

DISCUSSION PLAN

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 15:23-28.

Looking back on your schedule and priorities for this year, what would you say is your ambition in life?

How do your ambitions compare with Paul's in terms of clarity? Value? Concern for God's kingdom?

Why does Paul say the Gentiles are indebted to the Jews?

Why should Christians be motivated to give sacrificially and generously to fund local outreach and ministry efforts?

Paul's missions journeys took many years of his life, but he had not yet traveled to Rome. Paul had missions in mind when he wrote about his desire to visit the Christians in Rome. He wanted to know them better, but not for his own sake. He wanted them to become partners with him in his journey to Spain. Their sending Paul implied financial assistance and fervent prayers for his successful labors on Christ's behalf.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 9:35-38.

The opening paragraph of this section describes Jesus' ministry approach. Jesus did not limit His mission and thus demonstrated His message is intended for all people. His great love and concern for people became the driving force for His prayer that God would call and send others to extend the work.

Based on verse 35, how was Jesus' mode of ministry different than the religious leaders of His day?

What does this verse reveal are the key components of mission work?

Why does Jesus want us to be concerned about people with spiritual *and* physical needs?

The contrast between Jesus and other religious figures is striking in many important ways, but this verse illustrates one of the most important. Jesus went to all towns and villages. John the Baptist, for example, was called to perform his ministry in the wilderness. He probably would not have been well-suited to be in the cities where the people lived. They had to come to him. Jesus' mode of ministry teaches us an important truth about God and the urgency of our shared mission. When Jesus walked the earth as God's Son, He was not a hermit or one hidden away in a monastery-like residence. He went where the people were.

What motivated Jesus to minister to the people in the ways that He did (v. 36)?

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What steps can we take to bring Jesus' compassion to people who are weary and worn out?

Why did Matthew describe the crowds as helpless, like sheep without a shepherd?

In what ways can you relate to feeling like a sheep without a shepherd? Read John 10:14. What does it mean that Jesus is the good shepherd? Why is this important?

Because of Jesus' loving heart for the people, He looked on them as sheep abandoned by their shepherd. God had directed the leaders of Israel to care for the people. But instead of caring for them, the religious leaders neglected and abused them. They imposed heavy religious obligations on the people who already carried heavy spiritual and physical burdens. Israel's shepherds neglected God's people (Ezek. 34); nobody seemed to care for them. But Jesus, the Shepherd of the sheep, had come. He cared and even gave His life on the cross for the sheep. Today He sends out Christians to join in and to continue His work.

What implications or promises are inherent in Jesus' description of the harvest (v. 37)?

Do you believe the harvest is truly plentiful? What implications should that reality have on your life?

Why do you think workers in the Lord's harvest are so few?

Jesus' love for the needy Galileans fostered a sense of urgency. He wanted to meet their needs as soon as possible. Jesus saw the opportunity for a rich spiritual harvest, and He knew that He should waste no time in gathering it. The same opportunity exists today. A tremendous harvest awaits Christians who join God in His work. Although the harvest has the potential for being abundant, as in Jesus' day, relatively few believers help in reaching people for Christ.

What is the significance of Jesus' reference to the "Lord of the harvest"?

Seeing the needs of people, Jesus called on His disciples to pray that God would send out workers into His harvest. The harvest is great; opportunity is there for us. Believers today should pray for God to call workers to missions, for we know God works through the prayers of His people. Jesus instructed His disciples to direct their prayers to the *Lord of the harvest*. A reference to God, the phrase implies His sovereignty to direct people into fields to reap the abundant harvest. As we pray, we become more open to His direction and, therefore, more willing to obey Him. Listening to God in prayer leads to obeying Him when He gives us direction. In that way, we become the answer to our own prayers.

