



Devotions

Discover, Equip, Connect and Send

Luke 10: 1-11

After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place he was about to go. He said to them, "The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest. Go! Be warned, though, that I'm sending you out as lambs among wolves. Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Don't even greet anyone along the way. Whenever you enter a house, first say, 'May peace be on this house.' If anyone there shares God's peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you, for workers deserve their pay. Don't move from house to house. Whenever you enter a city and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you. Heal the sick who are there, and say to them, 'God's kingdom has come upon you.' Whenever you enter a city and the people don't welcome you, go out into the streets and say, 'As a complaint against you, we brush off the dust of your city that has collected on our feet. But know this: God's kingdom has come to you.'

72

That's the number of people Jesus sent out in Luke 10. Freshly commissioned, he sent them out in pairs. He sent them ahead, into all the places he was to go.

72

He said to them: "The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but the workers are few. Go. Beware. I'm sending you out as lambs among wolves."

Jesus says, travel light. "Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Greet no one on the way." Seriously, Jesus? No stuff? Don't talk? Can you believe Jesus found 72 willing to travel with nothing?

72

That is 6 x12

Half of 144

What's going on here? What is going on is clearly a signal to us that Jesus called more than the initial 12 disciples. Indeed, it seems as if Jesus invited all of his followers into the mission of God in the world. Over the last two years we have named God's call upon us to see our communities as the mission field. We have named each congregation as a mission station.

So what might it mean to be willing to be one of the **72**?

Here's what I see:

1. The harvest is plentiful.
2. There is more work than workers to do the work.
3. Jesus teaches us to pray about the harvest.
4. It requires active participation.
5. The mission of the Church is not limited to a "few chosen."
6. The mission of the Church will not be easy. In fact, it may be dangerous.
7. Stay focused. Disciples are focused on God's work; bringing peace to those who are receptive.
8. The host sets the agenda, not the guest.
9. Jesus acknowledges there will be failure.
10. Perseverance is a key skill in mission work.
11. Finally, Jesus reminds us: The kingdom of God has come near.

Are there **72** among us who are willing to step into this future bearing witness to the love of God in this world and speak God's truth?

We are seeking to live into this new future:

The mission of the Nashville Area is to discover, equip, connect and send lay and clergy leaders who shape congregations that offer Jesus Christ to a hurting world, one neighborhood at a time.

72 leaders who are willing to shape congregations that offer Jesus Christ to a hurting world, one neighborhood at a time.

Prayer: Holy Lord, open our hearts and our minds to be disciples who are willing to go as people of peace. Teach us boldness of heart and mind and soul. Give to us **72** willing souls, Lord, and we will change the world. So show us now, while there is still time, so that your kingdom may come upon the earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

Bishop William T. McAlilly
Nashville Area

Discovering Our Gifts (Discover)

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; and there are different ministries and the same Lord; and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.

One of my favorite times in ministry is when people discover the spiritual gift(s) God has given them. It is exciting to see someone light up with joy and be filled with eagerness. One particular spring, several youth and adults of our local church were studying the topic of spiritual gifts. Of special interest to me was one lady who had always served in administrative areas in the workplace and in the church. How surprised she was to discover with strong assurance that she possessed a gift in the area of hospitality. From that point on she became a force to be reckoned with when it came to fellowship meals and welcoming times at our church! Our Wednesday evening meal and group attendance more than doubled over the course of the following year!

During this time, a group of youth discovered their gifts in the area of compassion. A ministry to feed local students each weekend was birthed, beginning with meals for around thirty children. Now, a few years later, this ministry feeds over one hundred fifty children each weekend as the congregation and community have joined them!

The gifts of the woman and the youth differ, yet both have been able to feed others – physically and spiritually. We are reminded in the scripture above that there are different gifts, but the same Spirit; different ministries, but the same Lord; different activities, but it is the same God who produces all of them in everyone.

So it is in our congregations. We have different gifts, ministries, and activities yet we worship and serve the same Lord. How wonderful and how amazing! We are one body – the Body of Christ.

Prayer: O Lord, how thankful we are that we are given a variety of gifts. May we continue to be one body sharing one Lord. Amen.

Rev. Sammy G. Tillman, Jr.
Minister of Worship and Education, Brownsville UMC, Memphis Conference

Listening To God (Equip)

Micah 6:6-8

With what should I approach the Lord and bow down before God on high? Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings, with year-old calves? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with many torrents of oil? Should I give my oldest child for my crime; the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit? He has told you, human one, what is good and what the Lord requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

My friend, Renita, passed away a couple of years ago. She was an awesome clergywoman who died young, and yet left a legacy of love that has lifted her family, friends and colleagues to a higher and nobler place. She often spoke of “a de-cluttered life.”

Renita knew that too many people, lay and clergy, often hold on to worldly stuff that takes too much of our time and attention. Sometime we can't see the Cross because of the mountains of stuff. She de-cluttered her life early on, choosing to invest in God's people.

One day as we walked into a restaurant in Atlanta, she saw a young mother sitting on a bench with three small children. She went over and asked to hold the baby. Then, she invited them to have lunch with us. After the meal, I said to her, “That was a sweet thing you did.” She simply said,

“I just listened to God!”

We are all called to follow Renita's example, as we step out into a hurting world to bring wholeness, healing and hope.

Prayer: Lord, help me to stop talking so much, and to take time to listen to you. Open my eyes to see tired mothers, hungry children, and those who need to be brought to your table. Help me to “de-clutter my life.” In Jesus' name, amen.

Rev. Roger A. Hopson
Clarksville District Superintendent, Tennessee Conference

Love Connects Us (Connect)

1 John 4:7-12

Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. The person who doesn't love does not know God, because God is love. This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him. This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us.

This Scripture from 1 John describes the close relationship between God's love and the love we are to show each other. God loved us so much that he sacrificed his Son for us. This sacrificial love serves as a model for us to follow, and in fact God dwells within us and the actual love of God is reflected through our love of each other.

My family and I were humbled to receive a tremendous outpouring of love from others six years ago when my daughter was diagnosed with a brain tumor. We received meals, cards, change for hospital vending machines, stuffed animals for my daughter, help with child care for my other children, and of course countless prayers and encouragement. She is now a beautiful vibrant twelve year old, but those days of uncertainty about her future and watching her suffer through surgeries and radiation treatments were the darkest days of my life. As frightening and bleak as those days sometimes were, however, I could always find comfort and hope in the absolute certainty of God's love and presence as it was powerfully manifested through these loving actions of others.

When the Body of Christ gathers around one another, pouring out the love of Jesus into each other's lives, then the incarnational presence of God is active and alive in the world. It is in this atmosphere of soaking love that congregational excellence honors the Christ that we love and serve.

Prayer: Gracious and loving Father, help us to love each other as you first loved us through the sacrifice of your Son Jesus Christ. The needs are many in this broken world, but your love shines like a beacon of hope in the darkness. Direct our steps in all we do to reflect your mighty unstoppable love to a lost and hurting world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Theresa Johnson
Spiritual Formation Team Member, Tennessee Conference

Looking Outward (Send)

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Brothers and sisters, we want to let you know about the grace of God that was given to the churches of Macedonia. While they were being tested by many problems, their extra amount of happiness and their extreme poverty resulted in a surplus of rich generosity. I assure you that they gave what they could afford and even more than they could afford, and they did it voluntarily. They urgently begged us for the privilege of sharing in this service for the saints. They even exceeded our expectations, because they gave themselves to the Lord first and to us, consistent with God's will.

There were times when I was growing up that I would want something that our family could not afford, and I would throw myself a pity party! Without exception, when I was in the deep blues of my party, my mother would tell me to go do something for someone else. Or she would simply have me do something for someone.

It never failed, when I stopped focusing on what I could not have and put my attention on what I could do or give, my mood would shift and I would soon forget whatever it was I wanted.

We are living in a time of transition. Church leaders everywhere feel the pressure to adapt and change so that we may offer Christ to a hurting world. We realize that we can no longer sustain the models of ministry that pretty much all of us grew up with and our temptation is to throw a pity party, and to complain about what we cannot do.

I am convinced that if we can focus and engage in reaching out to others we will find new life and new purpose. Paul reports in 2 Corinthians 8 1-5 that the churches in Macedonia, even though they were desperately poor and in the midst of fierce troubles, found great happiness in serving others and there was an outpouring of pure and generous gifts.

Let us find ways to engage our neighborhood and the world, so that we may know the joy of being faithful and fruitful congregations.

Prayer: Lord, may we focus outward to the needs of the world around us, taking our eyes off of ourselves, so that we might see where you are calling us to go forth to serve others. In Christ's holy name we pray. AMEN.

Rev. Tom Hazelwood
Director of Connectional Ministries, Memphis Conference