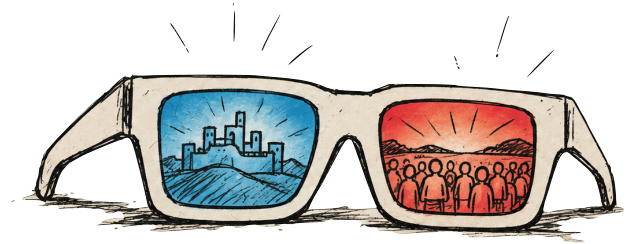


A NEW WAY TO SEE. A NEW PLACE TO START.

What if moving forward begins by looking again?

For most of my life, when I thought about reaching people for Jesus, I started with the Church. How do we get people to come? How do we create something they will attend? How do we make church more relevant, welcoming, engaging, or accessible? How do we get the people out there interested in what we're doing in here?



Churches have asked them with sincere hearts and have helped countless people encounter Jesus. But after years of conversations and relationships with people outside our churches, I began wondering if there might be another place to start.

I am increasingly convinced that the days of assuming the harvest will cross the thresholds of our church buildings are numbered. That doesn't mean church buildings are disappearing or that gathering together has somehow become less important. It means we can no longer build our approach to the harvest around the expectation that they will come to us.

The plentiful harvest Jesus described is already somewhere else. They are working beside us, living next door, sitting across the table, sharing the break room, drinking coffee, raising children, traveling, laughing, hurting, questioning, searching, celebrating, struggling, and simply getting on with their lives. Some are curious about Jesus. Some are skeptical. Some aren't thinking about Him at all.

And Jesus sees a plentiful harvest.

What if, instead of waiting for the harvest to come to us, we started there? Not as a strategy, but as a paradigm.

A NEW WAY TO SEE

A paradigm is simply a way of seeing. It shapes what we notice, what we assume, the questions we ask, and ultimately what we do.

Jesus looked at the crowds around Him and saw something His disciples apparently weren't seeing. Matthew tells us that when Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "*The harvest is plentiful.*"

I don't think we should separate those two things.

Jesus didn't just see opportunity. He saw people. He saw beneath the surface. He saw their weariness, confusion, vulnerability, and need, and what He saw moved Him with compassion. Then He called them a plentiful harvest.

That raises a couple of important questions: *What did Jesus see that they didn't? And what might He see in the people around us that we aren't seeing either?*

Those questions have increasingly shaped the way I understand what it means to follow Jesus into the world.

I sometimes picture it as putting on a pair of old-fashioned 3D glasses.

Those glasses had two different lenses. Looking through either lens by itself gave you part of the picture. But when you looked through both lenses together, something happened. The picture gained depth and dimension. You could see what you couldn't see through either lens alone.

Harvest Forward begins with two lenses: **KINGDOM** and **HARVEST**.

Jesus announced, ***"The time has come. The Kingdom of God has come near."*** He also looked at the crowds and declared, ***"The harvest is plentiful."*** And He taught His followers to ***"seek first the Kingdom."***

But Jesus said something else that matters deeply to the way we see the harvest. He called God ***"the Lord of the harvest"*** and told His disciples to ask Him to send workers into ***"His harvest field."***

THE HARVEST BELONGS TO GOD

That means when we step into the harvest, we aren't taking God somewhere He isn't. We aren't bringing the Kingdom into a God-forsaken place. We are entering fields that already belong to Him. The Lord of the harvest is already there.

That changes the posture of the worker. We don't enter as the people who have arrived with God and all the answers. We enter with Holy Curiosity, expecting that the Lord of the harvest has preceded us. We listen. We notice. We pay attention. We ask, "Jesus, what are You already doing here that I haven't learned to see yet?"

These aren't competing ideas, and they aren't sequential realities. The Kingdom is near. The harvest is plentiful. And the Lord of the harvest is already present in His fields. These are realities Jesus invites us to recognize.

The **KINGDOM** lens reminds us what we are seeking. Jesus is King. His Kingdom is near. We learn to look for His activity, His character, His purposes, and the signs of His reign breaking into ordinary life.

The **HARVEST** lens reminds us whose field we have entered. These aren't people waiting for us to arrive so God's work can begin. They are people deeply known and loved by the Lord of the harvest. So we listen to their words. We notice their behavior. We learn their stories. We pay attention to their hopes, heartaches, questions, expectations, fears, frustrations, dreams, and desires. We resist the temptation to assume we already know what they think, what they need, or what Jesus wants to do in their lives.

And when we look through both lenses together, something happens: Holy Curiosity.

Holy Curiosity is what happens when we look through the lens of the Kingdom and the lens of the Harvest together.

Holy keeps us seeking the Kingdom.

Curiosity keeps us paying attention to the harvest.

Curiosity without Holy can become little more than fascination with people. Holy without Curiosity can become assumption. We can become so certain that we already know what God wants to do that we stop paying attention to the person standing in front of us.

Holy Curiosity holds both together. We enter the plentiful harvest expecting the Kingdom to be near because the Lord of the harvest is already there. We listen. We notice. We wonder. We ask questions. We allow ourselves to be surprised.

And compassion matters here. Holy Curiosity isn't detached observation. Jesus didn't merely notice the crowds. He was moved by what He saw. Learning to see differently should lead us toward people, not simply give us better information about them.

The Kingdom is near.

The harvest is plentiful.

The Lord of the harvest is already there.

Holy Curiosity helps us see.

That is the Harvest Forward paradigm.

A NEW PLACE TO START

This changes more than what we see. It changes where we start.

When I say, "*Start with the harvest*," I am not suggesting that the harvest comes before the Kingdom. Jesus told us to *seek first the Kingdom*. I mean that when we're asking what a faithful expression of the Kingdom might look like among particular people, we don't begin with our existing church form, program, strategy, or preferred solution.

We begin with the actual harvest in front of us.

Instead of beginning with what we want to build, we begin with who is already there. Instead of beginning with a program, we begin with a person. Instead of beginning with an answer, we begin with Holy Curiosity. Instead of asking, “*How can we get them to come to us?*” we begin asking, “*What might Jesus want us to see here?*”

That doesn’t make the Church less important. It reminds us that the Church belongs to Jesus and has always been sent into His world.

The harvest isn’t somewhere we occasionally visit when we have an outreach event. It is where most of us already live, work, eat, play, shop, travel, exercise, raise our children, and drink our coffee (or other beverage of choice). The harvest is all around us.

And Jesus called it plentiful.

A NEW PARADIGM REQUIRES NEW PRACTICES

Read that section title again. Pay attention to the word *requires*.

We cannot learn to see the harvest differently and then simply return to the same practices built around our old way of seeing. *If the way we see changes, the way we move must change with it.*

This doesn’t mean everything we have practiced before is wrong or that everything we do next must be new.

Prayer is still prayer. Scripture is still Scripture. Hospitality, compassion, worship, communion, generosity, disciple-making, and gathering together remain deeply important.

But a different starting point will *inevitably* change how those practices take shape.

If we start with a program, we will look for people to fit the program.

If we start with a church form, we will look for ways to bring people into that form.

But if we start with the actual harvest in front of us, seeking the Kingdom and practicing Holy Curiosity, the expressions that emerge may look very different from anything we would have designed beforehand.

If we simply carry our existing practices into a new paradigm without asking whether they make sense within this particular harvest, we haven’t really started with the harvest at all. We’ve changed the way we see without allowing what we see to change the way we practice.

That is why Harvest Forward needs more than a new way of seeing. A new paradigm requires new practices.

I picture those practices as a three-bladed propeller.

EXPLORE. EXPRESS. EXPERIMENT.

They aren't three steps to complete or stages we graduate from. Like the blades of a propeller, they keep turning together, creating movement.

EXPLORE is Holy Curiosity in practice. We listen before explaining. We notice before deciding. We ask questions before offering answers. We pay attention to people, relationships, patterns, tensions, and possibilities while remaining attentive to the Kingdom that Jesus says is near.

In essence we are doing *Kingdom Reconnaissance*.

EXPRESS grows from what we discover. As relationships deepen and trust forms, we begin discovering ways to express the Kingdom that make sense within these actual relationships and this particular harvest. Sometimes those expressions are remarkably ordinary: a meal, a conversation, an act of kindness, a question, a friendship, a small circle of people gathered around a table.

The expression follows the relationship.

EXPERIMENT gives us permission to try something without pretending we already know exactly what it should become. We take what we're seeing and learning and step into a possibility. Then we assess. We adjust. We advance. And what we learn sends us back into exploration with new questions and new curiosity.

The propeller keeps turning.

That's Harvest Forward.

It isn't a new church model. It isn't another program to implement. It isn't a blueprint I'm hoping churches will copy. It is a paradigm and a practice: an invitation to see differently and, because we see differently, to move differently.

The glasses help us see. The propeller helps us move.

KINGDOM and HARVEST. EXPLORE. EXPRESS. EXPERIMENT.

Seek first the Kingdom. Start with the harvest. Look through both lenses together. Practice Holy Curiosity. Enter the harvest knowing that it already belongs to God and that the Lord of the harvest is already there. Pay attention to the people around you and remain open to seeing something you couldn't see before.

Then move toward what you see.

And *that* is how the Kingdom advances.