

KINGDOM RECONNAISSANCE

Looking for Jesus in the Harvest

Jesus said the harvest is plentiful. You would think a plentiful harvest would be easy to recognize. Maybe people would regularly ask us questions about Jesus. Perhaps their eyes would light up whenever His name entered the conversation. They would be fascinated by our faith, grateful when we offered to pray for them, and eager to hear what we believe. Maybe they would even start asking where they could learn more. Wouldn't that be nice?



But that just isn't what I have experienced. The harvest Jesus describes often doesn't look or sound anything like what I imagined a harvest should look like. It can sound like skepticism, indifference, anger, confusion, loneliness, curiosity disguised as criticism, a joke about religion, a painful story about the Church, or a question that doesn't sound remotely spiritual. Sometimes it sounds like someone insisting they want absolutely nothing to do with God.

And yet Jesus said the harvest is plentiful.

So where is it?

That question has haunted me for years. If Jesus is right, and I believe He is, then perhaps the problem isn't the condition of the harvest. Perhaps the problem is our ability to recognize it. Maybe we have been looking for the wrong things.

We tend to recognize spiritual interest when it arrives in spiritual language. Someone asks about God, and we recognize it. Someone wants prayer, and we recognize it. Someone asks about the Bible, Jesus, faith, or church, and suddenly we know something is happening. But what if the harvest rarely announces itself that clearly?

What if it sounds more like, *"I thought getting this job would make me happier than it did"?*

What if it sounds like, *"I'm thinking about moving somewhere nobody knows me"?*

Or, *"I don't really talk to my family anymore."*

Maybe it sounds like, *"I deleted all my dating apps last week."*

"I have no idea what I'm doing when I go home."

Or even, *"Christians drive me crazy."*

None of those statements sounds particularly spiritual. Most would be easy to hear, respond to casually, and forget five minutes later. But an *éclairneur* hears them differently. Not because we

secretly assign spiritual meaning to everything someone says, but because we have learned not to dismiss the ordinary. We become curious.

Why did they say that?

What is underneath it?

Is this something I have heard before?

Is there a story here I haven't heard yet?

Suddenly, the harvest begins looking very different.

Matthew tells us that when Jesus saw the crowds, He saw people who were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He turned to His disciples and said, "*The harvest is plentiful.*" He saw the same people everyone else saw. He just saw something different in them.

That may be one of the great challenges facing those of us who want to enter the harvest. We don't simply need greater courage to talk about Jesus. We need eyes capable of recognizing where He may already be at work.

This is where *Kingdom Reconnaissance* begins. The French word reconnaissance carries the idea of recognition. It describes the work of entering territory to observe, investigate, and discover what is actually there. *An éclaireur*, a scout, spy, or pathfinder, doesn't enter unfamiliar territory assuming they already know what they will find. They pay attention.

Kingdom Reconnaissance is learning to do the same thing in the plentiful harvest. We listen beneath the obvious. We resist the temptation to interpret too quickly. We become curious about what catches our attention, what keeps happening, and what doesn't quite fit. Over time, I have learned to pay particular attention to three things: clues, patterns, and tensions. They don't prove that we know what Jesus is doing. They simply teach us where to look again.

CLUES

A clue is something that catches your attention without immediately telling you what it means. That's important because we are often far too quick to interpret what happens around us. Someone asks a question about God and we immediately see an opportunity to share the gospel. Someone expresses loneliness and we start imagining a small group. Three people begin meeting regularly and we wonder whether it could become a ministry. An *éclaireur* learns to resist that impulse because a clue is not a conclusion. It is an invitation to become curious.

A clue might be someone lingering at the table after everyone else has left. It might be a coworker suddenly trusting you with something deeply personal, the person who always seems to find you when something difficult happens, a joke about religion that carries more weight than the person intended, or someone becoming unusually defensive when God enters a conversation. It could even be something that initially appears negative.

For years, I thought resistance meant I had encountered a closed door. Sometimes it does. But sometimes resistance is worth becoming curious about because strong reactions often have stories behind them. Someone says, “I hate church.” That’s a statement, but an *éclaircisseur* may also hear a clue. Not because we secretly translate it into, “This person actually wants Jesus.” That would be dishonest. They may genuinely hate church. The clue is that something has enough significance to produce a strong reaction.

Rather than defending the Church, correcting their assumptions, or explaining why their experience isn’t representative, we can become curious and say, “Tell me about that.” Those four words have taken me into places arguments never could.

The same is true when someone says they don’t believe in God. We don’t need to hear that as a challenge requiring an apologetic response. We can simply wonder about the story behind the statement and ask, “What brought you to that conclusion?” Now we’re exploring.

The temptation is to turn every clue into an opportunity. Kingdom Reconnaissance teaches us to turn clues into questions. Why did that conversation suddenly become deeper? Why did she tell me that? Why does this group keep gathering? Why did he react so strongly? Why did that particular comment stay with me? Why does this person keep inviting me further into their story? We don’t have to know yet. A clue simply gives us a reason to look again.

PATTERNS

One clue may mean nothing, but then something similar happens again and again. The same question surfaces in conversations with different people. Several people begin expressing the same longing. The same group keeps finding one another. Conversations repeatedly become deeper in a particular place. People keep inviting you into similar parts of their lives. Clues begin connecting, and a pattern starts to form.

Patterns are important because they help us distinguish isolated moments from something that deserves sustained attention. This has happened repeatedly throughout the story of Cast Member Church. Something would happen once and I would notice it. Then it would happen somewhere else, and then again with another Cast Member from another country. Eventually, I would realize that I wasn’t looking at disconnected experiences anymore. Something was happening.

One of the patterns we began noticing among international Cast Members was the strange combination of freedom and disorientation that often accompanied leaving home. They had traveled thousands of miles for what many considered the adventure of a lifetime. They were meeting people from around the world, experiencing independence, discovering new possibilities, and becoming versions of themselves they hadn’t known before. At the same time, familiar anchors had disappeared. Family was far away. Old friendships changed. Cultural assumptions were challenged. Questions about identity, purpose, relationships, faith, and the future began surfacing.

No one handed us a document explaining that this was happening. We noticed it because we were there long enough to see the pattern. That’s an important part of Kingdom Reconnaissance

because patterns require presence. You cannot recognize what keeps happening if you aren't around long enough to see it happen again.

That is one reason relationships matter so deeply. When our interaction with the harvest is primarily occasional, event-driven, or transactional, we see moments. When we share life with people, we begin seeing movement over time.

Patterns, however, introduce another temptation. We see something happen repeatedly and immediately want to build something around it. We name it, brand it, organize it, create a strategy for it, and turn it into something reproducible. We move from observation to architecture before we have finished observing.

Kingdom Reconnaissance asks us to stay curious a little longer. A pattern doesn't necessarily tell us what to build. It tells us where to look closer. Instead of immediately asking, "What should we do about this?" we can ask, "What are we seeing?" What keeps happening? Who keeps appearing? What conversations keep surfacing? Where does trust seem to form naturally? When do people become unusually open? What questions keep returning? What changes over time? The longer we remain present, the more the terrain begins revealing itself.

TENSIONS

Then there are tensions. I have come to believe tensions may be some of the richest places for Kingdom Reconnaissance because tensions appear where two realities seem to exist at the same time.

Someone says, "I don't believe in God, but I still pray sometimes." Another says, "I would never go to church, but I like talking about Jesus." Someone surrounded by hundreds of people admits, "I have plenty of friends, but I feel completely alone." Someone living the experience they dreamed about for years says, "This is everything I wanted, but something still feels missing." Another person says, "I finally have the freedom I always wanted, but I don't know who I am anymore." Someone else admits, "I don't know what I believe, but I feel like something is happening to me."

Those statements don't fit neatly into our categories. That's precisely what makes them interesting.

We tend to want to resolve tension. Someone describes loneliness and we immediately start thinking about community. Someone expresses spiritual curiosity and we want to provide answers. Someone describes confusion and we feel pressure to create clarity. But an *éclaireur* doesn't rush to eliminate tension. An *éclaireur* explores it.

We might ask, "Tell me more about that," "When did you start feeling this way?" "Why do you think that bothers you?" "What do you think you're looking for?" or "What changed?" Those aren't questions designed to steer someone toward our predetermined destination. They are ways of walking further into the territory with them.

Tension often tells us that something beneath the surface deserves attention. There may be longing beneath frustration, a question beneath certainty, hurt beneath anger, hope beneath cynicism, fear beneath independence, or a desire to belong beneath someone's insistence that they don't need anyone. That doesn't mean we get to decide what the tension means. It means we get curious.

Sometimes our greatest contribution is resisting the urge to resolve what someone is still discovering. We can stay there, listen, and wonder.

OBSERVATION BEFORE INTERPRETATION

There is a danger in all of this. Once we begin looking for Jesus in the harvest, we can become so eager to find Him that we start seeing what we want to see. Every coincidence becomes divine orchestration. Every interesting conversation becomes a spiritual breakthrough. Every question becomes evidence that someone is "open." Every friendship becomes an opportunity.

That isn't reconnaissance. Reconnaissance begins with reality.

We observe before we interpret. A clue is a clue. A pattern is a pattern. A tension is a tension. We don't need to make them more spiritual than they are. Someone asking about Jesus doesn't necessarily mean they are ready to follow Him. Someone telling you their story doesn't necessarily mean God arranged the conversation. Someone criticizing Christianity isn't secretly asking you to evangelize them. We can allow things to be what they are.

This is why Kingdom Reconnaissance is different from looking for "ministry opportunities." The phrase sounds harmless, but it can subtly change the way we see people. When we enter someone's life looking for an opportunity, we are already interpreting the relationship through the lens of what we hope to accomplish. Eventually, we can stop seeing the person and begin seeing a potential attendee, convert, leader, volunteer, or success story. The harvest becomes a collection of possibilities for our vision.

Kingdom Reconnaissance reverses that posture. The person in front of me isn't a potential anything. They are a person. Their story deserves to be heard before it is interpreted. Their questions deserve to be explored before they are answered. Their pain deserves presence before explanation. Their trust deserves to be honored rather than leveraged. This is why we move at the speed of trust.

RECONNAISSANCE IS NOT RESEARCH

There is another distinction worth making. Kingdom Reconnaissance is not another name for demographic research.

Research can be incredibly useful. We can learn who lives in a community, what languages they speak, how old they are, what they value, what challenges they face, and where they spend their time. But Kingdom Reconnaissance begins somewhere different.

Research often asks, “What do we need to know about these people so we can determine what will work?” Reconnaissance asks, “What is already happening here?” The difference may seem subtle, but the posture is entirely different. One gathers information in order to create a strategy. The other enters without knowing what might emerge. One can study people from a distance. The other requires presence. One is looking for information. The other is learning to recognize movement.

You cannot spreadsheet your way into Kingdom Reconnaissance. You have to be there. You have to know names, hear stories, share meals, notice absences, recognize when someone isn’t themselves, remember what they told you three weeks ago, laugh with them, and sit with them when life falls apart. Eventually, you begin seeing things that could never appear in demographic data. You begin seeing the terrain.

POSSIBILITY BEFORE PLAN

Something interesting begins happening when we remain attentive long enough. Clues accumulate, patterns emerge, and tensions become visible. Eventually, possibilities begin appearing.

Possibilities are different from plans. A plan says, “Here’s what we’re going to do.” A possibility asks, “I wonder what would happen if...” That may be one of the most important questions an éclaircisseur can learn to ask.

We begin wondering what would happen if we invited them to dinner, kept having this conversation, introduced these three people to one another, asked another question, met here again next week, talked about a story from the life of Jesus, or didn’t organize anything at all and simply kept showing up.

That little phrase, “I wonder,” protects us from certainty. It allows us to move without pretending we know where we’re going.

This is where reconnaissance begins becoming experimentation, not because we have discovered the formula, but because we have discovered something worth exploring. We try something small and then pay attention again. What happened? What surprised us? What didn’t happen? What changed? What did we learn? What new clue appeared?

Then we assess, adjust, and advance. The experiment doesn’t end reconnaissance. It simply gives us more to notice.

THE HARVEST WAS THERE ALL ALONG

Which brings us back to Jesus and His words, “*The harvest is plentiful.*”

Maybe we’ve spent too much time reading those words only as a motivational statement about how many people need Jesus. What if they are also an invitation to see?

Jesus looked at ordinary people and recognized a plentiful harvest. The crowds weren’t necessarily asking the right questions. They weren’t standing in orderly lines waiting for someone to explain the gospel. They weren’t presenting obvious evidence of spiritual interest. They were people who were harassed, helpless, complicated, hurting, searching, and living ordinary lives filled with stories Jesus could see more deeply than anyone else.

And He called it a plentiful harvest.

Perhaps the harvest around us hasn’t disappeared. Perhaps it isn’t less receptive than it used to be. Perhaps our neighborhoods, workplaces, universities, hospitals, coffee shops, restaurants, apartment buildings, and dinner tables are already filled with the plentiful harvest Jesus described. Maybe we just don’t recognize it because we have been looking for something else.

Kingdom Reconnaissance teaches us to look again. Listen for the comment that makes you curious. Notice the conversation that keeps happening. Pay attention to the person who keeps appearing. Become curious about the contradiction that doesn’t quite fit. Notice where trust is forming. Watch for what changes over time. Look for clues, notice patterns, explore tensions, and resist the urge to decide too quickly what any of it means.

Somewhere beneath the ordinary conversations, complicated stories, skepticism, laughter, loneliness, questions, criticism, friendships, interruptions, and everyday life around us, Jesus may already be at work.

You don’t have to manufacture the harvest, and you don’t have to make it plentiful. Jesus already told us it is.

Our task is to learn to see it.