FIELDWORK TRAINING

Matthew 10:1–42

Key Verse: 10:1

“Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.”

 The famous rapper Willie D once said, “It’s easy to see why some people can’t seem to get where they want to go in life—they can’t follow instructions.” Many think it’s better to have their own ideas or be creative and to ditch the instructions. But later, they find they haven’t really learned or accomplished much. When we’re in some kind of training, following instructions is essential. In spiritual training, it’s even more crucial.

 One of the major themes of Matthew’s Gospel is discipleship. In this book Jesus uniquely gives five major discourses on discipleship. Chapter 10 is the second one. Until now the disciples have been following, watching and listening. Now they’re sent out for fieldwork training, their first exercise in what ministry would be like. In these instructions Jesus teaches his disciples to do exactly what he was doing. It seems hard—even impossible. But if they really listen to his instructions and follow carefully what he said, God will work through them. At first it may seem Jesus wants to use them to build a bigger ministry, to bring in more people. But his real goal is not a larger ministry, but the disciples themselves. Their spiritual growth is most important. His instructions in this chapter can still change us to really be like Jesus, if we’re willing to accept them. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living word today.

In chapters 8–9 Jesus was mainly healing people. He was overwhelmed by their needs. He saw them with compassion, as sheep without a shepherd. In his compassion, people were like a plentiful harvest; the problem was, there were too few workers. The same is true today. In this context, Jesus calls his twelve disciples to him and sends them out. He’s training them to be gospel workers.

How does he prepare them? Read verse 1. First, they’re called “to him.” It means he wants them to come and *learn* from what he’s about to say. Those not willing to learn from Jesus can’t be sent out by him. Second, he gives them “authority.” The Greek word is “exousian.” It means “permission, ability, strength or influence.” Jesus himself has God’s authority—God’s permission and God’s power—to minister to people, because he was sent by God. Now he gives his authority to his disciples. How could they have it? Only when they obeyed him. Third, he sends them out to heal. Read verse 1 again. To Jesus, people's real problems aren't human but spiritual; they're caused by “impure spirits.” They come from the devil. The human eye can’t see impure spirits, but this world is filled with them. They lead us to lust, or greed, or various kinds of rebellious, self-destructive behavior. Mere talk can’t help people under the influence of impure spirits. We need Jesus’ authority so that these spirits can really be driven out.

Read verse 1 once more. Jesus wants his disciples to focus on healing every disease and sickness. He wants them to be not wounders, but healers. Honestly most people are wounded--by their parents, teachers or coaches, by their classmates or peers or siblings; some are even wounded by their children. Usually wounded people wound others. Some people are like wounding machines; others are healers. As we’ve seen, in his ministry Jesus was a healer. 4:23 says, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, *and healing every disease and sickness.*” [emphasis added] Again, 9:35 says, “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom *and healing every disease and sickness.*” [emphasis added] Matthew especially portrays Jesus as our spiritual healer. As a tax collector Matthew had become spiritually very sick. But Jesus invited him to be with him. The Pharisees couldn’t understand how Jesus could associate with such people. Jesus responded: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick” (9:12). Among the Gospel writers Matthew uniquely describes Jesus: “He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases” (8:17; cf. Isa53:4). Jesus could heal not just with his power but because he was *with* the sick, taking up our infirmities and bearing our diseases. Now Jesus calls and sends his disciples to engage in healing ministry.

How can we be spiritual healers? We need to experience Jesus’ grace of healing. Apostle Paul was changed from a wounding machine into a healer when he experienced the grace of Jesus. In his famous book *The Wounded Healer* Henri Nouwen lamented that most Christian leaders are unprepared to help hurting people*.* Why? Because they only teach; they’re not willing to expose their own sins or share how the grace of Jesus has helped them. Frankly, many so-called Christians haven’t ever really opened themselves up to Jesus for his healing. So even though they work hard and seem good, they still have deep, unresolved life issues. Jesus doesn’t call us to go and force people to do certain things. He calls us to bring spiritual healing, by sharing his grace personally. In our own power we can’t heal anybody. But when we depend on Jesus’ authority and experience his healing grace, God can use us as a healer.

In verses 2–4 we find the names of the twelve. In some ways they were all similar. Unlike the Pharisees and teachers of the law, none of the twelve were like old wineskins, with fixed ideas, thinking they already knew the Bible. They all were like new wineskins, humble and ready to learn. On the other hand, they were all so different. Each had a unique personality. Simon Peter was passionate and outspoken; Andrew was simple and willing; James and John were quietly ambitious; Philip was a human calculator; Bartholomew was kind of just there; Thomas was a doubter; Matthew had been a public sinner; Simon the Zealot, a political radical; Judas Iscariot, a betrayer. Jesus chose all different kinds of people so that they might reach all kinds of people.

Verse 2 calls them “apostles.” Literally it means “sent ones,” meaning representatives, delegates, or ambassadors. As apostles they were sent by Jesus to represent Jesus. To really be his apostles, they had to represent Jesus well by doing and saying what Jesus would do or say. This again stresses how important it was to really be listening to Jesus and carefully following his instructions. The twelve apostles were special. They lived with Jesus and were personally trained by him. The church is built on them. But in a sense, all Christians are called to be Christ’s ambassadors (2Co5:20a). This is why we all need to be careful to be truly representing Jesus.

Look at verses 5–6. In this fieldwork training they were to go not to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of Israel. It was Jesus’ own mission while on earth (15:24). Later he would tell his apostles, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations” (28:19a). But at this time he tells them to share in his specific mission. God had a specific mission for Peter, and a specific mission for Paul (Gal2:8,9). God always has a specific mission for each believer. We need to pray and listen to God until we can discover it, then start doing it.

Read verse 7. Regardless of our specific mission, this always has to be our message. “The kingdom” was the message of John the Baptist (3:2), the message of Jesus (4:17), and the message of the apostles (10:7; cf. Ac8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31). In every generation and every local place, we need to be telling people, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” It’s not a prediction of the end times; rather, it means the kingdom of heaven is near to everybody right now, through Jesus. How? He’ll give anybody the forgiveness of sins if only we repent and believe in him (Ac2:38; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18). “The kingdom of heaven has come near” means people can be reconciled to God through Jesus (2Co5:20b). When we’re forgiven and reconciled to God, we have a living hope in heaven (1Pe1:3,4). The hope of heaven fills our souls. People may seem to need many things—a better job or education, a good marriage, or wisdom. But what everybody really needs is the message of Jesus: “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” We should be sharing it. “Near” implies immediacy and urgency. When we hear his message, it’s time to repent, to turn away from our sin and our worldly pursuits, and really turn to God. If we don’t repent, we may miss it.

Look at verse 8. Jesus is calling his apostles to do the very work he did. Healing leprosy? Raising the dead? It was only by the miraculous power of God. Elsewhere he told his disciples, “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (Jn14:12–14). We can do such miraculous works of healing when we truly believe in Jesus and pray. We especially need to pray that Jesus may be glorified, not us. Jesus also said that since we have freely received, we should also freely give (8b). It meant not to charge any money. As we receive the grace of spiritual healing freely from Jesus, so we should also share his grace freely. We shouldn’t calculate about the results, or try to hold onto people as if ministry were a business. Just freely receive his grace, and freely give.

Look at verses 9,10. Basically, Jesus is training them not to depend on money in ministry, but to depend only on God. Some people try to use money or material benefit to get people to come to church. It never works. Some workers worry about their own finances too much, and this worry chokes out the word of God from their hearts (13:22). Then they become ineffective and unproductive (2Pe1:8), pierced by financial distractions (1Ti6:10). Jesus wants to train us to truly depend on God for our finances. He taught in 6:33, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” He also said, “You cannot serve both God and Money” (6:24b).

Read verses 11–15. Here Jesus mentions a “worthy person” and a “deserving” home. Who is a worthy person? Simply, they're people who welcome a servant of Jesus (40a). They’re not trying to use Jesus’ servant; they’re trying to listen and learn because they’re truly open. Jesus says, “If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words…” (14a) Jesus is training his apostles here to be clear. We should be spending our time with people who’re interested in the words of Jesus. If not, we should leave.

Look at verses 16–25. In Jesus’ instructions this is the longest section. He predicts that many will not welcome or listen to his apostles. He also says many are like wolves, ready to use, even harm them. He predicts that his apostles will be arrested, tried, flogged, betrayed, sometimes put to death, and hated. The hatred and persecution will not really be for them, but for Jesus himself. Why is there so much resistance to Jesus and his gospel? It’s because he calls all people to repent, and people don’t want to repent. Instead, we get mad. If we don’t repent, we persecute. Persecution is so strong because, frankly, many are under devil's influence. We shouldn't be surprised when we’re not welcomed, but hated and persecuted because of our faith. We should prepare our hearts that when we make Jesus our Teacher and Master and follow him, we'll be persecuted as he was. In fact, God uses persecution to make us more like him.

Look at verses 26–33. Jesus repeatedly told his apostles in these verses, “Do not be afraid.” When facing hatred, persecution, or maybe even death, how easy it is to be afraid! But Jesus coaches us how to overcome this fear. It’s when we fear God. We need to remember that our souls are most important, and that only God determines our soul’s eternal destiny. Most of all, when we turn our thoughts to God and who he really is, fear of people evaporates. We can speak his word boldly, without fear. We also need to know how precious we are to God.

Look at verses 34–39. He goes even deeper here. How easy it is to love people close to us more than Jesus! How easy to love our lives in this world! But Jesus wants us to love him most, more than family and friends, more than the good life, even more than life itself. He wants us to love him, take our own cross and follow his footsteps. We can follow him and do his work when we have such love for him in our hearts. Again, gospel ministry isn’t a business; it’s a matter of love. In the last part Jesus promised God’s reward to those who welcome his servants (40–42). We, too, should welcome and help Jesus’ servants.

Today we learned that Jesus trained his disciples as gospel workers. For the training to work, they had to take his words seriously and actually follow his instructions. Jesus’ main focus was not on gathering crowds, but on his disciples’ growth as spiritual workers. May God humble our hearts to really follow the principles Jesus taught. Through his training may he grow us to be like Jesus, so that through us, people can be deeply healed by his grace and become members of his kingdom.