KICKED OUT FOR THE KINGDOM

In Luke 10:2, Christ proclaimed to the seventy disciples before they went out, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” While the translation is mildly put as “send out,” the original Greek is ekballo and is more akin to “throw,” “cast out,” or “violently thrust forth”! The sense is more forceful than the translation suggests. Christ indicated that these laborers had to be thrown forth into the work of the harvest!

Jesus uses the same word when casting out demons in Luke 11:20, and it is used when He Himself was “thrown” into the wilderness to be tempted for forty days in Mark 1:12. The sailors of Acts 27 “ekballo-ed” the wheat into the sea to lighten their ships. This word connotes a lot of action: Jesus was asking the seventy to pray for God to launch forth “ballistic missile” workers into His harvest work.

This week’s lesson looks at the fourth stage in the process of discipleship: harvest. All the efforts of preparing, planting, and cultivating have come to this point where souls are ready to make a decision for the kingdom of God. This is where the entire process comes to a climax, yet ironically, “the laborers are few.” How willing are you to be a kicked-out disciple for the kingdom of God?
Write out John 4:28–38 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, you may write out John 4:36–38. You may also re-write the passage in your own words, outline, or mind-map the chapter.
GASTRONOMY TO ASTRONOMY

After we cultivate interest with ongoing Bible studies, a time will come to reap a harvest of spiritual resolutions that culminate in the unique decision to be baptized. Full-grown wheat does not bless anyone unless someone intentionally reaps the harvest. In the same way, we are counseled to make personal and public appeals to those studying Bible truth, urging them to follow Christ and the light that has been revealed to them.

In John 4, the story of the Samaritan woman continues. After her encounter with Jesus, she goes back to her city and calls people to come and “see a Man who told me all things that I ever did” (John 4:29). While the newest Samaritan disciple is in the process of bringing people to Jesus, the other disciples are more fixated on their gastronomic needs (v. 31). Christ uses the topic of food to emphasize His appetite to do the will of God in winning souls for the kingdom of God. His concerns are cosmological issues between heaven and earth instead of mere bread!

As the Samaritans are walking toward them, Jesus instructs the disciples, “Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest” (v. 35). He proclaims that these Samaritans are ready to make a decision for God. Christ then explains that some have done the beginning work of sowing, while others have done the end work of reaping. In the end, this group of Samaritans believe, saying, “For we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (v. 42).

Jesus is looking for laborers in the harvest field—those who will lead others to make decisions to follow Christ and Bible truth. Crops do not harvest themselves. The reason many people don’t make spiritual decisions isn’t that they aren’t ready but that we often fail to ask for decisions. Calls for spiritual decisions are not just made publicly—they can also be made in one-on-one and small-group settings.

Too often, today’s disciples have the same fixations as Christ’s initial disciples. While amazing spiritual and evangelistic activities are happening, some disciples are just wanting to eat food and appeal to God with their mundane requests. As the Samaritan mission was launching and having a missiological domino effect throughout Samaria, the disciples were preoccupied with food. Though God, in His wonderful mercy, does provide food, shelter, and “all these things,” our food should be to do the “will of Him who sent [Jesus], and to finish His work.”

Memorize your favorite verse in John 4:28–38. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

Is your prayer life more fervent for temporal, gastronomical needs or eternal, cosmological interests? Why?
REGULAR PUBLIC EVANGELISM

One (and perhaps the best) way for churches to consistently gain decisions for Christ is to conduct regular public evangelism. Regular means more than holding a series every few years. It means publicly proclaiming the three angels’ messages (though some areas may require harvesting done in private contexts due to political situation), accompanied by personal ministry, through a full evangelistic series every year. Here are some practical ways to get this started:

1. SCHEDULE at least one full evangelistic series each year in a neutral or church location that can accommodate a crowd.
2. APPOINT one or two speakers, a meeting coordinator, and other necessary team members.
3. INVOLVE every member in some way—prayer and personal invitations, distribution of flyers, visitation, children’s program, registration, greeting, music, and so on.
4. ADVERTISE and INVITE in every way possible (personal invitations, mass mailings, radio, online, social media).
5. COMBINE a personal soul-winning plan with public preaching to include Bible studies, letters, visitations, baptismal classes, appeals, and a follow-up plan for each interest.
6. PROVIDE leadership support—promotion, financial support, and participation.
7. PRAY for laborers and for the salvation of souls through public evangelistic series.

For more information on the harvest stage and the Grow cycle, visit https://grow.adventist.org/harvest/.
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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Acts 20:20, 21
Matthew 9:35–38
Proverbs 6:6–11

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with discipleship and harvesting?

Review your memorized verse from John 4:28–38.
THAT DECISION

How many sermons have you heard that really have no point? How many Bible studies have you heard that have no purpose? How many Sabbath School classes have you been to that merely seek to run out the time? All that we do in our discipleship training should be for Christ. And as it is His great directive (see lesson 1) to “throw us out” into the world to seek souls, we are to bring people (at the right time) to a decision.

The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that the laborers of the harvest are few, though the harvest is ready and the fruit visible. Why is harvesting so difficult and even awkward? Perhaps while studying this week, you have been feeling like this lesson isn’t for you. The reluctance to call people to a decision may result from the following scenarios:

1. No Know-How: “Many would be willing to work if they were taught how to begin” (Christian Service, 59). This is the simplest and most common answer. Many have never learned how to make an appeal. As we share truth, we must ask the following questions. “What is it that I am asking the hearers to do?” “Why was this subject presented?” “What should the listener do with it?” “What is God’s will concerning the message and the hearer?” Second, the response should be carefully thought through. “With what or how will people indicate their response?” Will show of hands, standing, walking, cards, verbal assent be used? Third, clarity should be communicated on when, how, and where the response to the appeal should be made. Fear may lead one to make an ambiguous appeal that could compromise the decision. Remember, however, that mechanics are not as important as being honest and sincere in the personal plea you are making.

2. Too Self-Reliant: Some scenarios are awkward and uncomfortable because the disciple is focusing too much on self. When the emphasis is on public opinion, popularity, the avoidance of shame, and other selfish interests, the experience indeed becomes void of God’s approval. Instead, making an appeal should strengthen our reliance on the Holy Spirit and His will for the individual. “The secret of our success and power . . . will be found in making direct, personal appeals to those who are interested, having unwavering reliance upon the Most High” (The Review and Herald, August 30, 1892).

Do you want an intense experience that will drive you to complete reliance upon Christ? Why not get involved in public evangelism or in a Bible study decision scenario that harvests another generation of disciples for Jesus?
CLINCHING THE INTEREST

“If there is not a decided application of the truth to their hearts, if words are not spoken at the right moment, calling for decision from the weight of evidence already presented, the convicted ones pass on without identifying themselves with Christ, the golden opportunity passes, and they have not yielded, and they go farther and farther away from the truth, farther away from Jesus and never take their stand on the Lord’s side. . . .

“After the meetings are through, there should be a personal investigation with each one on the ground. Each one should be asked how he is going to take these things, if he is going to make a personal application of them. . . . Five words spoken to them privately will do more than the whole discourse has done. . . .

“All over the world men and women are looking wistfully to heaven. Prayers and tears and inquiries go up from souls longing for light, for grace, for the Holy Spirit. Many are on the verge of the kingdom, waiting only to be gathered in. . . .

“When we engage with all our hearts in the work, we are closely allied to the angels; we are co-workers with the angels and with Christ; and there is a sympathy with heaven and with us, a holy, elevated sympathy. We are brought a little closer to heaven, a little closer to the angelic hosts, a little closer to Jesus. Then let us engage in this work with all our energies.

“Do not become weary in the work. God will help us. Angels will help us; because it is their work, and the very work they are seeking to inspire us with. . . .

“This is a work you must take hold of earnestly; and when you find a wandering sheep, call him to the fold; and leave him not until you see him safely enfolded there. May Heaven let the Spirit that was in our divine Lord rest upon us. This is what we want. He tells us, ‘Love one another, as I have loved you.’ Go out for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. . . .

“If we have the interest that John Knox had when he pleaded before God for Scotland, we shall have success. He cried, ‘Give me Scotland, Lord, or I die.’ And when we take hold of the work and wrestle with God, saying, ‘I must have souls; I will never give up the struggle,’ we shall find that God will look upon our efforts with favor. . . .

“The test of discipleship is not brought to bear as closely as it should be upon those who present themselves for baptism. It should be understood whether they are simply taking the name of Seventh-day Adventists, or whether they are taking their stand on the Lord’s side, to come out from the world and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing. Before baptism, there should be a thorough inquiry as to the experience of the candidates. Let this inquiry be made, not in a cold and distant way, but kindly, tenderly, pointing the new converts to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Bring the requirements of the gospel to bear upon the candidates for baptism. . . .

“When in our work for God right methods are energetically followed, a harvest of souls will be gathered.”

(Evangelism, p. 283, 285; 292–294; 308; 311, 312; 330)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

If we pray the prayer of ekballo, what can we expect to see happen?

Why is it that Christ’s disciples often don’t get it—they’re caught up with temporal interests when spiritual realities lie right before them?

How are we the same? Or different?

Who are the Samaritans of your life?

How has your discipleship developed through your local church’s public evangelism plans?

Besides public speaking, what are other forms of harvest? Can digital harvesting occur?

How can you avoid awkward harvest scenarios?

Are there decisions in your own life that you need to make for Jesus now?