

"Compassionate Laborers"  
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"And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, '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.'" (Matthew 9:35-38)

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Pastor Wally told the story of Thomas Johann Bach who was converted to the Christian faith by gospel tract he received in Copenhagen. The story found in the "Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Autumn 1994 -- Volume 7:13, by Perry C. Brown (and the rest of the story): "A stranger stopped 18-year-old Thomas Bach on the streets of Copenhagen, Denmark and persistently offered him a gospel tract. "Why don't you bother other people with your religion?" Thomas barked. "I'm quite able to take care of myself!" Furiously, Thomas snatched the gospel tract from the stranger's hand, ripped it into pieces, and stuffed it into his pocket. "You attend to your business, and I'll attend to mine!" he snapped. Instead of answering Thomas's anger, the stranger simply turned away to a nearby doorway, folded his hands, closed his eyes, and began to pray. To the astonishment of Thomas, who was still watching, the stranger had tears on his cheeks. Making his way back to his room, Thomas was overcome by curiosity. He dug the scraps of paper from his pocket and began to piece them together on his desk. Then he read the simple message that "while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). "As I read," Brother Bach relates, "I came under conviction, and it seemed like the mighty hand of God was upon me. Before I had finished reading the tract, I was down on my knees asking God for the forgiveness of my sins. He was faithful, and then and there He brought me into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Out of gratitude for what God had done for him, Thomas Johannes Bach served God for years as the General Director of The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM) (often referred to as "The Little General"). He was a spiritual leader to the mission's eight hundred workers who labored around the world sharing the same good news that Thomas encountered that day in Copenhagen." In the story, Thomas asked the boy who had handed him the gospel tract "Why do you bother other people with your religion?" So, when's the last time that I actually "bothered other people with [my] religion"?

The story also recounts that the stranger "persistently offered him a gospel tract." How easy is it for me to just throw up my hands in surrender and declare, "Well, I tried!" when it comes to spreading the gospel message to someone who, like Thomas, responds with anger or bitterness, and why?

How did the stranger's response to Thomas' angry outbursts impact Thomas? Explain.

Jesus went out teaching (transferring knowledge) and proclaiming (To promulgate; to announce; to publish; to declare with honor; as, to proclaim the name of the Lord, that is, to declare his perfections (Exodus 33:19) – Webster, 1828) the “gospel of the kingdom”. What kind of pushback did Jesus receive as He taught and proclaimed the Gospel message? (To prime the pump, see Mark 3:1-2, 22)

Even before the inception of the New Testament church, the Old Testament group of the faithful went through some “pushback”. The author of the Book of Hebrews provides a summary statement of that fact: “... and others experienced mocking and scourging, yes also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground” (Hebrews 11:36-38). How do I respond to pushback in general and pushback (or attacks) about my faith specifically?

Hebrews 12:3, tells me to “[c]onsider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” So, stop for a bit and “consider him [Jesus]”. How did Jesus endure “such opposition from sinful men”?

Pastor Wally spoke of the Evangelism Explosion that was started in 1962 by Dr. D. James Kennedy who made witness-training the bedrock of his ministry, utilizing on-the-job training. There were two diagnostic questions that folks were taught to ask...Do you know for sure that you are going to be with God in Heaven? And then, if they answered yes, if God were to ask you, “Why should I let you into My Heaven?” what would you say? So, what would I say?

In Pastor Wally’s discussion of his evangelism handout discussing who God is, he said that because God is holy and good, He can’t abide sin/rebellion. Well, can I abide sin and rebellion?...do I abide sin and rebellion? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Jesus not only went out teaching and proclaiming the Gospel, He was also “healing every disease and every affliction”. Jesus has the ability to heal. I’ve not seen that I have that gifting. If and when I go forth to teach and proclaim the Gospel message, what God-given ability(ies) do I have to offer those with whom I share His message?

Pastor Wally reminded me of the parable of the sower – “...When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” (Matthew 13:18-23) R.C. Sproul said that “Though this parable is more commonly named after the sower of the seed, the “parable of the soils” is a more fitting title. The role of the sower in the story is important, but the parable’s point is twofold: first, to explain why different soils — different people — respond differently to the Gospel and, second, to invite us to examine ourselves to think about the kind of soil we hope to be.” Matthew Henry writes: “That which distinguished this good ground from the rest, was, in one word, fruitfulness. He does not say that this good ground has no stones in it, or no thorns; but there were none that prevailed to hinder its fruitfulness.” Stones or thorns may be found in the good soil of a true believer’s heart, but such obstructions do not finally prevent him from bearing fruit. Despite your remaining sin, is your life bearing fruit for Christ?” And, is it? Explain.

Do I find that at times I feel as if I’m living spiritually in a field of thorns where “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful”? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Richard Baxter an English Puritan, born on November 12, 1615 said in his book “Dying Thoughts”, “We are members of the world and of the church, and must labour to do good to many; and therefore we have greater work to do on earth, than merely securing our own salvation. We are intrusted with our Master’s talents for his service, to do our best in our places, to propagate his truth and grace, to edify his church, honour his cause, and promote the salvation of as many souls as we can. All this is to be done on earth, if we would secure the end of all in heaven.” In what way(s) am I using “our Master’s talents for his service” and promoting “the salvation of as many souls as [I] can”? Explain.

Pastor Wally spoke of sheep. Some times I've heard that sheep are dumb. Pastors sometimes say this as shepherds in reference to the sheep of the church—the congregation. The idea is that sheep are dumb, and must be led well, but sheep aren't dumb. In fact, we would do much better if we thought of the sheep the way the Puritan Thomas Watson (1620–1686) described them in his sermon, "The Good Shepherd." Do I see any of the "sheeplly" characteristics of which he spoke in me? He said...

"First, a sheep is an INNOCENT creature. It is not hurtful or ravenous, as other creatures are—but is very harmless and inoffensive. Just so, those sheep who belong to Christ, and are of His fold—are innocent. Philippians 2:15, "That you may be blameless," that you may be harmless. The Greek word is "without horn," or "without pushing or horning"—that you may be harmless. Christ's people walk as holily as they can, so that they may give no just offense. They would rather suffer wrong—than do wrong. Those who are set upon mischief, are not Christ's sheep but are ravenous birds of prey. Those who would spill Christian blood are none of Christ's sheep. These are wolves who have been suckled with the milk of the Romish whore. These are goats whom Christ will set at His left hand, Matthew 25:32.

Second, a sheep is noted for MEEKNESS in Scripture; it is a meek creature. Let the shearer take its wool, it does not resist. If you strike a sheep, it does not snarl or fly in your face. All Christ's sheep are meek-spirited, 2 Samuel 16:12. Though a child of God may sometimes fall into a froward fit—yet he grieves for it and weeps for his unmortified passion.

Third, a sheep is a CLEAN creature; it is neat and cleanly; it delights most in pure streams and clean pastures. Just so, Christ's sheep are clean and sanctified; holiness is the thing they pray for. Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart, O God!" Though they are not perfectly holy—yet they are perfecting holiness in the fear of God. They are neat creatures, and would rather die than go through dirty, miry places. Just so, it is with Christ's sheep—they will suffer anything rather than defile their conscience. Genesis 39:9, "How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?"

The wicked in Scripture are compared to swine. They wallow in sin—in their wickedness and uncleanness. They are steeped and boiled in sin. Yes—but a good Christian breathes after sanctity. A child of God may fall into sin unawares, as did David—but he does not lie in sin. He recovers himself again by repentance. A sheep may fall into the mire—but it does not lie there; it gets out again.

Fourth, a sheep is a very USEFUL creature. There is nothing about it, that is not of some use—the flesh, the fleece, the skin. Just so, all Christ's sheep, who are the sheep of His pasture, are useful. They are still doing good, they are profitable to others by their knowledge, counsel, example, prayers, and good works. They are useful in their places. The wicked are compared to wood, Ezekiel 15:3, which is good for nothing but fuel. Sinners are useless; their life is scarcely worth a prayer, nor their death scarcely worth a tear. They live to encumber the ground. But God's people are useful; they are called the excellent of the earth, Psalm 16:3. They are blessings in the places where they come.

Fifth, a sheep is a very CONTENTED creature. It will feed upon any pasture where you put it. Put sheep upon the bare common—and they are content. They feed upon the little they pick up in the fallow ground, a perfect emblem of true saints who are the sheep of Christ. Let God put them into whatever pasture He will and they are content, Philippians 4:11. They have

learned in every state therewith to be content. Paul could be in need—or abound. He could be anything that God wanted him to be. He was content with that portion, whatever it was, which providence carved out to him.

You who are apt to murmur and repine at your condition, and think you never have enough, think to yourselves, "Sheep are content with their pasture; surely were I one of Christ's sheep, I would be content." You who have the least of the world, you have more than you know how to be thankful for. He who has the least bit of bread, will die in God's debt. A sheep is a contented creature.

Sixth, to name no more, a sheep is a TIMOROUS creature. It is very fearful if any danger approaches. It is easily frightened by the wolf. Thus the saints of God, who are Christ's sheep, pass the time of their sojourning here in fear. They are—fearful of provoking God; fearful of wounding their peace; fearful of temptation; fearful they should come short of heaven through sloth, Hebrews 4:1. It is an earmark of Christ's sheep, that they are endued with the fear of God, Genesis 42:28. This is their earmark, "men fearing God". It's true, the righteous are as bold as a lion in a righteous cause—but timorous and fearful of sinful fear. And, let me tell you, happy is he who in this sense fears always. Holy fear is the best antidote against temptation. The way to be safe, is always to fear.

To make some use of this, let us all labor to be found in the number of Christ's sheep. All the world is divided into two ranks—sheep and goats. If you would be glad to be found in the day of judgment as Christ's sheep, and sit at His right hand, be much in prayer. Pray to God that He would change your nature, that He would take away your wolfish nature, your fierceness, your frowardness, and that He would transform you into His own image. Labor to be among Christ's sheep, to get into Christ's fold.

There is only one way in which you do not want to be like sheep—for sheep are apt to wander sometimes from their fold. Take heed that you do not straggle into bypaths of error and heresy. It is dangerous to wander for fear the devil, the wolf, should catch you. Don't go astray as sheep; but in other things resemble sheep in meekness, in patience, in usefulness, in willingness.

Oh! Let all Christ's people, His sheep, flock together and associate in love. Those who hope to meet together in heaven should not fall out by the way. Unity is the great music in heaven. There is unity in the Trinity—and unity among saints would be a great blessing on earth. For Christians to unite is their interest and wisdom; union is their strength, union is their glory and their ornament. This was the honor of the primitive churches, all of one heart, Acts 2:1. There was but one heart among them. Let the sheep of Christ unite together. When the saints are harmoniously united, then they adorn their blessed Shepherd, the Lord Jesus. So much for the first of these, Christ's sheep."