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Harvesting a Legacy - Faith Harvest

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No empire has ever proven stronger than faith. Even the tiny country of Israel, set between the major powers of the world - Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, and later Greece, and Rome, survived for thousands of years. They were *most* in trouble when their faith harvest became obscured with the weeds and thorns of doubt and idolatry. Moses spoke God's plan, not just for survival, but for transformation, in Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." Deuteronomy 6:4-9

This passage is called the Shema from the word "Hear (O Israel)." This is the basic confession of faith in Judaism. It means: The Lord is totally unique. He alone is God. For the Jews, there is a sense of security, compared to their polytheistic neighbors, whose gods never acted in harmony. People without this truth never know if loyalty to one god would serve as protection from the other gods. So many people live enslaved to forces and powers beyond their control. But when *you* understand this basic confession, you can know God is consistent and faithful.

Deuteronomy contains many of Moses' final speeches to the people, and this command, to love God, is given often. To *love the Lord* means to choose him for an intimate relationship and to obey his commands. It was to be wholehearted and was to pervade every aspect of an Israelite's being and life.

God's people were called to meditate on the commandments: to understand the Law and to apply it correctly. He addresses parents: in a position to impress God's commands on their children's hearts also. God's plan is for you parents to be the number one Christian educators of your children. It's not up to the Sunday school teachers! They are only there to help. Make God a natural part of conversation - around the dinner table, at bedtime, and whenever decisions weigh on us.

When it comes to empires and faith, if you are investing long term, faith wins out every time. Empires simply can't control unsupervised activities. Remember when seatbelt laws were implemented? Talk about an invasion of privacy! They were uncomfortable; irritating; they wrinkled your clothes; they were uncool. They really hampered the entire style and essence of dating. We used to ride in the back window! (Or on the armrest when that was invented). But look at how the world has changed. Today if you see an unbuckled kid in a car, your first thought is "negligent parent!" They don't even show those gory movies to the driver's ed. students

anymore, because they don't have to; because the law successfully moved to a value, based on people's faith. But laws cannot control unsupervised activity. Only faith has this kind of affect on decision making.

What if you and I realized the power of faith and put our belief in action? What if the church had a faith harvest? How much more powerful would a church be where faith, hope, and love prevailed? Could it be that all the ingredients we need for awakening a harvest lies in these three spiritual essences? To harvest a legacy of faith, hope, and love in the lives of children and in the life of this community would transform the world!

But it takes work. Which means it takes people: *"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Matthew 9:37-38.*

Jesus was teaching, preaching, and healing the crowds of hurting people. He felt compassion for them. And today his passion hasn't changed. Jesus' call is for us to ask God to send out additional workers. In Jesus' time the harvest was ready because the kingdom was at hand. And when more people responded, the faith harvest began one of the greatest mysteries in the entire history of humanity. The Christian movement in the first century was both unifying and expanding at the same time. Every single day the church expanded. It grew outwardly, reaching new people and bringing new complexity to the situation. And at the same time, the church is described as growing together with common purpose, common values, common vision, and common movement. They had a faith harvest. Their hearts were wrapped around the heart and values of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. Their souls had a "common breath." Their minds were being shaped by the mind and perspective of God. No empire is more powerful than faith when it is harvested. The force of this embryonic movement would soon turn Rome upside down. Jesus Christ began a revolution that transformed individuals and created a community of transformation, where the belief in action proved God can be trusted.

An entire book of the Bible - the Book of Acts - is the outcome and overflow of this faith harvest. But the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, as it is officially called, is only the first chapter of the book of all those who follow Jesus. **Today, more people are needed to complete the harvest.**

What does it mean to live by faith? Nothing more than obedience. Faith begins with God speaking and materializes when we respond. Faith is belief in action. Somehow we've come to believe that faith *removes* ambiguity rather than calls us to *live* in it.

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In the church that I want to be a part of, whether we succeed or fail, I want to be falling forward. We can't live on yesterday's faith. What took faith yesterday (like planting crops or seeds or bulbs or buying an old Boy Scout camp) is sight today. What's next? Church, Jesus is calling us to be the living expression of faith today, to take us into new experiences of who he is and how he works. When we harvest faith, we prove God's will can be trusted.