

I will begin today with an illustration that I have used before... because it is a good way to introduce our passage for today...

Schutt Sports... a major supplier of football helmets for the National Football League... issues the following warning label on all their helmets and on their website's homepage:

WARNING .... NO HELMET SYSTEM CAN PREVENT CONCUSSIONS OR ELIMINATE THE RISK OF SERIOUS HEAD OR NECK INJURIES WHILE PLAYING FOOTBALL.

The warning label continues with some information about the symptoms for concussions and concludes by repeating the original warning: "TO AVOID THESE RISKS [OF PLAYING FOOTBALL], DO NOT ENGAGE IN THE SPORT OF FOOTBALL." ... **[ P A U S E ]** ...

A visitor to the website can NOT access any content... until he or she checks a box next to the words "Please indicate that you have read and understand [this warning label]."

Whether or not lawyers and law suits have forced them to apply these labels... the football helmet industry is utterly honest about the risks of using their product.

In a similar way... the Bible is honest about the risks of following Jesus. (We will see this in today's passage in Luke.) In a way... we are about to see that "TO AVOID THE RISKS OF DISCIPLESHIP, DO NOT ENGAGE IN FOLLOWING JESUS." ... And since every follower of Jesus is a minister to others... the warning label of today's passage might also read:

"TO AVOID THE RISKS OF MINISTRY, DO NOT MINISTER TO OTHERS."

In our passage today... Jesus expands His ministry... in calling and sending out 70 ministers (in addition to His 12 disciples.) But He prepares them by being as truthful as a football helmet manufacturer.

Ministry isn't easy work. When Jesus outlined the mission for those He was sending out... He made this clear. We are about to see:

#1. The labor force is small (there are not enough laborers for the work).

#2. You will be vulnerable to the opposition that will be fierce as wolves.

#3. The ministry provisions and amenities are not ideal. (He wants us to rely on God).

#4. The time is limited (there is a real sense of urgency).

#5. The pay depends upon the good will of others.

#6. The message will often be rejected.

And #7. Ministry will alienate you from friends and family.

Could you ever imagine a local business... or a Fortune 500 Company recruiting workers with such honesty...? ... But Jesus encouraged His new recruits by giving them a realistic evaluation of the mission.

Why would anybody accept it...? Why have you accepted His call to minister...? ... **[ P A U S E ]** ...

(AND...) Why does He call us to minister? ... Often I have wondered why God involves people in His work... when He can do everything Himself. (I mean)... He can do the job better... accomplishing any task completely and

perfectly. ... So... why does the Lord entrust fallible... fickle... faith-challenged people... with something as important as building His kingdom?

From the very beginning of His ministry on earth... Jesus established a pattern that would become the *modus operandi* of the kingdom. ...

Beginning in Galilee... He won the hearts of a small army of disciples... and then He commissioned twelve of them to receive on-the-job training in how to minister just like Him.

(And) today we see that Jesus never intended to conquer the world with just twelve followers. ... Soon after “setting His face to go to Jerusalem,” Jesus decided to multiply His kingdom agenda by commissioning an additional seventy followers... challenging them to join His world-redeeming enterprise... with a very honest discussion about it’s difficulty.

This is something to marvel at. We might never know the answer fully – as to why Jesus does it this way. But He did.

I don’t know who Ronald Rohlheiser is... but I read a quote by him that might be part of the answer.

*"Crises of every kind will find us ... [But] these crises enter our lives not just as challenges to us to retain our balance and stability, but as invitations to stretch our hearts and minds ... [Every crisis] includes within [itself] an invitation for us to move from being good people to becoming great people."*

— Ronald Rohlheiser

When we accept The Lord’s invitation to minister... our hearts and minds are definitely stretched. It is like an invitation for us to move from being “good people” to becoming “great people.”

## Luke 10:1-12

Jesus had at least five hundred followers by the time he had finished his ministry. A group of 120 of these followers went to Jerusalem to begin the church there.

### **Acts 1:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> *In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said,*

Here Jesus designated a group of **seventy-two** to prepare a number of towns for his later visit. ... The Lord surveyed the men before Him. First... they must consider *the terms*.

They would have no special protection. They would be as sheep surrounded by a pack of wolves. They were not to take along a money bag... knapsack... or shoes. The “money bag” was for money... the knapsack was for extra clothes and supplies... and the shoes were a spare pair of sandals. ... (LISTEN)... They were not to prepare for anticipated needs. They were to ask for no money. They were not to store extra things to take along in case of need.

They were to trust that God would take care of all of these things. ... Plus... they were not to share social pleasantries: “And greet no one on the road.” This instruction refers to the long and tedious salutations that were so common in the East. They were not to stop and exchange social niceties (which could take a few hours) with every Tom, Dick, and Harry along the way. ... They were men on an urgent mission; they had more important things to do than idle pleasantries and exchanges with people. They were not to be distracted.

But I want to draw your attention back to verse two. This verse brought tears to my eyes this week as I spent time with it. My heart was so encouraged – and I hope that yours will be too.

### **Luke 10:2**

There is so much for us to glean here. ... First... ministry growth will be determined not only by the effort that we put into it – but it is primarily by prayer and God’s sovereign directing.

By calling Himself the “*Lord of the harvest*”... He reminded the laborers that the harvest — or lack thereof — belongs to God - not to the laborers. ... Boy! This really helps the workers maintain a healthy perspective. The seventy didn’t need to stay awake at night worrying over whether their efforts would succeed. God is responsible for the harvest. His laborers are responsible to labor faithfully... and to ask God to raise up more workers (more believers to minister with...)

If we ever feel overwhelmed in ministry... instead of praying for an easier job... we are to pray for more laborers to join us. ... And the word for pray is intense. It means earnest prayer. We cannot do this as though we are just going through the motions (which our praying is... so much of the time.) ... Workers have always been few in God’s work. The crying need in God’s work is more workers.

### **Luke 10:3**

Their calling was a dangerous one. ... As they invaded enemy territory... they would be like “lamb among wolves”. ... But as long as they relied on the Lord... they would win the battle.

Jesus makes it clear that their mission was not going to be rosy and cozy. They would face fierce opposition to the message of Christ. Some of it might be violent.

We are still lambs among wolves today. In fact... in our modern... so-called civilized time... 160,000 Christians are martyred for Christ every single year across the globe... especially in Muslim and Communist countries. We are only starting to face such fierce opposition in America... as many Christians are harassed and persecuted for their faith in Christ. (In California a piece of legislation has a good chance of passing that will define any parents who oppose the homosexual and transvestite agenda as “child abusers.”)

(But please hear me.) ... We all have been sent on a mission to reach even those who are wolves. ... Jesus warned it would not be easy. Yet... the opposition we face is an opportunity to show strength of character and sincerity of what we truly believe in our heart about the Lord. The Gospel is for everybody – including wolves.

#### **Luke 10:4**

Jesus gives them instructions on what not to take with them and what not to do on their journey. They were to implicitly trust the Lord for their needs. While the seventy went out as lambs among wolves... carrying no provisions... they were neither helpless nor poor. ... Jesus challenged them to live as He did (dependent upon God for safety and sustenance.) ... He wanted them to be rich and secure because of their connection with God... just like Him. ... And I believe that this has been the Lord’s lesson for us... as a church these past few years. (Don’t you?) ... We have had to implicitly trust Him to meet our needs – and He is! ... (You can almost say)

We fit the Lord's description for ministry better than a lot of churches here in America. (Perhaps – now - you know why I fell on my knees in tearful prayer... several times in my office this week.)

### **Luke 10:5-6**

Just as the seventy were to depend upon God for their provision and protection... so they were to rely upon God to send them to the right audience. ... Jesus subtly reminded His appointees that they must not be choosy about where they go or to whom they speak. ... They were to be on mission at "Whatever house" they entered. ... Regardless of the location... the size of the house... or the culture of the town... they were to bid them peace and proclaim the kingdom message. ... The seventy didn't know what houses they would enter... and Jesus didn't want them to care. ... It didn't matter. ... The kingdom of God isn't for a select and preferred audience. (*"I will only minister to those I am comfortable to be around..."*) No. The invitation is open to all people.

The blessing "Peace be to this house" is culturally rooted in the Hebrew word *shalom*. The meaning goes deeper than just the absence of war... battles... or arguments. ... It carries the idea of wholeness and prosperity in every aspect of life. ... For the Jew... the term *shalom* described the quality of life promised in the kingdom of God.

Saying "Shalom be to this house!" and watching for the response was a test. How the pronouncement of shalom was received... revealed the heart of the listeners. If someone in the house received it and then offered the hospitality of room and board – the disciple would know God wanted them to stay there... eat whatever was fed to them... and not move around to

other houses... even if another house was more to their liking. This is where God wanted them... until it was time to leave the city.

(Now)... here is something else that we all need to realize. They were not being sent ONLY to Jewish homes. They were sent to territories that included a strong mix of Jews and Gentiles. If God placed any of them in a Gentile home... they were even to eat foods that the Jewish law forbade them to eat. Jesus gave them an exemption. That is why we read THIS...

### **Luke 10:7-9**

When ministry makes us uncomfortable – we are not to go searching for another one that we simply LIKE better.

Jesus didn't want the seventy to focus on what they could **get** rather than what they had to **give**. But He did expect their physical needs to be met: "*The laborer is worthy of his wages.*" ... He expected them to receive enough compensation for their work to provide what they genuinely needed. ... He wanted them to keep their focus on the mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God and to become models of contentment rather than examples of greed or restlessness. ... In terms of ministry... contentment gains the respect of those who hear the message.

In each city they entered, they were to use their delegated power to reverse the physical effects of evil. ... And when performing a healing miracle... they were to announce that the miracle was just a foretaste of the Messiah's reign. ... (In the Greek) the phrase "*the kingdom of God has come near to you*" uses (what is called) the perfect tense... indicating a lasting effect. The divine rule of the Messiah has commenced... but the



fullness of the kingdom is still in the future. His reign will be consummated when He returns in power.

### **Luke 10:10-11**

He said to the twelve, that they are not to bless the unwilling. That's still wise advice. Don't waste your time on people who yawn or get angry or want to argue. ... Jesus advises us to tell the exciting news to those who are eager to hear.

### **Luke 10:12**

Jesus closes his instruction with a solemn word of judgment for the city that rejects his disciples. An unfortunate reality of life in a fallen world is that God's message of *shalom* will sometimes be rejected. Jesus therefore did not hesitate to prepare the seventy for inevitable resistance. In the face of rejection... the seventy were to stand fast in the truth with confidence.

On judgment day... Sodom, the most despicable of ancient Gentile cities and a symbol of unrighteousness... will fare better than the city that rejects the kingdom message. Cities that reject these messengers will have a more severe judgment... because more and greater revelation has come to them, making their sin worse.

The more light we have... the more searching the judgment. ... As for Capernaum and it's surrounding cities that all witnessed the majority of Christ's miracles and teaching... they had been exalted to heaven... but (now) would be thrust down to hell.

### **Luke 10:13-15**

This was said to prepare these ministers – for when they would be rejected. Justice will be served. “Woe” is an interjection of mournful pain and inexpressible sadness.

If we had heard the inflection of the Lord’s voice... we PROBABLY would have heard sorrow. ... The cities that rejected the kingdom message had doomed themselves to inevitable... unavoidable damnation. ... But He didn’t pronounce this “woe oracle” to convince the rebellious cities. Jesus mourned their loss to bolster the courage of the seventy. ... Those who reject these ministers message would bring condemnation down on themselves. Therefore... the ministers should not take the rejection personally.

### **Luke 10:16**

Jesus concluded His commissioning speech by underscoring their divine appointment. ... As representatives of the king... they were due the same respect owed to King Jesus. ... But... more importantly... the seventy could take neither the credit nor the blame for the people’s response to their message. ... People worship God and receive His Word because they love Him... **not** because the messenger is particularly skilled... articulate... tactful... or lovable. (Boy! That’s a relief... isn’t it?) ... Many people reject the Lord despite **His utter goodness**... not because Jesus’ messenger failed in some way. ... If the messenger has faithfully delivered the message... nothing more could have been done.

And let me say again - Ministry in the kingdom of God is not the responsibility of a select few. He didn’t set aside a group of clergy to do all the work of ministry... evangelism... care... teaching... and the myriad of

other tasks. ... While He does call some to devote their vocational lives to leading others in this way... the Messiah expects *all* citizens of His kingdom to shoulder the burden of ministry. ... While the Lord can complete the task without our help... He nonetheless has given *all* of His people a genuine stake in His agenda.

Now we come to the very exciting part in our passage where the seventy return... and give a report to Jesus.

### **Luke 10:17**

What a time their return and rendezvous must have been! ... Seventy excited Hebrews... each with a score of amazing stories to tell. ... Everyone was so fresh... so full of life. ... They chorused with joy: "*Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!*" ... Their joy was reasonable. Their joy was understandable. Their joy was right. ... Jesus even chimed in and celebrated their ministry.

### **Luke 10:18-19**

"Lightning" graphically depicts a power of dazzling brilliance that occurs so suddenly and then is snuffed out as quickly as it came. ... Jesus had seen Satan snuffed out by the powerful works of his followers! ... His power even enabled them to "trample on snakes and scorpions" (biblical symbols of evil.) Evil was stomped on. This was something to rejoice in. It was a proper joy.

HOWEVER ! This emphasis on power is not the one Jesus wants the disciples to have. He wants them to focus on their gracious and secure standing before God.

## Luke 10:20

He was not saying they should not rejoice in spiritual power, but that there is a *primary* rejoicing, a rejoicing that takes precedence over it—namely, that their names were inscribed in God’s book in Heaven.

In considering our own lives, there may be some to whom God has given many gifts. He may have given you influence in the church or power among people. Perhaps your gifts and influence have been used in many ways to thwart Satan and encourage the godly. Is this wrong? Should you not be joyful? Of course you should! We ought to be grateful for the gifts, influence, and success God has granted us. But there is a better joy—the joy that our “names are written in heaven.”

We must keep the joy of ministerial gifts, power, and success in right perspective because they can so easily foster pride. ... Virtually any person who is blessed with a spiritual gift, whether preaching or evangelism or pastoral counseling... and has had long success at it can begin to think it is because of some innate superiority.

Some people get emotionally intoxicated after successful service or the display of spiritual power. ... After God uses them in some way... they are arrogantly impressed with all *they did* for God. ... God wants us to always see that what He did for us always is far greater than what we could ever do for Him. ... It’s good for us to be moderate in the joy we have over our *talents... our gifts... and yes... our spiritual success.*

Our joy in our spiritual giftedness does **not** indicate spiritual superiority. Some inarticulate people’s prayers have been a thousand times more useful to the church... than the preaching of someone like Chuck

Swindoll... or David Jeremiah.. or whoever your favorite preacher is. Some who are illiterate reflect the heart of Christ more closely and more powerfully than seminary professors and their graduates.

For all these reasons we must not base our joy on the devils that have been conquered... the crowds gathered... or the souls saved. We can rejoice that our name is “written in heaven” because God chose to write it there. It was not the choice of a man or an angel. It was and is God’s sovereign choice. ... He knows us. He looks on us and regards us as his treasures... (anyway!) even though He knows us.

We are loved eternally. Some day the world will pass away. They will all die. All these marvelous events that thrill us now will some day be inconsequential. The eternal fact is that our names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

If you are rich... do not rejoice in your wealth... because your riches will fly away. Instead... rejoice that your name is written in Heaven. If you are a person of learning... thank God for it and use it to his glory. ... But do not make it your source of joy. Rather... rejoice that your name is written in Heaven. ... Do you have a position of leadership in Christ’s church? Thank God and glorify him in it. ... But rejoice first that your name is in the Book of Life. ... Do you have great gifts? ... Are you a meteor among many stars? Has God used you? Is he using you now? Fine. ... But rejoice first and foremost in this: your name is written in Heaven.

God has called us. And those He has called... He has equipped. He didn’t call us to fail; He didn’t even call us to “succeed” (whatever *that* means). He

called us to be faithful to Him. So... Don't give in. Don't give up. Don't burn out. Don't quit. Stay at it.