

EXPECTATIONS

The harvest isn't hiding. It just doesn't look like what we assumed.

We all carry expectations. We have them about people, places, churches, ministry, ourselves, and even God. They are formed by our experiences, what we've been taught, what has worked before, what hasn't worked, and the stories we've learned to tell about the world around us.

Expectations aren't necessarily bad. They help us make sense of life. The problem comes when we stop recognizing them as expectations and begin treating them as reality.

That's when expectations become filters.

We expect certain kinds of people to be interested in Jesus and others not to be.

We expect certain communities to be spiritually fruitful and others to be resistant.

We expect God to work through certain methods, conversations, gatherings, leaders, and environments because those are the places where we have seen Him work before.

Without realizing it, our expectations can become the boundaries of our imagination. We don't simply interpret what we see through them. We can actually stop noticing anything that doesn't fit them. Eventually, we stop looking for what we don't expect to find.

Jesus continually disrupted expectations.

When Philip told Nathanael that they had found the One Moses and the prophets had written about, Nathanael's response wasn't curiosity. It was an assumption: *"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"*

Nathanael hadn't met Jesus yet, but he already had a story about Nazareth. His expectation of the place shaped what he thought was possible from the person. Philip's response was beautifully simple: *"Come and see."* In other words, look again.

Then there were the children. People brought them to Jesus, and the disciples tried to send them away. Apparently, they had already decided who deserved Jesus' time and attention. Jesus saw things differently.

When Jesus spoke with a Samaritan woman at a well, His disciples were surprised to find Him talking with her. Their reaction tells us something about what they expected. This wasn't the person. This wasn't the place. This wasn't how they imagined the story unfolding. Yet Jesus saw something they didn't.



And then there were the crowds. The disciples saw hungry people and limited resources. They counted what they had: five loaves and two fish. The numbers told them there wasn't enough. Jesus saw opportunity where they saw limitation.

Again and again, the people around Jesus encountered something they hadn't expected.

God wasn't absent from the places they overlooked. Jesus wasn't avoiding the people they dismissed. The Kingdom wasn't waiting for the circumstances they considered ideal. Something was already happening. They simply hadn't learned to recognize it yet.

I wonder how often we do the same thing.

We look at a person and assume they aren't interested in Jesus because they don't use the language we recognize. We look at a community and decide it is resistant because people aren't responding to the approaches we have used before. We look at a generation and conclude they have walked away because they aren't showing up where previous generations showed up. We can even look at places with little visible Christian activity and assume there is little spiritual activity happening there. But those are not necessarily the same thing.

What if people are asking questions we haven't learned to hear yet?

What if spiritual hunger is being expressed in language we don't recognize?

What if people we have assumed are resistant to Jesus are actually resistant to something they have confused with Jesus?

What if our expectations are telling us what to see before we've actually looked?

That question matters to me because of something Jesus once said while looking at the people around Him: *"The harvest is plentiful."*

His disciples were looking at the same world. They were walking through the same towns, meeting the same people, and hearing the same conversations. Yet Jesus saw a harvest. Maybe the harvest wasn't invisible. Maybe they just hadn't learned how to see it yet.

That possibility challenges me because it means one of the greatest obstacles to seeing what Jesus is doing might not be what is happening around me. It might be what I have already decided is happening around me.

This is one reason *Holy Curiosity* matters so much.

Holy Curiosity interrupts expectation. It loosens our grip on the story we have already written and gives us permission to look again. Instead of saying, *"I know what's happening here,"* curiosity asks, *"I wonder what Jesus is up to here?"*

Instead of assuming someone isn't interested, we listen. Instead of labeling a place resistant, we pay attention. Instead of deciding something isn't working, we become curious about what might

be emerging that we haven't recognized yet. We look closer. We listen longer. We ask another question.

And sometimes we discover that the person we thought wasn't interested has been asking deeply spiritual questions for years. The community we thought was resistant is hungry for something real. The place we assumed was barren has signs of life everywhere. Jesus has been there all along.

The invitation isn't simply to work harder at reaching the harvest. The invitation is to question some of our expectations long enough to actually see it.

I don't believe the harvest is hidden. It just doesn't look like what we expected.

And that leaves me with a question I want to keep asking myself:

What am I not seeing because I don't expect to see it?