat-killed vaccine. What are the two advantages of using a live-attenuated vaccine vs. a heat killed vaccine in this case?” If I put that problem in front of you and asked you to solve it would it freak you out? That problem was on a biology final exam at MIT. Impossibly hard when it’s not your area of expertise and you haven’t studied.

If you had an interest in live-attenuated vaccines I suppose it wouldn’t be impossible. Same for just about everything, farming for example. If you’re interested then it wouldn’t be so impossible. How about this? Many people throughout the world are dying and going to hell. They need something to be saved, to be harvested for the Lord. But it must happen before they die. How do you solve this problem? That answer isn’t impossible. You know, but why and how?

Jesus warned about the challenges and difficulties that come with following him. Yet here we are. We’re Christians, just like in the gospel this week, ready to be called into the field for the harvest. Seems impossible, seems out of our area, but as Jesus called those disciples to go he calls us to go too...

**Christians bring in the Lord’s harvest  
Easier with the Lord’s strategy  
Completed with the Lord’s victory**

If only I’d paid more attention in tech ed class in high school. I could probably fix my own car, wire my house, or put up a fence. Then it seemed boring, now I can’t do it. I hire people who can, who have the knowhow, and the desire. With the number of people in the world currently standing at over 6.5 billion, a fair majority of those don’t hear about Jesus weekly and may never have heard about Jesus. They’re scattered widely, with little technology to communicate, and they speak different languages. There isn’t a class in high school or college you could’ve paid enough attention in to be able to reach all those people. It’s a big harvest field. **“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”** We know it, we see it.

So why does God send inexperienced and lowly disciples? Why send 72 who have little power when Jesus had all the power and desire to do the work? Wouldn’t that be a better strategy? God could just get the Word to people and make them believers or not. Then you and I wouldn’t have to feel so stressed. Jesus didn’t set it up that way though. **“Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go!”** They were the answer to their own prayer. They were the workers, but it was the Lord’s harvest fields and the Lord’s strategy. Jesus provided friendship and support. Jesus provided a home that would welcome them on the road. Jesus provided food and drink. The Lord’s strategy made sure they had what they needed to go.

Jesus also provided the message. **“Tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’”** That was a basic idea of the fuller message, but what’s the kingdom of God? Clearly it’s from God. Clearly it was a present reality and was something they knew about. God always comes to people through his Word. The Holy Spirit works faith through the Word in people’s hearts. So the kingdom of God is what? It’s God working in sinful people’s hearts right now, his active ruling activity.

Looking around does it seem like the strategy might be broken among us? The people of Oklahoma City seem unaffected by our message. Even pews where we expected people to be sit empty of members and guests. It’s easy for us, you and me, to say if we’re going to be part of a loser then we’ll go down trying every other strategy we can. We make demands of people. Give this much, attend this many times. We make people feel guilty for not coming or not giving. In desperation we might change the sign, the name, the programs until we found the combination that attracts the most people and boosts our membership numbers and financial numbers.

We want so badly to seem like we’re bringing in the harvest that we forget whose strategy it is. Jesus gives you the strategy. People must hear that they’ve cut themselves off from God by their sins. It’s realizing we have cut ourselves off from God with our misguided desires to see higher numbers of offerings and attendance simply for our own survival. It’s also a strategy of sharing why God saves. We proclaim Christ crucified and risen. We share God’s grace and people are brought into the kingdom of God. We hear for ourselves that Jesus wipes all our sins away. He frees us from the burden of guilt so no more demands need to be made. Our joy is to hear of the life giving and life saving gospel of Christ.

Our joy is also in being sent out like those 72 by the Savior. **“Go! I am sending you out...”** The gracious loving Savior sends you and me into the harvest of the Lord and gives us the strategy. We go because people won’t come to us. We go with something to invite them to. We may not have size, the programs, music that dazzles, or a rock stage. But I assure you we have what counts. The strategy of sharing Christ works because it worked on you. It’s hard because results aren’t always immediate. It’s hard because other churches seem to be growing bigger and faster. It’s hard but it’s the Lord’s harvest. And it’s easier because it’s the Lord’s strategy.

No strategy can guarantee success. Even sports teams with a strategy cannot assure victory. Even armies with a strategy can never be sure they’ll have no casualties. Even politicians with a strategy can’t be sure they’ll win. With the Lord it’s different. In the Lord’s harvest field he alone has the right strategy. What’s amazing is he also guarantees victory. Christians bring in the Lord’s harvest completely with the Lord’s victory.

When a team wins you're likely to hear all about how things worked so well. "I had my guy not knowing which way I was going." "I knew exactly what would come next." "It was all a piece of cake." **"The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'"** They were like a team celebrating an easy victory. "Jesus, your name was awesome. Nothing could stop us, not even demons." They needed to be careful. Teams who think everything will always go their way are in danger. If the missionary's joy is in victory and demolition of demons, what happens when victory isn't so apparent? The towns they preached in still didn't welcome Jesus with open arms when he came. Wasn't that failure? Where could they find joy then?

I've sat next to someone on an airplane and been involved in a conversation with them. I found out what they did, where they lived, and why they were traveling. I waited for them to ask me what I did, and had little butterflies rolling in my stomach. I nervously tried to figure out how I could bring the conversation around to spiritual things, how I could work Jesus into the conversation. And when I got it out, when I actually talked about Jesus, then I expected...what? I don't know. Maybe that the person would thank me for telling them. Maybe that the person would ask for more information. I'm not sure what I wanted them to do, but I was just glad I shared what I knew. But do you see the danger? I shared Jesus, but I relied on myself for victory. I looked for victory in the wrong place, and when it didn't happen like I thought it should I felt destroyed. I was quick to sin thinking more of myself and my techniques or even my desire. I forgot to see victory where it truly was.

True triumph and joy is found not in the defeat of demons or in the sheer numbers of people talked to. The real victory is that Christ was shared at all, that his grace was given to us, and that we have been given victory. **"Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."** Our victory is in Christ's victory. Jesus won the battle over Satan in our place. We are truly free from Satan's grasp. Our sins are blotted out in the blood of Jesus. Your names and mine are recorded in the book of life in heaven. Jesus' name is our reason for joy.

Whether it's solving infinitely hard biology problems, trying to do things around the house you weren't trained to do, or trying to share Jesus with an entire world, there's a huge amount of difficulty. Trying to do these things ourselves with no training seems impossible. But God has not left you to do it alone. He gives you his strategy, with a message about sin and grace, about death and life. He gives you his victory, won for you by Christ. Christian, with the Lord's strategy and victory we can bring in the Lord's harvest.