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Quit Talking and Start Doing Something!



Years ago, one of our Adventist magazines published a parable about a dreadful swamp. As people passed along the path going through it, they were often overcome and fell in. Their dying cries could be heard all through the nearby village. It was terrible.

The people held a village council. In fact, they held many village councils. Various theories and papers were presented analyzing the cause and sometimes even proposing solutions. But nothing was ever done except to continue meeting and talking. Over the years, the discussions continued. People wrote dissertations on the topic. Guest lecturers were brought in. Yard sales were held to raise money so that meals could be provided to those who sacrificed so many hours sitting in these meetings. Eventually, money was raised to build a soundproof meeting room so that the cries of the lost and dying would not disrupt the ongoing discussions. But nobody did anything to help those who were in trouble. And nobody did anything to try to stop more people from being lost in the swamp. They just talked.

The church as a whole and your Sabbath School class in particular don't want to be like the people in that village. We love our time together to pray, think, share, and discuss. But we long to go beyond this and actually do something for and with those around us. We want to make a difference in our communities and around the world. We want the work to be finished, and we want Jesus to return.

This quarter's *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is designed to focus attention on getting out there and doing something. We will examine many wonderful Bible stories. We will read about exciting experiences and illustrations. We will learn about available resources to assist us in reaching out to our neighbors (especially to those who have no Christian background). But those will just be ways of illustrating and motivating us. The real focus, the real heart, of each lesson is what will be shared on Thursday each week—a challenge to get out and actually do something.

We will share theological insights and provide tools and ideas for you to work with. And each Thursday's portion of the lesson will issue a careful progression of challenges. It will begin with what's easy. And as the quarter goes along, there will be subtle (and not so subtle) increases in the challenge. The goal is for each of us to take the challenge, pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us, apply what we've learned, and then spend a few minutes in the next

week discussing how it went. This isn't to be a time of boasting, but a time of sharing—both about what went well and what didn't. As we share, the group will generate ideas. Prayer lists will grow (personal and collective).

In the end, it is our desire that this quarter be remembered, but not for memorable thoughts, engaging stories, or deep theological concepts. These may be there—lots of them. But it is our desire that we will all look back on this quarter as the time when the Holy Spirit took our humble efforts and worked mission miracles for the honor and glory of God's name.

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The Global Mission Centers were first established by the General Conference in 1980. They operate under the direction of the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission. There are currently six centers. Their purpose is to help the church more effectively start new groups of believers among the major non-Christian people groups of the world.

At the time of this writing, the directors of these centers (Petras Bahadur, Richard Elofer, Kleber Gonçalves, Clifnond Shameerudeen, Doug Venn, Amy Whitsett, Greg Whitsett), assisted by Gary Krause (director, Adventist Mission), Homer Trecartin (retired director, Global Mission Centers), and Jeff Scoggins (Global Mission planning director) collectively authored this Adult Bible Study Guide. For more information, please go to www.GlobalMissionCenters.org.

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1.1 billion
people identify as **non-religious.**



GLOBAL MISSION

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God's Mission *to Us*: Part 1



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:9–15; Gen. 28:15; Exod. 29:43, 45; Matt. 1:18–23; John 1:14–18; John 3:16; John 14:1–3.*

Memory Text: “Then the LORD God called Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ ” (*Genesis 3:9, NKJV*).

Mission finds its origin and purpose only in God. This mission did not begin with Abram's call (*Gen. 12:1–4*) or with the Exodus (*Exod. 12:31–42*). It did not begin even with Jesus Christ on the earth (*Matt. 1:18–25*) or with Paul's missionary journeys (*Acts 13:4–14:26*). This mission began with God Himself, when He brought the universe into existence and later created humanity (*Gen. 1:26, 27*).

In the Scriptures, we see a God who intentionally reaches out and desires to be with His children. From the beginning, He establishes a relationship with Adam and Eve. Even after sin enters, He continues His mission, but now it is to reestablish His relationship with humankind. In the end, God's mission will be accomplished (*Revelation 21, 22*), which is why we should be motivated in the work of proclaiming the eternal gospel to the world (*Rev. 14:6, 7*).

The foundation of any mission endeavor, therefore, must be centered on a relationship with the Creator and with the proper understanding of His missionary nature and character. But before we understand the mission of God, it is essential to better understand the God of mission.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 7.

The God Who Reaches Out to Us

God created us in His image and likeness. He gave us a perfect world, and His purpose was that we would live in perfect connection with Him, a relationship centered in His most precious attribute: love. But for love to be real, God also gave us another precious gift: free will—the freedom to choose which way to follow. Of course, God gave clear instructions to Adam and Eve about the danger and deadly consequences of disobedience (*Gen. 2:16, 17*). Satan, in turn, deceptively persuaded Eve that she could eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but without any negative results. On the contrary, he claimed that they would “be like God, knowing good and evil” (*Gen. 3:5, NKJV*). Unfortunately, Eve chose to eat and gave the fruit to Adam, who made the same choice. The perfect creation, then, was stained by sin.

That moment changed God’s original plan and purpose for the newly created planet Earth. The mission of salvation, which had been designed “before the foundation of the world” (*Eph. 1:4*), had now to be implemented.

Read Genesis 3:9–15. What were God’s first words to Adam after he and Eve fell, and why is that statement so significant theologically even today?

Of course, God knew exactly where they were. Dominated by fear, Adam and Eve were the ones who needed to see what was going on. But they also needed to be confronted so they could understand the dreadful consequences of their sin. Satan also needed to be defeated. For that, God then began to present His mission: the plan of redemption (see *Gen. 3:14, 15*)—the only hope of “reconciling the world to Himself” (*2 Cor. 5:19, NKJV*).

We need to pay close attention, however, to the fact that before the confrontation and the promise of reconciliation, God came looking for fallen humankind. In spite of the seemingly hopeless situation, God essentially addresses two issues in His question to Adam: our fallen state and His missionary nature. We are lost and in desperate need of salvation. He is the One who finds us with the determination to save and to be with us.

Throughout history, God continues to ask: “Where are you?” In your personal experience, what does this mean for you, and how have you answered Him?

The God Who Longs to Be With Us

Read Genesis 17:7, Genesis 26:3, and Genesis 28:15. What was the main focus of God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants in these verses?

In the Old Testament narrative, God continues to act according to His missionary nature in order to fulfill His purposes. For instance, after the Flood the people of Babel decided to gather in one place to build a city and a tower that would reach to the heavens. God intervened, confusing their language with the goal to scatter them around the world (*Gen. 11:1–9*). He then enlarged His mission, calling Abram (who later became Abraham) to be a channel of His blessings to the whole world (*Gen. 12:1–3*). God’s promises to Abraham and his descendants were multifold, but one emerges above all. Several times God basically declared to them: “I will be [your] God.” “I will be with you.” “I am with you” (*see Gen. 17:7, 8; Gen. 26:3, NKJV; Gen. 28:15, NKJV*).

As history goes on, Joseph ends up in Egypt, but as an instrument of salvation to God’s people. In every step of Joseph’s experience—even in the most difficult moments of his life—the Bible affirms that “the Lord was with” him (*Gen. 39:2, 21, 23*). Generations later, in the fulfillment of His mission, God then sent Moses to Pharaoh as the deliverer of His people from Egyptian slavery. During Moses’ “commissioning,” God said to him: “I will certainly be with you” (*Exod. 3:12, NKJV*). Time after time, Yahweh confirmed His deep desire to be with His people.

Read Exodus 29:43, 45. What was one of the main purposes of the Old Testament sanctuary? God decided to be with His children in a different way. He confirmed to Moses His longing to dwell among the children of Israel in the building of the tabernacle and the establishment of a very intentional and purposeful system that would point to the ultimate instrument of His mission: Jesus Christ. “The sacrificial offerings, and the priesthood of the Jewish system, were instituted to represent the death and mediatorial work of Christ. All those ceremonies had no meaning, and no virtue, only as they related to Christ.” —Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Herald of the Sabbath*, December 17, 1872.

What are ways that you experience God’s presence in your life?

The God Who Became One With Us

The Old Testament presents how the Creator began to implement a plan through a people who were supposed to represent His nature and purpose to the world. Everything God did was according to His missionary strategy. Through the prophet Isaiah, God said: “I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, . . . saying, “My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure” ’ ” (*Isa. 46:9, 10, NASB*). In the New Testament, however, God’s desire to be with humankind takes a new dimension. Through Christ’s incarnation, what was only a promise in the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 3:15*) becomes a reality.

Read the narrative of the announcement of Jesus’ birth in **Matthew 1:18–23**. What essential things does this account tell us about God?

“God with us.” Immanuel. God had dwelt among His people within the sanctuary, and now He dwelt with them in the physical person of Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, with the birth of Jesus, God presented in concrete ways His continuous desire to be with us in nature and mission: the Son of God was fully human and fully divine, and He is the One who affirmed, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (*John 14:6, NKJV*).

Read **John 1:14–18**. What can you learn from Christ’s incarnation about God’s mission to us?

God moved forward with His mission and then, through Jesus Christ, was present in the flesh among His children. The “one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (*John 1:14, NIV*), fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and, in accordance with the divine plan, became one with us, God in human flesh. The God of mission was continuing to accomplish His purpose.

Think what it means that God’s love for us is so great that He would come to us in our own humanity. How should we respond to this love, especially in terms of mission to others?

The God Who Continues to Be With Us

Jesus' life and ministry were God's ultimate revelation. In about three years God was able to reveal more about who He was and what His mission was all about than in all He had done through any other method in previous generations. Christ was the perfect "image of the invisible God," the One in whom "all the fullness should dwell, . . . having made peace through the blood of His cross" (*Col. 1:15, 19, 20, NKJV*). In Christ, the missionary nature of God was completely made known. Jesus Himself revealed His mission, saying, "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*).

Read and carefully reflect on **John 3:16**. How do you see God's love and mission interacting here?

Later in His ministry, when Jesus approached His last week of life, humanity's final destiny was at stake. The events that took place during those days connected the expectation from the past with hope for the future. During the Passover celebration—which pointed to freedom from the Egyptian oppression—Jesus Christ, the incarnated God, gave up His life to deliver us from the bondage of sin. The apostle Paul wrote, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (*2 Cor. 5:21, NIV*).

Read **Matthew 28:18–20**. What is the promise we can find in the Great Commission? How does it bring assurance for us as we get involved in God's mission?

Christ's death was part of the reconciliation process, not the end of it. Through His resurrection, Jesus conquered death and received "all authority . . . in heaven and on earth" (*Matt. 28:18, NKJV*). Based on this reality, He then commissioned all of His followers to make disciples around the world, with an awesome promise: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV; emphasis supplied*).

In what ways have you seen Jesus' promise to be "with you always" being fulfilled in your own life as you are engaged in mission?

The God Who Will Come Back for Us

Read John 14:1–3. In what ways is it connected with the end-time message found in the Scriptures?

During His earthly ministry, one of Christ’s most precious promises, the blessed hope, reflects once again the Creator’s desire to be with us for eternity. Jesus affirmed, “ ‘I will come back and take you *to be with me* that you also may be where I am’ ” (*John 14:3, NIV; emphasis added*).

According to the apostle John, the promise will finally become reality. “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God’ ” (*Rev. 21:3, NKJV*).

“The work of redemption will be complete. In the place where sin abounded, God’s grace much more abounds. The earth itself, the very field that Satan claims as his, is to be not only ransomed but exalted. . . . Here, where the Son of God tabernacled in humanity; where the King of glory lived and suffered and died,—here, when He shall make all things new, the tabernacle of God shall be with men. . . . And through endless ages as the redeemed walk in the light of the Lord, they will praise Him for His unspeakable Gift,—Immanuel, ‘God with us.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 26.

Here we find the most beautiful picture of Redemption. The God of mission will finally fulfill His desire to be with His children eternally. What a tremendous privilege to be part of this reality!

Weekly Challenges. Throughout this quarter you will be invited to engage intentionally in God’s mission. This will be an opportunity to see and experience the God of mission at work in your life. Take advantage of this moment for personal reflection and be ready to share what you have learned with your class on a weekly basis. Additionally, the Challenge Up will encourage you to increase your involvement in God’s mission.

Challenge: Pray every day of the coming week for God to open your heart to be part of His mission.

Challenge Up: Learn the name of someone in your life you don’t already know—a neighbor, coworker, shopkeeper, bus driver, janitor, etc. Begin praying for him or her each day.

Further Thought: “The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Romans 16:25, R. V. . . . It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne. From the beginning, God and Christ knew of the apostasy of Satan, and of the fall of man through the deceptive power of the apostate. God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ John 3:16.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

“Christ did not tell His disciples that their work would be easy. . . . But they would not be left to fight alone. He assured them that He would be with them; and that if they would go forth in faith, they should move under the shield of Omnipotence. . . . So long as they obeyed His word, and worked in connection with Him, they could not fail. Go to all nations, He bade them. Go to the farthest part of the habitable globe and be assured that My presence will be with you even there. Labor in faith and confidence; for the time will never come when I will forsake you. I will be with you always, helping you to perform your duty, guiding, comforting, sanctifying, sustaining you, giving you success in speaking words that shall draw the attention of others to heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 29.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think about what it means that God’s first words to fallen humanity were not “What have you done?” Or “Why have you disobeyed Me?” Instead the first words were, “Where are you?” What comfort should this truth give us regarding God’s intention for us and our loved ones?
- 2 Think about what it means that God Himself, in the person of Jesus, came to this world in order to save us. Christ on the cross was the ultimate manifestation of God as a God of mission. What does this tell us about His character?
- 3 The mission belongs to God. Therefore, He will equip and empower people for the task. In light of this reality, when you look at the challenges of worldwide evangelization, how can you deal with feelings and attitudes of inadequacy or fear?

Two Boys, Two Prayers: Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Father was excited when he saw a new sign reading “Adventist Maranatha School” on a street in Conakry, capital of the West African country of Guinea. He wanted his two sons to go to a Christian school, and this might be their chance. He never dreamed that the school would change his life.

Father entered the fenced compound of the newly opened school and found a teacher. “Is this a Christian school?” he asked.

“Yes,” she replied. “This is a Seventh-day Adventist school.”

Father said his sons were studying elsewhere, and he promised to transfer them to this school. “I want them to have a Christian education,” he said.

Soon the two boys, 11-year-old Junior and 8-year-old Emile (pictured), were studying at the Adventist school. Among their subjects was the Bible, and the boys memorized verses that Father, to his surprise, had never heard. He was even more surprised when the boys declared that the teachers worshiped in church on Saturdays. The boys asked if they could go to a Saturday program in a church located on the same compound as the school. Father thought it was an extracurricular program and agreed.

The boys went to church every Sabbath for two years. Sometimes, school-teachers visited Father and invited him to come to church. “Would you like to come to our church on Sabbath?” they asked.

Father always refused. “No, I have to work on Saturday,” he said. “I’m busy.”

One Sabbath, the church pastor, Matthew, told the church members, “Today, we will visit the father of Junior and Emile.”

A group of 15 church members, accompanied by a delighted Junior and Emile, arrived at the house. “Can we pray together?” the pastor asked Father.

When Father agreed, the pastor asked if he had any requests. He did. Months earlier, Father, who led a nongovernmental organization, had applied to a Guinean government ministry for a grant, and he was still waiting for a response. The pastor prayed about the grant.

Three days later, on Tuesday, the ministry responded. The grant was approved. Father immediately went to the school and told the teachers about

the remarkable answer to prayer. He thanked God for the grant. But the answer to prayer did not convince him to go to church on Sabbath.



Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering three years ago that helped the Adventist Maranatha School expand in Conakry, Guinea, in the West-Central Africa Division (WAD). Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will again help spread the gospel in WAD. Read the story's conclusion next week.

God's Mission *to Us*: Part 2



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 20:21, 22; Matt. 28:16–20; Rev. 14:6, 7; Deut. 7:6, 11, 12; Rev. 7:9, 10.*

Memory Text: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (*Matthew 28:19, NKJV*).

The theme, that of God as a God of mission, runs throughout Scripture. It is the connecting thread of human history, and it demonstrates God's purpose for His creation. Furthermore, it consolidates divine revelation with a main focus: the restoration of God's image in His fallen children (*compare with Col. 3:9, 10; 1 John 3:2*).

The mission of God also functions as the background through which we should see and understand God's Word to us. When we read the Bible, we can identify a God who is intentionally reaching out to us. In spite of the separation caused by sin (*Isa. 59:2*), through His mission God continues to restore the broken relationship with humanity until the glorious moment when He will “make all things new” (*Rev. 21:5, NKJV*).

In the meanwhile, God has chosen to manifest Himself to us in such a way that we can understand His nature and purpose, and above all, we can have a real and lasting relationship with Him. In other words, we not only come to know Him but also share, with others, our experience with Him and His saving love.

In the Scriptures, then, God gives us the basic elements of what His mission is all about.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 14.

The Triune God: The Origin of Mission

The mission of God in Scripture has Jesus at the front and center as the only way to salvation. Christ Himself declared: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (*John 14:6, NKJV*). But Jesus also helps us understand the centrality of the triune God to His mission.

Everything Christ did was either for or from His heavenly Father (*see John 4:34, John 5:30, John 12:45*). However, we must always remember that Jesus’ mission did not begin when He came into the world. He had received it from the Father even before the creation of our world (*compare with Eph. 1:4, 1 Pet. 1:20*).

Therefore, God planned His outreach to humanity even before He laid the foundations of our planet, and He intentionally entered into humanity’s history in order to accomplish this purpose.

The Son created the world (*John 1:3*), and at “the fullness of the time” (*Gal. 4:4, NKJV*), God demonstrated His love by sending the Son here (*John 3:16, 17*). The Son came, died on the cross, and conquered death. Then, sent from the Father, the Spirit came here (*John 14:26, John 16:7*), convicts the world (*John 16:8–11*), and today continues the mission of the Father and the Son by empowering and by sending God’s people out for mission (*John 14:26; John 16:13, 14*).

Read John 20:21, 22. How should the understanding that mission finds its origin in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shape our mission?

Even though the word “trinity” is not found in the Bible, mission-focused trinitarian evidences are numerous. For instance, after His resurrection, Christ appeared to His disciples and promised them: “I am going to send you *what my Father has promised*; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (*Luke 24:49, NIV; emphasis added*). Here we find the reality of the Godhead’s mission in one sentence: the Father’s promise, the Son’s assurance of the fulfillment of the promise, and the promise itself, the coming of the Holy Spirit (*see also Luke 3:16; Acts 1:4, 5, 8*).

We learn from this that the mission is not ours. It belongs to the triune God. As such, it will not fail.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all involved in the work of saving souls. Why should you find this thought so comforting?

Making Disciples: The Focus of Mission

Read Matthew 28:16–20. What elements of discipleship can you identify in this passage?

Matthew 28:16–20 declares the biblical mandate, commonly identified as the Great Commission (*Matt. 28:18–20*), in which Jesus instructs His followers to move outward and make disciples, teaching them in faith, and initiating them into fellowship (*see also Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:21–23; Acts 1:8*).

The basic components of Matthew 28:16–20 can be seen in four simple aspects: (1) Jesus commands His disciples to go to Galilee to be with Him (*Matt. 28:16, 17*); (2) Jesus comes to them, declaring His authority and sovereignty (*Matt. 28:18*); (3) Jesus then commissions His disciples to a specific task—namely, make disciples—(*Matt. 28:19, 20*); and finally, (4) Jesus promises to be with His disciples until the end (*Matt. 28:20*).

Disciple-making is the primary focus of the Great Commission, and the main task of mission. Literally, in the original Greek language, the beginning of Matthew 28:19 says, “Having gone, therefore, make disciples [. . .]” The “therefore” gives to the commission its foundation on what has just been presented (*Matt. 28:18*): Jesus’ power, authority, and sovereignty—all these coming from the victory attained in His resurrection.

It is important to highlight that the only action verb with imperative force in the Great Commission is “make disciples.” Teaching everyone, baptizing them, and sharing Jesus’ teachings to the whole world are the characteristics of the discipleship process. Here Jesus is clearly directing His disciples toward one purpose: making disciples. This is indeed one of the greatest mission passages in all of Scripture. It ends with Jesus’ promise of continuous presence with His followers.

Obviously, the Great Commission was intended to be for more than just the first disciples gathered in that particular circumstance. They could not go to “all nations” by themselves in order to fulfill the new given mission of making disciples. Therefore, the commission is universal in its scope: every true follower of Jesus Christ should be engaged in disciple-making. Furthermore, the message to be conveyed—the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ—is intended for the whole world, with no geographical, social, or ethnic limitations.

The mission is to “make disciples.” How is this mandate of the Master affecting how you live and minister to others? What can you do to be more involved in what you have been called to do?

The Eternal Gospel: The Message of Mission

Read Revelation 14:6, 7. What aspects of God’s mission can you identify in the “eternal gospel” (*NRSV*) presented by the first angel of the three angels’ messages?

This is the only place in Scripture in which the words “eternal” and “gospel” are connected. The gospel is the good news of grace offered to all through Jesus Christ. He came into our world to show us “grace and truth” (*John 1:14*). He lived a sinless life and died on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice to bear the penalty of our sins (*Isa. 53:4, 5; 1 Pet. 3:18*). He rose to life, returned to heaven, was exalted by the Father, and today intercedes for us in the heavenly sanctuary (*Rev. 1:18, Acts 2:33, Heb. 7:25*). He will soon fulfill His greatest promise—to return in majesty and glory and, ultimately, after the millennium to establish God’s kingdom on earth (*John 14:1–4, Acts 1:11, Rev. 21:1–4*). These are all essential realities of the eternal gospel.

Nevertheless, the fact that this message is eternal is remarkable. There is only one gospel that can save us. It will remain the same until the mission of God is fully accomplished. There will never be another gospel. Deceitful teachings and doctrines come and go (*Eph. 4:14*), but the message of salvation, the eternal gospel, is unchanging, and those who believe and live it in obedience will be rewarded (*see Deut. 5:33, Rom. 2:6*).

The same commission given to the first disciples also is given to us today. We must continue the task of making disciples for Christ everywhere. But what kind of disciples? Good, honest, fully devoted, loving people? These traits are essential, but they are not enough. We must make disciples focused on all biblical elements of discipleship (*Luke 9:23; John 13:34, 35; 2 Cor. 5:17*) with an ultimate purpose: being prepared and preparing others for the second coming of the Master, Jesus Christ.

“The proclamation of the judgment [Rev. 14:6, 7] is an announcement of Christ’s second coming as at hand. And this proclamation is called the everlasting gospel. Thus the preaching of Christ’s second coming, the announcement of its nearness, is shown to be an essential part of the gospel message.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 227, 228.

How is the concept of judgment linked to the “everlasting gospel” in the first angel’s message? Why must the gospel be central to the idea of judgment?

God's People: The Channels of Mission

Throughout history, God has always had those who faithfully represented His character and, in obedience, followed His purposes. God's people are those who have been called and who have accepted His invitation to be partakers of His grace. All of them have been—and continue to be—God's instruments for the fulfillment of His mission.

Read Genesis 12:1–3 and Deuteronomy 7:6, 11, 12. What was God's original purpose for His people in the Old Testament?

God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants had a specific purpose. They were called, created, and commissioned to be agents of God's mission—channels of blessings to the nations (*compare with Deut. 28:10, Isa. 49:6*). However, they were chosen within a covenant relationship with God, based on an implied conditionality of faith and obedience (*Gen. 22:16–18; Exod. 19:5, 6; Deut. 28:1, 2; 2 Chron. 7:14*). This process, that of attracting the surrounding nations to Israel, was God's "mission strategy" in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, God's mission continues. The risen Lord and Savior now launches a renewed "mission strategy" (*see Matt. 28:18–20, Acts 1:8*) in which Christ's disciples—who comprise the church—go out in mission to the whole world instead of, as with ancient Israel, the world coming to it. Mission did not originate with the church. On the contrary, the church exists because God still has a mission to be fulfilled and is using His church to fulfill it.

Yet, a question remains: What is the church's mission? It is the same as that of the One who called the church into existence: " 'For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost' " (*Luke 19:10, NIV*). Though none of us in the church can save anyone, we can and must point others to the only One who *can* save, Jesus Christ.

"The mission of the church of Christ is to save perishing sinners. It is to make known the love of God to men and to win them to Christ by the efficacy of that love."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 381. What a privilege and tremendous responsibility!

Mission is to the church what air is to our lives. Without air, we die. Without mission, the church dies. What can you do, personally, to sustain the life of your church?

The World: The Arena of Mission

Read Revelation 7:9, 10. What does this text suggest about the far-reaching geographical scope of God’s mission?

This week’s lesson has intentionally discussed two crucial mission texts that emphasize the centrality of disciple-making in the Great Commission and the message of the eternal gospel. Interestingly, both texts have at least a common connecting point: the “where” of mission. They read: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (*Matt. 28:19, NKJV*), “those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV; emphasis added*).

In other words, the gospel of Christ is to reach all classes, all nations, all tongues, and all peoples. The influence of the gospel is to unite the saved in one great brotherhood. We have only one model to imitate, and that is Christ. If we accept the truth as it is in Jesus, national prejudices and jealousies will be broken down, and the spirit of truth will blend our hearts into one.

When Jesus said, “You will be my witnesses” (*Acts 1:8, NRSV*), He had three different geographical areas in mind:

Area 1: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem.” At that time, His disciples were very close to Jerusalem. So, Jesus was basically saying, “Begin to share your experience with God with people who are close to you.” Mission begins at home, with family, with neighbors, with friends. This is the ultimate place of mission.

Area 2: He then continues: “in all Judea and Samaria.” Our mission also involves those who are in some ways close but at the same time distant from us. In this group are people who may speak the same language that we speak—people who have a similar culture but do not live or share the same reality that we do. This is our further place of mission.

Area 3: Beyond this, Christ says: “and to the end of the earth” (*NKJV*). God’s mission calls us to reach individuals from all places, nations, people groups, languages, and ethnicities. This is our ultimate place of mission.

Challenge: Pray every day this week for the community where you live. God has placed you there for a reason.

Challenge Up: Research the demographics of your area (what kind of people live around you)—ethnic and religious background, old, young, poor, wealthy, languages spoken, and so on. Ask God to show you how you may be a channel of His love to them.

Further Thought: For a witness unto all nations. “The Saviour’s words, ‘Ye are the light of the world,’ point to the fact that he has committed to his followers a world-wide mission. As the rays of the sun penetrate to the remotest corners of the globe, so God designs that the light of the gospel shall extend to every soul upon the earth. If the church of Christ were fulfilling the purpose of our Lord, light would be shed upon all that sit in darkness and in the region and shadow of death; instead of congregating together and shunning responsibility and cross-bearing, the members of the church would scatter into all lands, letting the light of Christ shine out from them, working as he did for the salvation of souls, and this ‘gospel of the kingdom’ would speedily be carried to all the world.

“From all countries the Macedonian call is sounding, ‘Come over and help us.’ God has opened fields before us. Heavenly beings have been cooperating with men. Providence is going before us, and divine power is working with human effort. Blind indeed must be the eyes that do not see the working of the Lord, and deaf the ears that do not hear the call of the true Shepherd to his sheep. Some have heard the call of God, and have responded. Let every sanctified heart now respond, by seeking to proclaim the life-giving message. If men and women in humility and faithfulness will take up their God-given, appointed work, divine power will be revealed in the conversion of many to the truth. Wonderful will be the results of their efforts.”
—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 14, 1912.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 The credibility of the church’s influence in the community is determined mainly by the extent that we—the body of Christ—exemplify in our own lives God’s love in the fulfillment of His mission. How do you, personally, respond to this challenge?
- 2 How do you think your church is seen and understood by its non-Adventist neighbors? How do you know? If the perception is positive, what can you do to strengthen it more? If it is negative, what can you do to change it?
- 3 Why is keeping the “eternal gospel” as the center of our mission to the world so important? What ultimate hope can we present to anyone, anywhere, that is not centered on the great hope we have because of the gospel, the good news of what Jesus has done for us at the cross?

Two Boys, Two Prayers: Part 2

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Eight months passed after the miraculous answer to prayer, and Seventh-day Adventist church members visited Father for a second time on a Sabbath in Conakry, Guinea. Fifteen people arrived with Father's sons, Junior and Emilie, who attended an Adventist school on the church compound. "We are here to pray," a church elder said.

Father appreciated the gesture, but he had a question. "Why do all other Christians go to church on Sunday but you worship on Saturday?" he asked.

The elder invited Father to open his Bible to Exodus 20:8–10. Father read, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God" (*NKJV*).

But Father was unconvinced. "The seventh day is Sunday," he said.

The elder asked him to turn to Matthew 28:1. Father read, "Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb." Father saw that the seventh day of the Bible was Saturday. "I understand," he said. "Let's pray."

After the church group left, Father showed the verses to Mother. She was unmoved. "No, we will stay in our church," she said. "I don't care what they said. And even if our children go to their church, I won't leave my church."

Father suggested a time of prayer and fasting. "These questions started when our children began to attend that school," he said. "We sent our children there to be educated. We don't know whether God sent our children to that church to lead us there. If this is the church of Jesus, let Jesus show us."

Father and Mother prayed and fasted for a week. "If this is Your will, let nothing prevent us from going to church next Sabbath," Father prayed.

The next Sabbath, everything unfolded easily. Mother agreed to go to the Adventist church, and church members warmly welcomed them. Father was incredibly happy afterward. He felt like a burden had been lifted. He hadn't been faithful in prayer before, but now he found the energy to pray regularly.

As he prayed, God answered, and his life changed. His work flourished. He began to get along with his parents and siblings. An older brother even named a child after him. He and Mother gave their hearts to Jesus in baptism.



"I have peace," said Father, whose name is Pepe Victorien Soropogui (pictured with his wife, Tido Grace Haba). "Jesus' hand is in this church, and I thank God for bringing me here."

Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering three years ago that helped the Adventist Maranatha School expand into new buildings in Conakry, Guinea, in the West-Central Africa Division (WAD). Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will again help spread the gospel in WAD.

God's Call *to* Mission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 11:1–9, Gen. 12:1–3, Dan. 9:24–27, Matt. 1:21, Gen. 12:10–13:1, Acts 8:1–4, Acts 1:8.*

Memory Text: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*).

God can sometimes move us out of our comfort zone and make us His witnesses. Sometimes this change can be used to accomplish His purposes, such as in the example of the dispersing of the people at the Tower of Babel. “This dispersion was the means of peopling the earth, and thus the Lord’s purpose was accomplished through the very means that men had employed to prevent its fulfillment.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 120. Abraham, meanwhile, went from his home country to another (*Genesis 12*) as a means of witness. The disciples of Jesus went from working among only their own people (*Acts 3*) to working for others, as well (*Acts 8:1–4*). In *Acts 1:8*, Jesus laid down a principle of evangelism: they would start locally, Jerusalem and Judea, then go to Samaria and, ultimately, to the ends of the earth.

But even if we do not leave our country, God still wants us to reach out to the people around us. When the church in Jerusalem was becoming complacent, its members were dispersed. Though persecution came and people suffered, these unfortunate events became a means of spreading the good news all over the world.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 21.

Moving Beyond Our Comfort Zone

In order to reach others, God intends for us to move beyond our comfort zone. The desire to remain only with our own ilk and ethnic or social kind can lead to selfishness, even evil. This danger is one of the lessons derived from the story of Babel.

Read Genesis 11:1–9. What were the intentions of the people? What were they wanting to do, and why would God thwart it?

This story of the people at the Tower of Babel reveals their great ambition. They were planning to make a monumental structure—a city and a tower such as existed nowhere else in the world: “a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves” (*Gen. 11:4, NIV*).

How often today do people seek to do the same? Whether through politics, art, business, even religion, it doesn’t matter. There are those who want to make a great name for themselves. In the end, how futile and meaningless their endeavors are. (*See Eccles. 2:1–11.*)

The Bible says in Genesis 11:4 that these people wanted to build the tower so that they would avoid being scattered over the face of the earth. They wanted to stick together for their own selfish reasons. But God had another plan.

These people were also united for this work. But “the LORD said, ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them’ ” (*Gen. 11:6, NIV*). This ambitious plan of the people was, in fact, evil.

Though Scripture does not say it explicitly, Ellen White says that they didn’t trust God’s promise that He would never destroy the earth with water again (*Gen. 9:14, 15*). They intended to build for their own perceived safety rather than to trust God’s Word. Whatever their ultimate motives, God knew that their intentions were not pure but were filled with selfish ambition, and so He prevented them from achieving their stated goals.

Are you part of a group or ethnic community that is more comfortable among themselves? In what ways may you possibly engage with others who are not part of your race, ethnicity, or nationality?

Becoming a Blessing to the Whole World

Read Genesis 12:1–3. In what way was God’s instruction to Abram a call to mission?

God asked Abram (whose name He later changed to Abraham) to leave his country and his people and go to another land. It was all part of God’s plan to use Abraham as a vehicle to fulfill His divine purposes in the earth. And Abraham went, according to the Word of the Lord. If God has a plan for you, it may be a call for you to leave your extended family and your people and go to a place that He is opening up for you to serve Him, in order that you can be a blessing to others.

Read the following texts. What does each text tell of God’s covenant, His promise to us?

Gen. 3:15 _____

Gen. 17:19 _____

Num. 24:17 _____

Isa. 9:6 _____

Dan. 9:24–27 _____

Matt. 1:21 _____

From the above texts, it is clear that God was going to accomplish the promise, made in the Garden of Eden, that Someone will come as a solution to the sin problem. This solution, Jesus Christ the Messiah, was to arise from the line of Abraham and Isaac (through Sarah). Hebrews 11:9 states that Isaac and Jacob were heirs to the promise of blessing that God made to Abraham.

We don’t know exactly how much Abraham himself knew or understood of just how the promised Seed would arise through him, but he moved out in faith anyway. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (*Heb. 11:8, NKJV*).

What an example to us!

Suppose you are called by God to go, “not knowing” where you are going. How do you respond, and why?

Abraham's Call

Following the call of God, Abraham entered the land as God had commanded him. However, right from the start, things didn't seem to go too well for him. He arrived where God told him to go, but according to the Bible, "the Canaanites were then in the land" (*Gen. 12:6, NKJV*)—pagans known for their cruelty and violence. No wonder that right after Abraham got there, the Lord appeared to him and said, "To your descendants I will give this land" (*Gen. 12:7, NKJV*). No doubt Abraham needed the encouragement.

However, things *still* didn't go particularly well for him, at least at first.

Read Genesis 12:10–13:1. What things happened to him next, and what mistakes did this man of God make?

How discouraging it must have been for him: leaving a comfortable and most likely prosperous existence in the homeland, only to go, "not knowing where he was going" (*Heb. 11:8, NKJV*). And one of the first things he faced was a famine! This famine was so bad that he had to leave the place he had been told by God to settle in and go somewhere else. And then things got even worse after that.

"During his stay in Egypt, Abraham gave evidence that he was not free from human weakness and imperfection. In concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife, he betrayed a distrust of the divine care, a lack of that lofty faith and courage so often and nobly exemplified in his life. . . . Through Abraham's lack of faith, Sarah was placed in great peril. The king of Egypt, being informed of her beauty, caused her to be taken to his palace, intending to make her his wife. But the Lord, in His great mercy, protected Sarah by sending judgments upon the royal household."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 130.

No one has ever said mission work was easy, and by lying, by being deceitful, Abraham only made matters worse. Fortunately, God is a God of patience, and He didn't cast off His servant for his mistake, which, unfortunately, would not be the only one Abraham would make. How comforting to know that even despite our errors, if we cling to the Lord in faith and submission, as did Abraham, not only can our errors, sins, and faults be forgiven, but the Lord can still use us for mission.

What lessons can we take from the story about Abram in Egypt?

The Early Church and Comfort Zones

Read Acts 8:1–4. In the early church, what brought about the scattering of believers beyond their comfort zone?

Until this time, the early church was mainly in Jerusalem (or within the Jewish territory and among the Jewish people). When persecution began—in which Saul, a devout Jew and a Pharisee, was actively involved—the church in Jerusalem was then dispersed all over Judea and Samaria. Jesus had predicted in Acts 1:8 that “ ‘you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria’ ” (*NIV*). This statement was fulfilled, as noted in Acts 8:4, that “those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (*NIV*).

Even after the church began to move out beyond Jerusalem, the believers were still preaching in the regions of the Jews or in the neighborhoods of the Jewish people in other cities. Acts 11:19 indicates that the believers were dispersed all the way to Phoenicia (Lebanon) and Cyprus, but they did not at this stage preach the message to anyone other than the Jews alone. The disciples of Jesus and the early church did not intend to see the Gentiles, but only Jews, come to the Lord. They still had very narrow views on what the mission of the church was to be.

Peter, a disciple of Jesus and one of the leading figures of the early church, was averse to taking the gospel message to the Gentiles, even after Paul had begun to do so. Peter was known as an apostle to the circumcised (meaning the Jews), and Paul an apostle to the Gentiles (*Gal. 2:8*). Early on, Peter did not even want to be seen with the Gentiles (*Gal. 2:11, 12*). However, God moved Peter out of his comfort zone and changed his heart. He was starting to learn about what the gospel commission really entailed and what Jesus’ death was meant to accomplish for the whole world.

Read Acts 10:9–15, 28, 29. What was the message that the Lord was giving to Peter, and how must we, in our day and age, apply this principle to the work of mission?

Starting From Where You Are

Read Acts 1:8. What principle did Jesus present when doing the work of sharing or being His witnesses to the world?

This is the principle set out by Jesus that shows us how we need to act as His disciples, who have the good news to share with others. Sharing the truth is not about convincing others how wrong they are, but about sharing Jesus as portrayed in the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6–12.

There are, however, some principles in the words of Jesus in Acts 1:8.

First, “ ‘you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem’ ” (*NIV*). As we have seen (but it is worth repeating), we are to be His witnesses in the place where we physically reside. This may include our own home, our church, our neighborhood, and our community. We need to be His witnesses first where we are, in the area He has initially placed us—home or work—and to be His witnesses to the people closest to us. It can be close family or extended family, church people, work colleagues, neighbors, and the community.

Sometimes people are interested only in going off to a far country and alien culture to be God's witnesses. But they do not witness to people around them now. We should begin where we are and move from there as the Lord leads us.

Next, “ ‘in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NIV*). Again, Jesus affirms the reality that witnessing involves crossing cultural boundaries. Beginning from where we are, we may be called to move to other areas to reach out to different social, ethnic, and religious groups. If I belong to a certain ethnic or language people group, it may be much easier for me to witness to them because of minimal cultural barriers to cross. In some areas of the world, only one clan or tribe is represented in the makeup of the church. However, Jesus' great commission tells us that as His witnesses, moving out of our comfort zone and investing our resources for such people groups is crucial. They also need the message of Jesus.

Challenge: Identify and make a list of people groups with special needs in your community, whom the church has not made efforts to reach.

Challenge Up: Begin praying for an opportunity in the near future to become engaged in mission to people with special needs.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34, and “A Seeker for Truth,” pp. 131–142, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Before ascending to heaven, Christ gave His disciples their commission. He told them that they were to be the executors of the will in which He bequeathed to the world the treasures of eternal life. You have been witnesses of My life of sacrifice in behalf of the world, He said to them. You have seen My labors for Israel. And although My people would not come to Me that they might have life, although priests and rulers have done unto Me as they listed, although they have rejected Me, they shall have still another opportunity of accepting the Son of God. You have seen that all who come to Me confessing their sins, I freely receive. Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. To you, My disciples, I commit this message of mercy. It is to be given to both Jews and Gentiles—to Israel, first, and then to all nations, tongues, and peoples. All who believe are to be gathered into one church.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 27, 28.

The Great Commission is clear: “‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations’ ” (*Matt. 28:19, NKJV*). Therefore, it is definitely about going to others, especially other nations.

“The gospel commission is the great missionary charter of Christ’s kingdom. The disciples were to work earnestly for souls, giving to all the invitation of mercy. They were not to wait for the people to come to them; they were to go to the people with their message.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 28.

“There are in our world many who are nearer the kingdom of God than we suppose. In this dark world of sin the Lord has many precious jewels, to whom He will guide His messengers. Everywhere there are those who will take their stand for Christ. Many will prize the wisdom of God above any earthly advantage, and will become faithful light bearers. . . . Convinced that Peter’s course was in direct fulfillment of the plan of God, and that their prejudices and exclusiveness were utterly contrary to the spirit of the gospel, they glorified God, saying, ‘Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.’ Thus, without controversy, prejudice was broken down, the exclusiveness established by the custom of ages was abandoned, and the way was opened for the gospel to be proclaimed to the Gentiles.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 140–142.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How would you define the word *mission* as you apply it to your own life?
- 2 In what ways could you, daily, express mission in your attitude and behavior? How can you be more mission minded in your daily tasks?
- 3 How important is it that we examine our hearts and seek power from above to be purged from prejudice against those unlike us?

Desperate for a Mission Story

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Gina Wahlen was excited to visit a house church in a country where Christians face persecution for their faithfulness to God. She had arrived to collect mission stories for Adventist Mission.

The house church turned out to be a former home on the ground floor of an apartment building. The apartment had been gutted and turned into a church with a main sanctuary on one side and a small room on the other. Gina began interviewing people in the small side room with an interpreter.

The people were earnest and kind. But they didn't seem to have any special stories, speaking instead about the technical aspects of a house church.

As time passed, Gina grew desperate. This was the only place where she had planned to collect stories in the country. "Dear Lord, please help me to find someone who has an inspiring story," she prayed. "I don't know how to find anyone because I don't speak the language, and I don't think that the interpreter can help. So, Lord, would You please send someone?"

Soon afterward, a woman stepped into the room. Gina felt impressed to speak with her and struck up a conversation through the interpreter.

"Have you been coming to this church for long?" Gina asked.

No, the woman hadn't. She had been coming for only a few months.

Gina asked how she had learned about Seventh-day Adventists.

The woman said she had been walking with her children to the market on a Saturday. As they walked along the sidewalk, two neatly dressed men approached.

"The seventh day is the Sabbath," said one.

"To learn more, look on the internet," said the other. Then the men kept walking.

The woman went home and searched online. Somehow, she found a series of Adventist presentations by a U.S. evangelist that had been dubbed into her language. She watched many programs and was greatly blessed.

Then, she somehow found the house church. She showed up, prepared for baptism, and was baptized shortly before Gina's arrival. "I was amazed when I heard her story and was so delighted that God answered my prayer in such a beautiful way," Gina said.



Gina Wahlen served as Mission quarterlies editor at Adventist Mission for three years. Currently, she works as editor and project manager for the Office of the General Conference President. The house church featured in this mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan, "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach in large cities, across the 10/40 Window, among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions." Read more: IWillGo2020.org.

Sharing God's Mission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 18, James 5:16, Rom. 8:34, Heb. 7:25, Gen. 19:1–29, Gen. 12:1–9.*

Memory Text: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (*John 13:34, 35, NKJV*).

From the start, Abraham wanted to be used by God for mission. This truth can be seen, for example, in Genesis 18, when God warned him about what was going to happen to Sodom and Gomorrah. “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (*Amos 3:7, NKJV*). And in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, “His servant the prophet” was Abraham.

Abraham was resting during the heat of the day when he saw three travelers. “Abraham had seen in his guests only three tired wayfarers, little thinking that among them was One whom he might worship without sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 138, 139.

Abraham, however, soon became personally involved in God's mission. His involvement, as revealed in this chapter, was to pray for and intercede for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. That is, he wanted to see if, somehow, these people, despite themselves, could be saved. In a sense, if that is not what mission is about—what is?

Throughout this chapter, three great spiritual qualities of Abraham are revealed: hospitality, love, and prayer—qualities that can greatly aid in mission, as well.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 28.

The Gift of Hospitality

Read Genesis 18:1–15. What elements of hospitality are demonstrated in Abraham’s response to his guests?

Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. This behavior was unusual. At that time of the day in summer, when the sun is at its zenith, everyone is looking for shade and for a fresh breeze. But, perhaps, Abraham was enduring the heat in order to help anyone who might be passing by.

While there, he saw three travelers. His practice, most likely, was to offer hospitality to strangers. This is why the initiative of the encounter was from Abraham: in the text he ran toward them from the entrance of his tent. That is, and this point is important: Abraham took the initiative to meet them even before they came to him.

“ ‘Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant’ ” (*Gen. 18:4, 5, NKJV*).

Abraham was aware of his mission, which was to share with everyone the knowledge of the Lord in a world engulfed in paganism, idolatry, and polytheism. As we can see in this incident, his most immediate way to fulfill his mission was through hospitality toward these strangers, who seemed to have just appeared on the horizon.

Meanwhile, Abraham’s “great household consisted of more than a thousand souls, many of them heads of families, and not a few but newly converted from heathenism. Such a household required a firm hand at the helm. No weak, vacillating methods would suffice. . . . Abraham’s influence extended beyond his own household. Wherever he pitched his tent, he set up beside it the altar for sacrifice and worship. When the tent was removed, the altar remained; and many a roving Canaanite, whose knowledge of God had been gained from the life of Abraham His servant, tarried at that altar to offer sacrifice to Jehovah.”—Ellen. G. White, *Education*, p. 187.

From the start, this man understood that God had called him to mission, and that his going to the Promised Land was not for a vacation but to be a blessing to those around him and, through his seed, to the world.

What principles of Abraham’s example of hospitality can you emulate in your own life?

Abraham's Love for Everyone

Read Genesis 18:16–33. How did Abraham exercise his great quality of love for all people without distinguishing tribe, race, or people?

The second quality of Abraham drawn from Genesis 18 was his love for people, even for those he did not personally know. This is a great lesson for each of us. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were sinners, far removed from his values, but his heart was full of love for everyone without any distinction of race, gender, language, or religion.

God, then, reveals to Abraham His decision to annihilate the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. “Then the LORD said, ‘Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know’ ” (*Gen. 18:20, 21, ESV*).

With great humility and reverence, Abraham addressed his request to God: “ ‘Far be it from You to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?’ ” (*Gen. 18:25, ESV*).

Through his love, Abraham hoped to save all the people in these cities, not only the righteous. Certainly, Abraham knew just how evil and wicked the people were who lived there. Who knows what stories he had heard regarding those people and their practices? And from what we know about them, as revealed in the next chapter, with the sordid story of Lot and the mob outside his house (*see Gen. 19:1–11*), these were very evil people.

Yet Abraham, knowing for himself the love of God, appealed to Him in their behalf. Abraham knew that human beings always can return to God in repentance. To Abraham, saving the inhabitants of these cities would give them a chance to repent.

In the end, Abraham based his request on what he personally knew about God's love for human beings. He himself had a great love for sinners, and he knew that as long as there is life, there is hope for salvation.

Why is intercessory prayer so important in our own prayer life? How can praying for others in need help us grow spiritually and experience more the reality of God's love for sinners?

Abraham's Spirit of Prayer

Read Genesis 18:23–32 and James 5:16. What should this teach us about the power of intercessory prayer?

The dialogue between Abraham and God is a type, a representation, of intercessory prayer. Abraham is presented in this chapter as an intercessor before God for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. He was pleading for them, in behalf of them; that is, he was in a way acting as a type, a symbol, of Jesus as our Intercessor before the Father. Our mission today will be successful only if we proceed with these kinds of prayer.

Abraham had learned to love the inhabitants of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other cities close by. This is why his prayer was honest and sincere. He already had fought against some kings who had defeated the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. After Abraham's victory, Bera, the king of Sodom, came to meet Abraham with Melchizedek. Bera asked to have his people returned to their homes: " 'Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself' " (*Gen. 14:21, ESV*). This is an indication of the love of this king for his people. Since one of the great characteristics of Abraham was love, he loved the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, and he prayed for them and their people. "Love for perishing souls inspired Abraham's prayer."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 140.

Abraham exercised humility and perseverance in his prayers. As soon as God accepted the first request, to save the city as long as 50 righteous people were living there, he continued his intercession.

Our mission cannot be successful without prayer, intercessory prayer. After meeting someone, after giving a sermon or a Bible study, we must pray for the people we have been in contact with. God is heedful of these prayers in touching the hearts of the people we have contacted. It is not our words or eloquence that will convert our friends or acquaintances—it is the Holy Spirit. This is why in any mission in which we are engaged, we must pray for each person individually.

Read Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25. What do they tell us about what Jesus does for us, and how might this truth help us understand better our own role as intercessors for others?

Abraham's Mission

Read Genesis 19:1–29. What was the result of Abraham's spirit of hospitality, love, and prayer?

The text gives an interesting indication about the position of Lot in the city of Sodom: "Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom" (*Gen. 19:1, NKJV*). This means he was an important character in the city, certainly a public officer, because sitting in the gate is a privilege of officers, judges, and kings (*2 Sam. 19:8, Jer. 38:7, Ruth 4:1*).

Genesis 19 almost parallels chapter 18 and the story of the angels with Abraham. Abraham and Lot were each sitting at an entrance or gate (*Gen. 18:1, Gen. 19:1*); Abraham and Lot each invited strangers to rest in their abode (*Gen. 18:3, 4; Gen. 19:2*); Abraham and Lot each prepared food for their visitors (*Gen. 18:4–8, Gen. 19:3*). Whatever else his faults, Lot had some good characteristics, it seems.

"Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground" (*Gen. 19:24, 25, NKJV*).

We don't know how many people were living in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah at the time of this account, but among these thousands of people only four left the city, and only three were saved. The same with the Genesis flood. We don't know how many were alive then, but we know that most were not saved.

The small number of residents of Sodom who were saved has implications for our own mission: not everyone will be saved. We would like everyone to accept Jesus and His plan of salvation, but each person has free will. Our task is to invite as many people as possible to make the choice for Jesus. While we are carrying out our mission, God assists us through the Holy Spirit, but He will never go against the will of anyone. Free will means that, in the end, no matter what we do, no matter how much we pray, salvation comes down to each individual's choice.

How can we learn not to be discouraged if we are not seeing the kind of results that we want when we do mission?

Submission to God's Will

Read Genesis 12:1–9. What do these verses teach about submitting to God's will, even when the path ahead does not seem clear?

One of the main qualities of Abraham was his submission to God's will. All the experiences of Abraham with God were characterized by this submission.

His calling: Abraham received a challenging call from heaven: "The LORD had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you'" (*Gen. 12:1, NIV*). When he heard a voice from heaven, his first reaction could have been to disregard this voice, thinking he was having a hallucination. Or he could have challenged the message, saying something such as, *I don't want to go; I like it here*. "The land I will show you" may have seemed a strange description of a destination! But he accepted the call. He submitted his will to the will of God and left his father's household and his country: "So Abram went, as the LORD had told him" (*Gen. 12:4, NIV*).

Choice of the land: A quarrel erupted between the servants of Lot and those of Abraham, but Abraham was not a man to fight with his own flesh and blood. He submitted to God's will, who again blessed him: "The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Now raise your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants forever'" (*Gen. 13:14, 15, NASB*).

Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: When God revealed to Abraham the destiny of these two cities, Abraham, full of love, tried to save the cities. Because there were not even ten righteous persons in the cities, the cities were destroyed. Abraham submitted to the will of God and accepted God's judgment of these cities.

The Lord was able to use Abraham because of his submission to God in all circumstances. It must be the same with us today.

Challenge: In our cities, we face obstacles in preaching the gospel appropriately and effectively. We need to plead with God to intervene.

Challenge Up: Find a way to contact someone who is being directly affected by a difficult situation similar to your own. Tell that person you are praying for him or her, and ask God to show you what you can do to help.

Further Thought: “Love for perishing souls inspired Abraham’s prayer. While he loathed the sins of that corrupt city, he desired that the sinners might be saved. His deep interest for Sodom shows the anxiety that we should feel for the impenitent. We should cherish hatred of sin, but pity and love for the sinner. All around us are souls going down to ruin as hopeless, as terrible, as that which befell Sodom. Every day the probation of some is closing. Every hour some are passing beyond the reach of mercy. And where are the voices of warning and entreaty to bid the sinner flee from this fearful doom? Where are the hands stretched out to draw him back from death? Where are those who with humility and persevering faith are pleading with God for him?”

“The spirit of Abraham was the spirit of Christ. The Son of God is Himself the great Intercessor in the sinner’s behalf. He who has paid the price for its redemption knows the worth of the human soul. With an antagonism to evil such as can exist only in a nature spotlessly pure, Christ manifested toward the sinner a love which infinite goodness alone could conceive. In the agonies of the crucifixion, Himself burdened with the awful weight of the sins of the whole world, He prayed for His revilers and murderers, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ Luke 23:34.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 140.

“Abraham was honored by the surrounding nations as a mighty prince and a wise and able chief. He did not shut away his influence from his neighbors. His life and character, in their marked contrast with those of the worshipers of idols, exerted a telling influence in favor of the true faith. His allegiance to God was unswerving, while his affability and benevolence inspired confidence and friendship and his unaffected greatness commanded respect and honor.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 133, 134.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What other examples from Scripture show us an individual who fulfilled his call to mission? What about John the Baptist? Would you call him successful?
- 2 Read Genesis 19:30–36. What does this tell us about the character of some of those saved from Sodom?
- 3 What other lessons can we learn from the example of Abraham regarding mission and how it is done?
- 4 Think about this: Would you deem Abraham’s intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah successful or a failure?

The Little Church That Could

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

It seemed the Seventh-day Adventist Church on Rügen island in Germany would have to close. Only six people worshiped there: four elderly members of a single family, and two other older people. Membership had dwindled from seven when the church was founded in 1940 and from its heyday of 33 members in the late 1950s. Conference leaders recommended selling the site.

“No, we want to keep the church,” Gunthardt, the church’s head elder, told them. “We don’t want to sell it.”

Membership fell after Germany’s 1990 reunification. Elderly members died, younger ones moved away, and the population of the former East German island grew very secular. Attendance only swelled when vacationers flocked to the island in the summer. Some vacationers were Adventist.

Gunthardt and his wife and parents joined the other two church members in praying for the church’s future. “Bring us new members,” they prayed.

Then an Adventist physician and his family moved to the island. Church members kept praying. A former member suddenly renewed his membership, and several other people joined. When membership hit 16, conference leaders changed their minds. They agreed to keep the church open.

But by then the church needed a new building. Members prayed and agreed to contribute 136,000 euros (US\$136,000). While the sum fell far short of the final 730,000-euro bill, it encouraged them to keep praying.

Gunthardt, who had built several houses, designed a church building that also would serve as a center of influence. Church members from across Germany gave generously. The most unexpected contribution came after Gunthardt met a government leader at a business meeting. German politicians have authority to distribute state funds to private causes.

The leader, hearing about the initiative, put Gunthardt in touch with a local politician. Church members prayed before Gunthardt met with the politician and were delighted when the politician offered 300,000 euros. But he had a catch. “As a Christian,” he said, “I want the new church building to be used not only for social purposes but also to spread the Word of God.”

Today, 25 members and their children gather every Sabbath. “We have a new church building and no debt,” Gunthardt said. “God confirmed that our church should stay open.”



The Rügen church is waiting for more miracles. Located in one of the most secular places on earth, the church has a mission illustrating Mission Objective No. 2 from the Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan, “To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . among unreached and under-reached people groups” (IWillGo2020.org). “The people here are not very religious,” Gunthardt says. “We are trying to connect with them.”

Excuses to Avoid Mission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jonah 1–4; Nahum 1:1; 2 Kings 17:5, 6; Ps. 24:1; James 1:27; Isa. 6:1–8.*

Memory Text: “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me’ ” (*Isaiah 6:8, NKJV*).

Not everyone called to mission was as compliant as Abraham. Jonah is an example (*read Jonah 1–4*). God called Jonah to cry out against Nineveh, capital of Assyria. This city, located in modern-day Iraq, was 560 miles from Jerusalem, a good month's journey. Jonah not only refused to go—he ran in the opposite direction. Arriving at Joppa, he purchased passage to Tarshish, now southern Spain. Sailing the 2,000-mile trip would have taken at least a month, depending on the weather. Not wanting to confront the king of Assyria, Jonah uses the month it would have taken him to get to Nineveh to get away from it. Why would he, a man of God, have done that?

The Ninevites were notoriously wicked, a people known for their evil and cruelty and who had attacked Israel and Judah. Nevertheless, God called Jonah to go to Nineveh and to cry out against its great wickedness (*Jon. 1:2*). The wording here is very similar to the wording God used with Abraham regarding Sodom and Gomorrah, in Genesis 18:20, 21. As we will see, however, Jonah was no Abraham.

What can we learn from Jonah's attitude about the excuses that we can make in order not to do mission?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 4.

Our Excuses: Fear

Read Nahum 1:1; Nahum 3:1–4; and 2 Kings 17:5, 6; 2 Kings 19:32–37. What do these verses reveal about Nineveh and the relationship between Assyria and Israel? How might this relationship have impacted Jonah’s decision to go to Tarshish instead?

One of the reasons Jonah may have been unwilling to go to Nineveh was fear. The Assyrians were a formidable foe, and Nineveh served as the capital of the kingdom.

“Among the cities of the ancient world in the days of divided Israel one of the greatest was Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian realm. . . . In the time of its temporal prosperity Nineveh was a center of crime and wickedness. Inspiration has characterized it as ‘the bloody city, . . . full of lies and robbery.’ In figurative language the prophet Nahum compared the Ninevites to a cruel, ravenous lion. ‘Upon whom,’ he inquired, ‘hath not thy wickedness passed continually?’ Nahum 3:1, 19.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 265.

Nineveh was a magnificent city. Historians tell us that Sennacherib greatly expanded the city, including building the huge southwestern palace that alone measured 1,650 feet by 794 feet. (503 by 242 meters) and contained at least 80 rooms. He also built 18 canals to bring water to the city from as far away as 40 miles (65 kilometers). Its size alone would have been intimidating.

But the Assyrians were also ruthless. In his account of the conquest of Babylon, Sennacherib boasted that he filled the streets with the corpses of its inhabitants, young and old, and relief carvings found during excavations depict scenes of soldiers impaling victims. These were not people you wanted to cross; they were not averse to using violence, and gratuitously cruelly, too, against those they didn’t like. Indeed, at the thought of walking among the masses of people in Nineveh, Jonah must have quaked with fear.

In spite of all of this, we often read Jonah’s story with disapproval for letting fear get in the way of carrying out God’s instructions. What we fail to realize is that we can do the same thing (i.e., allow ourselves to be controlled by our fears rather than by God).

Think back to a time when you felt strongly that God was directing you to do something that you, out of fear, really didn’t want to do. What lessons have you learned from that experience?

Our Excuses: False Views

When the storm came, Jonah blamed himself (*Jon. 1:1–12*). His attitude does reveal something about the kind of worldview and understanding of God or “gods” that many had back then. While various gods, they believed, ruled in their various lands, the sea was deemed the chaotic realm of demons. In the worldview of the mariners, sacrifice was needed to appease their wrath. Although Jonah was a Hebrew, he quite possibly had a worldview that was influenced by the traditional beliefs of his times.

Read *Jonah 2:1–3, 7–10*. What do these verses reveal about how Jonah started to understand God’s providence?

Although Jonah was running from the territory where the people claimed Jehovah as their God, he learned (the hard way) that even when he was traveling into foreign cultures, Jehovah was still sovereign. The wind and waves belonged to God. The fish, too. “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness” (*Ps. 24:1, NKJV*). Jonah’s heart was turned to the Sovereign of earth and sea, and so he confessed and was saved.

We, too, can have misunderstandings about God and what He expects of us. One common misunderstanding is that God’s desire for us is to focus on our own salvation and to remove ourselves from the wickedness of the world around us. Though we are instructed to keep ourselves “unspotted from the world” (*James 1:27, NKJV*), our focus should be on how we can bring God’s blessings and hope to those in need.

Another misunderstanding that stops us from accepting God’s call into mission is believing that success depends on ourselves. We can no more save a soul than Jonah could save Nineveh. We can have a “savior” mentality about mission. Our call is not to do the saving but to cooperate with God in *His* saving work. We give testimony praising God for specific ways He is changing us, but only God can draw people to Himself. We can plant seeds of truth, but only God can convert the heart. We often confuse our role with God’s, which is enough to make anyone find an excuse not to witness. Yes, God used Jonah, but only God, not Jonah, turned Nineveh around.

Winning souls is hard, too hard for humans to do on their own. How can we learn, instead, to let God win souls, but through us and our life and witness?

Our Excuses: Inconvenience

Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish (*see Jonah 2*) was a dramatic show of God's love and mercy, and Jonah's prayer reveals that he didn't miss God's message of love. But just because he had had an incredible encounter with God didn't mean that his old thought habits or attitudes would easily change, even though he went to Nineveh anyway.

Read Jonah 3. How did the people respond to what Jonah had preached? What lessons are here for us about witnessing?

Whatever Jonah's personal feelings about the Ninevites, he preached what God told him to, and the results were astonishing. The Ninevites were moved to repentance! Yes, Jonah had to go through a lot, to do what he didn't want to do, but when he did it, God was glorified.

Thus, God's mission is carried forward on the shoulders of those who are willing to sacrifice, even if reluctantly. Our values must give way to God's priority for the lost. Like Jonah, we sometimes harbor prejudices that keep us from reaching out to a person or group.

Having to face our prejudices requires humility. Mission also requires time and emotional energy. Investing in others' lives and truly caring for them can be taxing. In an age when we are stressed keeping up with our own lives and problems, providing emotional support can seem just too exhausting.

And finally, being involved in mission often requires that we change how we feel about and use our money. Whether related to providing care for people, purchasing literature and outreach materials, or paying for services or conveniences to free up time for mission work, there are expenses related to mission. Whatever form it may take, mission work requires sacrifice.

The good news is that in spite of Jonah's inadequacies, God worked powerfully in bringing the Ninevites to repentance. Sadly, Jonah did not share in the blessing of heaven's joy.

What sacrifice is God asking you to make—or be ready to make—for the sake of sharing His love with someone else? How completely do you trust that He will fulfill His promise to enrich your life through sacrifice?

Our Excuses: Uncomfortable Confrontations

“Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm” (*Jonah 4:2, NKJV*). What a beautiful prayer on the part of Jonah. Or was it?

Read *Jonah 4*. What was wrong with this man?

Jonah had such a deep hatred for the people God sent him to that he felt it was better that he die than to lose face when the failure of his doomsday preaching against Nineveh was revealed. Jonah wanted Nineveh to be the next Sodom and Gomorrah. He was hoping for God’s judgment on these hated people. When it didn’t happen, his worldview was being shaken to the core, and Jonah would rather die than allow his world to be turned upside down.

For the second time in the story of Jonah, God confronts him, not with a sermon or a saying but with an experience. Worldviews are not formed on demand. Nor do they change because we hear something new or different. Worldviews are often formed and changed based on life experiences and how they are interpreted or explained.

The new experience God gave was to help Jonah recognize his own distorted worldview. God made a plant miraculously grow large enough in one day to offer sufficient shade to protect Jonah from the blazing sun. Jonah was grateful, not for God, who performed the miracle, but for the plant. Rather than seeing this as an unmerited miracle, he saw it as an appropriate and well-deserved blessing that followed his good works. When the plant died, it was a misfortune that caused Jonah to grow angry and insecure in his self-worth, and his thoughts grew suicidal.

The experience is followed by God’s voice of gentle correction, helping Jonah see how foolish it was for him to value a plant more than the many thousands of men, women, and children in Nineveh, as well as their animals.

The story doesn’t resolve with an ending of Jonah’s repentance. Rather, the unfinished story pivots to us. What will we do about God’s concern for the wicked, for the bullies, for the unreached across the globe?

Here Am I, Send Me

Jonah's story is more than amazing. The fact that God could save the Ninevites in spite of the poor witness of Jonah is a stark reminder that our role is merely to be a conduit for God, who alone can convict and convert hearts. It is a reminder that God seeks only willing and humble messengers who will follow His direction.

Read Isaiah 6:1–8. What is the central idea expressed in this passage?

The call is there. God is looking for willing volunteers. We are to answer that call by submitting to His leadership, listening to hear His voice, and then choosing to obey whatever He tells us.

The story of Jonah also reveals God's love for people who live where His love is not felt and His voice not heard. Just as God had pity on Nineveh, He has pity on the millions populating the cities today, where buildings replace trees and flowers, and constant noise makes it difficult to be still and listen. Of Nineveh God said, they "do not know their right hand from their left" (*see Jon. 4:11, ESV*). God needs messengers who are willing to take His message of hope to those overwhelmed with the busyness and ugliness of life.

Isaiah heard a voice saying, "Who will go?" What will your response be?

Challenge: On a blank sheet of paper or in your prayer journal, make a list of ten people you know are not believers. We will call them your "disciples." List them by name if possible. Keep this list close by, and for the rest of the quarter, pray daily for each of your ten disciples. Pray that God will help you become casual friends with those who are acquaintances. Pray that you can develop deeper, closer, trusting friendships with your casual friends. As you deepen your relationships, carefully watch and listen so you can identify their specific needs, hurts, and pain. Then pray that God will meet them in that area of need.

Challenge Up: Choose a city near you as well as a city in another part of the world. Begin praying for the people who live and work in each. Ask that God will raise up a strong Adventist presence that can share the truth as we know it—the truth about the soon coming of Jesus.

Further Thought: Ellen G. White has a strong warning for those who are struggling to follow the call of Jesus to witness to those around them.

“The excuses of those who fail to do this work do not relieve them of the responsibility, and if they choose not to do this work, they neglect the souls for whom Christ died, neglect their God-given responsibility, and are registered in the books of heaven as unfaithful servants. Does the minister work as did the Master, to be a strength and a blessing to others, when he shuts himself away from those who need his help? Those who neglect personal intercourse with the people, become self-centered, and need this very experience of placing themselves in communication with their brethren, that they may understand their spiritual condition, and know how to feed the flock of God, giving to each his portion of meat in due season. Those who neglect this work make it manifest that they need moral renovation, and then they will see they have not carried the burden of the work.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 30, 1892.

While these are very strong words highlighting the importance God places on mission, we are not left without hope. “In the charge given him, Jonah had been entrusted with a heavy responsibility; yet He who had bidden him go was able to sustain His servant and grant him success. Had the prophet obeyed unquestioningly, he would have been spared many bitter experiences, and would have been blessed abundantly. Yet in the hour of Jonah’s despair the Lord did not desert him. Through a series of trials and strange providences, the prophet’s confidence in God and in His infinite power to save was to be revived.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 266.

Just like Jonah, we may find it easier to make excuses for not participating in mission. Our motivation for these excuses could be one of many. However, our call to mission is no less specific than was Jonah’s call. The question is, How will you choose to answer?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What excuses have you been tempted to use for not being involved in mission? What is your Nineveh?
- 2 Think about how precious the truth is that we as Seventh-day Adventists have. Think about how blessed you are to have these truths. What is holding you back from sharing with others what we love so much?
- 3 How can you learn by God’s grace to overcome any fears you might have about witnessing and mission?

Hope Amid Panic Attacks

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

As a girl, Grete had panic attacks. She woke up in the dark, scared, her heart beating rapidly. Her fear was so intense that she wondered whether she might explode. She didn't know where to find help. She didn't tell her parents. She thought her fears were bigger than people. The world scared her, even such ordinary things as school and walking on the street. She didn't think anyone in Germany, where she lived, could help.

On those sleepless nights, Grete began thinking about Annika. The two girls had grown up together, singing in a children's choir. Then Annika had been diagnosed with cancer. Still, she had been brave and put her trust in God.

"Don't be afraid," Annika had told her parents. "I know where I am going. Everything will be fine." Annika had died but without pain or fear.

Annika's faith amazed Grete. She was scared every night. Annika's words were the first time that Grete had heard about a loving God and eternal life. She wondered if there was something bigger than her and the world. *How can I get to this place where Annika planned to go?* she wondered.

Grete stopped having the nighttime panic attacks when she was 14, but she still felt afraid and lonely. Then she met her future husband, Nico. He didn't go to church regularly, but he strongly believed in God. His parents were Seventh-day Adventists, and they opened their home to Grete for the Christmas holiday. Never had Grete spent time with such a kind family. It was a new world. Overwhelmed, she ran upstairs to cry.

As Grete sensed God's presence in the home, she realized that she could receive help for her fears. She saw that God is great, powerful, and able to save anyone. She felt safe for the first time. She wanted to feel safe forever.

Grete began taking Bible studies, and later, she and Nico joined the Seventh-day Adventist church on Germany's Rügen island. They didn't know it at the time, but the church had faced closure because of declining membership. Their presence was an answer to the prayers of church members, including Nico's father, Gunthardt, the head elder. Today, Grete and Nico are active members of the thriving church, which recently constructed a larger building to accommodate its growing membership.



"The most wonderful thing in my life is that I got to know Jesus," Grete said. "I know that this is the best thing that I could have done. My life is so happy."

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel of hope in secular countries such as Germany and elsewhere across the world.

Motivation *and* Preparation for Mission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 24:1–12; Luke 24:36–49; Acts 1:12–26; Heb. 10:24, 25; Acts 2:1–41; 1 Cor. 11:1.*

Memory Text: “These are the words which I spake to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me’ ” (*Luke 24:44, NKJV*).

Wrote Paul to the Philippians: “Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice” (*Phil. 1:15–18, NKJV*).

Powerful words! Whether in “pretense or in truth,” Christ is preached—and that is what mattered to Paul. Ideally, though, our motives for preaching Christ, for mission, for reaching others with the good news, should be out of love, and out of truth—and not from selfish ambition, envy, or strife.

What, then, are some of the motivations for preaching Christ, and what are some of the ways that we can prepare for doing this?

This week we will look at some events in the early church that can give us guidance on these crucial parts of mission.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 11.

To Share the Good News

Read Luke 24:1–12. What was the response of those who heard about the risen Christ?

Early Sunday morning, after Jesus' death, Luke says that a number of women went to the tomb. They had spices with them; so, it is likely they were going to tend to Jesus' body now that the Sabbath was over. Expecting to find a still-sealed tomb, they were shocked to find the tomb empty. Unsure what to do, they were afraid when two men in shining clothing appeared. However, the men had a message for them. Reminding them of Jesus' words, they told the women that Jesus had indeed risen, as He had said He would. Overjoyed with the news, they quickly returned to where the disciples and many of Jesus' other followers were staying and told what they had seen and heard, because their excitement could not be contained. That is, they were sharing with others what they had learned of Christ.

Can you imagine how the women must have felt? They had just had an amazing experience, one that certainly filled them with awe, but the disciples called their experience "idle tales" and would not believe them. Thus, not sure whether to believe the women or not, Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself.

For Peter—and for many of us—there is a hesitancy to accept something simply because someone else said it. Though Peter listened to the women, he could not share in their experience until later. At first, all he experienced was an empty tomb, and that, Luke says, simply left him "marveling to himself" (*Luke 24:12*). His experience at the tomb was not the same as that of the women.

Regardless of Peter's response, as soon as these women heard the news about Jesus, they wanted to share it with others. What greater motivation for mission could there be than to let others know about what Jesus has done for them? What greater motive than to spread the good news of salvation in Jesus, the only hope any of us have?

Of course, we need a personal experience with God ourselves before we can share it with others. Our desire to share with others what we love so much must be a crucial part of our motivation for mission. In the end, we can't share what we ourselves don't have, can we?

What are some of the experiences you have had with the reality of God and His love? Why are these times so precious to you, and how do they motivate you to reach out to others with the good news?

A Prophetic Foundation

Read Luke 24:36–49. What happened here, and why was this such a pivotal experience for the apostles?

It is interesting that at first the disciples did not believe out of fear. Then, after seeing Jesus and being assured that He was indeed alive, they did not believe *for joy* (Luke 24:41). Have you ever felt that something was too good to be true? This was the experience of the disciples and the others in the upper room.

If Jesus had left them only with this experience, however, then when He departed, their faith might not have lasted. Over time the power of the experience could have faded; they would forget, or start, perhaps, even to question it. So, Jesus didn't stop with showing them His scars and eating fish in front of them. Instead, He then took them into the Word and showed them the prophetic foundation for His work and ministry. That is, no matter how great the experience that they had with Him, Jesus still wanted their faith grounded in the Word of God.

“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” (Luke 24:44, NKJV).

Here, too, we find a powerful motivation for witness, for mission: the Word of God. Jesus knew that to solidify the disciples' experience, they needed to understand why He had to die and what His resurrection signified. They needed their worldview to be shifted from a political and earthly kingdom to the great solution to sin and the victory of Christ over death. The gospel was so much more than achieving political sovereignty for Israel. It revealed Christ's victory over Satan and guaranteed that one day all wickedness in the world would be destroyed, that the earth would be created anew, and that God would be among His people. He “opened their understanding” (Luke 24:45, NKJV) so they could comprehend these truths, which they were to share with the world.

Our experiences with Jesus cannot be sustained without the foundation of His Word, including the prophecies that point to the history and events leading up to, and including, the first and second advents of Christ. With these truths firmly understood, we can be ready and motivated for mission.

How well grounded are you in the prophecies that point to Christ, both His first and second comings? Especially in the last days, why must we be grounded in the Word of God, including the prophecies, and why is understanding them so crucial, especially for mission?

Waiting and Mission

Luke 24 ends with Jesus' ascension into heaven (*Luke 24:50–53*). But that is not the end of the story. The author, Luke, continues, writing the book of Acts. Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gave the disciples a mission, a promise, and immediate instructions to wait in Jerusalem for “power from on high” (*Luke 24:49; see also Acts 1:4–8*).

Jesus instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until He fulfilled His promise to send the Promise of the Father (the Holy Spirit), who would empower them to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and beyond.

Read Acts 1:12–26. What were the disciples, now numbering around 120 men and women, doing while they were waiting?

Jesus had given the disciples a clear mission: they were to be witnesses for Him to the world. So, while they waited, they prepared for their mission in two ways. First, Luke says they continued in united prayer and supplication. There was no question in any of their minds about what the mission was that Jesus had given them, and they had each accepted that mission. This inspired them to unite in prayer. Luke does not share what they were praying about, but it is most certain they were praying for wisdom, strength, and courage to fulfill the mission together. What an example for us.

The second thing they did while they waited was to prepare logistically for their mission. Judas had handed Jesus over for execution and then taken his own life. This had left a vacancy among the twelve. So, as they waited, the disciples sought God's guidance and selected a replacement. In effect, the disciples were organizing themselves and planning the start of their mission. In the making of these decisions, Peter played a leadership role. No one challenged his move; they all saw God's wisdom in it. There was an understanding and a trust that God was acting and working and moving in their midst. Their time of waiting was not idle but was filled with purpose and mission-driven action.

While we wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to help us complete the great mission of God, we must unite to encourage each other (*Heb. 10:24, 25*), praying for God's Holy Spirit. Also, we should be aligning ourselves and our church with God's priority—the saving of the lost.

How can you learn to wait upon the Lord and not lose faith in the meantime? Meanwhile, while waiting, how can you best use your time, as the disciples did here?

“Whom You Crucified”

Acts 2 records the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. As the followers of Jesus were praying, tongues of fire rested upon their heads. They recognized that the promised power of the Holy Spirit had been given.

Read Acts 2:1–41. What happened to the disciples as a result of receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost?

The disciples began to speak in other languages “as the Spirit gave them utterance” (*Acts 2:4*). What’s crucial here is that God empowered each person for the benefit of unbelievers. The blessing wasn’t meant merely for their own good. It wasn’t a blessing to make them fit for heaven or a blessing to make it easier to do business in a foreign language. The blessing was given for fulfilling God’s mission to the lost. Today God calls on each of His followers to use their personal gifts for the good of His mission to unbelievers. We have been given gifts: what greater call to mission than to use what we have been given to reach others?

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit resulted in many of the people repenting of their rejection of the Messiah, for surely some of them were in Jerusalem when He died. Think of the power here: Peter accused some of them of having crucified the Christ. Obviously, they realized what they had done and, being convicted, cried out: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (*Acts 2:37*).

And yet, even they could receive forgiveness. Said Peter to them: “ ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ ” (*Acts 2:38, NKJV*).

Working together, in harmony with the Holy Spirit and each other, these followers of Jesus preached repentance and the forgiveness of sins—even for those who could have been directly involved in crucifying Jesus! That’s the power of the gospel. If that message doesn’t motivate us to mission, what will? We are called to spread the gospel to the world, a sinful, fallen, corrupt world with sinful, fallen, and corrupt people. Our job is not to judge; our job is to witness to the saving power of Jesus.

Why should the idea that even some of those who were complicit in Christ’s death were offered salvation (1) encourage us for our own souls and (2) encourage us to witness to others, no matter how bad they may seem to be?

A Picture of the Early Church

Read Acts 2:41–47. What kind of picture of the early church is present here?

Acts 2 ends with a beautiful picture of what the early church was like. Acts 2:41 says that those who were baptized were “added to them” (*NKJV*). We could read this to say that someone did the math and added the number of new believers to the number of existing believers and established a new total membership for the group. But that is a shallow understanding. Hidden in the wording is the idea that these newly baptized believers became part of the group as equals.

Meanwhile, a core function of the early Christian church was discipleship. As new members were added, they were discipled in three ways. First, they continued to be taught by the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship. The words “doctrine” and “fellowship” in this text literally mean “instruction” and “partnership.” The apostles’ preaching confronted incorrect beliefs and offered new explanations for what people were seeing and experiencing. But it didn’t teach them how to live out that new truth in their lives. Rather, the application of truth to one’s life happened in relationship as part of the group. New believers were carefully and intentionally discipled through direct teaching, as well as through participation in the daily lives of the other believers, all under the supervision and leadership of the spiritually mature and grounded apostles.

It is poor preaching that tells people what to do but not how to do it. However, even if one reads how-to books or listens to sermons that explain how to do things, there is no substitute for seeing people doing it and then imitating them. Paul knew this and instructed his followers to imitate him as he had imitated Jesus (*1 Cor. 11:1*). When others can see you and the reality of your experience with Christ, it will impact them, as well.

Challenge: Think of someone in your life who you wish was a believer. Pray every day for him or her to have a personal experience with Jesus.

Challenge Up: Whom are you discipling and leading into a relationship with Jesus? Look for ways to bring him or her into fellowship with other believers.

Further Thought: Our mission work must come from deep love and thankfulness for what Jesus has done and is doing in our lives. Any other motivation is misguided. Keeping immersed in the Word and in tune with the Word is the key to successful outreach and evangelism.

“Our life is to be bound up with the life of Christ; we are to draw constantly from Him, partaking of Him, the living Bread that came down from heaven, drawing from a fountain ever fresh, ever giving forth its abundant treasures. If we keep the Lord ever before us, allowing our hearts to go out in thanksgiving and praise to Him, we shall have a continual freshness in our religious life. Our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with a friend. He will speak His mysteries to us personally. Often there will come to us a sweet joyful sense of the presence of Jesus. Often our hearts will burn within us as He draws nigh to commune with us as He did with Enoch. When this is in truth the experience of the Christian, there is seen in his life a simplicity, a humility, meekness, and lowliness of heart, that show to all with whom he associates that he has been with Jesus and learned of Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 129, 130.

“There can be no growth or fruitfulness in the life that is centered in self. If you have accepted Christ as a personal Savior, you are to forget yourself, and try to help others. Talk of the love of Christ, tell [others of His self-sacrificing death in their behalf]. . . . As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others—you will grow and bring forth fruit. . . . Your faith will increase, your convictions deepen, your love be made perfect.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 67, 68.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How do you understand Paul’s words in *Philippians* about Christ’s being preached out of envy, strife, or selfish ambition? How can we make sure that we ourselves are not guilty of doing just that?
- 2 What has been your own personal experience with the reality of God and God’s love? That is, based on your own experiences, could you preach to others with sincerity and honesty about the goodness and love of God? What would your testimony be?
- 3 What has been your experience in waiting upon the Lord, and what has it taught you about trusting in Him and about faith in general?

“Blessing Is Greater to Us”

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A woman in the US state of North Carolina invited her two church pastors to her house to talk about something weighing heavily on her heart: the Annual Sacrifice Offering. She described how the Seventh-day Adventist Church had established the offering in a last-ditch effort to avoid calling missionaries home because of a lack of funds in 1922. She spoke about how people gave then and how the offering still supports missionaries today.

The pastors took her appeal to heart. One even preached a nine-part series on sacrifice ahead of the annual offering, which is collected in most parts of the world on the second Sabbath of November. As a result, the Annual Sacrifice Offering at the 700-member Hendersonville Seventh-day Adventist Church soared from \$1,400 the previous year to \$24,119 that year in 2016. The growth was only the beginning. During the COVID-19 pandemic when the world church again faced a budget crunch, members gave an astonishing \$37,545 to the 2021 Annual Sacrifice Offering.

“We were happily surprised,” said pastor David Wright (pictured). “Praise the Lord!”

He credited God’s grace for members’ sacrificial giving. “It is true this will bring much-needed light into dark areas of the 10/40 Window,” he said. “But consider the blessing that is ours as a church family. I have to believe the blessing is greater to us because Jesus Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Adventist Mission director Gary Krause agreed, noting that Adventist Church cofounder Ellen White called such a blessing the “reflex influence.” She said church members’ generosity toward foreign fields promoted success in their home field. For example, when some church leaders questioned the wisdom of sending funds abroad in 1900, White declared, “The prosperity of the home work depends largely . . . upon the reflex influence of the . . . work done in countries afar off” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 27). The Adventist Church’s top statistician, David Trim, has statistically verified White’s assertion.

A sacrificial spirit has permeated the church since its origins, world church leader Ted N. C. Wilson said. “We are told that God’s Advent movement was started in sacrifice and it will end in sacrifice,” he said. “What a privilege for each of us to sacrificially share what God has given to us.”



*Thank you for considering a generous donation to the 2023 Annual Sacrifice Offering. For online information, visit bit.ly/annual-sacrifice-offering. See also *Global Mission* (gm.adventistmission.org); the 1922 Annual Sacrifice Offering (bit.ly/1922-offering); and Ellen White’s “reflex influence” (bit.ly/EGW-reflex).*

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MORE MISSION!



A major challenge in the *Adult Bible Study Guide* for the week of December 23-29, 2023, is to invite someone to church.

That week's mission story in the youth and adult *Mission* quarterly features Susana, a 22-year-old student in Ghana who only gave her heart to Jesus after being invited to church.

Want to get more out of this quarter's *Adult Bible Study Guide* on "God's Mission – My

Mission"? Read it together with the *Mission* quarterly.

The Bible lessons were written by the directors of the Global Mission study centers (globalmissioncenters.org), which are part of Adventist Mission, the same General Conference entity that produces the *Mission* quarterly.

Download the *Mission* quarterly at: bit.ly/adultmission.



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Mission to My Neighbor



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 10:25–37, 2 Tim. 3:16, James 2:17–22, Matt. 22:37–40, Gal. 5:14, Micah 6:6–8.*

Memory Text: “He answered, ‘ “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ’ ” (*Luke 10:27, NIV*).

We all know the text: “ “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” ’ ” (*Luke 10:27, NIV*). Yet, our love for God can become superficial if we say that we love God but do not obey Him. We think that we love God, but how is this love demonstrated in our day-to-day life? Loving God requires full commitment of our heart, soul, body, and mind—daily. Anyone can say that he or she loves God; doing it, however, requires conscious effort.

However, even though loving God is good and important, God also wants us to love others, because our love for others reflects our love for God, and it does so in a powerful and very real way. First John 4:20 states, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (*NKJV*). Paul also says in Galatians 5:14 that “all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (*NKJV*).

This week we will be learning how this lesson can be applied in our lives.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 18.

The Question of Questions

Who are we? Why are we here? What happens when we die? What is our ultimate fate? These are, in many ways, the most important questions mortal beings, beings who know that they are mortal (oysters and chickens are, too, but don't know it), can ask. And in the Gospel of Luke, someone comes to Jesus with what is, in fact, the most crucial question of all.

Read Luke 10:25. What did this lawyer ask, and why did he ask it?

However serious the question itself, the Bible clearly states that he came to test Jesus. We know that sometimes some people may come with skepticism, even unbelief, and may not even be serious in their questioning, but they could still be reached. This is precisely how Jesus dealt with the lawyer, even though He knew that the man's initial intentions were not genuine. Yet, for the lawyer and the audience, this question was an opening that Jesus could use to prompt them to search their own hearts. Even knowing the lawyer's motives, Jesus was not going to ignore him or be disrespectful to him.

In the end, what question could be more important than this one? "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" No matter what our religious rituals or practices, behind them all is this crucial question. In contrast to this one, what else really matters for beings whose lives are depicted as "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (*James 4:14, NKJV*)? For what is the only other option to eternal life than eternal death?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:30–32. What point is Paul making here that underscores the importance of eternal life?

However dubious his motives, the lawyer asked a crucial question, and Jesus, ever watchful to use any and every opportunity for mission, took advantage of it to reach souls.

How can we also be mindful to take advantage of whatever opportunities come our way to witness, even if the circumstances are not ideal?

Jesus' Method and Response

The Bible tells us that the lawyer came to test Jesus, but Jesus knew what his intentions were. Indeed, God knows the longings and desires of our hearts more than we ourselves do. And we certainly do not know the heart or the motives of those who question us, do we?

Sometimes people from other religions question us about our faith. For instance, our Muslim friends ask us questions related to Jesus' divinity, such as, "Where in the Bible did Jesus say that He is God?" or "Why do you say there is one God when you have three persons in the Trinity?" Though these seem to be provocative questions, yet the heart-felt need for Jesus can be genuine and can represent a deep longing or emptiness of those asking the questions. We don't know their hearts; we don't need to. We simply need to minister to others the best we can, regardless of their deepest motives.

Read Matthew 26:56, Acts 17:11, 1 Corinthians 15:3, and 2 Timothy 3:16. How do these verses help us understand Jesus' response to the lawyer in Luke 10:26?

Sometimes we want answers but do not put in the work ourselves to find them. Jesus said: " 'What is written in the Law? How do you read it?' " (*Luke 10:26, ESV*). Jesus pointed to a very important aspect of learning. Instead of only listening to what others have to tell us, we need to read the Scriptures (the Word of God) for ourselves. The answers already are there, and the Holy Spirit works on our hearts to impress upon us what we need to do.

God has given us His Word. In it, we can find all the truth that we need to know about how we are supposed to live, about how we are supposed to treat others, and about how we can "inherit eternal life." Sure, there is a role for teachers and ministers, but in the end, we must go to the Bible for the truths that matter. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (*Ps. 119:105, NKJV*). This verse is not just poetry; it's sacred truth, pointing us to the Word of God and its importance to the believer.

Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, always pointed people back to the Written Word. What should this tell us about the importance of the Bible and why we must reject any philosophical or theological reasoning that lessens our trust in the Bible?

To Inherit Eternal Life

Read Luke 10:27, 28. What was the lawyer’s answer to his own question?

The lawyer had asked the question, and he himself gave the answer: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . .’ ” and “ ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Luke 10:27, NIV).

What was the response of Jesus? He said, “ ‘You have answered rightly’ ” (Luke 10:28, NKJV). Jesus went on to challenge him to do something about it, by saying, “ ‘Do this and you will live’ ” (Luke 10:28, NKJV).

For most believers, giving the right answers about doctrine and faith is not that difficult. The challenge, instead, comes in doing what they know is right and following what they believe. A lot of people who, though knowing enough to be saved, will be lost because they didn’t obey what they knew. That’s how serious this issue is. Just knowing about loving God and your neighbor isn’t enough. You have to do it!

Read James 2:17–22. How do these verses parallel what Jesus said to the lawyer?

If we love God, we will read His Word, we will pray, we will keep His commandments, and we will be obedient to His voice “with all our heart.” If I say I love others, but I don’t care about others in church, or if I ignore the needs of others when I can help, what good is my faith? Christianity is not just a set of distinct beliefs; it is a way of life.

“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (James 2:15, 16, NKJV).

How much do you care about the welfare of others? How much do you follow the words of Paul: “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4, NKJV)? By God’s grace, how can you learn to care more for others?

Loving Others as We Love Ourselves

Read Matthew 22:37–40. How does what Jesus Himself said here compare to His answer to the lawyer, in Luke 10:27, 28?

According to Matthew 22:37–40, Jesus made it clear that the everyday expression of true belief hangs upon these two commandments. And Luke 10:27, 28 makes it clear that if a person does these two things, then he or she will have eternal life.

“Love is the underlying principle of God’s government in heaven and earth, and it must be the foundation of the Christian’s character. This alone can make and keep him steadfast. This alone can enable him to withstand trial and temptation.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 49.

Read Galatians 5:14; Micah 6:6–8; and 1 John 4:20, 21. How do these verses reinforce what Jesus had told us?

According to Paul, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (*Gal. 5:14, NKJV*). For Paul, loving God can be practically seen only when that love is exemplified in how we treat others. Even though he stated that “ ‘the righteous shall live by faith’ ” (*Rom. 1:17, ESV*), yet living by faith is not something that is hidden, unknown or unseen by others. Paul, Micah, and John make it clear that practical works demonstrate the reality of the faith that we claim.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul stated very forcefully that if one claims to have great knowledge or to do great deeds or to have the great faith or even to give up one’s life but does not have love, then that person has become like “sounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (*1 Cor. 13:1, NKJV*).

Look at the Ellen G. White quote above. Notice what she says about how only in love can people remain steadfast and endure temptation. How does this idea show that the command to love is not salvation by works, but instead, an expression of the faith that we have in Jesus?

The Good Samaritan Story Today

When commending the lawyer for giving the right answer, Jesus said, “Do this and you will live” (*Luke 10:28, NKJV*), and thus, He touched the very core in the man’s heart. Giving all the right answers was easy for the lawyer, but doing those things was an issue 2,000 years ago—and it is still an issue for many of us today. The lawyer wanted to trap Jesus and show off his knowledge. He asked a follow-up question; “Who is my neighbor?” (*Luke 10:29, NKJV*).

Read *Luke 10:30–37*. How would you summarize Jesus’ meaning in the story here?

Are there people around us who have been unjustly treated by others? Have we done whatever we can to help them?

It is true that sometimes pastors, elders, and members do not help those who need help. Sometimes people of another faith may be kinder toward people in the community than we are. We may talk about being kind; yet, others may meet the needs of people that we don’t address. If our faith means anything, we must reach out and help those in need.

Jesus concluded the story of the good Samaritan by asking who among the three was truly a neighbor to the person who needed help.

“Thus the question, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ is forever answered. Christ has shown that our neighbor does not mean merely one of the church or faith to which we belong. It has no reference to race, color, or class distinction. Our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 503.

Challenge: Begin praying daily for someone who is different from you, or even for someone you may not personally like.

Challenge Up: List at least three names of your acquaintances (non-Adventists); identify their needs (emotional, physical, social), and consider how you can minister personally to those needs. What can you do practically for them in the coming week?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Good Samaritan,” pp. 497–505, in *The Desire of Ages*.

There are many hungry, needy, and mistreated people in our world today. You can do your part, however “small” it might seem to be. We are not going to solve all the world’s problems before Jesus returns. We haven’t been called to do that. But until then, our work can be as basic as helping someone you know who does not have enough food; or it can be helping a member in the church who is facing injustice, even bigotry, which remains a real problem in our world, even today.

“Pure religion and undefiled before the Father is this: ‘To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.’ Good deeds are the fruit that Christ requires us to bear: kind words, deeds of benevolence, of tender regard for the poor, the needy, the afflicted. When hearts sympathize with hearts burdened with discouragement and grief, when the hand dispenses to the needy, when the naked are clothed, the stranger made welcome to a seat in your parlor and a place in your heart, angels are coming very near, and an answering strain is responded to in heaven. Every act of justice, mercy, and benevolence makes melody in heaven. The Father from His throne beholds those who do these acts of mercy, and numbers them with His most precious treasures. ‘And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels.’ Every merciful act to the needy, the suffering, is regarded as though done to Jesus. When you succor the poor, sympathize with the afflicted and oppressed, and befriend the orphan, you bring yourselves into a closer relationship to Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 25.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can we make sure we understand that the command to love God and others is not salvation by works? When we consider who Jesus is, and what He did for us on the cross (see *Phil. 2:5–8*), why is the idea that anything we can do to earn or merit salvation so great an error? How can we learn to distinguish between working for salvation, which is a fatal mistake, and revealing in our lives the salvation that we already have in Jesus?
- 2 How can we learn to recognize some of the inherent prejudices we might have toward those who are different from us?
- 3 Other than those passages studied in this week’s lesson, what other scriptural support do you find for the need to show kindness to others, no matter who they are?

Mission Path to Spain: Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Luis fell ill shortly after he was baptized and enrolled as a theology student at Venezuelan Adventist University.

At first, he thought it was the flu. But the symptoms worsened, and he struggled to breathe. Physicians suggested that he might be allergic to the pollen from the orange trees that blossomed around the university. He received many injections, but his lungs still wouldn't allow him to breathe. Physicians advised him to quit his studies and return home, but he didn't want to leave. He continued to get tested.

Then a medical test showed that he was infected with HIV. It was a time when people were afraid of HIV in Venezuela. Many thought that they might catch the virus through touch. Luis was asked to leave the seminary.

Luis had no choice but to go home. At home, he underwent additional medical checks. The results were always the same: HIV. Luis couldn't understand why. Hadn't he given his heart to God? Hadn't he been studying to become a pastor? He was very sad.

A church elder noticed his downcast countenance. "You should be joyful," the elder said. "If you aren't joyful, it's because you haven't met Jesus."

The observation struck deep in Luis's heart. He went to his bedroom and knelt down. He prayed to God for forgiveness. He acknowledged that he had not glorified God with his body in his former life and was at fault for contracting HIV. "I don't want You to heal me," he prayed. "I just want to preach for the rest of the days that You grant me."

At that moment, something unusual happened. Luis felt as if his heart started burning, and the heat spread over his whole body. He blacked out.

When Luis got tested once again, the results came back negative. Surprised, he asked to be tested again—and again. Always he was HIV-free.

"Why are you asking for more tests if the results are negative?" the physician asked. "You don't need to be tested anymore."

Making good on his promise to God, Luis dedicated his life to preaching and bringing people to Jesus. He got married and completed his theology studies at the university in 2006.



"I haven't stopped preaching the gospel ever since," he said.

Today, Luis and his family are missionaries in Spain.

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offering that helps support missionaries around the world. Read next week about how a hostage crisis caused Luis to leave Venezuela.

Mission to the Needy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 5:17–26, John 5:1–9, Deut. 10:19, Lev. 23:22, Matt. 25:34–40, John 15:13.*

Memory Text: “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me’ ” (*Matthew 25:40, NKJV*).

Luke 5:17–26 provides many illustrations of how God is helping those in need. Sometimes God uses others to help us, or He uses us to help others. This work can be challenging, but it brings great rewards. By helping those in need, we are modeling the ministry of Jesus Christ. Sometimes it is easy to tell who is in need of help; at other times it is difficult to know. Whatever the situation, we are called to be God's helpers for all people in need, regardless of their background.

The Bible encourages us to draw close to strangers, and by winning their confidence we can learn better ways of helping them find Jesus.

In this week's lesson, our topic, “Mission to the Needy,” shows that God has a plan to reach those who might be needy in any number of ways. Their needs might be physical, emotional, financial, or even social: that is, some might be deemed as outcasts from their community or family. Whatever the needs are, we must be ready to do what we can to help. This is a central part of what it means to be a Christian and what mission must include.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 25.

The Faith of Friends

A powerful story in the Gospels reveals what some men went through in order to bring a needy person, probably a friend, to Jesus. We can learn from what happened here about the hard work it might sometimes take to minister to those in need.

Read Luke 5:17–26 (see also *Matt. 9:1–8, Mark 2:3–12*). **What are some of the lessons we can take from this story about mission and ministry?**

By bringing their friend to Jesus, these men took on the responsibility to care for him. God is calling us to be like this man’s friends—to lead the needy to Jesus Christ. This work requires faith, action, patience, and a willingness, if need be, to be unconventional. The men came to Jesus but encountered barriers. They could not bring their helpless friend to Jesus through traditional means. They did not give up; instead they found an innovative way of getting the man to Jesus Christ. *Dropping their friend down from the roof!* Yet, according to Luke, Jesus approved of what they did (see *Luke 5:20*).

Jesus’ desire is for us to bring our helpless friends to Him. The Bible refers to Jesus as the Great Physician who longs to forgive and heal those who are suffering, whoever they are.

Ellen G. White challenges us to help the helpless: “Do not wait to be told your duty. Open your eyes and see who are around you; make yourselves acquainted with the helpless, afflicted, and needy. Hide not yourselves from them, and seek not to shut out their needs. Who gives the proofs mentioned in James, of possessing pure religion, untainted with selfishness or corruption? Who are anxious to do all in their power to aid in the great plan of salvation?”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 29.

Jesus Himself demonstrates how to help the helpless and is calling us to do the same. First, we become their friends; then we learn about their needs; and finally, we lead them to Jesus, who is the only One who can help them. This is what the men in this story did; we need to do likewise in whatever situation we find ourselves. Help lead people to the only One who can save them: Jesus.

Who around you, right now, needs some help? What are you going to do for them?

Christ's Method Alone

What do the following stories teach us about ministry to the needy?

John 5:1–9 _____

Mark 1:23–28 _____

Ellen G. White provides a five-step process of Jesus' method in how to minister, especially to those in need: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

First, we must mingle with the helpless, spend time getting to know them, and understand their needs with the intention of doing good for them. Look at what Jesus did with the paralytic at the pool. Jesus was right there, amid the "great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed" (*John 5:3, NKJV*).

Second, we need to show sympathy. This can be challenging in some cases because of distrust, and because sometimes people use kindness as a means of winning the confidence of someone whom they later abuse. Nevertheless, God is calling us to show sympathy without expecting anything in return.

The third step is to minister to their needs. This involves more than just words. It takes action to minister to the needs of a friend or a stranger. Jesus spoke with the paralytic, asked what he wanted, and then worked a miracle in his behalf. In the story of the man possessed by an "unclean spirit," Jesus took complete control of the situation, doing for the helpless man what he could not do for himself.

The fourth step is winning their confidence. When we minister to people, when we help them, they will learn to trust us and what we say to them. So, when we talk to them about Jesus, they would be more open to listen. Jesus didn't want just to heal them physically; He wanted them to have eternal life in Him (*see John 10:10*).

The last step is to help lead them to Jesus, an act that requires faith from both you and the one whom you help.

We generally can't do the kind of miracles that Jesus did. But what are ways that we can still minister to those who need help?

Refugees and Immigrants

The topic of immigrants and refugees has become a hotly debated subject, especially because there are so many of them today. Whether displaced by war, natural disasters, or for the hope of a better economic future, millions around the world have been uprooted from their homes and are in desperate need of help.

In Matthew 2:13, 14, Jesus was a refugee. His earthly parents, Joseph and Mary, were forced to flee Bethlehem by night and seek refuge in Egypt to escape the murderous hand of Herod. The Bible says nothing about their experience in Egypt, but it's not hard to imagine that it had its challenges, perhaps some of the same challenges that refugees face today, as well. In fact, somewhat parallel to how Jesus' family sought asylum in a foreign land, many Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and nonreligious persons are seeking asylum in new lands today, as well.

Generally speaking, it is easier to make friends with individuals from our own culture and language group because we share many things in common. It is more challenging, however, to find common ground with immigrants and refugees who look different from us, who do not speak our language, who do not share the same religious values, and do not eat similar food. The gospel calls us to get out of our ethnic, national, and cultural comfort zones and to reach out to those in need, regardless of how different from us they might be.

Read Deuteronomy 10:19, Psalm 146:9, Romans 12:13, and Leviticus 23:22. What's the important theme here for us to remember?

How can we minister to immigrants and refugees? It is difficult because, in some countries, it may not be politically correct to mingle with or help these people. Yet, we must do what we can, when we can, to minister to these people, who surely have been through some very difficult times and are in need of our help. So, to whatever degree we can, we must help.

Begin with prayer, then seek information on immigrants and refugees. Many places have organizations that care for them. You can begin working with one of these organizations, or maybe your local church Sabbath School could start a ministry for immigrants or refugees.

Even if it's only a small amount, what can you do to help any immigrants or refugees you know about?

To Help the Hurting

Who among us hasn't experienced just how hurting our world really is? Whether living in an environment of wealth and materialism, or living in an environment of poverty and material needs—it doesn't matter. People are hurting, suffering, struggling. All one has to do, for instance, is read about the staggering amount of money spent on antidepressants in the Western world each year to understand that material wealth alone does not even come close to guaranteeing happiness or peace.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (*Luke 4:18, NKJV*).

What does this teach us about what Jesus did and what we, too, in our own sphere, should be doing for those in need around us?

God is calling us to meet the needs of all people, even though we don't know when or if they will ever accept Jesus. Though reaching them for Jesus is the foundation of our mission, we need to help those in need purely because they need help. We help them because we have accepted Jesus as our Lord, and that is what He calls us to do.

Jesus' example of trying to meet the needs of all people is a biblical principle to follow. We don't know if everyone whom He helped accepted Him or not.

To truly help others, we need to become aware of their needs. Every culture has its own way of showing how to treat a friend. In India, it is customary to serve food or a drink when entertaining visitors. It is easier to give a stranger token money than to comfort a friend who just lost a loved one. What your friend may need may be more than money or physical things. Often your sympathetic support during the time of a major loss could be much more helpful.

The important principle of being Jesus' helper to our friends begins first with the goal of showing selfless love toward them, understanding their needs first before trying to offer help. Provide the help they need, even though you may not know if they are ready to follow Jesus.

Read Matthew 25:34–40. What's the message for us here?

Greater Love

As we all know, and know too well, the needs never end. If you are willing to help others, you will have plenty of opportunities. Whether close friends or refugees far away, people are in need, and we should do what we can, when we can, to help. All through His earthly ministry, Jesus helped those who could not help themselves. In some cases, He took the initiative and went to those in need; in other cases, as with the men who lowered the paralytic from the roof in order to bring him to Jesus, friends took the initiative.

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (*John 15:13, NKJV*).

How do we apply this principle in our ministry to others?

One missionary family served six years in Trinidad and Tobago. The first three years they lived in a predominantly Hindu and Muslim community. Many Hindus complained that Christians refused their invitation to the annual Thanksgiving service. One day these Christians attended a Thanksgiving service of a new Hindu friend. They did this following Jesus’ example: He visited His friends when they invited Him to their special celebrations. In fact, Hinduism teaches that visitors or friends bring blessings to the home of the host.

Let’s make an attempt to begin making a friend this week by being a blessing to someone. First, survey your context, community, village, or city. Do you know of any refugee or immigrant living there? How about the people that live on your street? Do you know them all? Regardless of your situation, making friends with a stranger is not an easy task. Let’s pray and ask God for help. He knows everyone and knows the stranger that you can become friends with. Remember, the goal is to be their friend so that you can help by leading them to God for help.

Challenge: Learn about foreigners or non-Christians who live in your country. Joshuaprojects.net is a good place to survey unreached people groups in your culture.

Challenge Up: Identify someone within your sphere of influence. Begin regularly praying for the person after answering the following questions:

- Is this person my friend—according to Jesus’ model of friendship?
- Do I know the needs of his or her life?
- How can I lead him or her to Jesus for healing?

Further Thought: Read Arthur White, “A Few Days at Long Point,” *Ellen G. White: The Australian Years: 1891–1900*, vol. 4, pp. 100–104.

The Gospel writers recorded examples of Jesus’ practice of building bridges with people from other cultures in order to save them (*Matt. 8:28–34, Mark 5:1–20*). Likewise, we also are called to make friends and minister to people from other cultures, as well. Christ’s death was for everyone, regardless of race, nationality, wealth, or background. This is a point we must never forget. “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (*1 John 2:2, NKJV*).

“Men and women are not fulfilling the design of God, when they simply express affection for their own family circle, . . . while they exclude those from their love whom they could comfort and bless by relieving their necessities. . . .

“When the Lord bids us do good for others outside our home, He does not mean that our affection for home shall become diminished, and that we shall love our kindred or our country less because He desires us to extend our sympathies. But we are not to confine our affection and sympathy within four walls, and enclose the blessing that God has given us so that others will not be benefited with us in its enjoyment.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 15, 1895.

The responsibility given to us to be a blessing to those outside our comfort zone, whether they are from another culture or just a helpless person, is a nonnegotiable mandate from Jesus Christ Himself (*Acts 1:8, Mark 11:17*).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is your own comfort zone, and why must you be willing to step outside of it when necessary?
- 2 What are the implications of the incident when Jesus was called “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (*Matt. 11:19, NIV*)? What was Jesus doing that would have brought that accusation, and what does it teach us about mission?
- 3 To what extent should a Christian engage in the celebrations of nonbelievers? How might Christians do that without compromising biblical principles?

Mission Path to Spain: Part 2

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Only five families were at home when gunmen descended on a cluster of nine houses occupied by Seventh-day Adventist pastoral families in Venezuela. Waving weapons, the attackers forced the families into a single house where they separated the men, women, and children. Police arrived and surrounded the house, leading to a standoff that ended peacefully ten hours later when, at 3:00 A.M., the gunmen fled into a forest behind the house.

The wives and children of the nine pastoral families were relocated after the 2016 attack. The pastors worked alone for several months as they waited for new placements. Several moved to other countries to serve as pastors.

Luis Paiva, who had served as a pastor for about decade, wasn't sure what to do. Life had been difficult in economically volatile Venezuela before the attack. Money was tight, and food was scarce. For three years, he had been struggling to pay off a loan. But he couldn't even keep up with interest payments, and the debt had swelled to US\$1,000.

The hostage-taking was the breaking point for Luis's wife. The family of five had not been at home at the time of the attack. But his wife was left traumatized, and she didn't want to live in Venezuela anymore. Luis agreed that the country wasn't safe, but he didn't feel right about leaving an unpaid debt.

Luis prayed for a sign. He didn't usually ask for signs because he believed that God could lead without them. But he didn't know what else to do.

"Lord, if You work a miracle and help me pay this debt, that will be the sign for me to leave Venezuela," he prayed.

The gunmen had stolen things from all nine houses, including Luis's. Being robbed was not unusual. Luis's home had been broken into many times over the past year, but he had not filed any insurance claims. Usually the thefts were too small to make them worth pursuing a claim. But after the last theft, church leaders offered compensation for everything stolen over the past year if Luis obtained a stamped police report confirming the latest theft.

None of the other pastors were able to get the police report. But Luis happened to have friends in the police force, and he secured the document.

Two months later, the insurance company deposited \$1,000 into his bank account. It was the exact amount needed to pay the debt.

"I didn't benefit from that money," said Luis, who is a missionary in Spain today. "But I understood that God sent the money so I could pay off the debt. I knew that God also would bless the plan to leave the country."



Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offering that helps support missionaries around the world. Read next week about how Luis flew from Mexico to Spain.

Mission to the Powerful



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 4, 2 Kings 5:1–19, John 3:1–12, John 7:43–52, Matt. 19:16–22, John 19:38–42.*

Memory Text: “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (*Matthew 16:26, NKJV*).

Though written many years ago, the Bible, the Word of God, is the revelation of God's truth for our world. And among the many truths it reveals is that of human nature, and that—whether in seventh-century Judea or twenty-first-century Brazil—people are basically the same: sinners in need of divine grace.

This includes the rich and powerful. The rich and powerful of Bible times were no different from the rich and powerful in modern times, especially in their pursuit of wealth and fame and power, often (but not always) at the expense of the vulnerable. Yet, God is as concerned about the salvation of the rich and the powerful as He is for that of the weak and the needy. Scripture provides some gripping examples of Bible characters who were powerful, or rich, or both, and how God used them to be a blessing to the nations: Abraham, Isaac, Job, Solomon, and Joseph, to name a few examples.

This week we will explore God's mission to the rich and powerful. Journey with us as we see how God reached some of these people and how He is calling and preparing Seventh-day Adventists to be a witness to them today, as well.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 2.

Nebuchadnezzar

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in what is known as “unlimited atonement.” This means that, in contrast to some Christians, we believe that Christ’s death was for all humanity, not just a special group of those predestined by God for salvation. Because God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (*1 Tim. 2:4, NKJV*), Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice “for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (*1 John 2:2, NKJV*). That’s why everyone was chosen “in Him before the foundation of the world” (*Eph. 1:4, NKJV*), even if not everyone chooses Him in return. That’s why, too, we find accounts in the Bible of all sorts of people being reached for God.

Read Daniel 4. What happened to the king here, and what does this tell us about salvation coming to one of the world’s most powerful men?

A striking example in the Bible of how God reaches powerful unbelievers is the story of King Nebuchadnezzar. God’s judgment was executed on him in a way similar to some Israelite kings (*see, for example, 2 Chron. 32:25, 26; 1 Kings 14:21–31; 1 Samuel 28*). The biblical account of Nebuchadnezzar, who came to his senses and acknowledged the Creator God, shows that God cares about the wealthy and powerful, as well as the weak and needy. In verse 37, the most powerful man on the earth declared, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down” (*Dan. 4:37, NKJV*). If only all the rich and powerful and haughty among us mortal beings understood this truth!

What can we learn from this story? First, God uses committed believers, such as Daniel, as a bridge to reach powerful unbelievers. Second, God can directly intervene in the witnessing process in order to reach powerful unbelievers. Nebuchadnezzar was humbled by God for his pride and arrogance. And though this was a very dramatic story, there are many other ways in which the rich and powerful and haughty can be brought low.

Even if we are not rich and powerful by the world’s standards, why must we be careful to avoid the kind of arrogance that this king had manifested? Why might that attitude be easier to have than we might think?

Naaman

Christ died for all, regardless of their background, wealth, ethnicity, or status. God ceaselessly draws all humanity to Himself, including those individuals classed among the powerful non-Christians of the world (see Ellen G. White, *The Acts of Apostles*, p. 416).

Read 2 Kings 5:1–19. What can we take from this story about reaching people for the Lord?

In 2 Kings 5:17–19, Naaman made two unusual requests after God healed him of leprosy. First, he asked to take two mule-loads of earth from Israel back to Syria for the purpose of worshiping the living God. He states, “For your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to the other gods, but to the LORD” (2 Kings 5:17, NKJV). Though Naaman is clearly now a believer in the only true God, his first request shows that pagan influences still held sway over his thinking to a degree. The Syrian commander regarded the God of Israel as a divinity who must be venerated on soil native to that land. Although Naaman acknowledged the reality that there was no God aside from the Lord of Israel, he had not wholly dispossessed himself of the notion that God was, by some particular means, connected to the land of Israel. Thus, in his own country he desired to worship God on Israelite soil.

Naaman’s second petition shows the sincerity of his faith. While he resolved to serve only the God of heaven, he realized carrying out such a resolution in his own idolatrous country wouldn’t be easy. Moreover, the king of Syria still worshiped the god Rimmon, and in this occupation Naaman would serve as the king’s escort. While Naaman had no intention of forsaking his duties to his earthly king, he did not wish to be deemed as bowing in worship to Rimmon. Having surrendered his heart to Jehovah, Naaman desired not to make any concessions to idolatry by worshiping the heathen god. Nor did he want word to get back to Elisha that he was doing so.

Elisha responded to Naaman’s entreaty by saying “Go in peace” (2 Kings 5:19, NKJV). “These words must not be thought of as either expressing approval or disapproval of Naaman’s parting request. He was to depart in peace, not in doubt or restless uncertainty. God had been kind to him, and he was to find happiness and peace in his knowledge and worship of God. Naaman was a new convert, a man with conscientious scruples, who would grow in strength and wisdom if he clung to his new-found faith. God leads new converts on step by step, and knows the appropriate moment in which to call for a reform in a certain matter. This principle ought always to be borne in mind by those who labor for the salvation of souls.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 878.

What lessons should we learn from this story about not pushing people too quickly, especially those who come from a non-Christian background?

Witnessing to the Learned: Nicodemus

Nicodemus was a learned man. The Bible describes him as a ruler of the Jews (*John 3:1*). Jesus referred to him as a teacher of Israel (*John 3:10, NKJV*). He had a good understanding of the Bible and had a spiritual hunger for the Lord. From a human perspective, he may have looked as though he were a follower of God. He kept all the commandments, and he was a respected leader among the Jews. He was powerful and wealthy. Many looked at these as signs that God had blessed him. Nevertheless, it turns out that the surface appearances were only that—surface appearances.

Read *John 3:1–12*. What does this story reveal about Nicodemus’s spiritual needs and how Jesus addressed them right away?

When Nicodemus came to Jesus, he tried to maintain the façade, the status quo. But God knew his heart. Similarly, God knows the hearts and needs of all the rich and powerful, whatever their background. Nicodemus came to Jesus because Jesus’ teachings had convicted him. His pride kept him from openly confessing Jesus Christ as Lord, but that night changed him forever. Even after his conviction that Jesus was sent of God, he still did not openly acknowledge that he was a follower of Jesus Christ.

Read *John 7:43–52* and *John 19:39*. What do these texts tell us about Nicodemus and Jesus?

We can see here in these verses that Nicodemus had, obviously, been greatly impacted by Jesus. He sought to protect Him when Jesus was alive and then to honor Jesus after Jesus was dead. No question, Jesus had reached Nicodemus, who, even in his vaunted knowledge and wisdom, had a great need of the Savior, as we all do.

Why must we be careful of the trap of thinking that because “we have the truth” (which we do), then the knowledge of this truth alone is enough to save us? How many souls will be lost who had more than enough knowledge, even of the three angels’ messages, to be saved?

Mission to the Rich

Read Matthew 19:16–22. What lessons can we learn from this story, in which, in contrast to Nicodemus, a person did not accept Jesus?

Jesus' interaction with the rich young ruler shows just how dangerous a trap wealth can be. Look at these words: "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (*Matt. 19:24, NKJV*). This, of course, does not mean the rich cannot be saved, but only that, if these people are not careful, their riches can truly be an impediment to salvation.

In the end, the rich and the poor face the same fate: the grave. This means that the rich are in as desperate need of salvation as is anyone else. Whatever else money can buy, it cannot buy an exemption from death. That exemption comes only as a gift, offered freely by Jesus to whoever will claim it by faith. "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (*John 11:25, NKJV*).

Read Luke 19:1–10. What made the difference in this story, in contrast to the one about the rich young ruler?

Zacchaeus responded to Jesus in a way that, unfortunately, the rich young ruler didn't. Notice, Jesus didn't tell Zacchaeus to sell what he had and give to the poor, as He did to the rich young ruler. Jesus must have known just how tied to his money the rich ruler was, which was why Jesus said what He did to him. In contrast, though we don't know all that was spoken when Jesus was in his house, Zacchaeus obviously was convicted by Jesus and knew that he had to make some changes in his life, especially as it related to his wealth.

"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (*Matt. 16:26, NKJV*). What should these words say to us all?

Mission to the Powerful

Jesus knew how to make friends with the powerful. He was admired and respected by many of these people and, at the same time, was also despised by many. The powerful people in the Bible who came to Jesus for help surely sensed that He cared for them. Also, many of the rich and powerful did not openly come to Jesus right away; they waited until they were certain that Jesus was truly the Son of God. Such was the case both with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea.

Read **Matthew 27:57–60** (see also *Mark 15:43–47, Luke 23:50–53, and John 19:38–42*). **What does this account tell us about how the Lord used a rich man who clearly had been impacted by Jesus?**

Until this time we have heard nothing of Joseph of Arimathea. Suddenly this rich man appears, almost out of nowhere, and is used to help fulfill prophecy. God has used and will continue to use the rich for His purposes. Hence, we must have a mission to them, as well.

Where to begin can be one of the most difficult phases in making friends with powerful people. In general, it is better not to pursue them; let them come to you. Jesus did this; they became a witness to His message, healing, and power from God. They were convinced behind the scenes that He is truly the Son of God.

Powerful people will seek to partner with genuine ministry for a number of reasons. They want to be part of something good that is changing the lives of people. This is one way they know that it can also change their lives. It provides a subtle way for the rich and powerful to get the help they need without publicly disclosing their needs.

The second phase is to begin a genuine ministry as an avenue for the rich and powerful to be part of God's ministry. Take some time to invest in the lives of the rich and powerful in your society.

Challenge: Add someone to your daily prayer list who is in a position of power, is not a believer, and is someone you could come in contact with from time to time.

Challenge Up: Address a letter or email to someone in a position of power—even if it is someone you may never have met—and tell that person that you are praying for him or her.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Ministry to the Rich,” *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 209–216; “Captive Maid Shows Concern for Naaman,” *Reflecting Christ*, p. 337.

Jesus’ love is the same for the poor as it is for the rich and powerful people in the world. He died for princes as well as for paupers. Jesus knew the most effective way of reaching their hearts. He warned us that “ ‘it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God’ ” (*Mark 10:25, NIV*). We are challenged this week to reach powerful and wealthy individuals with the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are as much in need of salvation as is anyone else, even if, unfortunately, they might not realize it because of the “security” that they believe their wealth offers.

“Much is said concerning our duty to the neglected poor; should not some attention be given to the neglected rich? Many look upon this class as hopeless. . . . Thousands of wealthy men have gone to their graves unwarned. But indifferent as they may appear, many among the rich are soul-burdened.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 210.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Jesus broke down caste and class barriers when ministering to the rich and the poor during His earthly ministry. How do we as Adventists address this issue, that of the gap between the rich and the poor, that is so ingrained in all our societies?
- 2 Jesus said the following: “ ‘Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful’ ” (*Matt. 13:22, NKJV*). What do you think Jesus meant by “the deceitfulness of riches”? Why do we not necessarily have to be rich to be deceived by riches?
- 3 In class, go over the question asked at the end of Tuesday’s study about the fact that knowing the truth is not the same thing as being saved by it. Why is this such a crucial distinction for us to make? If knowing the truth alone is not what saves us, what does save us?
- 4 What other reasons can you think of for why the rich young ruler rejected Jesus while Zacchaeus accepted Him?

Mission Path to Spain: Part 3

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Pastor Luis Paiva miraculously received US\$1,000 to pay off a debt, leading him to believe that God’s will was for him, his wife, and their three children to leave Venezuela. But they didn’t have any savings.

“Lord, how do I leave with no savings?” he prayed.

At home, his wife said a pastor in the United States had called, wanting to speak with him. The pastor was looking for a volunteer missionary to work for a year in an area of Mexico without a Seventh-day Adventist presence. Luis went to Mexico, and his wife and children joined him two months later.

Over the next eight months, 35 people were baptized through Luis’s efforts. One new member donated a building, and a new church was opened.

But the authorities denied Luis a visa to stay in Mexico. He seemed to only have two options: move to the United States illegally or stay in Mexico illegally. He didn’t want to live anywhere illegally. Luis had become acquainted with a regional immigration official. When the official heard about Luis’ situation, he promised not to deport him. Luis believed him. But he believed God even more when God said, “Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save” (*Psalm 146:3, NIV*).

Worried, Luis prayed. He also made phone calls to the United States and Canada, seeking legal advice on leaving Mexico. Only two churches replied—an Adventist church and another church, both in Canada—but Luis remained in Mexico. Then a church member visited his home.

“What’s your biggest fear?” the man asked.

“I don’t want to live illegally in Mexico, and I don’t want to travel illegally to the United States,” Luis replied. “I also don’t want to return to my country.”

“If you had the money, what would you do right now?” the man asked.

“I would buy a plane ticket to fly to Spain,” Luis said.

Luis had a same-age aunt who had immigrated to Spain 20 years earlier. If he moved, he would have a family member nearby. Also, he had visited Spain three years earlier and felt comfortable there.



After listening to Luis, the church member said, “So, let’s buy the tickets and have you fly to Spain.”

After buying plane tickets for Luis and his family, he told Luis not to worry. “God is with you and is leading you,” he said.

Today, Luis and his wife are missionaries in Spain.

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offering that helps support missionaries around the world. Read next week about how Luis left a fruit stand to become a missionary.

Mission to the Unreached: Part 1



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 17, 1 Cor. 2:2, Rom. 1:18–25.*

Memory Text: “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands’ ” (*Acts 17:24, NIV*).

Depicting what Paul did in Athens, Luke wrote: “Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there” (*Acts 17:17, NKJV*).

Naturally, Paul would have been most comfortable working among the Jews, his own flesh and blood. But Paul refused to be satisfied with working among only his own people. He had been called to reach others, as well.

Or Paul could have worked just with the “God-fearing” Gentiles, whose worldview already had undergone substantial change. They had a biblical foundation that Paul could build upon, even if they still needed to know the God whom they “feared”—Jesus the Messiah.

But, no. While in Athens, a city famous for its philosophy, Paul sought to reach the people there, as well. Many of these had a radically different background and worldview from that of the Hebrews and their sacred history, which formed the foundation of the faith that Paul wanted to teach the Athenians.

How did Paul go about seeking to reach these people, and what can we learn from his attempts?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 9.

A Hebrew in Athens

Read Acts 17:1–16. How did Paul wind up in Athens, and how did he respond to what he found there?

The city of Athens was “given over to idols” (*Acts 17:16, NKJV*). Knowing the history of his own people and their proclivity (despite the endless warnings) to idolatry, Paul was upset at all the idols he found in Athens, as well. No question, Paul was motivated by compassion for the Athenians, who would die in their sins if they did not learn of the true God.

Today, our cities are still full of idols, even though they are less obvious than what Paul saw. And unfortunately, many believers are fully capable of walking through a city without reacting in the least to its idols. Paul, though, was tuned in to the Holy Spirit enough to respond. Out of step with some other believers, who still didn’t grasp that the gospel was for all the world, Paul knew that God wanted the Athenians to be saved along with everyone else. He understood that the global mission concept was to take the gospel to those who were entirely unreached, including idol-worshiping pagans, as well as the philosophers who filled the streets of Athens.

Paul, therefore, frequented the marketplace where these people were to be found. We might say that he formed the first Global Mission Study Center, where he used the marketplace to study and test methods of reaching the hearts and minds of these pagans.

Paul knew that he could not approach the Athenians in the same way that he approached Jews or even God-fearing Gentiles. These were people whose starting point was not the God of Israel or His works among the nation of Israel. No matter how central these concepts and beliefs were to the Jews and even to the God-fearing Gentiles, they meant nothing to the people Paul encountered in the Athenian marketplace. Hence, an entirely new approach would be needed.

Today, we often seek to reach people whose background has nothing in common with what has been called “the Judeo-Christian” heritage. Hence, like Paul, we need to adapt. An approach that might work fine, for example, in Buenos Aires could be useless in Bangkok.

What kind of idols are people worshiping in your society, and how can you open their eyes to how worthless it all is?

Paul in the Areopagus

No matter where he was, Paul, given his commission from God, was going to preach the gospel. So, that's exactly what he sought to do in Athens.

Read Acts 17:18–21. What were some of the different ways that the pagans in the marketplace reacted to Paul's speaking and questioning?

Clearly, with his “foreign gods,” Paul made an impression on these people in the marketplace (*Acts 17:18*), and so they took him to the Areopagus, a part of the city where legal and religious matters were adjudicated, though it does not seem as if Paul was facing any kind of legal trial. It was just, it seemed, to give him and his “new doctrine” (*Acts 17:19*) a hearing. It would be hard to ignore someone of Paul's eloquence, passion, and intelligence, even if he were promoting ideas that seemed very strange to these people.

Acts 17:21 says the Athenians did nothing but talk about and listen to the latest ideas. Was Luke accusing them of laziness? Probably not. More likely he was pointing out that they were experienced thinkers and debaters. After all, the Greeks produced such men as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, philosophers whose influence has reached down to our day, as well. Athens for centuries had been seen as the center of intellectual and philosophical thought. Though some of these thinkers were not atheists, certainly not in the sense that we think of atheism today, many of their philosophical ideas were radically different from the teachings of Christianity. It's hard, for example, to find a place in the philosophy of the Epicureans and Stoics for something like a resurrected Messiah.

In Athens, Paul had expected that the Holy Spirit could use his knowledge and oratorical skills, which he had gained in his education under Gamaliel. But in reality it was Paul's education on the streets of Athens that the Holy Spirit was able to use even more. “The wisest of his hearers were astonished as they listened to his reasoning. He showed himself familiar with their works of art, their literature, and their religion.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 237.

After Paul's experience in Athens with these pagans and philosophers, he wrote to the Corinthians that “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2, NKJV). What lesson is there for us about how central Christ must be to our message regardless of whom we are preaching to?

Paul and the Unknown God

Notice that Paul did not disparage the false religion or false gods of the Athenians. He gathered whatever points of good he could find, few as they were, and capitalized on them.

Read Acts 17:22, 23. What was Paul doing here in his attempt to reach these people with the gospel?

“ ‘People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious’ ” (*Acts 17:22, NIV*). Paul was complimenting pagans! Their religion was misguided in every way, and yet, Paul complimented their devotion to it because devotion to even misguided spirituality is more commendable than not caring at all about spirituality.

Paul continued, “ ‘As I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship . . .’ ” (*Acts 17:23, NIV*). By describing his own study of the Athenian religion, Paul communicated a respectful attitude toward the people. He was not rushing in as a self-proclaimed expert with all the answers for how the people needed to change. In reality, he was, in fact, an expert and did, in fact, have the answers that these people needed! But he did not present himself that way, or else he would have been rejected outright. Instead, he was seen as someone who cared for the people and desired their good.

Commenting on the inscription, “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (*Acts 17:23, NKJV*), Paul took advantage of what could be seen as common ground. They believed in god (many, actually), which was a great start (some people back then didn’t believe) and could open the way to deeper conversation. He did not scoff at the negative idea of an altar to an unknown god. Instead, he appreciated and admired a people who cared enough about spiritual things to go to the effort and expense of worshiping something they didn’t even know, just in case they were missing something.

Were they misguided? Of course, but that could be addressed. What was important in the beginning was that they were devout in what they did understand. That, Paul recognized, was material the Holy Spirit could work with.

Paul had found a talking point that would pique their interest.

What bridges and points of contact can you think of that would open opportunities for deeper conversation with others with whom you come in contact?

Introducing a New God

Now that Paul had the attention of the thinkers in Athens, he turned his audience to the God of heaven.

Read Acts 17:24–27. What approach was Paul taking here in an attempt to reach these people?

For a people who cared enough about spiritual things to build an altar to an unknown god, Paul's words were intriguing: a Creator God who does not live in a temple needs nothing from humans, but instead supplies human needs. For a culture steeped in Greek mythology—in which the gods were unpredictable, self-centered, and cruel—the idea of a God like the one Paul described was a wonderfully intriguing thought. And the men of the Areopagus took their first baby steps toward a God of love.

The fact is that this God, whom they did not know, could be known! Indeed, He wants to be known, as well.

Paul probably spoke longer at the Areopagus than just the few words Luke shared in this story. It seems reasonable for the sake of space that Luke just summarized Paul's speech. If that is true, then each of the concepts we have read so far Paul probably fleshed out in more detail. Then we break down Paul's speech into concepts:

1. Paul first complimented their current spiritual awareness and sincerity.
2. Next he showed that he had studied their belief and that he found some things that he respected from what he had learned.
3. He then told them about one particular thing that he had discovered in his study of their religion that they admitted they did not understand.
4. After that, he shared the aspect of God that he knew they desperately needed, which is the fact that God exists and that He loves them and is not far away.
5. Finally, at the end of his speech, Paul moved to warning them of what it means to reject the knowledge of this God they did not yet know.

Paul took them as far as he could, based on what he knew about what they believed. If he could get them that far, he was making good progress.

Notice Paul's appeal to the created world and to God as the Creator (see also Rom. 1:18–25). Why is this such a good approach to take, at least as a start, with most people? What is it about the created world that points so powerfully to God?

Crossing a Line

Read Acts 17:24–34. How does Paul continue his witness?

It's also interesting to note that Paul actually quoted some of their own writers, who, having written something fairly close to biblical truth, gave Paul an opening to take his hearers further along. That is, he used his familiarity with their beliefs to seek common ground with them, only to then take it further. No question: in seeking to reach others, having a familiarity with what they believe and seeking points of common ground can be a powerful method of reaching people.

Notice, too, that Paul uses this common ground with them to go then to where he wanted to go: the resurrection of Jesus and the hope it offered them all. Luke described the reactions to Paul's closing words about the Resurrection. Some sneered at the idea; others said they wanted to hear Paul again on the matter; and some believed. What is key in this story for our purposes is that *all of them had actually listened*. And that was Paul's hope from the beginning.

We know that some people will reject the gospel, but we must do everything possible to ensure that before they reject it, they understand what they are rejecting. Paul, by his method of working among the Athenians and his strategic use of what he had studied and learned of them, ensured that they heard with open minds that a God existed whom they did not know but who had created them. This God loved them and wanted to be known by them. He had been merciful to them in spite of their ignorance. But Judgment Day was coming. And if all of this sounded too unbelievable, there was verifiable evidence for it in the resurrection of Christ.

Now that the people had actually heard and comprehended the message, they had to choose for themselves whether to reject it outright or investigate further. And some did investigate further and became followers of Jesus (*Acts 17:34*).

Challenge: In prayer, ask for God's specific guidance in knowing how best to witness to someone you know.

Challenge Up: Explore social media as a possible "Areopagus" for you to represent the gospel—with Paul's clarity and discretion—to unbelievers.

Further Thought: One of the primary takeaways from the story of Paul's experience at the Areopagus is its on-the-ground study of how to approach an unreached group of unbelievers, which resulted in a small group of believers starting in Athens.

"The words of the apostle, and the description of his attitude and surroundings, as traced by the pen of inspiration, were to be handed down to all coming generations, bearing witness of his unshaken confidence, his courage in loneliness and adversity, and the victory he gained for Christianity in the very heart of paganism.

"Paul's words contain a treasure of knowledge for the church. He was in a position where he might easily have said that which would have irritated his proud listeners and brought himself into difficulty. Had his oration been a direct attack upon their gods and the great men of the city, he would have been in danger of meeting the fate of Socrates. But with a tact born of divine love, he carefully drew their minds away from heathen deities, by revealing to them the true God, who was to them unknown."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 240, 241.

By his direct contact with the people, a study of their culture and religion, and his respect for their devotion to spiritual things, Paul managed something notable in Athens—something that is a treasure of knowledge for the church. *He avoided irritating his listeners.* This was in and of itself a major, God-inspired accomplishment. This, according to Ellen G. White, is the treasure of knowledge that we as a church need to pay attention to in this story.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 With the story of Paul in Athens as a model, what is the first step for anyone beginning new evangelistic work in a city?
- 2 What sort of behavior is required of a Christian to build bridges with people in the city (and frankly, anywhere else) who do not know God?
- 3 When we are provoked by the modern types of idols, what should we avoid doing, especially right at first, in starting new work among the people who worship those idols?
- 4 Paul could have stopped with just introducing the people to this God who loved them, and they would have been quite pleased. But then he crossed a line that made people think he was deluded when he brought in the Resurrection. Should he have done that? Why, or why not?

Mission Path to Spain: Part 4

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Luis Paiva decided to open a fruit stand in Spain. But he moved forward with fear, sensing that God was calling him to serve elsewhere. He also worried that his new business might prevent him from giving his all to God.

Two short weeks after opening the fruit stand, everything seemed to fall apart. His business was failing. His partners were cheating him. He fell ill and no longer could walk. But Luis didn't want to give up. He asked fellow Seventh-day Adventists for business advice. One of them, knowing that Luis had trained to be a pastor, reprimanded him. "You shouldn't be engaged in worldly business but in the business of winning souls for the Lord," he said.

For Luis, the rebuke was like hearing God's voice. But he felt even more hopeless. How could he serve as a pastor without a church? Luis talked over the matter with his wife, and they decided to return to their native country, Venezuela. Perhaps he could recover his health there.

A short time later, Luis got a call from Gabriel Diaz, a leader of the Adventist Church in Spain. The church was looking for a missionary to work in Lugo, a city in northwestern Spain. Luis was delighted at the prospect of returning to full-time ministry, but he acknowledged that he had serious health and business problems. "I'm not even able to walk," he said.

The church leader was not dissuaded, and the two men prayed together.

In two weeks, Luis regained his ability to walk, and he opened a house church in Lugo. On the first Sabbath, only two people, both church members, showed up to worship. But in just four months, 22 people were gathering in the house church every Sabbath. Among them were three newly baptized members and others preparing for baptism. In addition, Luis had opened a Bible study school and a school of evangelism to teach people how to win souls for God. He was making plans to plant an official church.

"We know that we have to win many souls in order for that to happen," he says. "But I trust God, and I have confidence in Him that this will happen because we are using Christ's method alone."

"Christ's method alone," according to Ellen White, "will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me'" (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

As a pastor in Venezuela and later a missionary in Mexico, Luis never dreamed that he would be serving God in Spain. But he couldn't be happier.



"I'm here because of God's grace," he said. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offering that helps support missionaries around the world.

Mission to the Unreached: Part 2



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Kings 11:1–6; Matt. 4:23–25; Matt. 15:22–28; Mark 7:24–30; Acts 10:34, 35; Matt. 8:10.*

Memory Text: “Then Jesus answered and said to her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed from that very hour” (*Matthew 15:28, NKJV*).

From the beginning, a loving God sought His lost children (*Gen. 3:9*); and, to our day, this same loving God is still seeking to reach the lost (*see Rev. 14:6–12*), including the lost in the cities. In 2018, the United Nations published its latest findings, which say that 55 percent of the planet’s population lives in urban areas, and this will grow (if time should last) to 68 percent by 2050. We have no choice: we must witness to those in the cities.

Yet, many of God’s people act as Jonah did when called to witness to a city: for whatever reason, they flee from the task. “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (*Rom. 15:4, NKJV*). That includes what was written about Jonah.

When here, Jesus ministered not only to those in the cities of Israel but to those in foreign regions, as well; that is, to those outside of the Jewish nation and the chosen people.

This week we will study the Bible story of Christ’s mission to Tyre and Sidon and draw lessons to apply to our lives today.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 16.

Mission to Regions Beyond

We read that Jesus took His disciples from Gennesaret (*Matt. 14:34*) “and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon” (*Matt. 15:21, NKJV*). Why did He take them from Galilee to these pagan places? He leads His disciples on this field trip into the borders of these foreign regions so that they can learn, on location, what they could not learn so easily in Galilee. He wanted to teach His disciples lessons that would help prepare them for their calling to reach all people groups, including urbanites.

Read Judges 3:1–6, 1 Kings 5:1–12, and 1 Kings 11:1–6. How do these texts help us understand a bit of the background of these cities?

From Judges 3:1–6, we see that these ancient peoples were used by God to test the Israelites’ faith. Unfortunately, God’s people failed that test, too, at least in this instance: “And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods” (*Judg. 3:6, NKJV*). Thus, right from the start, these people were a stumbling block to Israel.

In 1 Kings 5:1–11, we can see the close relationship between the Sidonians and the Hebrews. Though on one level, the economic ties were mutually beneficial, no doubt the Hebrews were still negatively influenced by the paganism and idolatry of their trading partners.

First Kings 11:1–6 reveals just how negative that influence eventually became: King Solomon married Sidonian princesses, who led him astray. “For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians” (*1 Kings 11:5, NKJV*).

Yet, despite the history of paganism and idolatry, and their negative influence on the chosen nation, Jesus still brought His disciples to these places. In this way He initiated them in cross-cultural urban mission, confronting their bias and bigotry, and modeled for His followers wholistic urban mission to all cultures and nationalities.

Many challenges face the Adventist urban missionary, among them include health and environmental concerns. Others would include the high cost of living, racism, bigotry, nationalism, and constraints on religious freedom and expression. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, we must work for the cities.

What can you do to help those involved in urban ministry?

Seeking the Multitudes

Despite challenges, external and internal, Jesus graciously extends the call to us for His mission to the cities.

Read Matthew 9:35–38. What does this teach us about mission to the multitudes, wherever we find them?

Jesus was moved with compassion for the multitudes, such as are found in cities. Luke 19:41 describes how Jesus wept over Jerusalem. We may not understand the depths of Jesus' love for His children, even for the "faceless masses" living in cities. This is why in Matthew 9:38 Jesus tells us to pray, so that our motives and hearts can be like His.

Read Matthew 4:23–25. As Jesus began His ministry, from what geographic locations did the people come?

In Matthew 4:25, the multitudes following Jesus came from Galilee, from the ten city-states of the Decapolis to the east, from Jerusalem, and from Judea to the south. Besides Samaria, what region was missing? The coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, part of Phoenicia, along the Mediterranean Sea and northwest of Galilee. We now see why Jesus went to this area! This trip to the region of Tyre and Sidon was one of Jesus' cross-cultural mission trips.

"After the encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus withdrew from Capernaum, and crossing Galilee, repaired to the hill country on the borders of Phoenicia. Looking westward, He could see, spread out upon the plain below, the ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon, with their heathen temples, their magnificent palaces and marts of trade, and the harbors filled with shipping."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 399.

How can we help people see just how futile, in and of themselves, "their magnificent palaces and marts of trade" are, and why they need Jesus?

In Tyre and Sidon

Bible scholars believe that the Gospel of Matthew had been written specifically for a Jewish audience, and that Mark was written with primarily a Gentile audience in mind. It is helpful to keep this distinction before us as we study the Gospels.

Read Matthew 15:22–28 and Mark 7:24–30. What differences do you see in how the woman was depicted?

Notice how Matthew describes this mother using her nationality or race: Canaanite. Mark is led by the Holy Spirit to use additional terms to describe this mother as “a Greek” or “a Gentile” and then gives additional information: “a Syro-Phoenician by birth” or “a Syrian of Phoenicia”—the only time that this term is used in the Bible.

Consider how this story in Matthew 15 would impact the intended primary audience with their background and worldview. Matthew’s audience would see this mother as a despised heathen. This comes from the Jewish people’s historical experience with the Canaanites as an idol-worshiping people group whose evil lifestyle and practices had long been a stumbling block to their nation. Even Christ’s disciples did not consider the possibility that this woman had faith and was part of the kingdom of God!

In Mark 7, Mark’s audience of Gentiles would have a different response from that of Matthew’s. The Gentiles did not have the same experience as the Jews did with the Canaanites. Instead, the Gentiles would identify with this woman, “a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth” (*NKJV*). Jesus healed one of their own! For the Gentiles, this woman would be regarded as a beloved mother who was concerned about the fate of her daughter and wanted the Master to heal her, regardless of this mother’s ethnic and national background.

“Christ did not immediately reply to the woman’s request. He received this representative of a despised race as the Jews would have done. In this He designed that His disciples should be impressed with the cold and heartless manner in which the Jews would treat such a case, as evinced by His reception of the woman, and the compassionate manner in which He would have them deal with such distress, as manifested by His subsequent granting of her petition.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 400.

Read 1 John 2:2. What should this text tell us about how we are all the same before God?

“Send Her Away!”

In the unreached neighborhood of the cities, there are many who long for hope. During Christ’s time, what prevented God’s people from bringing hope of the Messiah to such foreign cities as Tyre and Sidon? Nationalism, pride, and prejudice blinded God’s people to the opportunities to see those nearest to them who longed for the hope foretold by the prophecies of the First Advent. Today in the cities, there are many population groups with whom Jesus Christ wants His people to share the “blessed hope” of the Second Advent (*Titus 2:13*). And just as Jesus didn’t care what their nationality or race was, neither should we.

Read Acts 10:9–16, 28, 34, 35. How would you summarize the lesson taught here by the Holy Spirit?

While waiting for lunch, Peter was given a vision of a rooftop buffet complete with a tablecloth filled with unclean animals and birds. Three times he was told in this vision to get up and eat. God used these visions to confront Peter’s religious pride and bigotry against the Gentiles. Peter eventually understood this truth: “Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him’ ” (*Acts 10:34, 35, NKJV*).

With this background, let’s reflect on our story for lessons from Tyre and Sidon. Look again at Jesus and His interaction with the mother. What lessons did the disciples learn from this field trip that related also to Peter’s vision? How can we apply these to our lives today and to Christ’s last-day call to His mission to the cities? What biases prevent us from seeing the needs of urbanites? What opportunities has God provided to us in the cities—to expand our mission understanding, and caringly to confront our bigotry, nationalism, and spiritual pride?

Jesus patiently taught His disciples, who did not yet fully understand that God’s great plan of salvation was for the entire human family, not just one nation or rural ethnic group. The Holy Spirit can help us to overcome our prejudice and bias in order to complete our mission to the cities.

Read Galatians 2:11–13. What should this teach us about how hard it can be to be purged of the prejudices we have been taught since childhood?

Faith on Earth?

In Luke 18:8, Jesus asks this question at the end of one of His parables: “ ‘When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’ ” (*NKJV*). As Christ’s disciples today, we need to see what Jesus is looking for. In this story, we can see that Jesus is looking for faith that shines even amid darkness.

Read Matthew 8:10, 13; Matthew 9:2; Matthew 20:29–34; Mark 2:5; Mark 10:46–52; and Luke 18:35–43. In these passages, whom does Jesus describe as having faith?

This list includes people with faith that shone even in dark cities. In Capernaum, Jesus highlights several people with faith. In Matthew 8:10, 13, we see a converted pagan centurion with great faith. We meet four faith-filled friends who ripped up the roof to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus (*Matt. 9:2, Mark 2:5*). In Mark 10, we meet the former blind man, Bartimaeus, whose faith shines bright in Jericho.

At the same time, we would expect that among God’s people there would be great faith. Yet, even in Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth, little faith—or even outright unbelief—was the limiting factor to Christ’s ministry. Among His disciples, several times Jesus says of Israel, “O ye [thou] of little faith!” (*Matt. 6:30, Matt. 8:26, Matt. 14:31, Matt. 16:8*). And in Matthew 17:17, Jesus exclaims, “O faithless and perverse generation”!

One lesson that we can apply to today is that faith is found in unexpected places: in the cities among foreigners, pagans, and people with different religions. In humility, we must go into the cities as Jesus did, seeking out those who, when presented with truth, will respond with a saving faith in Jesus. And they are indeed out there.

Challenge: Open your heart in prayer for a greater portion of faith with which to share your love for those near and far.

Challenge Up: How did you come to know Jesus and the precious three angels’ messages? List three spiritual blessings that you have experienced from Jesus in your personal life. Prepare to share these concepts with your Sabbath School class.

Further Thought: “Among those whom the Jews styled heathen were men who had a better understanding of the Scripture prophecies concerning the Messiah than had the teachers in Israel. There were some who hoped for His coming as a deliverer from sin. Philosophers endeavored to study into the mystery of the Hebrew economy. But the bigotry of the Jews hindered the spread of the light.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 33.

“The Lord Jesus, the mighty Saviour, has died for these souls. He can arouse them from their indifference, he can awaken their sympathies, he can soften their hearts, he can reveal to their souls the beauty and power of the truth. The Master-worker is God, and not finite man; and yet he calls upon men to be the agents through whom he can impart light to those in darkness. God has jewels in all the churches, and it is not for us to make sweeping denunciation of the professed religious world, but in humility and love, present to all the truth as it is in Jesus. Let men see piety and devotion, let them behold Christlikeness of character, and they will be drawn to the truth. . . . They are to lift up Jesus, the world’s Redeemer; they are to hold forth the word of life.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 17, 1893.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some of the immediate needs in the areas where you live that could give you and your church the opportunity to reach out to souls who don’t know the truths that we do?
- 2 Look at Ellen G. White’s words above regarding those of other faiths: “God has jewels in all the churches, and it is not for us to make sweeping denunciation of the professed religious world.” In other words, how can we show people the error of their ways while at the same time not denigrating the people personally?
- 3 “‘When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’ ” (*Luke 18:8, NKJV*). What does Jesus mean by this rhetorical question? What is the difference between faith and belief? Why might people who have the correct belief be found void of faith when Christ returns?

Dreaming Dreams: Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Sixteen-year-old Joseph Delamou was anxious. He worried that he wasn't attending the right church in Conakry, capital of the West African country of Guinea.

"Show me the way," he prayed. "I'll go wherever You lead." That night, he had a vivid dream. He dreamed that he and 70 members of his church were on a compound, making plans on how to grow their congregation. Outside the compound loomed the palace of a mighty king, the ruler of the world.

Abruptly, a unit of soldiers burst into the compound. "You need to leave," a soldier told Joseph. "We want to train you to join our ranks."

Joseph didn't want to leave, but the soldier insisted. "You can't stay," he said. "Leave. Go anywhere you want. Just don't stay here. After three days, you can come back and see what has happened to these people."

Joseph left and, returning three days later, found a very quiet compound. He wondered where everyone was. Then he saw a boy hiding behind the wall of the king's palace. The boy was bleeding and, when Joseph tried to talk to him, put a finger to his lips.

"Come over here," he whispered.

After Joseph drew near, the boy said, "Your God is great!"

"What?" Joseph asked.

"I said, 'Your God is great!'" the boy said. "How is it that you are the only person who left us three days ago? Many of us were shot and killed, but you are the only one who escaped. How?"

Joseph pressed the boy for details, and the boy led him to a mound of dirt. He said it was the mass grave of more than 40 people. "The soldiers didn't train anyone," he said. "They shot people and took survivors away in cages."

Then Joseph noticed a snake lying motionless on the ground. The boy said it was the king who had lived in the palace, and he had been slain. "Let me show you the prince who has taken over from the king," he said.

Joseph couldn't take his eyes off the snake. "How did a snake rule the world and call itself king?" he asked. "I don't understand how people could accept a snake as king."

"I can't explain this to you right now," the boy replied.

At that moment, Joseph woke up. He didn't understand the dream. But he sensed God was calling him to leave the church of his father. Where should he go?



Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on December 30 will help spread the gospel in the West-Central Africa Division, which includes Guinea. Thank you for planning a generous offering. Read more about Joseph next week.

Esther *and* Mordecai



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Dan. 1:1–12; Dan. 6:1–9; Esther 2:1–10, 20; Esther 3:1–15; Esther 4:1–14; Esther 9:1–12.*

Memory Text: “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (*Isa. 49:6, NRSV*).

One of the most inspiring accounts of “cross-cultural ministry” in the Bible can be found in the book of Esther. A great deal has been written over the millennia about this book, and to this day many Jews celebrate the feast of Purim, based on Esther 9:26–31.

Esther and Mordecai, her cousin, were Jews living in the capital of the Persian Empire, Susa. For whatever reason, unlike other Jews who had returned to Judah, they, along with others, remained in the land of their captivity.

Then, through a series of providences, Esther becomes queen. “The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti” (*Esther 2:17, NKJV*).

It was in this role that Esther, even if somewhat reluctantly, was able to play a major part in biblical history. In its own unique way, this story shows how God’s people, even in foreign environments, can witness for truth.

Whatever your time allows, read (or skim through) the book of Esther for this week’s study.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 23.

Captive in a Foreign Culture

It is never easy to be expatriated to a foreign culture. It may be difficult for us today to comprehend what the Jews faced, first under the Babylonians and then the Persians.

None of us, for instance, lives in an Adventist country where the principles of our faith are, to some degree, the law of the land. But before being deported, the Jewish people had been living in their own country, where the principles of their faith were also enshrined in the law of the land.

On one level, think how easy that should have made it to be faithful to God. After all, how much easier would it be to keep the seventh-day Sabbath if, in fact, keeping the seventh-day Sabbath were enshrined in the legal codes of the nation?

On the other hand, sacred history has shown us that whatever the decrees of the land happen to be, even if favorable to faith, faithfulness must stem from the heart, from within, or else sin, apostasy, and ruin will surely follow.

“Therefore the Lord said: ‘Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men’ ” (*Isa. 29:13, NKJV*).

In contrast, for those who are determined to be faithful, even the most unfavorable environment cannot keep them from obedience.

Read Daniel 1:1–12, Daniel 3:1–12, and Daniel 6:1–9. However unique each situation, what do these accounts reveal about the challenges God’s people can face living in a foreign culture?

No matter who we are, or where we live, we are immersed in an environment that to some degree, either by laws themselves or by the culture, or both, can be greatly challenging to our faith and our witness. These accounts in Daniel, though always ending “happily,” reveal that even under trying circumstances people can stay faithful to God. Even if none of these accounts had turned out well, there’s no doubt these men still did the right thing.

What are some of the challenges to your faith that you face in your own culture? How do you respond to them?

In a Foreign Court

Eventually, after the fall of Babylon and the rise of Medo-Persia, many of the Jews returned to their ancestral lands. But not all returned. Some remained where they had been living for a generation or more.

With this background in mind, we have a bit of the context for the story of Esther. “In those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel” (*Esther 1:2, NKJV*). Here is where the biblical narrative unfolds, the Persian Empire under this king.

In chapter 1, queen Vashti falls out of favor with the king, which leads him to look for another queen, one to replace the now-disfavored Vashti. It’s in this context that Esther and her cousin, Mordecai, first appear.

Read Esther 2:1–9. What do these verses teach us about the situation of Mordecai and Esther?

It seems that Mordecai, as a royal officer, was sitting at the gate of the palace and was residing in the city of Shushan with his adopted daughter, or cousin, Esther. Because of their position and living where they did, they were immersed in the Persian culture. This must be at least part of the reason Esther was chosen to be presented to the king: “Esther also was taken to the king’s palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem” (*Esther 2:8, NIV*).

Read Esther 2:10, 20. What was going on here, and why would Mordecai give her such a command?

Though the text does not say precisely why, it’s not hard to guess. As aliens in a foreign culture and religion that, we will see, could be hostile, they were wise in keeping silent about their family and people.

What circumstances might you think of where it could be prudent not to be overt about our faith? Or should we never do that? And if not, why not?

Mordecai's Faithful Witness

Living as they were in a foreign land, sooner or later Mordecai and Esther, if they were to remain faithful to God, might have run into trouble. This, certainly, became the case for Mordecai.

Read Esther 3:1–15. What happened here, and why?

In Esther 3, we learn that King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) honored Haman and gave him a high position full of power. Everyone was told they must bow down before Haman. But we read: “Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor” (*Esther 3:2, NIV*). The Bible does not give the reason that Mordecai did not kneel before this man. But we know why. He is a faithful Jew. Mordecai is not willing to pay homage to a descendant of Agag, an Amalekite, enemies of his people since the Exodus (*Deut. 25:19*). How could a faithful Jew kneel down before an Amalekite? Or, for that matter, worship anyone but the Lord?

“Then the king’s servants who were within the king’s gate said to Mordecai, ‘Why do you transgress the king’s command?’ ” (*Esther 3:3, NKJV*). Though we don’t know in detail how he responded, the next verse says that “Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew” (*Esther 3:4, NKJV*). Surely in that response, Mordecai had an opportunity to explain that as a worshiper of the God who created the heavens and the earth, he could not worship any sinful human being. No doubt Mordecai was to some degree able to witness about his faith, a faith that he adhered to so strongly that it endangered himself and, unfortunately, others.

“From Daniel and his companions and Mordecai, a bright light shone amid the moral darkness of the kingly courts of Babylon.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 13, 1884.

When Haman wanted to destroy the Jewish people, describing them as “a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws” (*Esther 3:8, NIV*). A people whose customs are different and who do not obey the king’s laws? A perfect recipe for persecution.

What are ways, even now, that we might be tested as was Mordecai? How should we respond?

For Such a Time as This

Read Esther 4:1–14. Why was it considered at this moment appropriate for Esther to identify herself as a Jew?

When Mordecai contacted Esther for her help, she had been married to Ahasuerus for several years, but there was a law in Persia that no one could come to the king's throne without an express invitation from the king. Anyone who didn't respect this rule risked death. Esther, knowing the risk, went to the throne room anyway, uninvited.

Mordecai's faith sought to awaken Esther's faith. The heart of the book of Esther is found in Mordecai's words to Esther: "And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: 'Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?' " (*Esther 4:13, 14, NKJV*).

Esther's faith was put to the test as Mordecai appealed to her love for her people. No one knew she was Jewish except Mordecai, and once she made the decision to become involved, she did not hesitate to put her life on the line.

Her faith in God was strong, and she knew that without God's help she could not succeed. Her answer to Mordecai revealed her faith: " 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish' " (*Esther 4:16, NIV*). Mordecai sent this information to the entire Jewish community in Shushan (Susa), and while they fasted and prayed, Esther prepared herself for the dangerous moment. "On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter" (*Esther 5:1, 2, NIV*).

For the Jews in such a situation as described above, prayer would certainly accompany fasting. That is, though they acted in their own behalf, prayer was central to their response. What obvious lesson can we take from this?

The Miracle of Purim

Commentators for millennia have noticed that God’s name does not appear in the book of Esther. This is the only biblical book where such a phenomenon occurs. However, the Jews were able to recognize God’s actions in the great deliverance made for them, and this book was selected by God’s people to be included in the canon of the Bible.

Are we able to discover the presence of God beneath the surface of our daily life? God’s actions can take the appearance of normal, natural events, and if we don’t pay careful attention to them, we will not notice God’s presence.

Read Esther 9:1–12. What was the result of Esther’s effort?

The miracle of Purim takes a very unusual form. The miracle is hidden, disguised in apparently natural events. The law to destroy the Jews was not reversed, but a new law was written, allowing the Jews to defend themselves.

Also, notice what else had happened, and how God was able to work through these events. The Persians noticed God’s actions on behalf of the Jews.

And the result?

“Many people of other nationalities became Jews” (*Esther 8:17, NIV*). This is a great example of how the Lord was able to work to bring lost souls to a knowledge of Him.

The leaders of the Jewish people recognized the working of God. When the Jews were victorious in defending themselves, they declared a yearly time (called Purim) in remembrance and celebration of their victory. These days are still traditionally spent in thanksgiving to God in remembrance of His deliverance.

Challenge: Pray that God will give you the courage to share something He has done for you with one of the people on your prayer list this week.

Challenge Up: Begin a diary or journal of special little things (or big things) that God does for you. Review it and pray that God will bring these things to your mind at just the right time so you can share them with someone.

Further Thought: “To every household and every school, to every parent, teacher, and child upon whom has shone the light of the gospel, comes at this crisis the question put to Esther the queen at that momentous crisis in Israel’s history, ‘Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’ Esther 4:14.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 263.

“Esther was a beautiful Jewish girl, cousin of Mordecai, who took her into his home after her parents died, and loved her as his own daughter. God used her to save the Jewish people in the land of Persia.” (Note: This second paragraph above is introductory material included about Esther in *Daughters of God* on page 45 and was not written by Ellen White. However, the two subsequent quotations below were written by her.)

“In ancient times the Lord worked in a wonderful way through consecrated women who united in His work with men whom He had chosen to stand as His representatives. He used women to gain great and decisive victories. More than once, in times of emergency, He brought them to the front and worked through them for the salvation of many lives. Through Esther the queen, the Lord accomplished a mighty deliverance for His people. At a time when it seemed that no power could save them, Esther and the women associated with her, by fasting and prayer and prompt action, met the issue, and brought salvation to their people. . . .

“A study of women’s work in connection with the cause of God in the Old Testament times will teach us lessons that will enable us to meet emergencies in the work today. We may not be brought into such a critical and prominent place as were the people of God in the time of Esther; but often converted women can act an important part in more humble positions. This many have been doing and are still ready to do.”—Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God*, pp. 45, 46.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 The book of Esther does leave us with some unanswered questions, particularly concerning Esther’s role in the court of the king, even though she was elevated to the role of queen. How do we reconcile these things with her faith, or can we?
- 2 The famous words of Esther, “ ‘and if I perish, I perish!’ ” (*Esther 4:16, NKJV*), have echoed down through the millennia as an example of faithfulness even in the face of death. How do her words reflect what God’s people will face in the last days, when the issues in Revelation 13 become a reality?
- 3 In class, go over the question, at the end of Monday’s study, about not revealing your faith at times. Should that ever be the case for us?

Dreaming Dreams: Part 2

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Since childhood, Joseph Delamou had gone to church daily and, following his father's example, knelt before images. But he had a vivid dream when he asked God if he was going to the right church. He sensed that God was calling him to leave his father's church.

So, 16-year-old Joseph joined another church in Conakry, capital of the French-speaking country of Guinea in West Africa. He soon became its youth leader, and he organized numerous outreach programs.

Several years passed, and Joseph's father grew increasingly displeased with his son for going to another church. "I want you to learn English," he said. "You need to give up your church activities and focus on English."

Joseph was reluctant to stop going to church. But to make Father happy, he quit the outreach programs and enrolled in English lessons at the age of 23.

The English teacher, Fortunate Kaloubilori, opened the first lesson with the words, "Let's pray." Joseph was astonished. He had thought that he was giving up God to learn English, but the teacher prayed at every lesson.

Three weeks into the lessons, the teacher asked Joseph for help. "I have many papers to grade," Fortunate said. "Please, could you stay and help?"

After grading the papers, Fortunate invited Joseph to study the Bible with him. Joseph was pleased. He thought, *God is following me everywhere!*

But the Bible study left him confused. He had left his father's church to join another church. But now he was hearing new Bible teachings that seemed to lead to Fortunate's church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

"This is because of my father," Joseph told himself, bitterly. "If he hadn't sent me to these lessons, I wouldn't have these problems!"

He continued Bible studies for two months and then went to his pastor for advice. He wanted to know which church was right. The pastor dismissed the Adventists as incorrect.

"Don't listen to them," he said.

Joseph asked for a meeting with the pastor and Fortunate to discuss the Bible. The pastor refused to come and sent representatives. When the representatives failed to support their views from the Bible, the pastor demanded a second meeting. But again, he sent representatives whose answers didn't satisfy Joseph.

Joseph decided to pray and fast for three days about what to do. Then he had another dream.



Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on December 30 will help spread the gospel in the West-Central Africa Division, which includes Guinea. Thank you for planning a generous offering. Read more about Joseph and Fortunate (pictured) next week.

The End of God's Mission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 1:1–7, 1 Pet. 2:9, Rev. 14:6–12, Luke 11:23, 1 Tim. 2:4, Rev. 21:1–4.*

Memory Text: “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God . . . ?” (*2 Peter 3:11, 12, NKJV*).

The book of Revelation fills the mind with scenes of the end. The epicenter of the book deals with the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. Satan has lost his legal hold over the earth, and now he pursues those who remain loyal to God. The book climaxes with Jesus' return to deliver His children, both the living righteous and those faithful ones who have died since the fall of Adam and Eve. The book shows us, too, the destruction of Satan and the wicked by fire, and Jesus' establishment of His eternal kingdom on the earth made new.

Students of Revelation enthusiastically explore and seek to identify the predicted signs and events that mark church history from the first century AD to our day in the end of time. They are right to do so, too.

However, in this quarter's final lesson, we will see that Revelation is a missionary book focused on a missionary God who is calling us to be a missionary church. Our calling to proclaim “present truth” to the world will exist right up until everyone has made the choice for or against God.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 30.

Revelation: God's Last-Day Mission

The opening lines of Revelation indicate to the reader that this book is focused on God's mission.

Read Revelation 1:1–7. In what ways do you see evidence that Revelation is focused on God's mission in the last days?

After revealing in the first verses that Jesus is the source and focus of Revelation, Revelation 1:4, 5 alludes to all Three Members of the Godhead, who are working unitedly to save human beings. The Father is the eternal one who was and is and is to come. The Holy Spirit, who is working powerfully among the first-century churches, is named. Then John recalls the status of Jesus Christ—the “faithful witness,” “the firstborn of the dead” (*Rev. 1:5, NRSV*), who possesses legal ownership of this planet. Satan's attempt to use this earth to establish his kingdom is ruined. In addition to God's victory over Satan, our Creator's shed blood washes away our guilt and shame.

Read Revelation 1:6 and 1 Peter 2:9. What do the titles for the redeemed in these verses signify?

The focus of God's mission is not simply to drag perishing people to safety. God's salvation offers a new and honorable status, because God's image is restored in us. The redeemed become royalty (kings) because we are blood-related to the King of the universe through Jesus' shed blood. Now, as royal family members, we join the mission of the royal family in the salvation of other human beings. This makes us priests! Christ had constituted His church a “kingdom” and its individual members “priests.” To be a member of the kingdom is to be a priest.

In Revelation 1:7, we find the urgency of mission: Jesus is coming, and the nations will mourn because they are lost. God longs after those who are estranged from Him.

The book of Revelation opens, then, with God's mission for human beings.

Not only have we been created by God, but we have been redeemed by Him, and at such an amazing cost, too. Why should this truth give us so much hope, no matter our present situation?

The Three Angels' Messages and Mission

The book of Revelation gives us a powerful and graphic representation of the great controversy theme, perhaps most dramatically depicted in Revelation 12:12: “Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (NKJV). It’s hard to imagine how anyone can understand anything in Scripture apart from the great controversy motif, which will climax in the last days.

Read Revelation 14:6–12. What is depicted here, and what have these verses to do with our mission and message?

Central to mission, God’s mission, is the message, God’s message: the gospel. The message, in a real sense, is the mission. The world needs to be warned about what is coming upon it, and every person will be forced to make a choice, a choice either for life or for death.

“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters” (Luke 11:23, NKJV).

What is Jesus saying here that deals so directly with our mission?

The three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 form the core, the heart, of what we as Seventh-day Adventists have been called to proclaim to the world. Central to it, foundational to it, are two themes: “the everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6, NKJV) and the worship of the Creator. These two themes appear in this depiction of the saints: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12, NKJV). No matter what else we do—all the good that we do in helping people—we must never lose sight of our special calling and mission, which is to proclaim to a lost world the hope found in the “everlasting gospel,” as well as to warn the world of what will one day come upon it.

“He who is not with Me is against Me” (Luke 11:23, NKJV). How do you understand what Jesus is saying to us here? Why should these words cause us to examine where our hearts really are?

The Final Crisis

Jesus said to His disciples and to us: “ ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen” (*Matt. 28:19, 20, NKJV*). This is the Great Commission, and in many ways the three angels’ messages, with a call to “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*), is simply the “present truth” (*2 Pet. 1:12*) expression of the Great Commission.

Read 1 John 4:8, 2 Peter 3:9, 1 Timothy 2:4, and Genesis 12:3. Why does every group of people matter to God?

Christ’s love is for all humanity, with no people group excluded. Contrary to the theology that teaches that Christ died only for a predestined elite, the Bible is clear that Christ’s death was for all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, or any other factor. If you are a human being, Christ died for you. Period. The only question remaining for anyone is, *How do you respond to His death?*

When Jesus returns, there will be only two overt camps: those who have submitted to the authority of Satan through religious and political institutions as shown in Revelation 13 and 17, and those who have fully submitted to Jesus Christ, whose faith is made manifest by their keeping “the commandments of God” (*Rev. 14:12*).

Since the beginning, human beings have had evidence of who God is and of His way of righteousness and love (*Rom. 1:18–21*). Therefore, all human beings from ages past will be judged based on how they cooperated with God and how they lived—regardless of how much they did or didn’t understand (*Rom. 2:11–16*).

But in this time of the end, there is a growing polarization, and no longer will freedom of conscience be respected. People will be pressed to align themselves with Satan’s party. It is urgent that the gospel be proclaimed and the serious news about Satan’s strategies be exposed. And that is exactly what the three angels’ messages, and our mission, are all about.

Dwell on the fact that Christ has died for you personally. What could possibly make you think that anything you have done, no matter how bad, could not have been sufficiently paid for by the death of Christ on the cross?

Success in Mission

What is success in mission? We might be tempted to think that it is many baptisms, big churches, and rapid growth rates. We might feel that success consists of entering every tribe and people group on earth with the truth and that we can speed it up by using radio, the internet, and TV. While all of this can be good, we must remember what Paul wrote to the community of faith in Corinth: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” (*1 Cor. 3:6, NKJV*). In other words, our focus is to be on the process; God’s focus will be on the growth.

We have already seen that the object of God’s mission is saving the lost in every people group on earth by making them loyal disciples of Jesus who are involved in His mission.

Read the following texts. What do they tell us about the character of those who become followers of Jesus?

2 Cor. 11:2 _____

Isa. 30:21; John 10:27; John 16:12, 13 _____

2 Thess. 2:9–11; Heb. 3:12, 13; 1 John 1:8 _____

1 John 1:9, Rev. 7:14, Rev. 19:8 _____

Disciples of Jesus are pure, remaining loyal to Him as a pure bride would to her betrothed. They follow Jesus as He leads them by the still small voice of the Holy Spirit. This includes leading us into missionary work for others. There is no deception in these disciples. They are not led astray by debilitating doubt, false teachings, or immorality. And they do not feel morally superior to others. They recognize that they are imperfect, requiring God’s cleansing grace and mercy. Understanding this, they also are open to receiving correction and instruction from other believers. Success in mission results in making this type of disciple.

What does it mean to be a “chaste virgin to Christ” (*2 Cor. 11:2*)? How can we, as sinners, be this before God and point others to becoming chaste virgins to Christ, as well?

Mission Complete

Read Revelation 21:1–4 and Revelation 21:22–22:5. What is the scene described here?

What a paradise the new earth will be! Death and sin will be gone, Satan and wickedness destroyed. We will meet our loving Savior and reunite with loved ones. And the new earth will be populated with representatives from every ethnicity and language.

The General Conference Mission Board has approved Global Mission metrics that can be used to determine whether a people group is reached or unreached. A “reached people group” is one that has adequate numbers and resources to witness effectively to the rest of the group without requiring outside assistance; it has worship services, Bibles, and other literature in their first language; and there are indigenous church leaders who can witness to the rest of the people group without working through a translator.

An “unreached people group” is one that has no indigenous community of believing Adventists with adequate numbers and resources to witness effectively to their own group without assistance from outside their culture.

Each local church and conference must determine the people groups in their community who need to be reached. Now is the time to invest in God’s mission of making disciples in all people groups, hastening our Savior’s return and, in the end, living with them in the new heaven and new earth that is promised to us here.

Challenge: How are you hastening Christ’s return? Are you planting seeds of hope in the hearts of those who need to hear good news? Are you “watering” new believers by helping them learn what it means to live a life of loyal obedience to Christ? Pray for opportunities to communicate the promise of the earth made new with the people on your daily prayer list.

Challenge Up: Some of your “disciples” may be ready to accept Christ. This includes joining a church or group of believers. Put yourself in his or her place and imagine attending your church for the first time. What kind of experience would he or she have? How prepared is your church to welcome and disciple new people? Are you open to starting new groups of believers, not just building up your own existing church? Create a strategy to address weak areas. Share your thoughts with your church leaders, and work with them to implement a plan to become a more intentional disciple-making church.

Further Thought: “The great plan of redemption results in fully bringing back the world into God’s favor. All that was lost by sin is restored. Not only man but the earth is redeemed, to be the eternal abode of the obedient. For six thousand years Satan has struggled to maintain possession of the earth. Now God’s original purpose in its creation is accomplished. ‘The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.’”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 342.

But before that can become a reality, it is our duty to partner with God in His mission to reach the world with the message of warning so that people can accept and be a part of God’s promise of re-creation.

“I long to see very many laborers at work for those who know not the evidences of our faith. Many have received great light through hearing the three angels’ messages, and now they should proclaim these messages in all parts of the world. I desire to do my part and to open the way for others to carry the light of truth. May the Lord help us to put the armor on. The believers are to unite in the solemn work of giving the last note of warning to the world.”—Ellen G. White, Letter 390, 1907 (unpublished).

Throughout this quarter we have studied various aspects and issues related to God’s mission. This week we concluded our study by exploring Revelation’s keys to understanding what a restored relationship with God looks like, and it climaxed with a vision of the mission fulfilled—the re-creation and restoration of the earth. While it is true that the destruction of sin and suffering will be the most terrifying days of earth’s history, God casts our vision to a time beyond this destruction and provides comfort and encouragement in the promise of the earth restored.

Discussion Question:

- 1 What is the “everlasting gospel”? Why is it “everlasting”? And why must what it teaches be foundational to our mission?
- 2 Why do we have such an emphasis on the three angels’ messages? How do you respond to the argument that we need to focus on Jesus and not on something as supposedly “negative” as these messages, which include very strong warnings?
- 3 How has this quarter helped you better understand not only the importance of mission but how you and your church could better participate in it, which is what we have been called to do?

Dreaming Dreams: Part 3

By ANDREW McCHESNEY

Joseph Delamou had prayed to God to reveal His true church, but Joseph didn't know where to worship in Conakry, capital of the French-speaking country of Guinea in West Africa. After studying the Bible with his English teacher, a Seventh-day Adventist named Fortunate Kaloubilori, he fasted for three days and pleaded with God to reveal His will.

Then Joseph had a dream in which he was locked up in prison. A prison guard was a relative, and he begged him for freedom. "I cannot free you even though we are from the same family," the relative said.

Joseph attempted to escape but was caught and reproved by his relative.

"Don't play with me," the relative said. "If you try that again, I will punish you in a way that you will never forget."

A voice boomed out with a description of the punishment. "Someone will bring straw and put it under you and set it on fire," the voice said.

Joseph understood that the punishment represented hell after Jesus' coming. He prayed, "I'm not better than the others. Only don't let me die here. I want to accomplish something for You before I die."

After the prayer, he was somehow removed from the prison cell and into the presence of three soldiers. One soldier said, "Joseph, you must pay the ransom for your freedom."

"Only God freed me, not you," Joseph replied. "Jesus paid the price on the cross. I owe you nothing."

But the soldier insisted, "If you don't pay, we will take you back to prison."

"My freedom did not come from you, and you cannot go against God, who freed me," Joseph said. "My life depends on God, and if you harm me, you are not harming me but God."

The soldiers left, and Joseph turned around and saw Fortunate.

"Your freedom is from God," Fortunate assured him.

Then Joseph woke up. It was 3:00 A.M., and he was sweating. The dream seemed so real.

He prayed, "Thank You, God. Every time I ask for help, You answer me. I thank You, not for answering me but for loving me."



Today, Joseph is 24 and a faithful Adventist.

"When I was a child, I asked God to lead me to the right path," he said. "God answered this prayer by bringing me to the Adventist Church. I am ready to serve God."

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this Sabbath will help spread the gospel in the West-Central Africa Division, which includes Guinea. Thank you for your generous offering.

Uttered in praise, joy, sorrow, and despair, spoken or sung in private and in the public, by laypeople, kings, poets, and priests, coming from both the righteous and repentant sinners, the Psalms have served as the prayer book and the hymnbook to generations of believers.

The Psalms are a collection of 150 poems, and the collection may not be as random as it appears. The Psalms bear witness to a spiritual journey that is common to many of God's children. The journey begins with a faith that is firmly established and secured by God's sovereign rule, and where good gets rewarded and evil punished. As we progress through our study, we will see what happens when the well-ordered world of faith is challenged and threatened by evil. Does God still reign? How can believers sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Our prayer is that this study, entitled "The Book of Psalms" and authored by Dragoslava Santrac, will strengthen us on our life journey, and through these poems, we get to meet God daily, heart to heart, until the day when we see Jesus Christ face to face.

Lesson 1—How to Read the Psalms

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Psalms in Ancient Israel's Worship** (*Ps. 18:1*)

MONDAY: **Meet the Psalmists** (*Ps. 75:1, Psalm 72*)

TUESDAY: **A Song for Every Season** (*Ps. 3:1–8, Ps. 33:1–3*)

WEDNESDAY: **Inspired Prayers** (*Ps. 39:12*)

THURSDAY: **The World of the Psalms** (*Ps. 44:8*)

Memory Text—*Luke 24:44, 45, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Accepting the Psalms as God's Word and paying close attention to their poetic features, as well as their historical, theological, and liturgical contexts, is fundamental for understanding their messages.

Lesson 2—Teach Us to Pray

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Fostering the Use of the Psalms in Prayer** (*Ps. 105:5*)

MONDAY: **Trust in Times of Trouble** (*Psalm 44*)

TUESDAY: **A Psalm of Despair** (*Psalm 22*)

WEDNESDAY: **From Despair to Hope** (*Psalm 13*)

THURSDAY: **Oh, Restore Us Again** (*Ps. 60:1–5*)

Memory Text—*Luke 11:1, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The Psalms are prayers and, as such, are invaluable, not only for their theological insight but also for the ways they can enrich and transform our individual and communal prayers.

Lessons for People Who are Legally Blind The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on audio CD, and via online download to people who are legally blind or physically disabled. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488- 0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.