



Explore Missions

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Contents

- Explore Missions 1
- Course Contents 2
- Missions and the Old Testament 6
- Introduction: Mission from the Beginning 7
- Lesson 1: The Big Picture of the Bible 9
- Lesson 2: Missions in the Law of the Old Testament 15
- Lesson 2: God's Promises to Abraham 17
- Lesson 3: Missions in the Psalms 19
- Lesson 4: Missions in the Old Testament Prophets 23
- Lesson 5: Mission in the Book of Jonah 27
- Group Discussion: Missions and the Old Testament 31
- Missions and the New Testament 36
- Introduction: Four Types of New Testament Literature 37
- Lesson 1: Missions and the Life and Ministry of Jesus 39
- Lesson 2: Missions in the Book of Acts 44
- Lesson 3: Missions in the New Testament Letters and Revelation Next 49
- Lesson 3: Missions in Revelation 53
- Lesson 4: Missions and What the Bible Teaches About the Lost 55
- Lesson 5: Mission and the Bible: What Is The Mission of God's Church? 59
- Lesson 5: What is the Mission of the Church? 62v
- Group Discussion: Missions in the New Testament 64
- Being a Disciple of Jesus 73
- Introduction: Essence of Following Jesus 74
- Lesson 1: The Central Command of the Great Commission 76
- Lesson 2: Transformed Heart and Mind 81
- Lesson 3: Transformed Desired and Will 85
- Lesson 4: Transformed Relationships and Purpose 90
- Lesson 5: The Practices of a Disciples 94

- Group Discussion: Being a Disciple of Jesus 99
- What do Missionaries Do? 105
- Introduction: Basic Missionary Tasks 106
- Lesson 1: Engaging Those Who Have Never Heard the Gospel 109
- Lesson 1: Engaging Strategically 112
- Lesson 2: Sharing the Gospel 115
- Lesson 2: Principles of Contextualization 119
- Lesson 3: Discipling Believers 121
- Lesson 4: Planting and Multiplying Churches 126
- Lesson 4: What Should the Church Look Like? 129
- Lesson 5: Training Leaders 132
- Group Discussion: What do Missionaries do? 137
- Our Family Story 144
- Introduction: Our Family History 145
- Lesson 1: Missions in the Early Church 148
- Lesson 1: A “Christian” Empire 151
- Lesson 2: Missions in the Middle Ages 153
- Lesson 2: Christianizing Europe 156
- Lesson 3: Mission in the Reformation Age 161
- Lesson 3: Protestant First Fruits 164
- Lesson 4: The Great Century of Missions 167
- Lesson 4: Phase Two — To the Interior 171
- Lesson 5: Missions in the Modern Era 177
- Lesson 5: Phase Three — To Every People Group 180
- Group Discussion: Our Family Story 185
- Missions and the World Today 192
- Intro: Looking Back 193
- Lesson 1: Unreached and Unengaged People Groups 195
- Lesson 2: Other Religions 199
- Lesson 2: Building Relationships 210
- Lesson 3: Crossing Cultures 212
- Lesson 3: Levels of Culture 214
- Lesson 3: Relating to Other Cultures 217

Contents

- Lesson 4: Missions and the Local Church 220
- Lesson 4: The Role of Churches Today 222
- Lesson 5: Suffering for the Gospel 226
- Lesson 5: Suffering as a Missionary 230
- Lesson 5: The Joy of Suffering 232
- Group Discussion: Missions and the World Today 235
- Final Charge by David Platt 239

Course Overview

What does Jesus want us to do? The first answer to that question, of course, is that he wants us to repent of our sins and put our trust in him. This course is intended for people who have already taken that step. For those of us who know Jesus and trust him, we know that he taught us a lot about how we are to live our lives, love other people, and worship God. However, we also believe that he wants us to do these things in the context of a mission that he gave us—a mission we are to carry out in the world. This course is designed to help you explore and understand that mission.

Explore Missions is designed to be read in community. You should find at least one other *Explore Missions* partner so that you can learn and discuss together.

The course is organized into six sections, each with five lessons. We recommend working through the content with at least one reading partner over the course of six weeks.

section

Course Contents

An Introduction to Explore Missions

As Christians, we believe that the Bible is the actual word of God, and we look to it as our ultimate authority. For that reason, this course will begin by exploring the subject of missions as it is woven into the big story of the Bible. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) was not something Jesus simply tacked on as an afterthought right before He went back up into heaven, but rather one of the major themes that tie the Bible together. We will look through the Bible from beginning to end to see how God's plan for the nations flows through every part, and then sum it all up by looking at two crucial questions: What does the Bible as a whole teach us about people who have never heard the gospel, and what does it teach us about the nature of the mission God has given us?

Course Purpose

Once we have established our understanding of missions in the big story of the Bible, we will look at what missions actually involves. We will define missions as disciples of Jesus making new disciples of Jesus, out of peoples and places not yet reached with the gospel. For this reason, we will spend a full unit of lessons defining what it means to be a disciple, and then we will spend another unit exploring the basic tasks that make up the work of missions. In an age where the word "missions" can mean almost anything the church does outside its own walls, it is very important that we understand exactly what is involved in doing biblical mission work.

In Unit 5, we will get to know our family story. As adopted children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, we are part of a family that goes back to the days of the Bible, and our family history includes the history of global missions from the days of the apostles to the present. From the point of view of the first followers of Jesus, where we live is “the ends of the earth,” and the history of missions tells us how the gospel got from them to us. It also shows us things that have worked well and things that have proven unhelpful in the spread of the gospel. As there really is nothing new under the sun, we need to learn from our family members in the past. In the sixth unit of lessons, we will look at missions today. We will see where things stand at this point in the advance of the gospel, and explore issues that affect how we do the work that God has given us. Finally, David Platt, President of the International Mission Board, will give a challenge to you to take what you have learned and use it to engage the world with the gospel.

This course is an introduction for people who want to learn about missions but who have little or no background in it. The authors are practitioners who are involved in the global spread of the Good News of Jesus, and their experience includes decades of working in places and among people who have the least access to the gospel in the world. There are six units in this course which may be covered in six weeks, but you may take it at whatever pace works best for you. Each unit has an introduction, five lessons to be done during the week, and then a summary with discussion questions and exercises to be done, ideally, with a group of people who are taking the course together.

Our goal is to do more than simply inform you about missions. Real training involves not just your head, but your head, your heart and your hands together. We want the word of God and the lostness of the world to change the way you think, the way you feel, and what you do. For that reason, each unit will have questions to help you understand and apply what you are studying, and will include things for you to do with what you are learning.

Our prayer is that this course will transform every area of your life. We believe

that the word of God is true, and we live under its authority. By God's grace, we have come to realize that we are rebels against God who deserve only condemnation, and who can never save ourselves. By His grace, we have heard the gospel, trusted Jesus, and been saved from what we deserve. By His grace, we have been made alive by His Holy Spirit, rescued from condemnation, forgiven every evil we have ever done or will do, adopted as His children, and guaranteed eternal life with Him. By His grace, we have come to know God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and we have found Him to be more glorious than we could ever describe. His love and a passion for His glory now compel us to understand His heart for the nations and his plan for human history. They compel us to take the Good News to those who have never heard it. We pray that this study of missions will be a milestone in your life as you take your place in the purposes of God.

i Navigating Explore Missions

This material was designed to be read, discussed, and experienced in community, and is recommended for a six-week period of study. There are six units of five lessons each, with the intention of individual group members reading through and considering a lesson each day (five days each week) in preparation for a group discussion meeting once per week. As you move through the course material, you will see that each week's unit commences with a video featuring David Platt, IMB President, and an introduction, then presents five daily lessons to be read individually, and concludes with a Group Discussion Guide.

For example, the first week's unit — "Missions and the Old Testament" — has five daily lessons:

- The Big Picture of the Bible
- Missions in the Law of the Old Testament
- Missions in the Psalms

- Missions in the Old Testament Prophets
- Mission in the Book of Jonah

Most of these daily lessons are contained on one screen and only require some scrolling to read through on a given day. Some are a bit longer, however, and may have two pages of content. It's easy to know which lesson you're on, though, as each page has a clear heading!

Each unit introduction presents that week's memory verse in an interactive format that will help you commit Scripture to memory, and each daily lesson concludes with thought-questions meant to prepare the individual for weekly group discussion. There's plenty to do and learn!

section

Missions and the Old Testament



section

Introduction: Mission from the Beginning

Psalm 96:3

**Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the
peoples!**

In this unit, we are going to look at what the Old Testament teaches us about missions. This may come as a surprise to some people. After all, the Old Testament comes before Jesus ever gave the Great Commission.

Why would we start here?

There are several reasons we need to start in the Old Testament in order to understand the mission that God has given his New Testament people. First, the Old Testament is the foundation for the entire Bible. In the Old Testament, we learn the stories that set the plotline for the big story of Scripture. These stories include the creation of the world, the fall of the human race into sin, Noah and the flood, and the tower of Babel. They tell us about the beginnings of the people of God through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They tell the stories of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt, and Joshua and the conquest of the Promised Land. They give us the dismal account of God's people during the period of the Judges, and the glories (and tragedies) of the reigns of David and Solomon. They tell us about good kings and bad ones (mostly bad ones!) in the centuries after Solomon, and about the fall of Jerusalem and the exile in

Babylon. They give us the lives of the prophets whom God sent to call his people back to himself.

The Old Testament is a book of stories, but they are not random or disconnected. Rather, they are parts of one big story that shows the hand of God preparing the way for the coming of Jesus and the spread of the gospel worldwide. The Old Testament also gives us a worldview—a worldview that is God’s view of reality. In the Old Testament, we learn that there is one and only one God. We learn that God existed before time began and that he is a personal God who relates in a personal way to those he created. We learn that God made everything that exists and that everything he made is good. We learn that time had a beginning, that it is going somewhere purposefully, and that one day it will end. We learn that men and women were created in God’s image and given the task of filling the earth and ruling over it. We learn that human rebellion against God is The Problem that lies behind all the problems we face in this world. We learn that God is a God who saves undeserving rebels. Indeed, we learn a lot about this God. We learn about his character as we watch him act in history. We learn what pleases him and what displeases him from his law. We learn about his justice and mercy in the sacrifices he established. The Old Testament gives us the building blocks for understanding God, the world, and ourselves, and those building blocks are essential for understanding both the gospel and the mission God has given us.

Finally, the Old Testament shows us God’s agenda for human history. Throughout the pages of the Old Testament, we see God’s heart for all the nations and peoples of the earth, even while he focuses on the one nation of Israel. We learn about his plan to send a Messiah, and we learn that this Messiah will have an explicitly global mission of redemption. We discover God’s intention to receive the praise and glory that are due his Name from every people group on earth. Once we see all of this, the Great Commission becomes more than just one more thing that Jesus told his people to do. It becomes a fitting summary of everything that God has been doing since the start of time.

section

Lesson 1: The Big Picture of the Bible

Mission Woven Throughout Scripture

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." Luke 24:44-48

Jesus said these words to his followers right before he went back up into heaven. In his day, the Old Testament was the only Bible that God's people had, and they divided it into three sections: the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Book of Psalms was the largest book in the section they called the Writings, so sometimes they just called the entire section "The Psalms" as a form of shorthand. Jesus' words in these verses tell us how he understood the entire Old Testament—and indeed the entire Bible. As far as Jesus was concerned, the Bible was not a disconnected collection of stories and teaching points. Instead, it was one connected story pointing to him. Specifically, it was one connected testimony to his atoning death and victorious resurrection. Every part of the Bible of Jesus' day—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings—led to him. Note carefully, however, that he also regards the entire Bible as pointing to a mission that his people are to fulfill. It is written in the Law, the Prophets and the Writings that the Messiah would suffer death and then rise again from the dead. According to Jesus, it is also written in the Old Testament that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations. The entire Bible is about Jesus as Savior, and the entire Bible is also about missions. You cannot separate the two.

The Narrative of Scripture in Four Acts

We often read the stories of the Bible in isolation from each other. Instead, we need to read them as developments in one big story. We need to interpret each individual story in terms of its place in that big story. That story is absolutely true, and it defines and explains everything else. What is the big story of the Bible? First and foremost, it is the story about God. He is the author, and he is the only real hero. He is before, behind, all through, and at the end of the story. The story itself has four sections or plot movements: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. Here is how the story goes:

i Act One: Creation

In the beginning, before there was anyone or anything else, there was God. He needed nothing and he was enormously happy as God. Out of the overflow of his greatness and goodness, God made the entire universe out of nothing. Everything he made was good. As the climax of his creation, God made the first man and woman. He made them in his own image, so that they would represent him and reflect his glory. He put them in a perfect world, and he gave them work to do, filling the earth with other mirrors of his glory and taking care of the good world he had made. This was Act One of the big story: Creation.

i Act Two: The Fall

However, the first man and woman rebelled against God and disobeyed him. As a result of their rebellion, everything in the world was messed up. Their relationship with God was broken. Their relationship with each other was also broken. They were cast out of the perfect garden where God had placed them at creation. They were guilty before God. Every part of their nature was corrupted—mind, will, desires, everything. Work was now hard. Childbirth was now painful. Disease and natural disasters entered the world because of man

and woman's rebellion against God. Crime and war and oppression resulted from it as well. Death entered the world—spiritual death first, and then physical death as well. All of us who are descended from the first man and woman inherited all of this. Because of the sin of our first parents, everyone in the world is born a sinner, and everyone deserves eternal condemnation from God. This was Act Two of the big story: The Fall of Humanity into Sin.

i Act Three: Redemption

However, God chose to mount a rescue operation to save people, even though none of us deserve it. This is Act Three of the big story, Redemption, and it takes up most of the Bible. Early on, the story of Noah and the flood showed God's justice against human wickedness, and it also showed God's mercy in saving Noah and his family through the Ark. At the Tower of Babel, God again acted in judgment against human pride by giving people different languages and scattering them across the globe. At Babel, God created the incredible mosaic of different languages and people groups that make up the human race. That mosaic was an act of judgment on God's part, but he then used it as the very framework for his plan of redemption.

Genesis 12 is one of the biggest turning points in the Bible. God chose Abram (later renamed Abraham) to be the father of God's own special people, and God promised to bless him. At the same time, God promised to bless all the other families and peoples of the world through Abraham. God repeated that promise, with all of its parts, to Abraham's son Isaac, and to Isaac's son Jacob. When Jacob and his 12 sons ended up in Egypt because of a famine, God grew them into a nation. When the Egyptians turned against the descendants of Jacob (now known as Israel), God rescued them through the hand of a man named Moses. God led Israel to Sinai, where he gave them his law. His law told them how to live in a way that pleases God, and it also gave them a system of priests and sacrifices to deal, symbolically, with the fact that they

were still sinners. After Moses died, God led his people Israel to conquer the Promised Land of Canaan through the hand of Joshua. After a period of centuries when God governed and rescued his people through different, unrelated Judges, he gave them a king named David, and God promised David that one of his sons would always sit on his throne. David was a great king, and his reign was a high water mark for the people of God.

Israel in the Old Testament

The Divided Kingdom of Israel

However, in the years following David and his son Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided in two, and the people of God went through a vicious cycle of rebellion against God followed by partial repentance and restoration. God sent prophets to warn his people and to call them back to obedience and faith in him. Finally, God brought judgment on his people. The Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in the eighth century BC, and the southern kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians about a century and a half later. The people were taken into exile. Their lives and their country were shattered. However, God again had mercy on them. He allowed a portion of his people to return to their own land and to rebuild the temple where he was worshiped. However, they were now under the heel of foreign rulers, and many of their people remained in exile, scattered across the known world. There was no longer a king sitting on David's throne. Where had God's promise gone?

All throughout the history of Israel, God had spoken through the prophets, and he had told his people that an incredible day was coming—the Day of the Lord. On that day, God would change people's hearts so that they wanted to do what pleases God. The Day of the Lord would be the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on God's people. He would send the ultimate priest who would offer the ultimate sacrifice, a sacrifice that really would take away sins. He would send the ultimate king, David's eternal son, who would rescue and rule his people. The Day of the Lord would be the day of the Messiah. He

would also draw the other nations to salvation, in fulfillment of his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Day of the Lord would be the day of missions, the day of the ingathering of the nations.

All of that was fulfilled by Jesus. He was the second Adam, who won where Adam failed and who gave the human race a new start. He was the ultimate prophet, the ultimate priest, the ultimate sacrifice, and the ultimate king. The prophets, priests, sacrifices and kings of the Old Testament had simply been signposts pointing to him. He lived the life we should have lived and then died the death we deserve to die, in our place, as our substitute. He satisfied the wrath of God that we deserved and reconciled us to himself. He poured out his Holy Spirit on his followers to give them power to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. We are now living in the age that he started when he sent them out to make disciples out of all nations. This is the Age of Missions, and God's purpose is to call a people to himself from every tribe, tongue, people and nation, using us as his witnesses.

i Act Four: Restoration

This age will not last forever. One day Jesus will return, and he will bring history to a close. Everyone who has ever lived will be judged according to their record. For those who have not trusted in Jesus, their record will justly condemn them, and they will suffer the eternal punishment that we all deserve. For all who have trusted in Jesus, his record will be credited to them, and they will be judged on that basis. They will enter into eternal joy in his presence. Heaven and earth will pass away, and God will bring in the new heavens and the new earth, where righteousness dwell. This is the fourth and final act of the big story: Restoration.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

Have you ever thought of the Bible as one connected story? How does this affect your understanding of Scripture?

Question 2:

How did the different peoples and language groups of the world come into being? What role do they play in God's plan?

Question 3:

What was God's promise to Abraham? How does that connect to Jesus? How does that connect to missions?

section

Lesson 2: Missions in the Law of the Old Testament

God's Blessing from the Nations

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Genesis 12:1-3

The first five books of the Old Testament are known as "The Law." Written by Moses, they set the foundation for the rest of the Bible. These books contain the story of creation and the history of the world through the Great Flood, the Tower of Babel, the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the exodus of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. They also contain God's instructions to his people on how they are to live and how they are to worship him. How is the theme of missions woven into all of this?

First of all, the setting for missions is laid in the early chapters of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The rebellion of the entire human race against God is the reason this rescue operation is even needed. Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, every single person in the world is a sinner who needs to be saved, and none of us can rescue ourselves. This reality tells us just how serious the situation really is, and it also shows us that this mission has to extend to everyone in the world. The division of the world into languages and people groups in Genesis 11 sets the framework for how God will go about his mission. At the tower of Babel, God divided the world into different language groups as an act of judgment. In Genesis 12, God chose one man, Abraham, to create a new people group, but he expressly said that his intention in doing so was to bless all the peoples of the world. Later in the Old Testament, God stated his desire

to be worshiped in all the languages he had created and to save people out of all the people groups he had scattered around the world. Jesus sent his followers to all people groups in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20.) At Pentecost (Acts 2), God partially reversed the curse of Babel when everyone present heard the praises of God in their own language. In the scene around the throne of God at the end of the Bible (Revelation 7), we are told that God will be worshiped by a multitude no one can count from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. Genesis begins the theme of the nations or people groups of the earth, and it will be a key theme throughout the rest of the Bible.

Genesis also tells us the story of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These three men, father, son, and grandson, are absolutely key to the story of the Bible. Abraham (or Abram, as he was originally known) was born into a pagan family in the Middle East, in the area currently known as Iraq. When God called Abraham, it was a call to leave everything he had ever known, including his family, his home, and his religious background, to follow God to a place he had never seen.

section

Lesson 2: God's Promises to Abraham

In Genesis 17, God made a covenant with Abraham. Notice the specific things God asked, and the things God promised to him:

We also need to be clear that we're not saying that God's interaction with Abraham is normative for how he interacts with all of his people today.

- God called Abram to leave everything behind.
- God called Abram to go to a land that God will show him, and God didn't even tell Abram yet where that place is.
- God promised to make Abram (who did not yet have any children) into a great nation.
- God promised to bless Abram, without specifying exactly how.
- God promised to make Abram's name great.
- God promised to make Abram himself a blessing to others.
- God promised to treat others as they have treated Abram.
- God promised that through Abram, all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Both the demands and the promises of God's call were breathtaking. With this call, God narrowed his focus onto one single man, but in doing so he clearly stated his intention to bless all the peoples of the world. Abraham was blessed to be a blessing, and that blessing was intended to go global. The New Testament makes it clear that the coming of Jesus, and the global mission of his church, are the ultimate fulfillment of this promise. (Romans 4:1-25, Galatians 3:1-18).

God repeated his promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18. He made the same promise to Abraham's son Isaac: "In your offspring all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 26:4). He made it again to Isaac's son Jacob: "In you and your

offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 28:14). Eventually, the promise would be fulfilled by a descendant of Judah, one of Jacob's sons. As Jacob was blessing his children right before he died, he said of Judah: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (that is, the nations; Genesis 49:10). This is a prophecy of the Messiah. He will be the descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Judah, and the scope of his rule will take in the nations and peoples of the world.

From the very beginning, God made his intentions clear. In the very first book of the Bible, God separated the human race into different language groups and peoples, and scattered them across the face of the earth. He chose one man, and through him one family and one nation, and he blessed them in order to bless all the families and nations of the earth. At first, God did not make it clear exactly how he was going to do this. However, as the story progressed, the clues got louder and stronger. When God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt through the hand of Moses, he gave them the sign-celebration of the Passover, in which a lamb was slain in the place of the first-born sons of the Israelites (Exodus 12). He also gave them the tabernacle with its priests and its sacrifices to demonstrate that the justice of God had to be satisfied against sin. These pointed forward to the ultimate Passover Lamb, the ultimate Priest, and the ultimate sacrifice for sin, our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God would provide the ultimate blessing to all the families and nations of the earth.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What elements of Old Testament religious practice and government point forward to Jesus? What do these tell us about who he is and what he came to do?

Section

Lesson 3: Missions in the Psalms

Declaring God's Glory

*Oh sing to the LORD a new song;
Sing to the LORD all the earth!
Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
Tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!
Psalm 96:1-3*

The Book of Psalms is the songbook of Israel. All of the psalms are poems, and they were written for singing. The Psalms cover a broad range of types. Many are laments, in which the psalmist cries out to God for help, but also reminds himself of God's power, goodness, and faithfulness. Psalm 13 is a classic example of a psalm of lament. Some of these laments are confessions of sin, like Psalm 32 and Psalm 51. Other psalms give thanks to God for the good things he has done, like Psalm 103 and Psalm 136. Still other psalms are hymns of praise, in which the psalm summons people to praise God, and then gives reasons why he is worthy of praise. A great example of a hymn of praise is the shortest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 117:

*"Praise the LORD, all nations!
Extol him, all peoples!
For great is his steadfast love toward us,
And the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.*

Praise the LORD!"

In this psalm, the psalmist calls on people to praise and extol the LORD, using the covenant name for God which he gave his people Israel to use. The reasons he gives are found in the character of God. God's love is great and steadfast. God's faithfulness lasts forever. These are more than adequate reasons to worship God, and they point out the biblical principle that worship has content. Worship is more than simply whipping up emotion—it is remembering and celebrating what God has revealed about himself in his word. Biblical worship is deeply theological, and worship without theological content is less than biblical. In terms of missions, however, the key point to notice is whom the psalmist summons to praise God. The summons to praise goes to all nations and all peoples! He uses the covenant name for God, but the call to worship goes out to all the people groups on earth. Even in this period, when God had his focus on one nation, he revealed to them that nothing less than the worship of all nations and all peoples was sufficient for his glory.

The same theme is sounded in Psalm 96, quoted at the beginning of this lesson. Once again, all the earth is summoned to sing the praises of God. There are a couple of new notes sounded in this psalm as well. The people of God are commanded to declare God's glory among the nations, and his marvelous works among all the peoples. The mission of God's people is more than simply passing along information. It is an act of worship, in which his glory is declared and others are called to join in worshipping him. Verses 7 and 8 say:

"Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,

Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name,

Bring an offering, and come into his courts!"

All the families of the peoples are to ascribe to the Lord the glory that is due his name. God is glorious. We were created for his glory. We are being redeemed for his glory. And we are being redeemed to give him the glory that is due his glorious name. Missions is inseparably tied to worship. The act of sharing good news with the nations

is to be an act of worship, and the result is also to be worship. It is simply what God is worth.

Psalm 67 rounds out the picture of missions in the Psalms. It is worth quoting in its entirety:

*“May God be gracious to us and bless us
And make his face to shine upon us,
That your way may be known on earth,
Your saving power among all nations.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
Let all the peoples praise you!
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
For you judge the peoples with equity
And guide the nations upon earth.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
Let all the peoples praise you!
The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, shall bless us.
God shall bless us;
Let all the ends of the earth fear him!”*

This psalm repeats the same refrain we have already seen, over and over again: let all the peoples on earth praise God! The truth about God is a source of joy for the peoples and nations of the world, so the nations should be glad and sing for joy. Additionally, this psalm says something about the missionary purpose behind God’s relationship with us, his people. The psalm begins with a virtual quotation of the blessing that Aaron and his sons, the priests, were to pray over the people of Israel: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you” (Numbers 6:24-25). However, this blessing is followed with a twist.

The purpose of God's blessing on his people is that his ways and his saving power might be known in all the earth among all nations! This, in turn, reflects God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12), in which God promised to bless Abraham, but then also promised that Abraham himself would be a blessing to others and the means through whom God would bless all the families of the earth. God blesses his people, not so that the blessing can end with them, but so that they can be a blessing.

God is a glorious God, worthy of the praise and worship of every nation and people on earth. Through the Psalms, God summons all peoples to give him the glory due his name. He also commands his people to declare his glory, not just among themselves in church on Sunday, but among the nations that do not yet know him. Missionary evangelism is an act of worship leading to multiplied worship as its goal. God blesses his people in order that all the peoples and nations might know his saving power, not so that they can simply sit back and enjoy the blessings themselves. This is the message of the Book of Psalms regarding missions. It turns out that Israel's hymnal was also a missionary manual.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

According to Genesis 12 and Psalm 67, why does God bless his people?

Question 2:

What is the relationship between worship and missions according to the Psalms?

Section

Lesson 4: Missions in the Old Testament Prophets

Proclaiming the Day of Messiah

He says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Isaiah 49:6

God is a God who speaks to his people. In the Old Testament, the people whom God used to speak to men and women here on earth were known as prophets. Moses was a prophet, and God used him to give Israel his law. This law was a covenant—a binding relationship with stated expectations, given by God to the people whom he called his own. Many prophets followed Moses down through the centuries of Old Testament history. Today, when we hear the word “prophet,” we usually think of people who predict the future. That element certainly existed in the ministry of the prophets, but it was not all they did. In many ways, they were like prosecuting attorneys, making God’s case against his people for breaking his covenant with them. The history of Israel from the time of the Exodus from Egypt until the coming of Jesus many centuries later was a story of spiritual fickleness, with long periods of disobedience interrupted by occasional repentance. Time and again, God’s people were unfaithful to him. They disobeyed the law he had given them, both by oppressing and abusing one another and by worshiping other gods. Godly leaders emerged periodically who would lead the people back to covenant faithfulness, but the revivals seldom lasted longer than a generation or two. God sent prophets over and over again to call his people back to himself.

Old Testament Prophets

Throughout history, God sent prophets to call his people back to himself. This classic chart shows a timeline of prophets as found in Scripture.

What became clear over the centuries was that the law was great at showing people their sinfulness and powerlessness, but not at actually changing their hearts. Through the prophets, God began to let them know that he had something else ahead. A day was coming—the Day of the Lord—when God himself would step on the stage of human history and set things right (cf. Isaiah 13:6, 9). There were some in Israel who looked forward to the Day of the Lord as a time when God would restore the fortunes of their nation. Through the prophets, God warned his people that the Day of the Lord meant judgment for them as well as for the nations who had oppressed them:

Amos 5:18-20

Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why would you have the day of the LORD?

It is darkness, and not light,

As if a man fled from a lion,

And a bear met him,

Or went into his house and leaned against the wall,

And a serpent bit him

Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light,

And gloom with no brightness in it?

This warning, which is consistent with the picture of the Day of the Lord in the other prophetic books, is also consistent with the general message of the prophets. They were sent to remind God's people about the holiness of God and the severity of their rebellion against him. The nominal, inconsistent religion of the people of Israel was not enough to save them from the same judgment that would fall on other nations. However, the prophets also talked about Someone who would come on the Day of the

Lord. The Day of the Lord would also be the Day of Messiah (cf. Isaiah 9:1–7). He would be the descendant of David (cf. Isaiah 9:7). He would, in fact, be God himself (cf. Isaiah 9:6). He would lead his people with wisdom, rule them with righteousness, and care for them like a shepherd (cf. Isaiah 11:1–10, 40:11). He would die for them as their atoning sacrifice (cf. Isaiah 52:13–53:12). He would reign forever as their living Lord (cf. Isaiah 9:7). The Day of the Lord would be a day of judgment, but it would also be the Day of Messiah, and that was good news.

How does this apply to missions? There are two more aspects to the Day of the Lord that demonstrate that God’s plan was global all along. God had promised Abraham that he would bless all the families of the nations through him, and God summoned all the nations to worship him in the Psalms. How was this to happen? It would happen through the Messiah. The Day of the Lord, which would be the Day of Messiah, would also be the Day of the Ingathering of the Nations. Isaiah 49:6, quoted at the beginning of this lesson, makes this clear. God intended to do far more than save the people of Israel through the Messiah. He would make him a light to the nations (that is, to the non-Jewish people groups of the earth) and through him bring salvation to the ends of the earth. This theme is woven throughout the message of the prophets. God intended to bring the Gentile people groups of the world to himself, and the day of his coming would be the day that began (cf. Isaiah 2:1–4). The Messiah, promised through the prophets, would be a missionary Messiah, and his mission would be explicitly global. At the same time, the Day of the Lord would be the Day of the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Prophet Joel proclaimed this, and the Apostle Peter quoted him in his sermon on the day of Pentecost (cf. Joel 2:28–32). The Spirit would be given to empower the proclamation of salvation to the nations and families of the earth.

This is the message of the prophets of the Old Testament. Even as they denounced the unfaithfulness of Israel and called the people to repentance, they also pointed forward to a day that was coming—the Day of the Lord. It would be a day of judgment, but it would also be the Day of the Messiah, who would bring salvation. That day would

be the day when God's saving activity burst the bounds of national Israel and went global. God intended to bring his salvation to all the peoples on earth, to the very ends of the earth, and he gave that mission to the Messiah. The Messianic Age would be a missionary age.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What is the Day of the Lord in the writings of the Old Testament prophets? How does this day connect with missions?

Section

Lesson 5: Mission in the Book of Jonah

God Sends for the Nations

Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?

Jonah 4:11

Jonah is one of the most well-known stories in the Bible. If people know anything at all about the Bible, they have probably heard the story about Jonah being swallowed by a huge fish and then spit out alive on dry ground. However, the fish is not the point of the Book of Jonah. The fish is certainly important, but it plays a very secondary role in the story. Jonah is not about miraculous rescues, but about God's heart for the nations—even those at enmity with him—and his concern over the fact that his people don't seem to share his heart.

The story is fairly simple. (It is only about two pages long in your Bible, and we urge you to go read it right now.) Jonah was an Israelite. God told him to go to Nineveh, which was the capital city of the mighty Assyrian Empire, and preach a message of judgment against it. Instead of obeying God, Jonah went in exactly the opposite direction. Nineveh was to the east, but Jonah got on a boat and headed west over the Mediterranean Sea. God sent a big storm that threatened to sink the boat. Jonah told the sailors on the boat that his disobedience to God was the cause of the storm, and he convinced them (reluctantly—they seem like decent guys) to throw him overboard. Immediately, the storm died down, and the sailors feared the God of Israel and made sacrifices to him. Meanwhile, God provided a big fish to swallow Jonah to prevent him from drowning. Inside the fish, Jonah composed a really good hymn of thanksgiving to God, and it seemed as though he had learned his lesson and gotten right with God.

Three days later the fish spit him up on dry land, and God told him once again to go to Nineveh to preach a message of judgment against it. This time Jonah went, and his mission was wildly successful. Everyone repented, from the king on down, and God relented from sending disaster on the city. However, instead of being pleased with his success, Jonah was really upset. He went to the edge of town and pouted. When God confronted him, Jonah showed what was really in his heart. He didn't want the people of Nineveh to be saved. He fled the first time not because he was afraid for his life, or because he thought the job was too difficult, but because he was afraid precisely that God would save the Ninevites, and he wanted nothing to do with that. Jonah was a nationalist and a racist, and he wanted God to be gracious to him but not to his country's enemies. The book ends with God rebuking Jonah for his failure to share God's heart for the nations.

To understand this story, it is helpful to know something about the people of Nineveh, the Assyrians. The Assyrians have been justly called the Nazis of the ancient world. They were brutal and cruel. You did not want to be conquered by the Assyrians, but the Assyrians were determined to conquer everyone around them. Assyria had its eye on Israel, and eventually it would invade. The northern kingdom of Israel was permanently destroyed by the Assyrians, and the southern kingdom of Judah was devastated. Nineveh was like the capital city of the worst terrorist group you could imagine. Jonah's reaction to them was completely natural. It was just also completely wrong.

The real point of the Book of Jonah is in chapter four. Jonah's theology was extremely good. He knew that God is gracious and merciful, that he is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and that he relents from sending disaster (Jonah 4:2). When God demonstrated those things to Jonah himself, he was pretty happy about it (see chapter two—Jonah's hymn of thanksgiving for his own deliverance.) However, when God demonstrated those things to the hated Ninevites, Jonah was so angry about it that he actually asked God to take away his life. God responded by taking Jonah through a little exercise.

Jonah was sitting on the outskirts of the city, hoping that God would go ahead and blast the Ninevites. It was hot. God caused a plant to grow in such a way that it gave Jonah shade, and he was really happy about it. The next day, however, God caused a worm to attack the plant. It died. Jonah's shade was gone, the sun came up hot, and God sent a scorching wind to blow on Jonah. Again, Jonah was really angry, angry enough to die. God then made his point:

And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" Jonah 4:10

God pities the nations. He even pities those whom we regard as most evil. Furthermore, he requires us to share his heart in this matter. God was not content to use Jonah to accomplish his purpose and then simply let him stew in his resentment. He pursued Jonah and exercised his power over nature to bring Jonah around. This is the missionary message of the Book of Jonah. God pities every nation and every people group on earth. There are no groups of people on the planet who are outside God's saving purposes, and there are no types of people who are beyond his power to save. Think about the people you regard as the enemies of your country. Think about the people you fear the most. Think about the people you naturally hate the most. Think about the people you do not want to come live in your town or neighborhood. Think about the people and places you would not want to go visit, much less live near. Those are people whom God pities and cares about, and he requires us to pity and care about them, too. Jesus made this absolutely explicit when he said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27). This is not an optional standard for super-saints. It is a clear command for everyone who follows Jesus. In the context of Jonah, this command to share God's heart for the nations includes going to them with God's message. The missionary message of Jonah is that we are forbidden to think the way the world thinks about our enemies. We are required to love those whom we would naturally hate and fear, we are required to pity them, and we are required to go to them with the message of the gospel.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What groups of people in the world do you naturally hate or fear? Would you be willing to live among them to share the gospel with them?

Question 2:

How would you summarize the missionary message of the Old Testament?

Section

Group Discussion: Missions and the Old Testament

SUGGESTED OUTLINE (90 MINUTES)

1. Introductions (15 min)
2. Scripture Memory & Prayer (5 min)
3. Summary & Discussion (40 min)
4. Group Activity (15 min)
5. Prayer (10 min)
6. Before You Leave (5 min)

i INTRODUCTIONS (15 MIN)

Ask every member of the group to introduce and share a thing or two about themselves (if you haven't already done this). One key factor of success in this course will be healthy group interaction inside AND outside of your six group gatherings.

Introduce the Mission Course

Explain the progression, pattern, and expectations of the Mission Course in and between your regular gatherings. You can modify the list below to suit your context, and add additional instructions according to your group's schedule.

1. Each unit contains five lessons that are designed to be read prior to group discussion (stress the importance of reading before coming to discussion).

2. Each unit also has lesson quizzes, scripture memory, and supplemental content that will be useful for group discussion.
3. It's important that participants bring a device that contains the Mission Course to every Group Discussion so you can access notes and follow along in the Group Discussion Guide.
4. The Mission Course adheres to a "Know, Be, Do" philosophy. While knowledge and group discussion are important aspects of our growth as disciples, each group meeting will emphasize not only knowing the material, but being a disciple, and doing according to God's command. Discussions will have five major sections:
 1. Scripture Memory
 2. Group Discussion
 3. Group Activities
 4. Prayer for each other, your church, and the nations
 5. Weekly Homework (Group and Individual)
5. The course will culminate in a group project (introduced in the "Before You Leave" section in the Unit 3 Discussion Guide).

ⓘ SCRIPTURE MEMORY & PRAYER (5 MIN)

Ask someone in the group to recite [Psalm 96:3](#) from memory.

Pray briefly through [Psalm 96:3](#) for your group (see video on [Praying the Bible](#)). Also, ask that God would open the eyes and hearts of your group to the implications of His redemptive plan for the nations revealed in the Old Testament.

i SUMMARY & DISCUSSION (40 MIN)

Summarize

Ask someone in your group to summarize Unit 1, using this prepared summary as a check reference:

The Old Testament laid the foundation for God's global mission. From the first book of the Bible, God made it clear that he intended to bring the blessings of salvation to every people, nation, and language group on earth.

He summoned all people groups to worship him and give him the glory that is due his name. He focused on one family and then one nation, but his eyes were on all the people groups of the world. He promised that a day was coming in which he would act decisively in human history. That day would be a day of judgment, but it would also be the day of the Messiah, the day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the day of the ingathering of the nations into the people of God.

Through the prophet Jonah, God made it clear that he requires his people to share his heart for the nations, even when that heart runs against their prejudices and national interests. At the end of the Old Testament, the stage was set for the Messiah to come and for the mission of God's people to explode across the globe.

Discuss

1. Have you ever thought of the Bible as one connected story? How does this affect your understanding of Scripture?
2. How did the different peoples and language groups of the world come into being? What role do they play in God's plan?

3. What was God's promise to Abraham? How does that connect to Jesus? How does that connect to missions?
4. What elements of Old Testament religious practice and government point forward to Jesus? What do these tell us about who he is and what he came to do?
5. According to Genesis 12 and Psalm 67, why does God bless his people?
6. What is the relationship between worship and missions according to the Psalms?
7. What is the Day of the Lord in the writings of the Old Testament prophets? How does this day connect with missions?
8. What groups of people in the world do you naturally hate or fear? Would you be willing to live among them to share the gospel with them?
9. How would you summarize the missionary message of the Old Testament?

i GROUP ACTIVITY (15 MIN)

Break into groups of 2 or 3 and take turns explaining the big story of the Bible to one another, showing how missions is woven into it. Take 3-4 minutes each, and give one another constructive feedback.

You can use the following key words to help as needed:

- Creation
- Fall
- Redemption
 1. Noah
 2. Babel
 3. Abraham
 4. Moses
 5. The Judges
 6. David and Solomon
 7. The Exile and Return from Exile

8. Jesus
 9. The Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20)
- Restoration

i PRAYER (10 MIN)

Read [Psalm 96](#) out loud together.

Spend time in prayer with one another, asking God to:

1. Send gospel witnesses to declare His good news among the nations
2. Bring people from every nation to saving faith in Christ, causing them to worship
3. Give you a heart of pity and love for your enemies
4. Make you aware of foreigners and minorities around you
5. Give you the opportunity to share the gospel with them

i BEFORE YOU LEAVE... (5 MIN)

Each week your group will be asked to complete a small homework assignment. Encourage group members to participate and share what they learned at your next gathering.

This week, discover your church's history with sending and supporting missionaries. Find out whether your church has sent or is supporting any current missionaries on the field. This may require a conversation with a pastor or leader in your church.

Section

Missions and the New Testament



David Platt demonstrates what New Testament Scripture can teach us about God's mission.

Section

Introduction: Four Types of New Testament Literature

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

There are four types of books in the New Testament. The first type is the four Gospels, which are four accounts of the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus. With absolute accuracy, they both describe and explain who he was, what he taught, and what he did. They are based on the firsthand testimonies of human eyewitnesses. They interpret and explain the significance of what happened, and the perspective of those interpretations and explanations is the perfect perspective of God himself. In the Gospels, we find the clear command of Jesus to his entire church to take the good news about him to the ends of the earth.

The second type is a single book, the Acts of the Apostles. The Book of Acts is actually a sequel to the third Gospel (the Gospel according to Luke), written by the same author. Acts continues the story by telling the history of the early church, from the return of

Jesus back into heaven to the arrival of the Apostle Paul in Rome as a prisoner. This book, from beginning to end, is a missionary story, and the examples of the early followers of Jesus are a rich source of missionary wisdom for Christians today.

The third type of book in the New Testament is a large collection of letters from early church leaders like Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude to brand new churches around the ancient world, churches that were the fruit of the missionary efforts of the early church. These letters were themselves a part of the apostles' missionary method, as they encouraged, warned, and instructed new believers who had recently come to faith. They give us insight into both the apostles' missionary motivation and into their missionary methods.

The fourth type of book in the New Testament is the Book of Revelation. This book is an apocalypse or uncovering of the ultimate destiny of the history of the world. Christians have debated its exact interpretation for centuries, but it serves as a powerful source of encouragement for believers to persevere in the mission that God has given us. Revelation teaches us that opposition may be hard, but it is temporary, and this mission will succeed permanently.

In addition to looking at the theme of missions in these four types of books in the New Testament, we will conclude this unit by considering two big missions questions. First, what does the Bible as a whole teach about people who have never heard the gospel? Second, based on all that we have seen, what does the Bible as a whole teach us about the nature of the mission God has given us? With these two questions, we will have a solid biblical foundation for exploring missions further.

Section

Lesson 1: Missions and the Life and Ministry of Jesus

Missions and The Genealogy of Jesus

As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.

John 20:21

If you read the New Testament from the beginning, the first thing you find in the Gospel according to Matthew is a genealogy. People tend to skip over this section, or at most let their eyes pass rapidly over the names, because things like genealogies don't typically excite us. This is unfortunate, because God knew what he was doing when he inspired the Bible, and the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew has a lot to teach us.

The first and most obvious lesson from the genealogy is the clear continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Many of the most famous characters from the Old Testament are named in this list, and the very mention of them brings to mind story after story from what was written before. This list of names clearly tells us that this story is a continuation of the Big Story that started in Genesis.

Even more, by showing a direct link to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David, Matthew's genealogy highlights the fact that God's promises to those men were alive and well, and were about to be fulfilled.

There is one more mission element in the genealogy. In the ancient world, women were not normally named in lists like these. Even Luke, in his genealogy of Jesus ([Luke 3](#)), mentions only the men. Matthew includes five women in his list: Tamar, Rahab,

Ruth, the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba), and Mary. The first three of these women—Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth—are all foreign women. Each represents a story of God's grace extending outside the people of God, to those who by right should have been excluded from the congregation of Israel. Matthew breaks convention and goes out of his way to mention them. This is the first clue that something new is happening.

Missions and the Birth of Jesus

The surprises keep coming. As Matthew tells the story of the birth of Jesus, he includes the coming of the Magi. The word "Magi" is a Persian word, from the country we call Iran today. As a technical term, it referred to the priests of the ancient Iranian religious tradition. Such men were also astrologers and scholars, so the designation "wise men" is not completely inappropriate.

The stunning fact, missed by casual readers of the Gospels, is that pagan, Gentile, Iranian foreigners were among the first people to worship Jesus, drawn to him by God himself. The ingathering of the nations had begun!

Missions, the Centurion and Jesus

The next surprising incident comes just a few chapters later. A Roman centurion approached Jesus and asked him to heal his servant. The Romans were not only Gentiles, they were deeply hated foreign conquerors.

The word Gentile, found often in English translations of the Bible, refers to anyone who is not a Jew. The original Greek word behind this translation is *ethnos* (plural *ethne*), from which we get our word "ethnic." This word means "nations" or "peoples." It came to mean all the nations and peoples who were not Jews—the people groups of the world.

The centurion was an officer in a foreign army that was occupying Israel. For Jesus even to grant the centurion his request was unusual. What happened next was nothing less than astonishing.

After the centurion expressed complete confidence in Jesus' ability to heal the servant with a word, Jesus said, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness" (Matthew 8:10-12).

This interaction with the centurion was one more indication that the ingathering of the nations was on the horizon.

Missions, the End Times and Jesus

During the last week before his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus was in Jerusalem, and his followers asked him about the end of history. As he explained what will happen, Jesus connected his return and the end of history with the global spread of the gospel. He linked it specifically with the nations and peoples of the earth. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

According to Jesus, this is God's agenda for the time between the first coming and the second coming of Jesus, the time in which we live. The purpose of this time in history is the global spread of the gospel of Jesus, the King of the kingdom of heaven, to all the nations on earth.

The Great Commission and Jesus

The Great Commission, then, comes as no surprise. The Old Testament had promised it. The life and ministry of Jesus had been full of hints that it was all about to happen. After Jesus rose from the dead, he was with his followers for about 40 days before he went back to his Father, and during that time he gave them the same command over and over again, wording it differently each time but describing the same mission.

THE GREAT COMMISSION IN FOUR EXPRESSIONS

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem”

Luke 24:46-47

“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you”

John 20:21

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”

Acts 1:8

John recorded one of the simplest statements of the Great Commission in John 20:21. Luke gave us two other occasions when Jesus gave the Great Commission to his followers. The first came right after his resurrection from the dead when Jesus met with his frightened followers (Luke 24:46-47), and the second, immediately before he ascended into heaven (Acts 1:8). Somewhere during those 40 days, Jesus gave the Great Commission in the form that is probably the most famous, recorded for us by Matthew (Matt 28:18-20).

It couldn't be clearer. Jesus is King, and all authority belongs to him. As our king, he commands us to make disciples of all nations—all the people groups on earth. This isn't a suggestion. It is a royal command, and it fulfills everything God has been saying and doing throughout the Old Testament and the life of Jesus.

The redemptive plan of God has officially gone global.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What clues do we find in the Gospels that show us God's concern and love for the Gentiles?

Question 2:

What are the different ways in which Jesus gave the command to take the gospel to the nations during the period before he returned to heaven? What does each of these reveal about the mission of the church?

Section

Lesson 2: Missions in the Book of Acts

A Missionary Book

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Acts 1:6-8

The Book of Acts, more properly known as the Acts of the Apostles, is a missionary book from start to finish. It begins with Jesus restating the Great Commission, quoted above. Notice that the apostles were interested in politics and the end times. They wanted to know whether or not Jesus was going to restore political independence (and even dominance) to the nation of Israel, which was connected in Jewish thinking to the last days. Jesus redirected their thinking. Here (as elsewhere), believers are discouraged from speculating about the end times. Instead, they are commanded to focus their energies on evangelizing the world.

Notice also that the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to believers to empower them to witness for Jesus. The focus of the work of the Holy Spirit is to exalt Jesus, and a believer who is empowered by the Spirit will share the gospel. This is one of the clearest signs of a Spirit-filled life.

Next, notice that Jesus gives them one specific task. They are to be his witnesses. There are many things that believers can and should do, but witnessing to Jesus is the main job of their mission.

Finally, notice that Jesus describes their witnessing mission in ever-expanding circles. Jerusalem is where they were. Judea and Samaria were places nearby which they knew. However, their evangelistic witness was to reach the ends of the earth. Luke took these words of Jesus and structured his book around them, describing the spread of the gospel in Jerusalem and Judea in chapters one through seven, in Samaria in chapter eight, and then to the ends of the earth from chapter nine on.

Turning Points

In the Book of Acts, there are a series of turning points where the gospel broke through significant barriers. These are shared here:

i The Day of Pentecost

The first major turning point was the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the followers of Jesus, in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the Day of the Lord. The immediate result was the powerful proclamation of the gospel.

In a reversal of the curse of Babel, people who spoke many languages all heard the praises of God in tongues they could understand. These people were Jews who lived scattered across the ancient world, and they were most comfortable in the languages of their home countries. They had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost.

God called three thousand men and women to himself that day. Many of these new believers would return home after the feast was over, and the mission of the church was launched.

i The Stoning of Stephen

The next turning point came with the stoning of Stephen (chapter seven). Up until that point, the followers of Jesus had worked primarily in Jerusalem. After Stephen had died, we are told, “And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1).

The results were immediate. We are told, “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). These were not the leaders of the church. These were ordinary believers who were fleeing persecution, and they automatically shared their faith everywhere they went. As Jesus had said, the gospel was now being proclaimed in Judea and Samaria!

Even more radically, the gospel finally burst out of its Jewish cocoon. A man named Philip went to Samaria and shared the good news with Samaritans. Jews hated Samaritans and had nothing to do with them. They were the descendants of foreigners settled in Israel by the Assyrians after the northern kingdom of Israel fell in 722 BC, and their religion was a corrupt mix of biblical and unbiblical elements.

For the historical account of the origins of the Samaritans, see 2 Kings 17:24-41.

It was a bold move for Philip to offer them salvation in Jesus, and many responded in faith.

God then sent Philip to preach to an Ethiopian eunuch who was the treasurer to the queen of Ethiopia. As both a foreigner and a eunuch, this man was doubly excluded from the congregation of Israel under the Old Testament law, but God broke those barriers down by calling him to faith through the preaching of Philip. The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch happened out in

the desert, and the man went on his way to Ethiopia, taking the gospel with him.

i The Conversion of Cornelius

The inclusion of Gentiles in the community of the church became loudly public with the conversion of Cornelius and his household in Acts 10. God had to give Peter the same vision three times to convince him to go to the home of this Roman centurion, and he poured out his Holy Spirit on the new Gentile believers in a dramatic way to convince everyone in the church that their conversion was real. From this point on, however, there was no turning back. The church was irreversibly multi-racial.

i The First Sending Church

At this point, the center of gravity for gospel outreach moved north from Jerusalem to the city of Antioch, in the modern country of Turkey. The believers who planted this church were not apostles, but ordinary people whose names we don't even know. This church included both Jews and Gentiles together.

Meanwhile, a man named Saul had been converted while on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute the Christians there, and Saul (better known as Paul) ended up in Antioch as one of the teachers of the church there. In Acts 13, the Holy Spirit led the leaders of the church to set aside Paul and his friend Barnabas to go out on intentional missionary journeys.

The church was now taking the initiative to take the gospel to those who had never heard it. Paul and his companions made several missionary trips in the years to come, planting churches all over the eastern Mediterranean world.

The Book of Acts ends with Paul in prison in Rome, still preaching the gospel to anyone who came to see him.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What are the barriers that God propelled the followers of Jesus through in the spread of the gospel in the Book of Acts? What means did he use to push them through those barriers?

Section

Lesson 3: Missions in the New Testament Letters and Revelation Next

Missions in the Letters

And thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

Romans 15:20-21

The letters of the New Testament are part of the missionary strategy of the apostles. When the Apostle Paul planted churches, he moved on to new areas where Christ was not yet known, but he did not abandon the churches to figure things out on their own. He visited them again when he could (Acts 15:36). When he couldn't go himself, he sent other members of his team to check on them (1 Corinthians 4:17, Philippians 2:19, Titus 1:5). He sought out news of the churches from other believers (1 Corinthians 1:11). And finally, he and the other apostles wrote letters to the churches to teach them and to strengthen their faith.

Most of these letters were written in response to specific issues that emerged in the life of these brand new churches on the mission field. By looking at the letters of the New Testament, we learn a lot about the missionary theology of the apostles, and we also learn a lot about their missionary method.

The Missionary Theology of the Apostles

The Book of Romans was written by Paul as a missionary support letter. He was in the eastern Mediterranean area, and he wanted to go to Spain to preach the gospel there.

Rome lay right in the middle of his route. There was already a church in Rome. No one knows who planted that church. Like Antioch, it was planted by unknown, ordinary believers who shared the gospel wherever they went.

Paul had never been there, and most of the church in Rome did not know him. He wrote his letter to the church in Rome in order to introduce himself and to explain the gospel he preached. His hope was that the Roman church would then help him on his way to Spain (Romans 15:24).

This letter is rich in missionary insight. First, Paul explains that the problem with the human race is sin. Everyone in the world is a sinner, so everyone is condemned before God and in need of salvation (Romans 1:18-3:20). Next, he describes the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus as God's solution for our problem (Romans 3:21-30).

The next several chapters make it clear that sinners receive the gift of salvation by faith alone. In Romans 10, Paul draws the conclusion that people need to hear the gospel in order to be saved. In Romans 15, he describes his own motivation for mission work, in the words quoted at the beginning of this lesson. He had an ambition, and it was a godly one. He wanted to preach the gospel where Christ was not yet known. He understood that people had to hear the gospel to be saved, and he wanted to take it to those who had never heard.

The Missionary Method of the Apostles

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul describes his understanding of missionary roles. He was a pioneer church planter, who laid the foundation of the church in the gospel. His friend and colleague Apollos built on that foundation, developing and strengthening the church. Both of these roles are valuable and necessary. In either case, God is the one who actually gives the growth.

Paul gives more of his missionary strategy in 1 Corinthians 9. He was working cross-culturally. He recognized that he was free to eat whatever he wanted, to have a wife like Peter and the other apostles, and to live according to his own Jewish cultural

background. However, he voluntarily gave up any freedom that might put an obstacle in the way of people hearing and receiving the gospel. As much as possible, without disobeying the clear commands of Scripture, Paul lived and acted like the people he was trying to reach with the gospel. This is the context for his famous saying, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings" (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). The word we often use for this idea is contextualization.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul tells us more about his missionary methods. He is deeply committed to integrity in both his message and his methods. "We are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:17). He goes on to say, "We have denounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2). He refused to change the message to make it more acceptable to pagan society. He never sought to get rich through his ministry, he never took advantage of people, and he was open and transparent with his finances. He refused to be deceptive or manipulative. At the same time, he understood the urgency of the message, and he believed it was right to urge and persuade people to believe in Jesus. "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others...Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:11, 20). Paul's missionary method involved bold evangelism with a clear call to repent and believe.

The letters of Paul also tell us what he expected from the new churches that he had planted. He expected them to continue the work of evangelism in their area. We have already seen that this was normal behavior for New Testament Christians. They shared the gospel wherever they went, and ordinary believers started churches, including some of the most active and influential churches in the Bible.

This pattern is reflected in the churches that Paul planted. In his letter to the Philippians, he mentions that “most of the brothers” are speaking the word of God without fear, despite his imprisonment (Philippians 1:14). Similarly, when writing to the church in Thessalonica, he says, “the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia,” indicating that they had evangelized both their own province and the next one as well (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

This is why Paul could say that he had fulfilled the ministry of the gospel from Jerusalem as far as Illyricum (modern Croatia), and there was no more work for him in those regions (Romans 15:18-24). He is not saying that everyone in those regions has heard the gospel. What he is saying, however, is that he has planted churches in all of those areas, and those churches have the ability and responsibility to complete the task of evangelism where they are.

Paul’s method was to plant evangelistic, multiplying churches where the gospel was not yet known, and then entrust the continuation and completion of the task to them.

Section

Lesson 3: Missions in Revelation

The Bible ends with the Book of Revelation. This book was not written to provide fuel for speculation about the exact schedule of the end times. It was written, instead, to encourage persecuted believers with the reality that their present suffering was temporary.

Evil may sometimes appear to win, but in the end, the purposes of God triumph. Jesus will return, all opposition to God will be overthrown, the people of God will be vindicated, and everyone who trusts in Christ will live with him forever in perfect joy in the new heavens and new earth.

Even here, the theme of our mission to the nations is clear. In Revelation 5, we learn that the purpose and effect of Jesus' atoning death on the cross were global: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and open its seals, for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

We discover that heaven completely fulfills God's promise to Abraham and his descendants that all the peoples and families of the earth would be blessed through them: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9-10).

At the end of history, Babel will be undone completely, as all the languages of the world are used to praise God. All the promises of the Bible will be fulfilled, including the promise that salvation would reach the ends of the earth.

The book of Revelation ends on an international note. As John describes the New Jerusalem, he tells us that the glory of God will be its light, and then he adds, “By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it” (Revelation 21:24). In the very last chapter, John says that the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2).

Literally from beginning to end, the Bible is a book about God’s plan for the nations of the earth, and about the mission he has given his people to bring the good news of salvation to all of them.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What do we learn in the New Testament letters about the missionary methods of the apostles? What do we learn about their motives and strategies?

Question 2:

According to Revelation 5, what did Jesus intend to do when he shed his blood on the cross?

Question 3:

According to Revelation 7, who will we find in heaven?

Section

Lesson 4: Missions and What the Bible Teaches About the Lost

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

What we believe to be the main problem facing the human race will have a big impact on how we live. It certainly will have a big impact on our understanding of missions. If we believe that the real problem that people face is poverty, or racism, or ignorance, or oppression, or something else outside of themselves, we will concentrate our efforts on social change. If we think that the problem is inside us, but that it isn't all that serious, we probably won't do much at all.

Likewise, what we think about the consequences of sin and unbelief will have a big impact on our approach to missions. If we believe that God will forgive and accept everyone in the end, or if we believe that he will accept sincere people from any religion, or if we think we don't need to be forgiven at all, we will probably do little to go to those who have never heard of Jesus.

Because of this, it is critically important that we answer three questions from the Bible before we go any further in our exploration of missions:

1. What is the problem facing the human race?
2. What is the solution to that problem?
3. What do people need to do to take hold of that solution?

In this lesson we will consider each of these questions in turn.

The Problem

First, what is the problem facing the human race?

There is no question that poverty, disease, racism, ignorance, injustice, crime, violence and oppression are all serious problems, and they are worth attacking. The Bible, however, tells us that behind these outward symptoms there is a deeper, more sinister cause. That cause is our rebellion against God, and the Bible calls that sin.

Sin entered the world when our first parents refused to trust God and disobeyed him instead (Genesis 3). From that point on, sin has been a universal plague. Every human being who has ever lived (with the sole exception of Jesus) is a sinner (Romans 3:23). Sin enslaves and corrupts every part of our nature as humans (John 8:34, Romans 3:10-18, Romans 8:5-8, I Corinthians 2:14, II Corinthians 4:3-4, Ephesians 2:1-3).

Our sin provokes the righteous wrath of God against us (Romans 1:18, Ephesians 2:1-3). The consequences of sin are death and hell, and these consequences are completely just and fair (Matthew 5:29-30, Matthew 10:28, Romans 6:23, James 1:15). This is the deepest problem facing every person on earth. Everyone is a rebel against God. Everyone has offended him and broken his law. Everyone deserves death and judgment. The only thing fair would be for God to send us all to hell.

The Solution

What is the solution to that problem?

The solution is the gospel. Even though we deserve condemnation, God loved us and decided to rescue us. God became one of us in the person of Jesus. He lived the perfect life we should have lived. He then died in our place to pay the penalty for our sins and to bear the wrath that we deserved. He rose again from the dead, the permanent conqueror of sin, death, and hell.

Because Jesus died in the place of sinners, God can declare us “not guilty” based on Jesus’ record. God can still be a just God, and at the same time justify sinners like us.

This is the only solution to the universal human problem of sin. It is not a solution we deserve. It is free, undeserved grace alone (cf. Isaiah 53:1-12).

The Response

What do people need to do to take hold of that solution?

They need to repent (cf. Mark 4:14-15) of their rebellion against God and believe the gospel of Jesus (cf. John 1:12). This is the only answer the Bible gives. These are not two different responses, but two sides of the same response—turning away from sin and rebellion in repentance and turning to Jesus in faith.

Saving faith is, according to the New Testament, a faith that works through love (Galatians 5:6). It is an active faith that both trusts Jesus alone to save and entrusts everything to him as Lord. It is a faith that has content, and that content must be heard to be believed.

Therefore, Paul spells out the implications of the gospel message and the response we must make to be saved:

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 10:13-17

The logic is clear and inescapable. The only way anyone can be saved is by repenting of their sin and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, the only way to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is to hear the gospel message. Therefore, no one can be saved apart from Jesus, and no one can be saved apart from hearing the good news of

who he is and what he has done. Those who have never heard the gospel have no hope of salvation. There is no “Plan B.” They are not condemned because they have never heard, but rather they are justly condemned because of their sin—just as we deserve as well. This makes it absolutely necessary that we get the gospel message to everyone, because without it, they cannot be saved.

This fits with the rest of the message of the New Testament. Jesus himself said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). The Apostle Peter said, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The Apostle John agrees. “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:11-13).

The consistent message of the New Testament is that people must hear the gospel and believe in Jesus in order to be saved.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

According to the Bible, what is sin? How bad is our sin problem? What are the consequences of sin? Do you think of your own sin in these biblical terms?

Question 2:

If someone were to ask you, “Do people have to hear the gospel in order to escape eternal condemnation,” how would you answer them from Scripture?

Section

Lesson 5: Mission and the Bible: What Is The Mission of God's Church?

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Luke 24:44-49

What is the mission that God gave his church? When we say that are doing missions, what do we mean?

For some people, anything we do outside the walls of the church is missions. In other words, whatever we do for people outside of our church is a form of missions, whether we proclaim the gospel in the process or not. For others, anything at all that Christians do in obedience to Scripture is part of our mission. Therefore, things like prayer and worship also fit into the mission of the church. Still others define missions much more specifically as sharing the gospel and making disciples.

How do we answer this question? Specifically, what does the Bible teach us?

The Great Commandment

When Jesus was asked to define the greatest commandment from the law of God, he actually gave two, quoting from the Old Testament: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and

first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

Followers of Jesus, who want to be like him, and who are taught to obey everything he commanded, will make these two commandments top priority in their lives. They will seek to love God with all that they are. That means that they will worship him and pray to him. They will share his heart for the things that matter to him, and they will join their lives to his plans and purposes. They will show their love for him by their obedience to him (John 14:15, 21).

These followers of Jesus will also seek to love their neighbors as themselves. Jesus made it clear that our neighbor is anyone in need, even if they are our natural enemies (Luke 10:25-37). Followers of Jesus will seek to meet the needs of others, regardless of race, religion, nationality, or any other factor.

Critical Questions

That leaves us with a series of critically important questions.

1. What matters most to God?
2. What are his plans and purposes for human history?
3. What has he commanded his people to do?
4. What are the deepest needs of our global neighbors?

The answers to these questions will point us toward the mission that God has given his people in these days between the first and second coming of Jesus.

What matters most to God?

God is most passionate for his own glory. As we saw in our study of the Psalms, God intends to receive the glory due his name from every tribe, tongue, people and nation on earth. He has also, in astonishing grace, chosen to display his glory by blessing undeserving rebels with salvation. Therefore, if we share his heart for what matters

most to him, we will proclaim his glory and announce his saving grace to the nations, so that he can receive the praise and worship he deserves from every people on earth. What are God's plans and purposes for human history?

The answer is the same. God is up to a global rescue mission, in which he is calling people to himself out of every people group on earth, in order to display his glory by lavishing his saving grace on them.

What has God commanded us to do?

Jesus, who is God himself, commanded us repeatedly at the end of his time on earth to tell people who he is and what he has done in order to call them to become his followers. Furthermore, he commanded that we do this among all peoples and nations to the ends of the earth.

What is the deepest need of our global neighbors?

Unquestionably, people need food and clothing, shelter and medical care. They need education, and they need freedom from oppression. Loving our neighbor will certainly include all of these.

However, the deepest need of every man, woman and child on earth is to be rescued from their sins. If we give people temporary relief from the sufferings of this life, but leave them ignorant of the only solution to their sin problem, we have consigned them to the worst suffering of all.

Hell is real, it is eternal, and it is just. Everyone deserves to go there. The only way of escape is through hearing and believing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, if we do not share the gospel with those who have never heard it, we do not love them.

Section

Lesson 5: What is the Mission of the Church?

What is our mission, then?

Our mission is defined for us by the commands Jesus gave repeatedly during the 40 days between his resurrection from the dead and his return to heaven. We are to be his witnesses. We are to proclaim the good news that he lived and died in our place, that he rose from the dead, and that anyone who believes in him has their sins forgiven. We are to make disciples. Furthermore, we are not just to do this with people like us who happen to live near us. We are quite explicitly told to make disciples out of every nation and people group on earth. The Great Commission defines our mission.

This does not mean at all that we will ignore the temporal needs of others. A disciple is a person who is taught to obey everything that Jesus commanded. Therefore, if we ourselves are disciples, and if we make disciples of others, all the other things Jesus commanded will happen as well, and they will happen in ever-expanding circles.

We will worship God, and more and more people will worship God as well. We will feed the hungry, and care for the sick, and fight oppression, and more and more people will do those things as well.

If we do any of the other things that Jesus commanded as our primary mission, we will do a good thing, but it will go no further than us. If we live as disciples and make disciples of others as our primary mission, all the blessings of God will extend to the far corners of the globe.

Our mission is to share the gospel and make disciples of all peoples, and all other good things will follow.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What is the mission of God's people? How would you explain your answer from Scripture?

Section

Group Discussion: Missions in the New Testament

SUGGESTED OUTLINE (90 MINUTES)

1. Scripture Memory & Prayer (5 min)
2. Summary & Discussion (50 min)
3. Group Activity (15 min)
4. Prayer (15 min)
5. Before You Leave... (5 min)

i SCRIPTURE MEMORY & PRAYER (5 MIN)

Ask someone in the group to recite Acts 1:8 from memory.

Pray that God would open your eyes to new insights from His Word, and that, together, your group might see God's plan for the nations in the New Testament.

i SUMMARY & DISCUSSION (50 MIN)

Ask someone in your group to summarize Unit 2, using the guide below to help as needed:

Lesson 1:

In the New Testament, all the promises of God in the Old Testament find

their fulfillment. Specifically, the promises of God are fulfilled in Jesus.

The Gospels tell the story of his miraculous birth, his sinless life, his miracles, his teaching, his death on a Roman cross, and his victorious resurrection from the dead. From the very beginning of the Gospels, there is clear evidence of God's love and care for the nations outside of Israel. During the period between Jesus' resurrection from death and his return to heaven, Jesus repeatedly told his followers that their mission was to be his witnesses, to proclaim the good news about salvation in him, and to make disciples, out of all nations and peoples on earth.

Lessons 2-3:

The Book of Acts recounts the missionary story of the early church, as God propelled them through one barrier after another to get the gospel to other lands and other peoples.

The letters of the New Testament are part of the missionary strategy of the apostles, as they explained the gospel further and addressed issues in the newly planted missionary churches of the ancient world. In these letters, we learn about their missionary motives and methods.

The Book of Revelation points back to the atoning work of Christ, and tells us that Jesus died to redeem people for God from every people, tongue, tribe and nation. We look forward to the scene in heaven where God is worshipped by a multitude no one can count from every people, tongue, tribe and nation.

Lessons 4-5:

The New Testament clearly communicates that all people are sinners and rebels against God, that everyone deserves condemnation, and that the only way anyone can be saved from the judgment they deserve is to

hear the gospel and believe it.

Therefore, we must take the gospel message to everyone on earth, because those who have never heard it are lost with no hope of salvation. Our mission, as God's people, is to go to the ends of the earth and make disciples of all peoples.

Discuss (45 min)

1. What clues do we find in the Gospels that show us God's concern and love for the Gentiles?
2. What are the different ways in which Jesus gave the command to take the gospel to the nations during the period before he returned to heaven? What does each of these reveal about the mission of the church?
3. What are the barriers that God propelled the followers of Jesus through in the spread of the gospel in the Book of Acts? What means did he use to push them through those barriers?
4. What do we learn in the New Testament letters about the missionary methods of the apostles? What do we learn about their motives and strategies?
5. According to Revelation 5, what did Jesus intend to do when he shed his blood on the cross?
6. According to Revelation 7, who will we find in heaven?
7. According to the Bible, what is sin? How bad is our sin problem? What are the consequences of sin? Do you think of your own sin in these biblical terms?
8. If someone were to ask you, "Do people have to hear the gospel in order to escape eternal condemnation," how would you answer them from Scripture?
9. What is the mission of God's people? How would you explain your answer from Scripture?

i GROUP ACTIVITY (15 MIN)

Have you ever used storying to share the gospel with a non-believer? What advantages might this have when sharing the gospel with a person (or in a culture) with no background in Christianity? What about in an oral culture?

Chronological Bible Storying

Many missionaries share the Gospel through a strategy called chronological Bible storying. This method is used all over the world – from the bush of Mali to cities in Romania.

“Storying” is a simple way of sharing Bible stories the way most people in the United States might describe a news event, book or movie in conversation. Using this ongoing method, missionaries can take a person through the entire Bible – one story at a time.

Storying requires missionaries to be able to recall verbatim what they are teaching. And once they master the material, they can train local Christians to teach

Oral Culture

“Oral” does not necessarily mean “illiterate”, although in oral cultures, people are more likely to share information through telling stories and casual conversation than through written communication. In these cultures, Southern Baptist missionaries often share the Gospel through chronological Bible storying.

Use these examples to walk through the big story of Scripture from Creation to Christ (C2C):

1. **The Most High God:** I want to tell you a story. This story is from a book called the Bible. Men did not make up the Bible. It is the word of the Most High God. These stories are true and reliable because they are God's words. There is only one God, and He really is the Most High God. He is more powerful than any ancestor, person, government or false god that people worship. This story is true and reliable because it is the word of the Most High God.
2. **Creation:** The Most High God is the Creator. He existed before there was anything else. He created everything on earth and in heaven and is all powerful over everything. When God began to create things, He just used His words. He spoke and everything came to being. He created angels to worship and serve Him. They were very beautiful. He also created everything we can see — the sky, land, water, mountains, oceans, sun, moon, stars, all plants and animals. Finally, He created man according to His image. God created man to enjoy all that He has created. God created everything and saw that it was good.
3. **God and Man Together:** God placed the man and woman in a beautiful garden to live. They had a very good relationship with Him and with each other. He told them to take care of the garden and enjoy everything. He gave them a special command: they could eat from every tree in the garden except one. If they ate from that one tree, they would be punished and die. At first, the man and woman listened to God and had a wonderful relationship with Him in the garden.
4. **Sin and Separation:** One of the angels God had made was very smart and very beautiful. This angel became very proud. He wanted to be like God and to have the other angels worship him instead of God. Only God deserves all the worship and service. Therefore God cast this bad angel, now called Satan, and all the other angels who listened to him out of heaven. These other bad angels are known as demons. One day, Satan tempted the woman to eat the food from the tree that was forbidden. The woman listened to him and ate the fruit and then she gave it to her husband to eat. Both of them disobeyed God's command. Disobeying

God's command is known as "sin." God is righteous and holy. He must punish sin. God cast the man and the woman out of the garden and their relationship with God was broken. Human beings and God were now separated forever. Like the first man and the woman, all people since then have sinned by not listening to God's commands and are separated from God. The result of sin is eternal punishment in hell. We cannot live forever with God as we were designed.

5. **Commandments:** Over time, the number of people on earth multiplied. Yet God loved them very much and wanted them to have a relationship with Him. He gave them ten commandments to follow. Remember God is perfect and holy, so we must be perfect and holy to live with him. The Ten Commandments teach people how to relate to God and how to relate to other people. Some of the commands were: do not worship other gods or make idols; honor your parents; do not lie, steal, murder or commit adultery. However, no one was able to obey all of these commands.
6. **Sacrifices:** So, when they sinned, God allowed them to turn away from their sins and offer a blood sacrifice to take the place of their punishment. This sacrifice was shedding the blood of a perfect animal like a lamb. If they would repent and offer the blood sacrifice, God would forgive them and let the animal die in their place. Only by the shedding of blood can a person's sin be forgiven. However, people kept sinning, and the sin sacrifice became a ritual rather than something from their heart. God became tired of their insincere acts. People were still separated from God. We cannot come back to God on our own no matter what we do.
7. **God Sends Jesus:** God loves people and wants a relationship of love and trust with them, so the time came when He sent man a perfect way to reconnect to Him. God sent Jesus to show us the way back to Himself. Who is Jesus? Jesus is God's son, His one and only son. He became human like us: God in the flesh.
8. **Jesus, God's Son:** Even though Jesus lived as a man, He resisted temptation. He never sinned, and He remained obedient to God. Jesus had great compassion for people, especially those who had no hope. He

was a wise teacher. He performed many miracles proving He was God's Son. Jesus had power over nature, over disease, over evil spirits, and even over death.

9. **Jesus, the Sacrifice:** Many people loved Jesus. They believed Jesus and followed Him. However, some leaders hated Jesus and they were jealous of Him. They made plans to kill Jesus. Jesus willingly allowed himself to be arrested, tried, and condemned to die. Soldiers placed him on a cross. A cross is made from 2 large pieces of wood formed together. They took His hands and His feet and nailed them to the cross. His blood flowed from His hands, feet and body. He suffered much pain and He died on the cross. Because Jesus never sinned, Jesus is the perfect blood sacrifice. He did not deserve to die, but God sent Him to die on the cross and take the punishment for the sins of man, all people. He died on the cross in our place. Only through the shedding of His blood is God willing to forgive our sin.
10. **Resurrection:** Jesus' death demonstrates God's love for us. However, this story doesn't end here. After Jesus died, he was placed in a secure tomb. On the third day Jesus rose from the dead and showed Himself to His followers! He proved that He has the power over death. Then He returned to His Father in heaven. Jesus took our punishment and now provides a way for us to come back to God!
11. **Repentance:** God wants you and your whole family to return to Him. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, and He is the only way to restore our relationship with God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." You must go through Jesus to return to God. How can you go through Jesus? You must admit to God that you have sinned against Him. You must believe that Jesus died in your place. You put your trust in Jesus to bring you back and give you eternal life as God's son or daughter. From that point on, you let Jesus be your Master and obey His word. Do you want to let Jesus bring you back to God?
12. **Kingdom:** Jesus continues His work in the world through His Spirit and through His followers. God has set a day for Jesus to return to earth in all

His glory and to judge all people. He will welcome His followers and turn away those who oppose Him. His kingdom will have no end. Until then, His followers are to pray and work together that the kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. We are to carry the good news of Jesus to others and serve Him in all that we do.

i PRAYER (15 MIN)

Go to the [IMB Maps Gallery](#) and, using one of the gallery resources, choose one unreached people group (UPG or UUPG). Read their profile together.

Then Read [Psalm 67](#) out loud together, and spend some time praying for the people group you chose:

Pray that God would bless his Church in order that the nations might fear Him and that His saving power might be known in all the earth ([Ps. 67:1-2; 6-7](#)).

Pray specifically for the prayer needs expressed on the people group profile you read.

Pray that God would receive due worship from this people group ([Ps. 67:3,5](#)).

Pray for the joy and gladness that comes from knowing Christ to fill this people group ([Ps. 67:4](#)).

i BEFORE YOU LEAVE... (5 MIN)

HOMEWORK:

Pick three consecutive stories from the Creation-To-Christ narrative from the above Group Activity and commit to learning them this week. You can click [here](#) to find videos of others reading the C2C stories, as well as other resources.

You will practice sharing these with your group in Unit 4.

Section

Being a Disciple of Jesus



David Platt explains the relationship between being a disciple and making disciples.

Section

Introduction: Essence of Following Jesus

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth **has been given to me.** Go therefore and **make disciples of all nations,** baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe** all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The Essence of Following Jesus

As we have seen, the mission of the people of God in this age is to make disciples out of all the nations and people groups of the earth. Missions involves disciples of Jesus who make disciples for Jesus cross-culturally. At the heart of this definition is the word “Disciple.” This is not a word that we use in ordinary conversation. What is a disciple? How do you make a disciple? If those who engage in missions must be disciples, and if the basic task of missions is to make disciples, we must understand what this word means if we are going to understand missions.

The purpose of this unit is to explore what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We will start by looking at what discipleship meant in Jesus’ day. We will then look at the

characteristics of a disciple of Jesus as described for us in the New Testament. We will finish out this unit by looking at the practices of a disciple. As you read and digest these lessons, use them as a mirror to look at your own life. Do these characteristics describe you? Is your own church producing people like this? What can you and your church do to be more faithful in discipleship? This unit should cause serious self-examination, and it may be somewhat uncomfortable in the process, but joy and fruitfulness lie at the end of this road.

Section

Lesson 1: The Central Command of the Great Commission

Making Disciples of All Nations

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

The Great Commission, quoted here from Matthew 28, has one central command in it. In English, it looks like there are four commands: go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. However, in the original language (Greek), only one of these is in the form of a command. That is the command to make disciples. The other three are connected to that central command, and they help us understand what it means and how we are to do it. Thus, the word "Go" tells us that we are not to sit around and wait for people to come to us, but rather that we are to take the initiative to go where they live. "Baptizing" in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit tells us that radical conversion is involved in making disciples, because baptism is a picture of dying to everything we were before Christ and rising to live a new life in him (Romans 6:1-4). "Teaching" new disciples to obey everything that Jesus commanded shows us that discipleship involves both learning and doing the things that Jesus taught. At the heart of it all, however, is one thing: we are to make disciples of all nations. What does this mean?

The closest parallel to a disciple in the modern world is a student. However, this word does not really capture everything involved in being a disciple in Jesus' day. A student

today usually learns in a very impersonal way. He or she sits in a classroom with a lot of other students while the teacher lectures from the front. The teacher may never even learn the names of all the students in the class, and there is seldom a close personal relationship between teacher and student. The method of teaching usually combines listening to lectures with reading books, writing papers, and taking tests. The student crams information into his or her head and holds it there long enough to spit it back out on the final exam. After that, what they “learned” may or may not stick in their minds. Classes like this may occasionally change a student’s life, but there is no guarantee. This form of teaching is usually information-sharing, and nothing else.

Teaching happened in a very different way in the ancient world. This was not just true of Jesus and his disciples. Other Jewish rabbis, and pagan Gentile scholars and philosophers, all operated along a similar model. Ancient teachers would teach on two levels. On the one hand, they would deliver speeches to large crowds in public. On the other hand, they chose a small group of followers—disciples—who were with them all the time. These followers lived, ate, slept, and traveled with their teacher. They heard him speak to the crowds over and over again, so that they had the opportunity to master the content of their teacher’s message. They also spent time with their teacher away from the crowds, where they had time to ask questions and probe more deeply into what their teacher was saying. They were expected to do more than just learn the content of what their teacher thought. They were expected to embrace their teacher’s lifestyle. Being a disciple involved life transformation as well as mental education. The process of identification with the teacher was so radical that people could tell which disciples went with which teachers by their very mannerisms and patterns of speech. A disciple literally became a mirror of their teacher. They represented and reflected their teacher. When fully trained, they could go out and repeat the process themselves as teachers with a new group of students. This was what it meant to be a disciple in the world of the New Testament.

This, then, helps us understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in any age. It means more than just taking classes or memorizing information (although it certainly does involve learning the content of the Bible). A disciple of Jesus today is someone

who spends extended time with Jesus through his word, prayer and worship. Disciples of Jesus learn the content of Jesus' teaching so well that they can teach it themselves. Since Jesus endorsed the Old Testament as the word of God, and since the New Testament is the authoritative testimony of the eyewitnesses to Jesus, explaining and applying what he taught and what he did, a disciple of Jesus is someone who knows the entire Bible thoroughly. Disciples of Jesus embrace the way of life of their Teacher. They spend so much time with him that they come to resemble him. When people observe a disciple of Jesus, they should be automatically reminded of him. Such disciples also embrace the mission of Jesus. They love what he loves, hate what he hates, and do what he sent them to do.

In other words, disciples of Jesus become like him. They are transformed in every area of life into the image of Christ. This is actually their destiny: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29). Remember that we were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We messed up that image when we rebelled against God. Jesus rescued us in order to restore us to that image, so that we could go back to our original purpose: to reflect and represent him. Jesus himself, as God in human flesh, is the perfect image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). He perfectly shows us what God is like (John 1:18, John 14:9). He is, in fact, the second Adam, who restarted the human race (Romans 5:14, 1 Corinthians 15:42-49). A disciple of Jesus is someone who is being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, God the Son, so that we once again reflect and represent God as we were created to do.

We do this by using the tools he has given us. These include his word, prayer and fasting. They also include the teaching, community, and worship of the church. God did not design us to become like Jesus or to serve Jesus by ourselves. In fact, we only become mature as disciples when we are connected to other disciples in the church, and when each disciple uses his or her gifts to build up the church (Ephesians 4:1-16). Finally, we also grow as disciples as we ourselves serve others in the church and advance the gospel in the world.

This gives us an idea of what Jesus was talking about when he commanded his

followers to make disciples of all peoples and nations. This shows us what we ourselves need to be in order to participate in this mission, and it also shows us what the results of our mission work should be. We are not trying to multiply converts. We are out to make disciples.

One final word. The description we have just given of what it means to be a disciple may seem radical and extreme. It is. However, that does not mean that it is something reserved for some sort of Christian elite. This is the Bible's description of the normal follower of Jesus (cf. Matthew 7:21-27). Do not make the mistake of settling for a lukewarm version of discipleship, either for yourself or for others. According to these passages from the Bible, it is entirely possible that those who are content with lukewarm discipleship may not be disciples at all. At the same time, do not despair if you look at this standard of discipleship and realize that you don't measure up. We are saved by grace, not by works, and no one reaches perfection in this life (Ephesians 2:8-10, 1 John 1:8-10).

The best way to evaluate your spiritual condition is to look at your attitude toward radical discipleship. Is it something that you yearn to see in your life, or do you find your heart cold and indifferent toward it? Does the distance between your present reality and the goal of being like Jesus cause you grief, and make you long to be with him and to be like him, or does it not really matter to you? A true disciple experiences confidence and despair at the same time: confidence in the grace of God, and despair in ourselves. We know that Jesus is able to rescue us from our sins and make us like himself, but we also know that we aren't there yet, and that we have no strength in ourselves to get there. If you yearn to be more and more like Jesus, and if you hate the sin that you still find at work in you, then you have good cause for encouragement in Christ. It is those who don't really care about how different they are from Jesus who have the most reason for concern. We are to be disciples who make disciples. For your own good, and for the sake of the mission God has given us, be a faithful, growing disciple of Jesus!

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What did it mean to be someone's disciple in Jesus' day? How is that different from the way education is done today?

Section

Lesson 2: Transformed Heart and Mind

Being Born Again in Christ

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

John 3:3

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

In the last lesson, we explored what it meant to be a disciple in the days of Jesus, and we used that model to help us understand what it means for us to be disciples of Jesus today. In the next three lessons, we will get more specific about the characteristics of a disciple. The first characteristic, which is absolutely essential before any of the rest of them mean anything, is that a disciple must have a transformed heart. In other words, he or she must be born again. As we have already seen, apart from Christ people are spiritually dead. In order to do anything else, a dead person needs to come to life first. You can dress up a corpse as nicely as you want, but it is still a corpse! Therefore, the first step in being a disciple of Jesus is to be born again.

Transformed Heart

Jesus himself made it clear that being born again is connected inseparably with believing in him (John 3:1-21). In order to become a disciple of Jesus, a person must hear the gospel and respond to it by repenting of their sins and putting their trust in

Jesus. People who have trusted in Jesus are now spiritually alive, where before they were spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1-10). They have been re-created in Christ, so that what they used to be is now gone and they are new people in him (Romans 6:1-11, II Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:3). The Holy Spirit has now taken up residence in them (Romans 8:9-17, 26-30, I Corinthians 6:19-20, I Corinthians 12:13, II Corinthians 3:17-18, II Corinthians 5:1-5, Ephesians 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit gives us the power to do everything that is involved in being a disciple of Jesus. Apart from him, we are powerless. The life of a disciple begins when the Holy Spirit makes a spiritually dead person alive in Christ and begins the process of remaking that person to be like him.

This transformation can be seen. A converted person is a changed person. The Bible tells us the evidence that we should be able to see in the life of a person who has been born again. They will believe that the gospel is true, and they will stop trusting anything else and trust in Jesus alone to make them right with God (John 3:16-18). They will trust that what the Bible teaches is true, and they will have a hunger for God's word (Psalm 119, Colossians 3:16). They will grow in the habit of obedience to the word of God (1 John 2:3, 10). They will love other Christians, and they will show this love in practical ways (1 John 3:10-18). If someone says they have been born again, but there is no evidence of it in their lives, there is good reason to question whether anything has happened or not.

Transformed Mind

In addition to having a transformed heart, a disciple of Jesus will also have a transformed mind. This will begin immediately, as the new believer realizes that God's word is true, but it will grow more and more as the believer matures in Christ. The Holy Spirit is the one who renews and changes the mind of the believer, and the tool he uses is the word of God. The Bible gives us a complete worldview that shows us reality from God's perspective. The Bible answers the great questions of life, and it answers them differently from secular society and from other religions.

Before meeting Jesus, people think like the world around them. After meeting him, they begin to realize that their entire mental framework for reality was wrong, and that the Bible presents a new framework that makes sense for the first time. Therefore, empowered by the Holy Spirit, disciples of Jesus hear, read, study, memorize and meditate on the word of God. As they do so, they begin to think the way God thinks. They adopt God's perspective on what is true and what is false, what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong, what is valuable and what is worthless. This perspective is often exactly the opposite of what the world thinks, so they need constant encouragement and reinforcement from their brothers and sisters in the church in the face of the mockery of the world. In time, disciples come to understand and evaluate everything around them in biblical terms. A good indicator of a healthy disciple of Jesus is that the disciple loves and studies God's word. Furthermore, the word of God shapes the values, decisions and convictions of a healthy disciple. They increasingly demonstrate the mind of Christ in all of life (1 Corinthians 2:16).

What does this mean for the work of missions? First of all, it means that those who do missions must be born-again believers themselves whose minds are saturated and shaped by the word of God. It also means that biblical mission work will strive for clear personal conversion. People must be born again to enter the kingdom of God, so we must present the gospel with clarity and urgency. We must never water down the gospel message or soften the rough edges of repentance and faith, because we never want to be guilty of luring people into false conversions.

We also must never present the facts of the gospel without an urgent appeal to respond. The stakes are simply too high to do anything else. We must work to transform the minds of new believers with the word of God. That means that we need the Bible in the language of the people we are trying to reach, so Bible translation may well be necessary. We need to teach the Bible to new disciples thoroughly, from cover to cover, and we need to apply the Bible to every area of life. We need to train new believers in the habits of Bible study, memorization, and meditation. We need to challenge all the elements of a believer's pre-Christian worldview with the narrative of the Bible. A disciple of Jesus has a transformed mind, reshaped by the Holy Spirit into

conformity with God's word, so those who make disciples cross-culturally must study, obey, and teach the word of God as the very heart of their ministry.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

How is a person born again? Why does it matter?

Question 2:

What does it mean to have a transformed mind? How do we go about getting a transformed mind?

Question 3:

What role does the Bible play in mission work?

Section

Lesson 3: Transformed Desired and Will

Loving and Submitting to God

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

Psalm 42:1-2

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

John 14:15

In this lesson, we are continuing our exploration of the characteristics of a biblical disciple of Jesus. We have already seen that a disciple has a transformed heart and a transformed mind. To that list, we now need to add that a biblical disciple has transformed desires and affections. Before conversion, the passions and desires of our rebellious nature ruled our lives. Now, our greatest love, our strongest desire, and our deepest affection should be God himself. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:28-30).

Transformed Desires

The psalms are full of heart-cries like the one quoted above, in which the psalmist compares his desire for God with the intensity of hunger and thirst. Christian discipleship is a passionate thing! A disciple recognizes that God himself is more desirable and more satisfying than anything else in the universe (cf. Psalm 16:11). Such a disciple is willing to lose everything in order to have him (Matthew 13:44-45, Philippians 3:7-14). Not only that, but a disciple of Jesus learns to love what Jesus loves and to hate what Jesus hates. Jesus loves justice, mercy and faithfulness, so the disciple

of Jesus loves them, too (Matthew 23:23). Jesus loves his people, his neighbor, and his enemy, so the disciple loves them, too (cf. Luke 6:27-36). Jesus, as God, hates pagan worship, and wickedness, and arrogance, and lying, and violence, so the disciple hates them, too (cf. Deuteronomy 12:29-31). A biblical disciple of Jesus embraces his desires and affections.

This means that a disciple will live differently from the world, because he or she will have different ambitions and live for different rewards. Where the unbeliever is motivated by selfish ambition and self-advancement, a disciple has the ambition to be pleasing to God and to advance the gospel (Romans 15:20, 2 Corinthians 5:9). Where the unbeliever lives for worldly pleasure, possessions or power, the disciple lives for the infinitely greater pleasure of knowing Christ, and for the ultimate joy of being with him forever (Philippians 3:8). This should be reflected, then, in how the disciple makes decisions, and treats people, and uses money and other resources.

A disciple will not run after the things that lure unbelievers, because he or she is drawn by better things. The life of a disciple will therefore look crazy to the eyes of the world, but the disciple will be content that he or she has chosen better treasure. In practical terms, leaving home and loved ones and safety and comfort and career behind to take the gospel to unknown people in dangerous places looks insane to this world, but a disciple of Jesus has better desires and higher ambitions in mind, so he or she will think it is the most reasonable thing in the universe.

Transformed Will

As a result of their transformed hearts, minds and desires, disciples also have transformed wills. Before meeting Jesus, their wills were enslaved to sin (cf. John 8:34). However, part of what it means to be born again is to die to our rebellion against God. The Apostle Paul spells this out clearly in his letter to the Romans:

What shall we say, then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For the one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:1-11

The Bible uses radical language to describe what happens when a person is born again. You died to sin. You were baptized into his death. You were buried with him. You were united with him in a death like his. Your old self was crucified with him. You have died with Christ. You must consider yourself dead to sin in Christ Jesus. While no one can claim to be perfectly sinless (1 John 1:8-10), the orientation of our lives is now radically different. The normal pattern of the life of a disciple is now rejection of sin and obedience to Christ.

The positive side of this transformation is as glorious as the negative side is radical. If you have been born again, you now walk in newness of life. You will be united with him in a resurrection like his. You have been set free from sin. You will live with Christ. You are alive to God in Christ Jesus. For this reason, Paul goes on to say, "Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness" (Romans 6:13). Present all the parts of your body to God to be used by him as instruments of righteousness! A transformed will has two sides to it. We put off rebellion against God, and we put on obedience to him. We don't live in sin; we do live for Christ. We don't pursue the things that a rebellious world pursues; we do pursue the agenda of God. We put to

death everything that is ungodly in our character, and we embrace the character of Christ (Ephesians 4:17-5:21, Colossians 3:1-17). The life of a disciple is not private and passive. There is an active side to it. We certainly have a list of things we don't want to characterize our lives, but we also have a glorious list of things that we do want to be true of us (Galatians 5:16-26), and we have work to do which we actively pursue as instruments of God.

This is not something we can do in our own strength. The work of transforming our wills so that we live in a way that pleases God must be done by the Holy Spirit (cf. Romans 7:4-6). He is the one who made us alive when we were dead in our sin (born again = born of the Spirit, John 3:1-8). He is the one who can put sin to death in us (Romans 8:13), and he is the one who remakes us in the image of Christ, which is perfectly described by the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). He is also the one who gifts and empowers us for service to Christ (1 Corinthians 12). The life of obedience is a life full of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is essential that we keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25), and that we do nothing to grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). Apart from him, we are powerless.

This is also gospel-based obedience. We do not obey God in order to earn his favor. We do not obey God in order to contribute anything at all to our salvation, because we cannot (cf. Romans 3:20-31). We do not obey God in order to get him to do something for us (Romans 11:33-36). We obey God because of what he has done for us in Christ, and we obey out of a transformed heart and transformed will. Furthermore, we never pit obedience and action against any other part of the Christian life, whether that might be knowledge of biblical doctrine or the transformation of our character. All of them are important together (Mark 12:28-30).

A disciple of Jesus has a transformed will. He or she now desires to obey Christ in everything. In our own lives, that means that he can ask anything he wants of us, whatever the cost. We are willing to give up our lives for the One who died for us. That includes the Great Commission, both in our immediate neighborhood and among unreached peoples halfway around the world. It also means that we train other

disciples to obey everything he commanded. There is nothing too small and nothing too big to fall outside his gracious rule. He is Lord of all.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

How does being a disciple of Jesus affect your desires? Do see this at work in your own life?

Question 2:

What is the role of obedience in the life of a disciple? What is the motive for obedience in the life of a disciple?

Section

Lesson 4: Transformed Relationships and Purpose

Loving the Way Jesus Loves Us

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:35

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one died for all therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Transformed Relationships

As we continue our exploration of what it means to be a biblical disciple of Jesus, we come to the crucial issue of relationships. The Bible devotes a lot of attention to our relationships with others, and what it says could be summarized simply: our relationship with Jesus transforms every other relationship we have. We are to love people in the way that God loves us in Christ. This is not a fuzzy, sentimental statement, but a massive challenge to our habits of self-protection and self-promotion. What does it look like?

First, put in the negative, love does no wrong (Romans 13:10). That means that love rules out any form of hurt or injury to another person. Love is the opposite of gossip, slander, or deceit, much less theft or murder. Love does not use other people for its own ends. If you love someone, you will not do any form of wrong to them. This may

sound like a small thing, and it certainly does not tell the whole story, but in a fallen world this is actually quite significant.

Positively, love means that we do good to the people we love (Luke 6:35). We love them as ourselves, which means both that we love them as much as we love ourselves and that we love them in the many ways that we love ourselves. This is not a command to love ourselves, because everyone does that anyway. We lavish attention and care upon ourselves every day. To pay as much attention, and to do as much practically, for someone else as we do for ourselves is quite a radical command! Finally, we are commanded to love other people as Christ has loved us (John 13:34). Jesus loved us by leaving the glory of heaven, sharing in all the joys and pains of our life in a fallen world, and then dying a horrible death on a cross in our place to bear the penalty for our sins. That shows us an amazing degree of love, and it also shows us how love acts—placing the interests of others before our own, even when those others do not deserve it, and even at tremendous cost to ourselves. That is love, and that is what our relationships are supposed to be like as disciples of Jesus.

The Bible gives us three groups of people whom we are supposed to love. We are supposed to love one another as brothers and sisters within the community of believers (cf. John 13:34-35). We are supposed to love our neighbors, and when Jesus was asked who is our neighbor, he answered the question by giving the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The point of this parable is that your neighbor is anyone in need, even if that person is a foreigner, an unbeliever, and a traditional enemy.***

Samaritans were all three to the Jews.

Finally, just to be explicit, Jesus commanded his followers to love their enemies (Luke 6:27-36). Jesus never told us we could love our fellow believers, or neighbors, or enemies only when it was safe or convenient. He simply commanded us to love them.

In practical terms, this means that disciples of Jesus serve other people sacrificially. They forgive those who wrong them. They seek ways to do good to other people, even if those people are their enemies. They commit themselves in a special way to a group of other believers called a church, where they encourage each other, meet each other's needs, and lay down their lives for each other. They take care of their families, and the sick, and the poor, and anyone else they encounter who is in need. A disciple of Jesus is characterized by transformed relationships, as we love everyone we know or meet in the way that Jesus loved us.

Transformed Purpose

Finally, disciples of Jesus have a transformed purpose in life. They recognize that they do not belong to themselves; they have been bought with the price of the death of Jesus, so they seek to glorify God in everything (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 1 Corinthians 10:31). This includes mundane, ordinary things like eating and drinking and the way in which we do our jobs. They live for the glory of God in their own lives and in the world. That means that disciples live on mission. Compelled by the love of God and the grace they have received, they are captured by the Great Commission (2 Corinthians 5:14-21). Whatever their occupation, and whatever their geographic location, disciples of Jesus live for this purpose, to see God receive the glory due his name. For this reason, they seek to share the gospel and make disciples in every context of their lives.

This mission is both local and global. While it is true that God seems to gift some believers with unusual evangelistic ability, all believers are called on to share the gospel with those whom God brings into their lives. All believers are also part of the process of discipleship in their local churches. At the same time, all believers have a global responsibility for the Great Commission. For all of them, their passion for the global glory of God should lead them to learn about God's word and his world, to pray for the advance of the gospel, and to give generously to support that advance. They will also work in the context of their local church to send gospel messengers to those who have never heard, and they will honestly present themselves to God to be sent out if he so affirms through the church (Romans 10:13-17).

This wraps up our exploration of the things that characterize a disciple of Jesus. Biblical disciples are followers of Jesus who walk with him in such committed intimacy that they come to reflect him as they represent him to the world. They are characterized by a transformed heart, a transformed mind, transformed desires and affections, a transformed will, transformed relationships, and a transformed purpose in life. This is what it means to be an ordinary Christian. The Bible has no category for Christian believers who follow Jesus casually, or whose lives show no change. This is the kind of people we must be in order to be useful to God in the mission he has given us. This is the kind of fruit we are looking to see as we make disciples out of all the peoples and nations of the earth. The task of missions is simply the work of disciples making disciples of all nations, so these lessons have given us the description of both those who do the work and those who are its result.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

Who are we supposed to love? Who do you find it hardest to love? What can you do to show love to those people?

Question 2:

What is the purpose of life for a disciple of Jesus? How is that different from the culture in which we live?

Section

Lesson 5: The Practices of a Disciples

Tools for a Disciple's Growth

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 2:42

We have described what a disciple of Jesus is. What does a disciple of Jesus do in order to grow more and more into this description? It is true, on the one hand, that the Holy Spirit is the one who reshapes the life of a follower of Jesus (cf. John 14:15-17). However, growing as a disciple of Jesus is not a passive thing. We are commanded to work diligently to grow into the image of Jesus, and God has graciously given us tools to advance this growth (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:58). In this lesson we will examine those tools, and the practices that should mark the life of a disciple.

Tool 1: God's Word



“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Bible is the very voice of God, and it teaches us how to think, what to love, what to hate, and what to do in every area of life. Disciples of Jesus are people of the word of God. They hear it read and taught, and they read it, study it, memorize it, and meditate on it themselves. They do so carefully and reverently, trembling at his word (Isaiah 66:1-2). They study it inductively, looking at individual passages in their context. They also study it thematically, grasping the big picture of the Bible and learning the entire scope of what it teaches on the issues that are central to its message. These are issues like what the Bible as a whole teaches about God, his word, his creation, the human race, sin, our Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the church and its practices, the mission God has given us, and the destiny of history and of each human life.

Tool 2: Prayer



God also has given us the amazing privilege of prayer. Like the Bible, prayer should fill the life of a disciple (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

In prayer, undeserving rebels like us are welcomed into the very presence of the King of the universe as beloved children (Romans 8:14-17, Hebrews 10:19-22). From the models of prayer we see in Scripture, our prayers should include worship of God for who he is, confession of sin, and thanksgiving to God for what he has done, as well as

asking God for what we want him to do. Our requests should include gospel-advancing prayers as well as prayers for the things that we and our loved ones need. Our prayer life should include daily times of concentrated prayer and constant on-the-go prayers throughout the day. We should pray alone, and we should also pray with other believers in the church. Our prayers should be simple, honest, and humble (Matthew 6:5-15). Prayer may often be accompanied by fasting, both individually and corporately (Matthew 6:16-18, Acts 13:1-3). Disciples of Jesus are people of prayer.

Tool 3: Church



The church itself is another powerful and indispensable tool in our growth as disciples.

We have already seen that the church plays a significant role in our use of these first two tools, the word and prayer. Apart from the church it is not possible to mature as a disciple of Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Ephesians 4:11-16). Over and over again, the New Testament tells us things that we are to do for one another: love one another, outdo one another in showing honor, instruct one another, care for one another, comfort one another, serve one another, bear one another's burdens, bear with one another, forgive one another, sing to one another, submit to one another, encourage one another and build one another up, do good to one another, exhort one another, stir up one another to love and good works, confess our sins to one another, pray for one another (cf. John 13:35). These are things we do together as the community of the church, and they are essential to our growth as disciples of Jesus.

The worship and teaching of the church, including the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, are also vital and necessary to our growth as people who reflect and represent Jesus. Disciples are active, committed members of a local church, where they submit themselves to the oversight and care of other disciples and where they invest themselves in the lives of others.

In all of this, disciples strive after holiness (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:1). A holy life has two parts. We put off the things in our lives which are contrary to the character of Christ, and we put on the things that reflect the character of Christ (Colossians 3:1-17). The world often thinks of holiness as an entirely negative thing: holy people are uptight people with a long list of things they do not do. The biblical picture is quite different. A holy person is a person who reflects Jesus, in all of his unsettling attractiveness. We have already established that a disciple of Jesus should mirror him to the world. Therefore, being a disciple and striving after holiness are two ways of saying the same thing. Disciples of Jesus are different from the world in ways that remind everyone of Jesus himself.

Disciples also work. They work in the church, exercising the spiritual gifts that God has given them to serve the church and build up other disciples, as we have already seen. They also work in the world to advance the gospel. Evangelism and missions are not specialty skills reserved for paid professionals or the spiritual elite. Ordinary, unknown believers shared the gospel and planted churches in the New Testament, and they can still do so today. Indeed, God's strategy for reaching the world with the gospel has always been to plant healthy churches in every place where there are none, and then use the ordinary disciples in those churches to share the gospel with those around them and to plant more churches in the process. A disciple is therefore a follower of Jesus who uses the tools God has given us—his word, prayer, fasting, and the life of the church—to grow in holiness, while serving other disciples in the church and advancing the gospel in the world.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What are the tools that God has given us to grow as disciples? Which ones do you need to use more faithfully?

Question 2:

How closely does the description of a disciple in this unit fit you? How well does it describe the discipleship ministry of your church? What parts of this unit made you the most uncomfortable?

Question 3:

What will you do differently in the days and weeks ahead as a result of studying this unit?

Section

Group Discussion: Being a Disciple of Jesus

SUGGESTED OUTLINE (90 MINUTES)

1. Scripture Memory & Prayer (5 min)
2. Summary & Discussion (45 min)
3. Group Activity (20 min)
4. Prayer (10 min)
5. Before You Leave (10 min)

i SCRIPTURE MEMORY & PRAYER (5 MIN)

Ask someone in the group to recite Matthew 28:18-20 from memory.

Pray that God would use this week's discussion to move your group towards a greater understanding of what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus. Ask Him to continue to transform you and your church members into more faithful gospel witnesses.

i SUMMARY & DISCUSSION (45 MIN)

Summarize

Ask someone in your group to summarize Unit 3, using this prepared reference check:

A disciple is a follower of Jesus who spends time with him, learns and

obeys his teaching, becomes like him, and represents him in the world. A disciple is characterized by a transformed heart, a transformed mind, transformed desires and affections, a transformed will, transformed relationships, and a transformed purpose in life.

A disciple uses the tools God has given us – his word, prayer, fasting, and the life of the church – to grow as a disciple. The disciple pursues holiness while serving other believers in the church and advancing the gospel in the world.

The Bible has no category for casual Christians; to be a Christian means to be a radical disciple of Jesus. We must be growing disciples in order to carry out the mission God has given us, and the central task of our mission is to make disciples out of all the nations and peoples of the earth.

Discuss

1. What did it mean to be someone's disciple in Jesus' day? How is that different from the way education is done today?
2. How is a person born again? Why does it matter?
3. What does it mean to have a transformed mind? How do we go about getting a transformed mind?
4. What role does the Bible play in mission work?
5. How does being a disciple of Jesus affect your desires? Do see this at work in your own life?
6. What is the role of obedience in the life of a disciple? What is the motive for obedience in the life of a disciple?
7. Who are we supposed to love? Who do you find it hardest to love? What can you do to show love to those people?
8. What is the purpose of life for a disciple of Jesus? How is that different from the culture in which we live?

9. What are the tools that God has given us to grow as disciples? Which ones do you need to use more faithfully?
10. How closely does the description of a disciple in this unit fit you? How well does it describe the discipleship ministry of your church? What parts of this unit made you the most uncomfortable?
11. What will you do differently in the days and weeks ahead as a result of studying this unit?

i GROUP ACTIVITY (20 MIN)

When you share the gospel with non-believers, it is important to pay careful attention to the words you use, especially when there are language barriers. Certain biblical terms and expressions do not always make sense to someone who is less familiar with the bigger story of the Bible.

Practice sharing the Gospel together in groups of 3 or 4. Pay attention to your vocabulary and make sure confusing terms and concepts are explained adequately. Remember themes such as Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration, and try to explain them in a simple way (see [Unit 1](#) to review).

To make this more engaging, consider playing **Gospel Taboo**:

GOSPEL TABOO:

SUPPLIES NEEDED:

Buzzer– Group members can download a buzzer like this [Free Buzzer App](#) on their Mobile Device (If group members do not have a mobile device, they can make a buzzer noise with their mouths)

Timer– Group members can use a clock or the a timer on their Mobile Device

RULES:

1. Break into groups of 3-4
2. Have one person explain the gospel with others in the group. The person should explain as if he/she is speaking with a non-Christian.
3. While this person explains, others in the group will listen for the following key words:
 1. Gospel
 2. Sin
 3. Accept
 4. Trust
 5. Jesus
 6. Saved/Salvation/Born Again
 7. Repent/Repentance
 8. Forgive/Forgiveness
 9. Heaven
 - 10.Hell
 - 11.Eternal Life
4. If one of the above key words is spoken without an explanation, group members will press the buzzer to alert the person sharing that he/she needs to explain the term.
5. Ask one person in the group to keep time
6. The speaker should try to explain the gospel in 2-3 minutes without getting “buzzed” by the group.
7. Repeat until every member of the group has a chance to explain the gospel

NOTE: If there aren't enough devices to keep time, operate the buzzer, and open the list of key terms, write down the key terms on a piece of paper to look at during the gospel presentation.

FEEDBACK

After everyone in the group has had a chance to share, offer helpful feedback to one another on how clear and complete each other's gospel presentation was (strengths/growth areas).

Discuss whether your group tended to leave out any of the following important aspects of a gospel presentation:

1. God
2. Man
3. Christ
4. Response
5. Life Change

i PRAYER (10 MIN)

Read Matthew 28:18-20 out loud together.

Spend time praying for the following:

1. Pray for the mentality of "every member a disciple-maker" to pervade your local church. Pray that every brother or sister in your church would see his or her life as a critical part of the accomplishment of the Great Commission regardless of where they live.
2. Pray for a movement of disciple-makers in your church that multiplies the gospel from neighborhoods and workplaces in your city to neighborhoods and workplaces among the nations.
3. Pray that a growing number of Christians in your church would engage in the hard labor of discipleship, teaching younger believers to obey all the commands of Christ.
4. Pray that the promise of Christ's ongoing presence would make you bold in your disciple-making "...remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" – **Matt 28:20b**

i BEFORE YOU LEAVE... (10 MIN)

SAVE THE DATE:

Before you leave tonight, look at the calendar and determine a date your group can host (or join) a community block party or group hang-out (ideally in the week or two following the completion of *Explore Missions*).

Whether it falls on a weekend or week night, choose a date/time that's conducive to inviting/interacting with non-believing neighbors and/or internationals in your area. The purpose of this event is to intentionally form relationships with others in your community as a first step in being a faithful gospel witness.

The most important thing now is that you set a date. At your next gathering, you can discuss the details and determine whether it's appropriate to make flyers, go door-to-door, invite people you know, etc.

HOMEWORK:

Commit to learning three new consecutive Creation-to-Christ (C2C) stories this week. You will practice sharing these stories (and the three you learned last week) at your next group gathering.

Section

What do Missionaries Do?



David Platt explains that there are multiple pathways for all of us to be involved in the spread of the gospel.

Section

Introduction: Basic Missionary Tasks

Romans 15:20-21

And thus I make it my ambition **to preach the gospel**, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him **will see**, and those who have never heard **will understand.**"

What do missionaries do? What are the basic tasks of missions? This unit will seek to answer those questions.

Because missionaries are disciples of Jesus, and because many of the places where missionaries work are also places with many serious human needs, missionaries often find themselves engaging in works of mercy: healing the sick, feeding the hungry, developing educational programs, helping the poor to better their lives, and a host of similar things. All of these are good things that disciples should do, but by themselves they are not Christian missions.

As we have already seen, the heart of Christian missions is Jesus's command to make disciples of all nations and peoples. What does this practically involve?

Jesus' one command to make disciples of all nations can be broken down into six tasks. First, we must engage the unreached with the gospel, finding ways to get to them, live among them and get to know them. Second, we must share the gospel in language they can understand and challenge them to repent and believe. Third, we must disciple new believers so that they grow to reflect and represent Christ. Fourth, we must plant healthy churches that continue the work of evangelizing their area and that reproduce and multiply. Fifth, we must train leaders for those churches, and we must train people who can keep training leaders whether we are there or not. Sixth, we must work ourselves out of a job and partner with these new churches to move on to other places and people groups that need the gospel.

The emphasis of our work in any given place is connected to the state of the church in that place. In brand new fields, where there is no church, engagement and evangelism will be the focus. In places where there are believers but few churches, the focus of the work will be on discipleship and church planting. In places where churches are beginning to multiply, leadership training and theological education will be the emphasis. This usually means that different kinds of workers with different skill sets are needed in different places.

The task is complete when there are healthy, multiplying churches with trained leaders that can evangelize their own people without the help of foreigners. Furthermore, the task is not done until those churches have the means of training new leaders in sound, biblical teaching, and until those churches are actively sending missionaries to other nations and peoples themselves. These new churches then join the task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, until there are no peoples or places left.

The task of the Great Commission belongs to every believer and every church. That means that every Christian needs to understand the missionary task, whether you are fulfilling it by preaching the gospel at the ends of the earth or fulfilling it by praying, sending, giving, and witnessing from the church where you grew up. Sending churches need wisdom in knowing how to raise up cross-cultural missionaries, how to pray

effectively for those missionaries, what to support with their resources, and how to partner effectively with work on the mission field. The lessons in this unit are designed to help you understand the missionary task so that you can support it and engage in it wisely, whether as a sender or as a goer.

Section

Lesson 1: Engaging Those Who Have Never Heard the Gospel

But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Romans 10:14-15

Getting Started

You understand that the theme of God's heart for the nations is woven right through the central core of the Bible. You accept the biblical teaching that no one can be saved from eternal condemnation without hearing and believing the gospel, and you have embraced the responsibility for taking the good news to those who have never heard. You are growing as a disciple of Jesus, and you have a clear picture from Scripture of what it means to make disciples among the nations and peoples of the earth. You want to engage in cross-cultural missions.

How do you start?

Understanding Unreached Peoples and Places

The first thing you need to do is to understand who it is you are trying to reach. In a general sense, we are trying to get the gospel to everyone who hasn't heard it. More specifically, however, the Bible talks a lot about people groups.

The word “nations” in the biblical languages refers to people groups more than it does to countries with borders, a flag, and a government. The New Testament Greek word for “peoples” or “nations” is *ethne*, and we get our word “ethnic” from it. Simply put, a people group is a group of people who think of themselves as “us” as opposed to “them.” They are related by ethnicity, history, religion, language, geography, and/or anything else that draws a significant boundary for them in their relationships. Just to give an example, India is one country in political terms, but the people of India speak hundreds of different languages and are divided into a bewildering variety of ethnic groups, religions, and castes. India is one country, but it is hundreds of people groups, in biblical terms.

In addition to people groups, the Bible also shows us examples of missions to unreached places. In the Book of Acts, Paul and his companions traveled from city to city to plant churches in places where there were none.

For the purpose of missions, the best way to determine our strategy is to ask a simple question: what is the largest group of people within whom the gospel can spread freely without encountering a significant boundary? That defines the people group or place within which we want to see healthy, reproducing churches. Those churches then become the best vehicle for getting the gospel to everyone within that people group or place who still haven’t heard it.

People Group Research

Before actually going to unreached peoples or places, cross-cultural gospel workers first need to learn all they can about them. The following questions are important:

- Where do these people live?
- What language(s) do they speak?
- What is their history?
- What is their culture like?
- What is their official religion, and what do they actually believe (which is often somewhat different)?

- What is their attitude, if any, toward Christianity?
- Does their government allow open missionary work among them, or will you need to access them by another route?
- What are their felt needs?
- What possibilities are there for ministry among them?

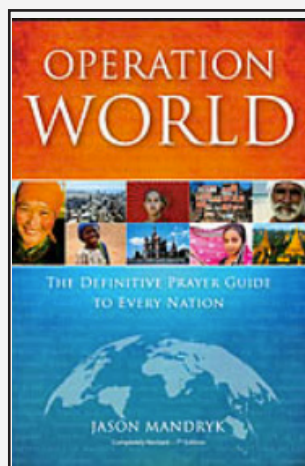
This kind of research is invaluable for fruitful missionary work, and doing it early will prevent a lot of slips and falls down the road.

There are a number of helpful resources you can consult to do this research. The [IMB Global Research page](#) is a good place to start! [Operation World](#) by Jason Mandryk is also helpful. The internet is full of people group research resources—use them carefully, as the quality of their information varies widely.

The task of learning about a people or place never ends. Once you are among them, you need to constantly evaluate what you have researched against the reality that you find.

i Operation World

Written By Jason Mandryk [Purchase](#)



[Purchase](#)

“Operation World (OW) is widely regarded as the definitive volume of prayer information about the world. First published in 1964 and now in its seventh edition, OW is the recipient of the ECPA Gold Medallion Award for Excellence in Evangelical Christian Literature and was listed in Christianity Today’s Top 50 Books That Have Shaped Evangelicals.”

Section

Lesson 1: Engaging Strategically

Through Prayer

Before even thinking about engaging a people group or place with the gospel, missionaries need a solid base of prayer support. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). Your own prayer life needs to be vibrant and focused on the people you are trying to reach, and you need a solid group of other disciples who will pray for you faithfully. Churches that send missionaries need to grasp the solemn, serious responsibility of praying for them. Prayer is central and not peripheral to any fruitful missions strategy.

Through Creative Access

Missionaries need a way to gain access to their people group. For most of the modern era, that simply meant applying for a missionary visa from the government of the country where you wanted to live. Currently, however, most of the people groups that need the gospel most live in countries that do not give missionary visas and that do not allow overt missionary activity.

If you want to live among your people, you have to find a legal way to be there that involves something other than professional Christian ministry. It needs to be something that the country wants and welcomes. In some places, human needs work, like hunger relief, education, and medical aid, is welcomed. In other places, governments have become suspicious of the motives of human needs workers (whom they often suspect of being foreign spies), and this sort of non-profit work is not allowed. In cases like this (which are more and more common), you need a regular

profession to live in the country, and you need to do legitimate work in that profession once you are there.

In many ways, this is good news to the ordinary believer who wants to take the gospel to those who have never heard. The kinds of people needed today are business professionals, medical workers, sports coaches, engineers, English teachers, university professors, lawyers, agriculturalists, or practically any other type of professional who is a growing disciple and who knows how to share the gospel with others. Students and retirees also have opportunities for significant gospel advance because of their place in life.

All of these people need to add solid theological training to their professional education, and there is still a major role for people with advanced theological degrees, but most of the unreached people groups left in the world will be reached by Christian disciples who have solid, legitimate professional skills and experience as well as broad and deep biblical knowledge.

“...most of the unreached people groups left in the world will be reached by Christian disciples who have **solid, legitimate professional skills and experience** as well as broad and deep biblical knowledge.”

Because of this reality, it is wise for anyone who wants to engage unreached peoples and places with the gospel to train in a secular profession. For those who are still in high school or college, pursuing a marketable degree can be invaluable. For people who already have college or graduate degrees in theology, training in a skill like Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) can greatly enhance your ability to go where missionaries per se aren't allow to live.

Experience in a secular profession can also be very helpful. This does not mean that theological education is unnecessary or unhelpful. Just the opposite. Anyone who shares the gospel, discipled believers, plants multiplying churches and trains church leaders cross-culturally needs solid biblical and theological training to do the job

faithfully. It simply means that legitimate dual-competence is now usually necessary—competence in handling the word of God, and competence in the profession that will give you access to the people you are trying to reach.

All of this goes together to form an access strategy for the work. From your research, you have learned what is possible to access your people group. You have discovered the attitude of the government and of society in general toward Christian mission work. You have learned enough about the local economy to know what the real possibilities are for living and working among these people.

You now need to honestly assess yourself. What can you do with integrity that fits one of the possibilities for access that you have discovered? It has to be something you really know how to do, and it has to fit who you are, or it will not work for long. Do you need further training or experience? With all this in mind, you can craft an access strategy that will allow you to engage your people group with the gospel.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

How well do you know the rest of the world? Can you quickly locate other countries on a map? How much do you know about other countries? What can you do to improve your knowledge of the world that God has called us to reach with the gospel?

Question 2:

What skills and experience exist in your church that could be used to take the gospel to places where traditional missionary work is forbidden? What skills and experience do you have?

Section

Lesson 2: Sharing the Gospel

The Primary Missionary Task

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

2 Timothy 4:5

Missionaries share the gospel. This is true whether they are living in their new country on missionary visas, or they are living there as students, professionals or retirees. If they are not sharing the gospel, what they are doing is not missions no matter how useful their work might be.

However, we have already established that disciples of Jesus are people who share the gospel, wherever they are and whatever their official job. If someone calls themselves a disciple of Jesus but never tells anyone else about Jesus, they are not being faithful to their calling as his disciple. As for missionaries, this task of evangelism is non-negotiable. The reason we go is to tell others who have never heard.

Key Components of Sharing the Gospel

Learning the Heart Language

In order to share the gospel, you must be able to speak with the people you are trying to reach. In most places, that means that you need to learn their language. While it is true that there are English speakers all over the world, the world will not be evangelized in English. In the vast majority of unreached people groups, those who speak English are a small minority, and even those who do often only know

those parts of English that relate to their work. When they deal with heart issues, they need to function in their heart language. Discipling people also requires the ability to understand complex issues that lie close to the heart, and this requires mastery of their heart language as well.

Language learning is hard work, but it is not as hard as many people think. For most people, their only experience trying to learn another language came in high school Spanish or French class, and they are painfully aware that they never learned to speak it very well. Learning a language that surrounds you every day is a completely different experience, and generally is much more effective. Cross-cultural gospel workers usually concentrate on language learning as much as they can when they first arrive on the field, because the sooner and better they learn to speak with the people around them the more effective they will be.

Translating the Bible

It also helps tremendously to have the Bible in the language of the people you are trying to reach. There are still thousands of languages in the world that do not yet have a translation of the word of God. If the people you are trying to reach speak one of these languages, Bible translation will be an early priority in your work.

Hand in hand with the Bible, evangelistic tools like the Jesus film, which uses the Gospel of Luke as its script, are very useful, and this may help you to decide the order in which to translate the books of the Bible. We believe that the word of God has power to break through the barriers that people raise against the gospel (Hebrews 4:12), and the word of God is the message we want to share when we proclaim the gospel and disciple believers. Without it, we have nothing worth saying.

Proclaiming the Gospel

The message of the gospel itself never changes. God is a holy God who hates sin and must condemn it. We are sinners, rebels against God who deserve condemnation and eternal punishment. God loved undeserving sinners like us and became a man in the person of Jesus Christ in order to be our substitute, living the life we should have lived

and then dying the death we deserved to die in our place. He rose again from the dead, victorious forever over sin and death, and he now freely offers forgiveness of sins and eternal life with him to anyone who will repent of their sins and trust in him.

This is as true in Indonesia as in Indiana and in Afghanistan as in Alabama. We can never tamper with the message. Furthermore, we believe that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to change people's hearts, convict them of sin and lead them to repentance, so we don't need to be clever or eloquent for our evangelism to be effective. We do, however, need to make sure that we are communicating clearly. We need to make sure that there is nothing in our own lives that distracts people from hearing the message we are trying to share.

Adapting to Culture

Therefore, as much as we can without compromising Scripture, we will adapt our own lives to the culture of the people we are trying to reach. Like the Apostle Paul, we will voluntarily give up freedoms that would put a stumbling block in the way of people hearing and understanding the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:1-23).

So, as much as is biblically possible, we will dress in ways that are viewed as modest in their culture, and eat in ways that look normal to them, and decorate our homes in ways that make them comfortable to visit us. We will take into account what they understand or don't understand when we say certain things, so we will carefully build up their understanding of the biblical background behind the gospel as we share it. We will clearly but graciously address those areas where their religious background contradicts the biblical message. We will adapt our style of teaching to their style of learning. Our goal is to communicate clearly, and if there is any offense in our message, we want it to be the offense of the cross, not the offense of our foreignness.

In adapting ourselves and our message to a new cultural context (a process known as contextualization), there are certain things that we will not do. We will not adopt cultural practices or attitudes that are contrary to Scripture, like sexual immorality or the dehumanizing of women. We will not pretend to convert to the majority religion of the people we are trying to reach, nor will we say or imply that a person can be a

faithful follower of Jesus while remaining within another religion.

We will not downplay or remove elements of the biblical gospel that are offensive to the majority religion (like calling Jesus the Son of God in a Muslim context). Our goal is to make the gospel clear, not to make it comfortable.

Section

Lesson 2: Principles of Contextualization

Sharing Creatively

Across the world, gospel workers have developed helpful tools for sharing the gospel effectively.

One of the most widely used of these tools is Chronological Bible Storying. As we saw when we explored the biblical foundations for missions, the gospel is set in the context of the historical narrative of the Bible. Through his dealings with his people in history, God showed who he is, who we are, what the problem with the world is, what he expects of people, and what he is doing about it. This background makes sense of the gospel. Furthermore, a majority of the population of the world communicates and learns through stories, so telling the stories of the Bible makes sense of the gospel in a manner that makes sense to most people.

This means that patience and perseverance may be needed in sharing the good news! The people we are trying to reach did not grow up in a culture that has been shaped in any way by the Bible. The gospel presentations we give to people in our own culture presuppose that people understand who God is, and what sin is, and what happens after you die. (Our own culture has changed so much over the last few decades that these presuppositions are often no longer true in North America. This may be why our evangelism has become less effective in our own environment). People who grew up in completely non-biblical cultures don't understand any of these things, so they need to learn the biblical foundations laid in the Old Testament for the New Testament to make sense to them.

The Number One Task

The point in all of this is to share the good news of Jesus to everyone possible. We use whatever avenues we can, like books, pamphlets, audio and video pieces, and internet sites. We make sure that we don't communicate in ways that cause unintended barriers to understanding.

Still, the gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, so gospel sharing is the number one task of every missionary.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

Do you feel competent to share the gospel with someone? If not, what can you do to be trained in this area? Is there someone you know with whom you could share the gospel this week? We urge you to do so!

Section

Lesson 3: Discipling Believers

Presenting Everyone Mature in Christ

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

Luke 6:40

him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Colossians 1:28

The goal of mission work is not to add up converts but to multiply disciples. Like Paul, we want to present everyone mature in Christ, which means that they will clearly (if still imperfectly) reflect and represent Jesus. We want to leave behind mature disciples who themselves are making mature disciples.

In Unit 3, we looked carefully at the biblical picture of what a disciple is. In this lesson, we will explore how you make disciples in a cross-cultural setting. Jesus himself laid out the program for us in the Great Commission when he told us to teach new disciples to obey everything he commanded. There are two parts to this. The first is knowledge, and the second is obedience.

Imparting Knowledge

Teaching Scripture

It is hard to obey what you do not know, so discipleship involves learning the content

of the word of God. There are no shortcuts to teaching and studying the Bible. The disciple of Jesus who wants to make disciples for Jesus needs to know the Bible well, both in its big picture and in its individual parts. He or she must understand what the entire Bible says about the important themes of the Bible. He or she must be able to lead a new disciple into that same level of knowledge of Scripture.

Disciple-makers should always point to Scripture, and not to themselves, as the authority that answers whatever questions the new disciple may have. At the same time, disciple-makers should not be afraid to teach and speak with authority when they are communicating the truth of God's word, making it clear that they are reflecting Scripture and not their own opinions.

Reshaping Worldview

In teaching the content of Scripture to new disciples, it is very important that we address worldview issues. A person's worldview is the lens through which he or she understands everything, and it shapes behavior as well as thinking. If we teach new disciples a set of beliefs and behaviors, but do not reshape their worldview, we are condemning them to a life of syncretism, which is a mixture of biblical religion with deeper elements that are fundamentally incompatible with biblical truth.

In much of the world, what passes for Christianity is actually a mix of Christian doctrines and practices with a worldview steeped in animism and tribalism. For that matter, much of what passes for Christianity in North America is actually a mix of Christian doctrines and practices with materialism and secularism.

People live the way they think, and Christian discipleship has to challenge the deep structures of every new believer's worldview if it is to produce effective disciples for Jesus.

Teaching Obedience

Knowledge is vitally important, and we should never downplay it. At the same time, it is not enough. Jesus did not simply tell us to teach new disciples everything he had

commanded. He told us to teach them to obey everything he had commanded.

Every Christian should be a good theologian, but it is possible to be the most knowledgeable theologian in the world and not be a disciple of Jesus. As we have already seen, a disciple not only has a transformed mind, but also transformed desires and affections, and a transformed will. Following Jesus shapes what we know, who we are and what we do, all at the same time.

Our desire is to be like Jesus, and that is what we desire for everyone we train. That means that the discipleship process involves more than just information-sharing. It also involves training in righteousness. Teaching always leads to application. The teaching process goes on from instruction to personal examination, transformation, and accountability.

Personal Examination

This is why Paul said that he warned everyone while he taught everyone. The process of discipleship is a highly personal, intrusive, disruptive matter. When you disciple someone, you have to earn their trust, get in their lives, and sometimes get in their faces.

Transformation

Therefore, discipleship addresses character issues. The goal is to be like Jesus. Paul's discussion of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 is a great description of the transformation that needs to happen in every disciple.

In North American evangelical culture, certain sins are more tolerated than others, so that we will immediately respond to any hint of sexual sin, but completely ignore pride or envy or outbursts of anger. The Bible lumps them all together as equally incompatible with being a disciple. Just as people tend to struggle with different besetting sins, cultures do as well. Different cultures tolerate some sins but condemn others, and we need to know what those are to disciple people well.

The goal is not some form of legalistic drudgery, but rather clearing the way for the growth of the fruit of the spirit. If a new disciple seems to be free from lust, but is also free from joy or kindness, the goals of discipleship have not yet been met!

Discipleship also speaks into behavior and action. What we do matters. This is true of the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, fasting, and church involvement. We need to teach new disciples how to do these things. It is also true of service to others in the church and active advancement of the gospel in the world. We need to work with new disciples to discover their spiritual gifts and use them in the body of Christ.

We also need to mentor new disciples in sharing the gospel and discipling new believers. You do not need to be an old, mature disciple before you can disciple someone else. You just need to be one step ahead.

Accountability

In all of this, accountability is key. Because discipleship is so much more than knowing information, disciples must be held accountable for being like Jesus and for doing the work of the gospel.

This is why, ultimately, discipleship is the work of the local church. The cross-cultural worker plays a crucial role in discipling new believers, but without the church, the process will be incomplete. For this reason, we cannot talk about discipling believers without turning immediately to the importance of planting churches.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

Have you been disciplined in all the areas we discuss in this course? If not, how can you address those issues in the fellowship of your church?

Question 2:

Are you discipling a younger believer within your church? Have you ever? Is there someone you could begin mentoring now?

Section

Lesson 4: Planting and Multiplying Churches

The Goal of Biblical Missions

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Biblical missionary work involves church planting. This follows from the nature of the task. Jesus told us to make disciples. We have already seen that fully biblical discipleship only happens in the context of a local church. Therefore, in places where the gospel is just arriving for the first time, new disciples will need new churches.

This is not purely a pragmatic thing, however. The verses quoted above teach us that one of the first things that the Holy Spirit does in the life of a new believer is to baptize them into the body of Christ, which is the church. The consistent practice of the apostles was to gather new believers into churches. As you read through the Book of Acts, it seems to be automatic—new believers in a new location meant new churches. It was a non-negotiable part of their strategy.

What Is a Church?

If we think of church in the way we usually experience it in North America, this can seem like an intimidating task. However, we need to remember what a church is and what it is not.

A church is not a building. Churches did not have buildings in the New Testament, nor for a couple of centuries afterward. New Testament churches usually met in people's homes, and churches can still do that today. In fact, in areas where Christians are persecuted, this is often the only option for them—just as it was in the first century.

Churches are not complicated sets of programs requiring multiple paid staff members. A church is a group of baptized believers who have joined together by covenant to be the body of Christ to one another. Their leadership structure is simple—pastors/elders/overseers (the three terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament) who teach and keep watch over the congregation, and deacons who are appointed as needed to meet practical needs in the church. While it is good for a pastor/elder/overseer who devotes himself to teaching to be financially supported by the church, it is not required, and many churches have bi-vocational pastors.

The church meets together to worship God, study his word, pray, exercise their spiritual gifts to build each other up, and hold each other accountable. They celebrate baptism and the Lord's Supper together, and they meet each other's needs as much as they are able. The church scatters to represent Christ and advance the gospel in the world.

It really is that simple. None of it requires money or property, and none of it requires complicated infrastructure.

Once you realize that buildings, budgets, paid staff, and highly organized programs are optional, church planting becomes a much more doable task.

That doesn't mean it is easy. In areas where believers are persecuted, new disciples are often reluctant to meet together with others whom they do not know, because they fear that those others might be false believers who could turn them in to the police.

If you do not regard church as absolutely necessary, you will be constantly tempted to resort to one-on-one discipleship alone. However, there is no category in the New Testament for a follower of Jesus who is not an active member of a church. That means that cross-cultural workers themselves need to be involved in church where they live and work, and that church planting needs to be an automatic part of their efforts to advance the gospel.

Section

Lesson 4: What Should the Church Look Like?

The Structure of the Church

We have already stated that the church does not need a building, so in that sense, it doesn't need to "look" like anything. If a new church does decide to get a building, it should do so with its own resources (foreign money has consistently proven to be poison in the life of missionary churches), and the building should look local and not foreign.

For more on this issue, see *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's, or Ours?*, by Roland Allen. See also *When Helping Hurts*, by Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett.

The leadership should also be local, although the cross-cultural worker may need to do a lot of coaching in the early weeks and months of the life of the church. The worship should contain the elements that are taught by Scripture, and none other: singing, reading Scripture, prayer, confession, giving, thanksgiving, teaching from Scripture, testimony, mutual encouragement and admonition, and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The style of the music should be local, and new believers who are musically gifted should be encouraged to produce Christian worship music in their own language and musical style. A good place to start is usually setting Scripture to music.

The seating patterns and general decoration of the place where they meet should feel natural to local people. If people in that culture usually sit on the floor, the church should sit on the floor, and if unrelated men and women usually do not sit together, they should not sit together in church.

There are two goals in designing and organizing the life of the church.

1. The church must be obedient to Scripture.
2. The church should be as much at home in the local culture as it can be without violating goal number one.

Churches in the New Testament were very different culturally from churches in modern North America. What we do is adapted (contextualized) for our cultural setting. Churches in other parts of the world do not need to look like us. They simply need to be faithful to the Bible.

The Mission of the Church

These churches also need to multiply. God never intended for any church to be a gospel dead end street. Churches should grow from the natural evangelism done by the ordinary disciples in the congregation.

By and large, fruitful evangelism in most places today will not happen from a “come and see” approach, where unbelievers are brought into the church to hear the gospel from the professionals up front. Fruitful evangelism happens from a “go and tell” model, where everyone in the church regards themselves as commissioned and sent to share the gospel in their neighborhoods, at work, and anywhere else that life takes them. This should lead the church to be in a constant mode of launching new churches that can take the gospel further than the original congregation could ever go.

Again, if church planting does not require buildings, money or paid staff, a church does not need to be wealthy to engage in ongoing church planting. No church is healthier than a church that is always in the process of birthing new churches.

Church planting is an essential part of biblical mission work. These churches need to be healthy and biblically sound, but they do not need to look like churches in North America. As much as possible, they should be financed and led locally, and they should

engage in evangelism and church planting themselves from the very start of their existence.

They should also embrace a vision for the nations from the very beginning. They should be trained and encouraged to take their place with the rest of the global church in spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth, until there is no place left where Jesus is not known.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

When was your church planted? In the years since, has your church planted any other churches?

Section

Lesson 5: Training Leaders

The Final Stage of Missionary Work

And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

2 Timothy 2:2

Churches need leaders. God has gifted some men in the church to be pastors and teachers. Every believer has a role to play in the life of the church, and the Holy Spirit has given every believer spiritual gifts that are crucial to the health of the church, but not every believer is gifted and called to be a leader and a teacher. Those who are, however, need to be trained to do the job faithfully. For this reason, biblical missionary work must include leadership training and theological education.

Leadership Training

What does this training look like? A large part of it is simply the same sort of discipleship that every believer needs. If you look at the qualifications for leadership described in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, you immediately notice that most of them have to do with character and family life. None of these are extraordinary. They are exactly what would be expected of any mature believer, because an overseer/elder is supposed to be an example to other believers of what every disciple should be (1 Timothy 4:12).

Leadership training is simply an extension of basic discipleship. Without that foundation of discipleship speaking into the leader's character, affections and behavior, leadership training can be a dangerous thing, filling his mind with information but puffing up his ego in the process. Since discipleship happens in the local church, there

are hugely important parts of the leadership training process that can only happen in the church.

Theological Education

However, there is one element in the description of an elder/pastor/overseer that is unique to him, and that is the ability to teach (1 Timothy 3:2).

Paul spells out what this means in detail in his letter to Titus: “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). This means that he must have been taught the trustworthy word, and he must be convinced that it is true. He cannot be a person with shaky convictions. He needs to know sound doctrine and be able to explain and apply it to others. He also needs to be able to refute false teaching.

This means that an elder/pastor/overseer needs to have solid biblical and theological training in order to fulfill his responsibility to God and to his congregation.

How will he receive this training?

The Residential Seminary Model

In North America, the usual approach is for an aspiring pastor or missionary to leave home and move to another city to attend a seminary. In the seminary, the ministry candidate receives a high level of academic education in an academic community. These students are encouraged to join local churches while they are in seminary, but because there are usually a lot of seminary students compared to the number of local churches in the area, they have to compete with other such students for ministry experience in their new church.

The seminary is largely unequipped to address character issues, so it must trust the churches to nurture the ministry candidates in this area. After a period of a few years,

the candidate graduates from seminary, and then launches into ministry, usually in yet another church or ministry.

These seminaries are a wonderful gift to the churches whom they serve, and the churches are blessed to have them. There are some places overseas where this model can be followed. In many places, however, it cannot. There are certain drawbacks to the residential seminary model that make it hard to utilize in many settings:

Drawbacks to the Residential Seminary Model

1. It is highly visible. In an area where Christians are persecuted, this can be a big problem.
2. It is expensive. Many pioneer areas for the gospel are also poor areas, and qualified ministry candidates cannot afford to uproot themselves, move to the seminary, and then both pay tuition and support themselves and their families.
3. In order to be accredited, seminaries require a level of formal education that many promising leaders from poor areas have never had.
4. As institutions, seminaries need to be in places where Christians are allowed to worship and teach freely, and in places with good infrastructure. When ministry candidates leave poor and/or dangerous places and go to the safe, prosperous places where the seminary is located, experience has shown that they seldom return. The same thing is true when ministry candidates come to North America for theological training. The unintended consequence of bringing such leaders to seminary is to take them permanently away from the churches that need them.

An Alternative Model

The solution, in many parts of the world, is to take the theological training to the churches.

Academic accreditation is not necessary. Buildings are not necessary. The training

can happen anywhere, so it does not need to attract unfriendly attention. Those who receive the training can remain in their communities and continue their jobs, which relieves the financial burden of residential training. The training can be tailored to the educational level of those who receive it. The people being trained do not leave home, so they are not tempted to remain in a safe, comfortable place far away. Instead, theological education happens in the context of church life and church ministry. People are trained in ministry, not simply for ministry.

In this way, more people can be trained more effectively for significantly less money than utilizing a residential seminary alone. A theological teacher comes to a location periodically and pours himself into a small group of students for a few days. He then gives them assignments and moves on to do the same for another small group of students in another location. He does this in a circuit, returning to each place every few months to continue the training. In the process, he can make sure that the new leaders receive a thorough education in the Bible and theology that is rooted in the life of the church.

The usual term for this approach is “Theological Education by Extension,” or TEE.

There is still a place for residential seminaries on the mission field. These institutions are a great asset to the life of the church, as long as they remain sound in their teaching. Churches in every country and culture need theologians and scholars who can speak to the issues that the churches are facing. They also need to train and send out the theological educators who will train the ordinary leaders in the churches.

The Missionary’s Role

What role does the foreign cross-cultural worker play in all of this? In the beginning, when the gospel first penetrates an unreached people group or place, foreign workers will need to do all of the training. In addition, there are places around the world where the church was planted decades ago, but where false teaching (like the so-called “prosperity gospel”) has taken hold. Many of these places still do not have adequate theological training for their church leaders.

Foreign cross-cultural workers are needed to train leaders in these places. At the same time, they should be laboring to work themselves out of a job. They should be training others who can train the theological trainers without the need for outside help. Until that day, the future health of the churches, and the continued spread of the gospel, is dependent on cross-cultural workers providing sound theological training to church leaders.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

Have these lessons challenged your understanding of the church? If so, in what ways?

Question 2:

How could your church train leaders in all the areas described in these lessons?

Question 3:

Are there people in your church who could train leaders on the mission field? What can you do to encourage them in this direction?

Section

Group Discussion: What do Missionaries do?

SUGGESTED OUTLINE (90 MINUTES)

1. Scripture Memory & Prayer (5 min)
2. Group Activity (20 min)
3. Summary & Discussion (45 min)
4. Prayer (10 min)
5. Before You Leave (10 min)

i SCRIPTURE MEMORY & PRAYER (5 MIN)

Ask someone in the group to recite *Romans 15:20-21* from memory. Then, read and recite it together as a group.

Pray that God would use this week's discussion to move your group towards a more holistic understanding of missionary work. Pray that your church would mature in the way they pray for and support those who answer God's call to live and work overseas to share the gospel and advance the church.

i GROUP ACTIVITY (20 MIN)

In small groups of 2-3 people, share the Creation to Christ (C2C) stories you've been memorizing. Take a few minutes to share, and then welcome

feedback from your small group. Try your best to share without looking at the story examples from previous units, or notes.

After each person has shared:

1. Give constructive feedback to one another on each person's presentation.
2. Discuss how using these stories might be helpful in sharing the big story of the Bible with someone who is not familiar with Christianity.

i SUMMARY & DISCUSSION (45 MIN)

Summarize

Ask someone in your group to state the central command of the Great Commission. Then, ask someone (or multiple people) in your group to summarize the five basic missions tasks.

The central command of the Great Commission is to make disciples of all nations and peoples on earth. We fulfill that command by doing five basic missions tasks:

1. **Engaging:** We engage unreached peoples and places with the gospel. We define our target, do research on it, and discover viable ways we can gain access to it. We pray, and we get others to pray for us. After examining ourselves, we craft an access strategy that matches our experience and abilities with the opportunities available. We never go alone.
2. **Sharing the Gospel:** We share the gospel with our people group. In order to do so, we learn the heart language of the people we are trying to reach. If the Bible has not yet been translated into that language, we make it a priority to get translation work going. We adapt our lifestyle to the culture of our people group as much as we can without disobeying Scripture.

We explore and utilize tools for evangelism that will help our people understand the gospel clearly. We share the gospel with as many people as possible, and we pray for the Holy Spirit to make it effective in their lives.

3. **Discipling Believers:** We disciple new believers. We teach them the content of the Bible. We apply the Bible to their worldview, seeking to reshape their understanding of everything in conformity with God's perspective. We challenge them in their desires, affections and character, urging them and training them to become like Jesus in every area of life. We also challenge them in their behavior, training them in the spiritual disciplines, in service to the church, and in evangelism in the world. We do all of this in the context of the local church.
4. **Planting and Multiplying Churches:** We plant multiplying churches. We recognize that a church does not require a building, a budget, a set of programs, or a paid staff. We embrace the biblical description of a healthy church, and we overcome any resistance to get to church. We encourage churches to be as much at home in their local cultural setting as they can be within the guidelines of Scripture. We train and encourage churches to multiply.
5. **Training Leaders:** We train leaders for those churches. Our leadership training, like our discipleship, addresses the head, the heart and the hands. We value rigorous biblical and theological training, we value maturity in character, and we value skills development. In most cases, we take the training to those who need it rather than bringing them to us. Our goal is to work ourselves out of a job, as the churches among our people group develop the means of training leaders themselves.

Discuss

1. How well do you know the rest of the world? Can you quickly locate other countries on a map? How much do you know about other countries? What

can you do to improve your knowledge of the world that God has called us to reach with the gospel?

2. What skills and experience exist in your church that could be used to take the gospel to places where traditional missionary work is forbidden? What skills and experience do you have?
3. Do you feel competent to share the gospel with someone? If not, what can you do to be trained in this area? Is there someone you know with whom you could share the gospel this week? We urge you to do so!
4. Have you been disciplined in all the areas we discuss in this course? If not, how can you address those issues in the fellowship of your church?
5. Are you discipling a younger believer within your church? Have you ever? Is there someone you could begin mentoring now?
6. Have these lessons challenged your understanding of the church? If so, in what ways?
7. When was your church planted? In the years since, has your church planted any other churches?
8. How could your church train leaders in all the areas described in these lessons?
9. Are there people in your church who could train leaders on the mission field? What can you do to encourage them in this direction?

PRAYER (10 MIN)

Sometimes, you may find it difficult to think of new ways to pray for missionaries. It's easy to fall into repetitive patterns of praying for general "blessing" rather than lifting up specific needs. Below is a brief list of ways you can specifically lift up cross-cultural workers.

You can pray for their:

Spiritual Health

- Love for God
- Consistency in God's Word and in prayer

- Spiritual growth
- Battle against sin

Physical and Emotional Health

- Physical needs
- Protection from disease
- Safety in difficult and dangerous places
- Protection from depression, anxiety, and loneliness

Family Health

- Relationship with spouse (if applicable)
- Relationship with children (if applicable)
- Relationship with other immediate family
- Relationship with church family (sending church and local church)

Team Health

- Communication with teammates
- Submission to one another and to leadership on the field
- Relationships with locals, other missionary teams and partners/pastors/evangelists

Ministry

- Boldness to proclaim the gospel
- Open ears and soft hearts to receive the gospel
- Sound teaching and doctrine
- Sustainable presence in the area where they're working

Adjustment to Culture

- Cultural Acquisition (understanding their people group and context)
- Language Study (and continued growth in ability to communicate)
- Growth in learning ways to communicate the gospel more effectively in their culture

People Group and Context

- Specific prayer needs among their people group
- Government and political issues
- Favor among the local people

Pray

Read Matthew 9:35-38 out loud together, and spend some time praying for the following:

- Pray specifically for missionaries you know, especially those who have been sent out from your local church to serve Christ around the world.
- Pray that God would raise up and send out more/many missionaries from your local church to go to the world's unreached peoples.

i BEFORE YOU LEAVE...(10 MIN)

Continue to plan and discuss your group hangout/party that you began to plan in the previous week's unit.

Remember

The purpose of this event is to intentionally form relationships with others in your community as a first step in being a faithful gospel witness. This can be a very low-budget (or even free) event. Be creative, and prayerful, as you plan.

Delegate different responsibilities for this event as appropriate. Things to consider:

- Hosting/Venue (You can create your own event and host at a group member's house or another venue, or you can join a pre-existing event or activity. Visit your city's chamber of commerce website, or visit www.meetup.com and find local hangouts or activities your group can attend together.)
- Preparing food/snacks, activities/games

Homework:

Brainstorm ways you and your group might care for the missionaries you prayed for today:

- Continue praying
- Ask to receive their newsletter/updates (and reply often)
- Send emails or letters (be mindful of security issues)
- Send care package(s)
- Send Birthday cards for kids
- Call them as a group (using Skype, FaceTime, etc.)
- Provide financial assistance for special projects
- Other (Get Creative)

Next week, decide as a group how you might like to support your missionary(ies). Designate a point-person for this activity who can lead this discussion next week and make sure everybody plays their part.

Section

Our Family Story



David Platt encourages us to join in the story of the spread of the gospel.

Section

Introduction: Our Family History

Matthew 9:36-38

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

This chapter is the story of our family history. You may not have ever thought about the history of missions in that way before, but the story of missions is our story as the people of God. This chapter is about what God has done throughout history, and through his people, to make his name known to the nations. That topic should interest us, challenge us, and motivate us.

Why Study Missions History?

Here are four reasons why studying the history of missions is practical and valuable for Christians obeying the Great Commission today:

First, history teaches us. Studying the good, the bad, and the ugly of our family story shapes our current practice and helps us avoid old pitfalls. Both the successes and

failures of past missions efforts should inform how we understand and approach missions now.

Second, history humbles us. The writer of Ecclesiastes wrote, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Our missionary strategies, as creative as they may be, are probably not original to us, and they are not perfect. Our successes rest on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, and when we fail, we can take comfort from knowing that we are not alone in our failures. In both triumph and defeat, we are in good company.

Third, history shows us how the gospel got to us. As **Evangelical** Christians in the Western world (Europe, North America, and related countries like South Africa, Australia and New Zealand), we forget there was a time when our ancestors were unreached peoples with no witness to the gospel. To the apostles in Jerusalem, where we live was the ends of the earth. The gospel got to us, too, because of missionaries who risked their lives to take the good news to our ancestors at some point in the last 2000 years.

Fourth, history inspires us. Reading stories—from those of first-century believers to modern missionary workers—can have a dramatic effect on our lives. We are humbled to be a part of the long story of missionary activity by the church, challenged by the perseverance of those who have walked hard and dangerous roads, and propelled into action by their faith.

We study the past, then, because it weaves before our eyes the amazing story of God’s glory filling the earth by way of broken people like us. As we take a brief look at that history here, be encouraged—be challenged—to take your place boldly in God’s redemptive story, both for his glory and for the joy of the nations.

The Spread of the Gospel

Watch a brief video on the spread of Christianity from Western Conservatory on Vimeo.
(1 min 30 sec)



Section

Lesson 1: Missions in the Early Church

Preparing the Way

God had prepared the way for the spread of the gospel centuries before the death and resurrection of Jesus. When the Babylonians conquered the kingdom of Judah and scattered the Jews across the ancient world in the 6th century BC, those Jews set up synagogues wherever they lived. They worshiped the one true God and taught his word, even while they lived among the pagans. Many Gentiles were attracted to the God of Israel and to the purity of his law. However, the process of official conversion to Judaism was not easy, so many lived on the fringes of the Jewish community as Gentile “God-fearers.”

The presence of these two communities—Jews and God-fearing Gentiles—all over the ancient world provided natural landing places for the gospel from the Atlantic Ocean in the West to the inner recesses of Asia in the East. The good roads of the Roman Empire, the relative safety brought by Roman military power, the trade routes that flourished across Europe and Asia, and the common use of the Greek language also made it easy for the good news to spread quickly. It was not long before there were churches in the major cities of the Roman and Persian empires.

The Gospel Advances

Through Persecution

The story of the early church after the death of the apostles is a story of faithfulness under fire. Christians were not persecuted all the time, nor were they persecuted

equally in every place. Persecution tended to come in waves, and often it was local rather than empire-wide. Still, there is no doubt that the early church grew and expanded in a context of suffering.

This had two effects. First, it kept the church pure. **Nominal** Christians don't stick around when there is a price to be paid for following Jesus. Second, it actually advanced the gospel. The fact that Christians were willing to suffer, and even die, for Jesus made it clear just how valuable He was to them. The faithfulness and cheerfulness of the martyrs attracted people to the gospel.

Through Moral Example

Christian moral purity also drew people to Jesus. The world around the early church was adulterous, perverted, and profane. Christians stood out from the crowd with their honesty, reliability, peacefulness, and purity, and this made the gospel attractive to people who were tired of the degeneration of their society.

Through Christian Service

Christian service also drew people to the gospel. Christians were noted for their kindness and generosity. Christians fed the poor and took care of the sick. They picked up abandoned babies and raised them as their own children. They looked after widows and orphans. This care for others became a major part of their public reputation, and it made the gospel look good in an age of cruelty and indifference.

Through Community

Christian community also attracted people to the gospel. Christians were willing to accept people of any race and people of any economic class. Artificial human barriers fell apart in the church. The fellowship of the church provided love and support that simply couldn't be found in pagan society. In a world that seemed to be falling apart, the community of the Christian church pulled people toward Jesus.

Through Evangelism

Christian evangelism was the heart of why the early church grew. It is clear from the New Testament that ordinary Christians regularly shared the gospel wherever they went (Acts 8:4). They knew and believed that lost people only come to faith in Jesus through the message of the gospel (Romans 10:9-17). The early church did not delegate the responsibility for evangelism to a small professional elite (like the clergy, as we often do today). The whole church embraced the responsibility to share the good news, and God used this abundant gospel sowing to call people to himself.

Through the Holy Spirit

Ultimately, of course, it was the Holy Spirit that empowered the dramatic spread of the gospel in the ancient world. That power, undoubtedly, flowed more freely in company with the faithfulness, cheerful courage, purity, generous service, and love of the early Christians.

The only resources the early church had were the word of God, the testimony of their own lives, and the power of the Holy Spirit (Revelation 12:11). They were mostly poor and overwhelmingly uninfluential. Only God could have accomplished what happened in the first three centuries of Christian history, when the church went from tiny obscurity to a massive movement. Only God gets the glory as a result. Perhaps the greatest lesson we can learn from the explosive spread of the gospel in the ancient world is that we are most effective when we depend on ourselves the least and on God the most.

Section

Lesson 1: A “Christian” Empire

A “Christian” Empire

A Legal Religion

Eventually, after a final bout of intense persecution, the Roman Empire embraced the Christian religion. A powerful man named **Constantine** was in a fight for the throne of Rome, and he faced a major battle at Milvian Bridge in Italy in the year A.D. 312. Tradition says that he saw a vision of a cross with the words “In this sign conquer!” He put crosses on his soldiers’ shields, won the battle decisively, and embraced Christianity. He issued an **edict** the following year from the city of Milan making the Christian faith a legal religion throughout the Roman Empire.

A Required Religion

At first, Christianity was simply one legal religion among many. However, the emperor was a Christian, and Christians were placed in positions of power and influence. For that reason, people flooded into the church. Finally, in A.D. 380, the Emperor **Theodosius** issued an edict from the city of Thessalonica that made **Trinitarian Christianity** the only legal religion in the Roman Empire, outlawing all other religions and compelling everyone living within the boundaries of Rome to be a member of the church.

A Weakened Church

The Edicts of **Milan** (A.D. 313) and **Thessalonica** (A.D. 380) meant the end of persecution for Christians in the Roman Empire and the beginning of state protection and promotion of Christianity. However, they also resulted in a serious weakening of the church.

People became church members because they had to, not because they were genuinely born-again Christians. The church became politically entwined with the state. Under the previous persecution, only people who were serious about following Jesus had called themselves Christians. Under the new merger of church and state, **nominal** Christianity became the rule rather than the exception. It is no wonder that Roger Williams, the founder of the Rhode Island Colony and supporter of the separation of church and state in early America, claimed that Nero the persecutor was far better for the Christian church than Constantine who made the Christian faith a legal religion in the Roman Empire.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What were the factors that spurred on the growth of Christianity in the ancient world? Do these factors describe your church as well?

Question 2:

What happened in church history when church and state were united, or when the Christian religion was imposed by force? What is the difference between "Christianization" and biblical missions?

Section

Lesson 2: Missions in the Middle Ages

The Church in Asia

The Gospel Goes East

In the years following the resurrection of Jesus, the Christian faith spread west and north throughout the **Roman Empire**. However, that wasn't the only place where the gospel was known. The gospel went east as well. Although Christianity never became a state sponsored religion in the East, the story of the gospel in Asia is one of perseverance and missionary advance in the face of overwhelming odds.

Remember that Jews were scattered all over the **Persian Empire** in the years after the fall of Jerusalem in 589 B.C., and converted Jews returned to Persia after the Day of Pentecost. It did not take long for the gospel to take root across western Asia. This quick tour will help you see how the gospel spread in those days.

The church made a fairly quick advance into Upper Mesopotamia (northern Iraq and eastern Turkey), which became a passageway for Christianity into Persia. Christian tradition also states that the Apostle Thomas carried the gospel into India, and it is certainly true that the Indian church dates very early. From there, it spread into Central Asia by the second century AD. Twice, in the seventh and thirteenth centuries, Eastern Christians advanced into China, but both times their presence was temporary, and persecution put an end to it.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, the Church of the East was vibrant and courageous. Their missionary boldness was admirable. Over the years, however,

they weakened spiritually, and they became caught up in the political fortunes of the empires around them.

The conquest of the Middle East and Central Asia by the armies of the new religion of Islam in the seventh century steadily eroded the Christian presence in those areas, although it was centuries before Muslims became the majority of the population. The conquest of most of the Asian continent by the Mongol armies of Genghis Khan was a shock to all the peoples of the East.

The final blow to the Church in the East was handed down by **Tamerlane**, a Central Asian Muslim ruler who conquered much of Asia. He was utterly anti-Christian and worked to erase the Christian religion from his empire. The lure of being a part of the majority religion drew many nominal Christians into Islam during this time, which quickened the demise of the church in the region.

The church in the East spread from Jerusalem after Pentecost just as the church in the West. In fact, there were times when the church in Asia was actually larger than its counterpart in Europe. There were thriving churches in what is now Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, India, Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics, and China (as well as south in Egypt). The main difference in the churches was status. The church in the East endured long periods of suffering and persecution and never achieved state religion status. Much of the spread of the gospel in the East occurred as Christian merchants traveled and engaged in business, sharing their faith along the way.

Key Takeaways

There is much to learn from the rise and fall of the church in the East.

Though always a minority, the church had a zeal for missions and no sense of entitlement to safety or comfort. They braved the vast landscape of Asia, marked by significant physical and spiritual obstacles, to advance the gospel eastward. What's more, making disciples wasn't solely the responsibility of professional clergy. Christian businessmen owned their evangelistic role, penetrating segments of Eastern society

that were otherwise inaccessible to traditional missionaries. Today, **marketplace ministry** remains a pivotal strategy for global engagement.

“Purity of doctrine and purity of life are nonnegotiable in the work of the gospel...”

On the other hand, the Eastern Church failed to guard the gospel. Over the centuries, they lost their grasp of biblical truth, trading biblical zeal for tradition, devotion for ritual, and holiness for moral laxity. It is hard to pinpoint when it happened, and there were probably real believers in Asia throughout history, but over time both the theology and the lifestyle of Eastern Christians ceased to be biblical. With lives that no longer adorned the message they were preaching, the Asian church lost its power to persuade and even its will to survive. When persecution hit hard after the collapse of the Mongol Empire, the Eastern Church did not have the spiritual strength to survive.

Today, there are small pockets of Eastern Christians in places like Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and India, but their numbers are tiny and their impact is minimal. Purity of doctrine and purity of life are nonnegotiable in the work of the gospel, and the fate of the ancient Asian church is clear testimony to this reality.

Section

Lesson 2: Christianizing Europe

Monks and Nuns

After the **Edict of Thessalonica** in A.D. 380, the entire Roman Empire was legally Christian. However, with the flood of unsaved people into the church, the purity and zeal of the Western Church dropped tragically. This led to the rising popularity of **monasteries**, as men and women became monks and nuns in order to withdraw from the **nominal** cultural Christianity of the world around them. Monks and nuns also played a key role in spreading Christianity into new areas throughout the Middle Ages.

The Roman Empire itself began collapsing in the fifth century. Germanic barbarians overran the western parts of the empire, sacking Rome in A.D. 410 and deposing the last emperor in A.D. 476. In the chaos that followed, the Christian church was the only remaining pillar of stability in Western Europe, and its **secular** role grew larger and larger.

Patrick

There are heroic stories of missionary courage from the Middle Ages. A man named **Patrick** was captured from Roman Britain in the early fifth century and taken to pagan Ireland as a slave. He eventually escaped, but then voluntarily returned to Ireland as a missionary. The Irish Christian church that grew out of his ministry was then instrumental in taking the Christian faith to Scotland, northern England (pagan again after being overrun by the Anglo-Saxons), and on to continental Europe.

Boniface

The English were evangelized from the north by the Irish and from the south by missionaries sent from Rome after the collapse of the empire. In turn, the English

also sent missionaries to the continent of Europe. One of the most famous of these is known to history as Boniface. Born in southern England sometime around A.D. 675, **Boniface** went as a missionary to the areas known today as the Netherlands and Germany.

He is most famous for his power encounter with pagan religion at the Oak of **Thor** in southern Germany. To demonstrate the superior power of the Christian God over the gods of Nordic religion, Boniface cut down an enormous oak tree which was considered sacred to the god Thor. The local population expected him to be struck dead by Thor for this act of sacrilege. When nothing happened to him, they were suddenly open to hearing what he had to say, and Boniface even used some of the wood from the oak tree to build a church building!

Boniface was eventually killed by hostile pagans while leading a mission trip to the area now known as the Netherlands. He was well past the age of 70 when he died, still preaching the gospel.

Cyril and Methodius

There were missionaries in Eastern Europe as well. In the 9th century, two brothers named **Cyril and Methodius**, who were Greek by birth, worked among the Slavic peoples who had occupied much of the **Balkan Peninsula**. In order to translate the Bible and the worship service of the church into the local language, they invented the alphabet—known as the **Cyrillic script**—which is used to this day to write Slavic languages such as Bulgarian, Serbian, and Russian. Unlike the Roman Catholics in Western Europe, who kept the Bible and the worship service in Latin even after Latin died out as a living language, the **Orthodox** churches in Eastern Europe made a point of using the local language everywhere they went.

Royal Edict

In addition to missionaries like these, the Christian religion spread by other, less spiritual, means as well. On several occasions, a king would simply decide that he wanted his kingdom to embrace the Christian religion, and that would be that.

Some of the most famous examples of this practice occurred in the fifth century A.D. when **Clovis**, the king of the Franks in what is now France, converted to Roman Catholic Christianity, and in the 10th century, when **Prince Vladimir** of Kiev decided that the Russians would all become **Eastern Orthodox** Christians. As with the Roman Empire after the **Edict of Thessalonica**, these forced “conversions” flooded the church with people who had never been born again.

The Sword

In other instances, people were literally converted at the point of the sword. When **Charlemagne**, king of the Franks and the first emperor of the **Holy Roman Empire** (an ironic name, as it was not particularly holy, not really Roman, and only occasionally an empire) conquered the **Saxons** of Germany, the terms of surrender stated that any Saxon who refused to be baptized would be put to death. These involuntary converts brought their pagan worldviews and many of their pagan practices into the church with them.

By the end of the **Middle Ages**, all of Europe was nominally Christian—Roman Catholic in the West, and Eastern Orthodox in the East. However, church membership was automatically connected with citizenship, and the leaders of the church were deeply enmeshed in the politics of the state. The church was wealthy, powerful, and spiritually compromised.

God, though, has always had a people, and there were true believers throughout this period. However, on the whole, the Middle Ages are a painful example of missionary failure. The legacy of coerced conversion and the marriage of church and state left most people in Europe in spiritual lostness even though they were church members.

Muslim Conquest

As with the Church of the East, Islam had a powerful impact on European Christianity. In A.D. 632, when **Muhammad** died, the Mediterranean Sea was the center of the western Christian world. By A.D. 732, Muslims had conquered most of the Middle East,

all of North Africa, and Spain, and they were moving northward through France. Their advance into the heart of Europe was stopped only in A.D. 732, by **Charles Martel** (the grandfather of Charlemagne) at the Battle of Tours in France.

For the next 700 years, the indigenous cultural Christians of Spain and Portugal fought a long struggle to regain their independence from Muslim rule, culminating in final victory in 1492 when the last Muslim stronghold was taken by **Ferdinand and Isabella**, king and queen of Spain. North Africa was lost for good, and Christianity disappeared from that region for centuries.

In the Middle East, after a quick succession of early victories, the armies of Islam were halted just north of Syria, and the Greek-speaking **Byzantine** Empire held most of Anatolia (modern Turkey) for another four centuries. However, in the year 1071, a group of Turkish Muslims out of Central Asia won a decisive battle against the Byzantines and overran Anatolia, gradually turning it into the Turkish and Muslim place that it is today. The Byzantine Emperor appealed to the Pope in Rome for help, and this led to the **Crusades**.

The Crusades

This attempt to reclaim the Middle East for Christendom by the power of the sword ultimately failed, and it left a lasting impression in the minds of Middle Eastern Muslims that Christians are as willing as Muslims to use military force to spread their religion. To this day, Christians working in the Muslim world have to overcome the suspicion that their hidden agenda is to impose the Christian religion by force.

On the Brink of Collapse

At the end of the 15th century, as the **Middle Ages** came to a close, things did not look good for the Christian faith. The Christians in Asia were barely surviving. In Africa, the Church in Ethiopia had been isolated for centuries and was not identifiably evangelical. The church in Europe was corrupt and compromised, and it was surrounded on all sides by Islam—to the south in North Africa, to the east in Central Asia, and to the southeast in the Middle East. To make matters worse, **Constantinople** fell to the

Muslim Turks in 1453, and the Turks actually invaded Europe through the **Balkans**, making it as far as **Vienna** in less than a century.

Missionary activity had essentially ceased, and the church itself had almost lost the gospel. It looked like the Christian faith was on its last legs. Then a monk in Germany named **Martin Luther** met Jesus, and everything started to change.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What is nominal Christianity? Do you find nominal Christianity in your community? In your church? What effect does nominal Christianity have on the advance of the gospel?

Section

Lesson 3: Mission in the Reformation Age

The Reformation

The Reformers and Europe

At the start of the modern era of Western history, a shock hit the religious and political system of Europe in the form of a hammer and nail. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther made his conflict with the Roman Catholic Church public by nailing 95 topics for debate (known as “theses”) to the door of a church building in Wittenberg, Germany. He understood the Bible to be the final authority on matters of faith, not church leadership. Salvation, he said, came by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, not through **indulgences** or other religious works.

Europe at the time was primed for change. The newly-invented printing press enabled mass distribution of Bibles and other literature for the first time in history. With a similar movement on the rise in Switzerland led by men like **Ulrich Zwingli** and **John Calvin**, Europe was plunged into the era of the **Protestant Reformation**.

The Reformers and Missions

The **Reformers** have often been portrayed as indifferent to missions. This is due in part to the fact that some early Protestants taught that the Great Commission had been fulfilled in the time of the apostles, and in part to the reality that global engagement was difficult for the new Protestant movement. Both Luther and Calvin, because of their open break with the Roman Catholic Church, were under frequent threat of death. They were in a fight for the soul of Europe, as they themselves realized that most Europeans were Christian in name only. They were rediscovering and

proclaiming what the Bible actually teaches, and they were trying to re-form European churches according to biblical truth.

But to say that they were indifferent to missions could not be further from the truth. While their efforts were small in comparison to the activities of Roman Catholic missionaries in this same period of time, the Reformers' concern for global evangelization was far from insignificant. Calvin, in particular, sent missionaries to France and Brazil, and the **Anabaptists**—who emerged during the Reformation—engaged in personal evangelism and church planting. The period saw the translation of Scripture into the languages people actually spoke in Europe. Though the period of the Reformation saw little active global outreach, a subsequent upturn in missions activity occurred as Protestant Christians grappled with the implications of the gospel.

Roman Catholic Expansion

At the close of the Middle Ages, Roman Catholic missions got a fresh start. At the end of the 1400s, the Portuguese discovered the sea route south around Africa, and **Christopher Columbus** led the way west across the Atlantic for the Spanish to take over Central and South America. The Islamic chokehold around “Christian” Europe was broken.

Colonialism, under the banner of spreading the Christian religion, led to a political race for territorial expansion and power. Spain and Portugal, under the direction of the pope, divided the known world between them.

Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain saw colonial conquest as a means to convert native populations to Roman Catholicism. Spanish conquerors brought the original peoples of their colonies in the Americas and the Philippines into settlements for the supposed purposes of teaching and evangelism, but it actually meant little more than enslavement.

Portugal took control of Brazil and parts of Africa and the East Indies, converting the original peoples, in places, by force. Biblical discipleship was largely absent. This was “Christianization,” but it was not biblical missions.

During this time, Roman Catholic missionaries who rejected forced conversion were working in India, Japan, and China, and they experienced some measure of success. Though a form of the church was planted in these regions, their inadequate understanding of the gospel and their failure to disciple the people led to **syncretism** (the mixing of religions), a lasting characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church from this period. Native “converts” simply adopted Christian language in the worship of their former gods, and replaced pagan temples with Catholic shrines.

While colonialism effectively expanded the geographical reach of the Roman Catholic Church, the semi-pagan behavior and belief that followed had a lasting effect, and evangelical mission agencies still regard these areas as legitimate mission fields to this day.

Section

Lesson 3: Protestant First Fruits

The Danish-Halle Mission

Joining church and state has never produced long-term positive results for the church. The years following the Protestant Reformation were no exception, as Protestant churches were established as the state religion in majority-Protestant countries. These churches became cold, formal and in need of revival.

Enter **Pietism**, which began in the 1670s in Germany with a focus on personal Bible study and Christlike living. The **University of Halle** in Germany was founded by Pietists in 1691 and became a home base for the movement as well as its primary training center, stressing personal evangelism, prayer, education, and missions.

As a result, missions efforts were launched, the first of which was a cooperative Danish and German mission in India (known as the **Danish-Halle Mission**). Two **University of Halle** students went to southern India, started a school, and turned their attention to translating the Scriptures into the local language. They devoted their time to studying the native language and culture with a focus on personal evangelism rather than attempting mass cultural and political conversion. The fruit of their labor was the first indigenous Protestant church in India.

The Moravians

“They are a body who have perhaps excelled all mankind in solid and unequivocal proofs of the love of Christ and ardent, active zeal in his service. It is a zeal tempered with prudence, softened with meekness and supported by a courage which no danger can intimidate and a quiet certainty no hardship can exhaust.”

- William Wilberforce of the Moravian Church

One of the missionaries at the Danish-Halle mission returned to Europe to raise support and report the work going on in India. A man named **Nickolaus von Zinzendorf**, a nobleman who was also a student of the **University of Halle**, heard him speak, and it transformed his heart for cross-cultural missions.

Shortly thereafter, a group of Protestant Christians from **Moravia** fled persecution in their home country, and Zinzendorf invited them to settle on his land in a place they called Herrnhut (The Lord's Watch). Zinzendorf soon became the leader of a growing Moravian church, and he challenged those believers to answer the missionary call. In the wake of his plea, a remarkable movement among the Moravians sent out over 2,000 missionaries in a period of 150 years. They established a 24-hour prayer watch that lasted, without a break, for 100 years.

The Moravian Church emphasized personal evangelism and translation of the Scriptures into the local language. All missionaries were self-supporting, working among the people to whom they were sent. Some even sold themselves into slavery in the West Indies to proclaim the gospel to those who had not heard. The passion of the Moravians and their groundbreaking principles of missionary practice continue to set an example for modern missionary advances today.

North American Missions

In addition to the Moravians, English missionaries ministered among Native Americans in North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Local church pastors such as **John Eliot** and **Thomas Mayhew Jr.**, and missionaries like **David Brainerd** and **Jonathan Edwards**, took it upon themselves to engage native populations in the New World. Their work, and especially the journals of Brainerd, went on to influence the later missionary efforts of such missionaries as **William Carey**.

“Here am I, send me; send me to the ends of the earth; send me to the rough, the savage pagans of the wilderness; send me from all that is called comfort on earth; send me even to death itself, if it be but in Thy service, and to promote Thy kingdom.”

– David Brainerd

Setting the Stage

By this point in Christian history, the church was moving toward a global presence. Lessons were being learned that continue to shape modern missions—lessons such as the need for a willingness to suffer for the gospel, the imperative of personal evangelism and individual conversion, the importance of Bible translation, and the necessity of local church leadership. All of this set the stage for what has come to be known as the “**Great Century**” of global missions.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What can we learn from early Protestant missionary efforts like the Danish-Halle Mission in India, the Moravians, and the Puritan missionaries to the Native Americans?

Section

Lesson 4: The Great Century of Missions

“Some wish to live within the sound of Church or Chapel bell;

I want to run a Rescue Shop within a yard of hell.”

– C.T. Studd

The Great Century (1792–1910) saw the launch of the modern missionary movement among **Protestants**. The **Industrial Revolution**, the spiritual awakenings, the growth of global exploration and trade, and improvements in transportation created the perfect storm for an explosion of evangelism and missions. Missionary societies multiplied rapidly on both sides of the Atlantic. With a dramatic rise in commitment and an equally dramatic mobilization of resources, Protestant missions took on the world.

Phase One: To the Coastlands

*“**Expect** great things from God; **attempt** great things for God.”*

– William Carey

The evangelical world was permanently changed in 1792, when a young English cobbler and bi-vocational pastor shook the Protestant world with his famous publication, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* (more frequently referred to as “**An Enquiry**”). Its author, William Carey, remembered as the “Father of Modern Missions,” questioned the common understanding that missions was the exclusive responsibility of the Early Church. Through his careful assessment of the Great Commission and the state of global Christianity, he challenged believers to carry the gospel to the least reached corners of the world, ushering in a new era of missionary activity.

His publication soon led to the foundation of the **Baptist Missionary Society** in 1792 with the help of his friend, pastor and theologian **Andrew Fuller**. A student of prior missions efforts (particularly the Moravians) and legendary explorers, Carey was convinced that the church was falling short of its Great Commission mandate. Thus, in 1793, Carey and a small team packed their bags and set sail for India as the first missionaries of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS).

The next 41 years were a mix of loss and gain for Carey. He lost his wife and son to death, but the far-reaching impact of Carey's patient gospel labor is felt to this day. The model of the BMS paved the way for the thousands of missionary organizations that have followed in its wake. Carey trained numerous missionaries and national pastors, established **Serampore College** (which exists today), helped reform corrupt Indian social practice, was involved with at least 35 translations of the Bible, and planted the first Baptist church in India.

Carey's work far outlasted his death in 1834. The best-known linguist in Indian languages in his time, Carey offered inspiration to men like **Adoniram Judson** who would mirror his enthusiasm and cultivate a passion for global missions in America.

*"O Burmah! Shrouded in the pall
Of error's dreadful night!
For wings-for wings once more to bear
To thy dark shores the light:
"To rear upon thy templed hills,
And by thy sunny streams,
The standard of the Cross, where now
The proud Pagoda gleams.*

“One prayer, my God! Thy will be done-

One only boon I crave:

To finish well my work,- and rest

Within a Burman grave!”

- Adoniram Judson

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), a **Congregationalist** society influenced by Carey’s work in India, sent its first team of missionaries by boat from America to **Calcutta** in 1812. Among them were **Adoniram Judson**, his wife of only two weeks, Ann, and his good friend **Luther Rice**. As **Congregationalists**, the new missionaries studied their Bibles on the long ocean journey in order to prepare to defend infant baptism against the Baptist **William Carey** whom they would meet in Calcutta. Instead, their studies had the opposite effect, and the Judsons and Rice arrived in India as committed Baptists. They were baptized as believers by their new British Baptist colleagues.

Out of a sense of integrity, the three new Baptists felt that they needed to resign from the Congregationalist mission agency, so they sent **Luther Rice** back to America to tender their resignations and to encourage Baptists in the US, who now had their first international missionaries, to start a mission agency to support them. The fruit of Luther Rice’s work was the **Triennial Convention**, the first nationwide denominational structure of Baptists in America and the precursor to the **Southern Baptist Convention** and the **American Baptist Convention**.

Shortly after their arrival in British-held Calcutta, the outbreak of the **War of 1812** forced the American Judsons to relocate to Burma (present-day Myanmar), a country steeped in **Buddhism**. Judson’s evangelistic labors were marked by trial. He worked for eight years before seeing his first Burmese convert, struggled through personal health issues, faced imprisonment, lost two wives and four children, and fought depression through the duration of his life.

Judson's impact, however, cannot be understated. His Burmese-English dictionary and complete Burmese translation of the Bible are still used to this day, and were foundational for Burmese missions in the centuries that followed. The Judsons and their close teammates, **George and Sarah Boardman**, also helped ignite one of the first fairly large-scale **people movements** in modern history among an animistic tribal group called the Karen (pronounced "kuh RIN"). Further still, Judson's missionary story made its way back to the States through letters and stories, inspiring American Christians to take up the cause of the missionary enterprise.

Other Early Pioneers

There were other great missionary pioneers during the first half of the Great Century. **Robert Morrison**, from the **London Missionary Society**, was the first Protestant missionary to China. He translated the Bible into Chinese in 1823. He labored for seven years before he saw his first convert, much like both Carey in India and Judson in Burma. **Henry Martyn** was a Cambridge University scholar and one of the best linguists of his day. He arrived in India in 1806, and died in Persia in 1812, at the young age of 31. Even so, in the span of six years, he had translated the Bible into **Urdu**, revised the translation into Persian, and begun a revision of the Arabic Bible when he died.

This was a day of firsts, and within a few decades, Protestant Christianity had exploded out of its narrow home in northwestern Europe and the eastern seaboard of North America to the coastlands of every continent in the world.

Section

Lesson 4: Phase Two — To the Interior

Beyond the Coastlands

The initial phase of the **Great Century** of Protestant missionary activity went to the coastal regions of the world. This makes perfect sense. People traveled by sailing ship in those days, and ships go only as far as the coast. With most of the world unevangelized, it was only natural that missionaries went to one coastal region after another where Christ was not yet known. Once there, it was also natural that missionaries tended to stay on the coast. Transportation inland could be very difficult. Support and supplies from home could only come by ship to the coast. In an emergency, the only way out was by ship from the coast.

After several decades of pioneer missionary efforts, there were Protestant missionary outposts all over the coastlands of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. However, the inland regions were largely untouched. The second phase of missionary activity came in the middle of the 19th century with a great push inland to the interior regions of the unreached world.

The names of famous interdenominational missionary agencies such as **China Inland Mission**, **Sudan Interior Mission** and **Africa Inland Mission** all date from this period, along with famous missionary explorers such as David Livingstone. They are all testimony to the courageous efforts of pioneer missionaries who left the relative security of the coastal regions to go inland where the gospel had not yet been preached.

*“There is a needs-be for us to give ourselves for the life of the world. **An easy, non-self-denying life will never be one of power.** Fruit-bearing involves cross-bearing. There are not two Christs- an easy-going one for easy-going Christians, and a suffering, toiling one for exceptional believers. There is only one Christ.”*

– Hudson Taylor

One of the most famous of these pioneers was **Hudson Taylor**, a British medical doctor who first went to China under the **China Evangelization Society** in 1854. Taylor left the CES in 1865 to form the China Inland Mission. By 1882, CIM had missionaries in every province of China, and by 1929 it was the largest missionary agency in the world.

Hudson Taylor built his agency on a set of principles that guided its work:

- No appeals for funds would be made.
- There were no set educational requirements for service with the CIM.
- The missionaries of the CIM would go inland and evangelize every province.
- The mission would be interdenominational.
- Single women were welcome to serve.
- The administration of the mission would be in China, where the work was being done.
- Missionaries must identify as much as possible with the Chinese people and Chinese culture.

These were radical ideas in that day, but they were part of a larger picture of change in the way missionary efforts were being done. The last point, in particular, was indicative of a move toward **indigenous missionary methods and indigenous church principles**. Men like **Henry Venn, Rufus Anderson, John Nevius, and Roland Allen** all promoted the idea that the goal of missions was to plant churches that were not dependent on foreign leadership or foreign money, and that were as local in style as possible.

Rufus Anderson was the one who coined the **“Three-Self” formula**: churches planted by missionaries should be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. Roland Allen, a British missionary to China in the early years of the 20th century, gave classic expression to these ideas in his 1912 book, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?* For his part, Hudson Taylor insisted that CIM missionaries dress like the Chinese and live like the Chinese as much as possible without compromising the commands of Scripture—a standard also embraced by Southern Baptist missionaries like **Lottie Moon**.

It took time, but indigenous church principles became the accepted standard of Protestant missionary practice down to this day.

Southern Baptist Missions

Meanwhile, back in the United States, the growing division between North and South over the issue of slavery led to a split in the **Triennial Convention** of Baptists. When the American Baptist board for domestic missions made it clear that they would not appoint slaveholders as missionaries, Baptist churches in the South withdrew from the Triennial Convention and formed the **Southern Baptist Convention** in 1845, in order to safeguard their ability to send slave owners as missionaries.

(NOTE: The Southern Baptist Convention formally repented of this foundational commitment to slavery by a vote of the convention in 1995, and elected the first African-American President of the SBC in 2012.)

The messengers of the new Southern Baptist Convention immediately established two mission boards, one for home missions and the other for foreign missions. The Board of Domestic Missions (now the **North American Mission Board** based in Alpharetta, Georgia) was first established in Marion, Alabama. The Foreign Mission Board (FMB) set up its headquarters in Richmond, Virginia, where it has been ever since (though it was renamed the **International Mission Board** in 1997).

The new organization inherited some missionaries from the old **Triennial Convention**

who had been sent from southern churches, and the trustees voted on China as their first field of focus. Just 16 years after it was founded, the FMB was hit hard by the American Civil War. The economic devastation of the South meant that there was little money for anything, including missions, and the FMB was in debt and unable to expand its efforts significantly from the end of the Civil War until World War II.

*“What we need in China is more workers. **The harvest is very great, the laborers, oh! So few.** Why does the Southern Baptist church lag behind in this great work?”*

– **Lottie Moon**

One of the most famous of all FMB missionaries was a single woman named Charlotte (Lottie) Moon. Lottie Moon was not the first single woman appointed by the FMB—that distinction goes to **Harriet Baker**, who was appointed in 1849, making the FMB one of the early adopters of the then-radical notion that single women could serve as missionaries.

Lottie Moon was appointed in 1873, and she served in China until her death in 1912. Lottie embodied many of the principles of indigenous missionary practice, learning the Chinese language, adopting Chinese dress and as much of Chinese culture as possible without biblical compromise, and stressing the importance of training local leaders for churches.

She is perhaps best remembered for her appeal to **Annie Armstrong**, the head of the newly-formed **Woman’s Missionary Union**, for a special offering for missions to be collected at Christmas time. After her death, that offering was named after her, and to this day the **Lottie Moon Christmas Offering** is by far the largest single source of financial support for the Southern Baptist International Mission Board. Lottie Moon died in 1912, after giving away her food to her starving Chinese friends during a famine, but her legacy remains powerful to this day.

The Edinburgh Conference

By 1910, the religious map of the world had changed dramatically. In 1792, Protestant Christianity was limited to northwestern Europe and the eastern coast of North America. The so-called **Enlightenment** had sapped the spiritual fervor and biblical faithfulness of a large portion of the Protestant world. The worlds of **Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, animism** and **Chinese religion** were each vastly larger than global **Evangelical** Christianity.

Within a century, everything looked different. The English speaking world itself had undergone a significant spiritual shift, and **evangelicalism** was the dominant form of Protestant Christianity on both sides of the Atlantic. Evangelical Protestantism had also become a global faith. There were significant pockets of evangelicals all over China and India, the two largest countries in the world. Africa was still predominantly Muslim or animist, but there was now an evangelical Christian presence across the continent, especially south of the Sahara Desert. Evangelicals had made inroads into Latin America and Southeast Asia. There were still many, many unreached peoples and areas in the world, but Christianity was now a truly global religion.

This **Great Century** of Evangelical Protestant missions reached a climax with the **Edinburgh Conference** in 1910. This conference, which met in Edinburgh, Scotland, consisted of 1215 delegates from 176 missionary agencies, based in North America, Britain, continental Europe, South Africa, and Australia. These delegates represented missionaries who served all over the world. The original watchword of the conference was “The Evangelization of the World in This Generation.” It was the most globally representative Protestant meeting in history up to that point, and it demonstrated how far evangelical mission work had gone.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What were the three phases of Protestant missionary work, beginning from the start of the Great Century? Why did each matter?

Section

Lesson 5: Missions in the Modern Era

A Changing World

The optimism of the **Great Century** was shattered in 1914 with the outbreak of World War I. Followed quickly by the **Great Depression** and then World War II, the early decades of the 20th century were hard on the cause of missions. However, the World Wars had an unexpected impact on missionary mobilization, especially in the United States.

i Changing Perspectives

Young American men who had never left home before were exposed to the needs of the world as they were deployed by the military across the globe. After World War II was over, there was a surge in missionary mobilization as some of the Christians among these young men, with a new burden for the world, volunteered for missionary service.

i Changing Global Economy

The close of World War II also saw an increase in financial resources available for missions. While the continent of Europe was devastated, and Great Britain was left deeply in debt, the United States entered a long period of financial growth. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board got out of debt during World War II for the first time since the Civil War, and the decades

after the war ended were a time of unprecedented growth in the number of missionaries sent overseas.

i Changing Politics

At the same time, the world changed rapidly, and missionary work got harder as a result. At the start of World War I, most of the globe was under the rule of some “Christian” country in Europe or North America. Missionary activity occurred under the protection of the colonial powers, which provided privileged access for missionaries to most areas of the world.

From the **Bolshevik Revolution** in 1917 until the fall of the **Berlin Wall** in 1989, however, the portion of the world that was open to traditional missionary work steadily grew smaller. The Communist takeover of the **Russian Empire** in 1917 eliminated a large landmass from missionary outreach, and after World War II Communism conquered Eastern Europe, China, and North Korea.

In the decades that followed, other places like Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos fell under the domination of Communism. Missionaries were expelled or killed, and local believers were persecuted. At the same time, the collapse of colonialism around the world closed many other doors.

Christian missionaries, in many cases, had actually worked against colonial exploitation in many areas of Africa and Asia, but to the local population, the missionaries had arrived with the occupying armies of their colonial masters, so they were tarred with the same brush. As one colony after another gained independence in the years following World War II, many chose to limit or even halt foreign missionary activity.

i Changing Religious Devotion

Historical religious traditions like **Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam** experienced revival in the mid-20th century, and these traditions were often linked in people's minds with national identity and patriotism. Islamic countries, in particular, tended to shut down Christian missionary work once they had gained independence from foreign colonial rule.

The growth of theological liberalism in North American and European denominations also led to a sharp decline in missionary effort. In the 19th century, **evangelicalism** had dominated the English-speaking church world, but by the 1920s most of the mainline **Protestant** denominations had begun to drift from their confessional moorings.

As commitment to the **inerrancy** and authority of the Bible waned, so did belief in the necessity of gospel proclamation, and as that waned, so did missionary zeal. Denominational mission agencies played a large role in the expansion of Christianity in the 19th century, but by the end of the 20th century, these agencies had largely left the scene, with the notable exception of Southern Baptists.

Along with smaller conservative groups such as the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Conservative Baptists, and the Assemblies of God (AOG).

The **Conservative Resurgence** in the **Southern Baptist Convention**, which began in 1979, involved a recommitment to the inerrancy of Scripture and to the historic doctrines of evangelical Christian faith, and it was accompanied by an unprecedented surge in missionary going. Without question, missionary faithfulness is inseparable from theological integrity.

Section

Lesson 5: Phase Three — To Every People Group

A New Era in Global Missions

In 1974 an international conference on world evangelism met in **Lausanne**, Switzerland, where a man named **Ralph Winter** made a presentation which altered the shape of missionary strategy for decades to come.

Winter pointed out that the New Testament word usually translated “nations” (ethne in Greek) actually referred to ethnolinguistic **people groups**, not to modern political countries. Although the church might be present in almost all of the countries of the world, a large portion of the human race belonged to people groups who had no access to the gospel. The imperative of the Great Commission extended to every people group, not just to every modern country.

Just as earlier phases of the modern missionary movement had focused first on coastlands and then on inland regions, Winter’s plea at Lausanne refocused the missionary effort on **people groups**.

Creative Access Strategies

The difficulty, of course, is that most **unreached people groups** live in **restricted access countries**—that is, they are unreached because you cannot get to them using traditional missionary methods on traditional missionary visas.

This, in turn, led to the rise of **creative access strategies**. The 1980s and 1990s saw a dramatic shift of attention toward those countries where traditional missionary work was no longer allowed, as churches and mission agencies looked for ways to

get the gospel to **unreached people groups** despite governmental, social or cultural opposition.

For decades, most mission agencies had regarded governmental prohibition as an insurmountable barrier to work in a country. Now, Christians have discovered that there are many ways to live in **restricted access countries** and to share the gospel with unreached peoples that don't require a missionary visa. The result is that in the last few decades the gospel has penetrated places and peoples that seemed hopelessly out of reach in the past.

Technological Advance

The rapid advance in transportation and communication technology has also had a profound effect on missionary activity in recent decades. In the years following World War II, **shortwave radio** stations were established in strategic locations around the world by Christian mission agencies, and these stations broadcast the gospel into countries where missionaries were not allowed to go. In more recent years, these efforts have been joined by satellite, internet, and other information technology resources to make the gospel accessible to more and more people.

A New Role For Sending Churches

The improvement in global transportation and communications has had another effect. For most of church history, sending churches could pray, give money, and send missionaries, but more direct involvement was nearly impossible. Once travel to the other side of the world was possible in hours rather than months, and once it was possible to talk with workers and see their faces anywhere in the world, the level of local church involvement could become vastly greater.

Short term mission trips are an entirely modern thing, made possible by air travel. Direct, strategic involvement of a local church in missions is similarly recent, made possible both by air travel and by good communications. Local churches can be better informed and more strategically involved in missions now than at any point in history. The next unit in this study will help us think more about these possibilities.

Conclusion

The gospel is now spread more widely than at any point in history. From obscure beginnings in the Middle East, biblical Christianity can now be found on every continent and in most of the countries of the world. Our family story has shown what works well in spreading the gospel. It also shows us methods of spreading Christianity that primarily produce nominal Christians.

What, then, are some of the issues facing Christian missions in the 21st century?

1. Unreached People Groups. Despite the spread of the gospel over the last two centuries, there are still literally billions of people in the world who belong to people groups with no witness to salvation in Jesus Christ.
2. Creative Access. **Unreached people groups** remain unreached because it is hard to get to them, often because they live in countries that restrict or forbid overt missionary activity. Discovering and resourcing creative ways of gaining access to these people will be key to reaching the unreached.
3. Resurgent World Religions. **Islam**, in particular, has experienced a renewal of confidence and activism, but the same thing could be said of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions. Many of these religions have developed their own apologetics against Christianity, and some are actively trying to convert the nominal Christian world to their faith.
4. False Teaching. Missionary teaching has not always succeeded in penetrating below the surface of culture to transform a people's worldview, and as a result, almost everywhere, there is some degree of mixture of biblical Christianity with non-biblical cultural elements (known as **syncretism**). For example, one common element in popular religion all over the world is the idea that the purpose of religious practice is to manipulate the spiritual world into giving you what you want in this life. This idea has blended with Christianity all over the world to produce the **Prosperity Gospel movement**. This is actually no gospel at all, but a perversion of the gospel that contradicts biblical teaching at essential points.

5. Inadequate Biblical and Theological Teaching. In much of the world, church leaders have no opportunity to receive the kind of training in Bible and theology they need, either because it does not exist in their language, or because it is out of reach because location or expense. Church leaders in these new churches need solid teaching that is rigorously biblical, that speaks to their cultural setting, and that is delivered in creative ways that work for them.
6. A Wobbly Missionary Sending Base. For most of the last two centuries, missionaries have been sent from Western churches to the non-Western world. As the West has become less and less Christian, missionary support has dropped. The rise of consumer Christianity has made the situation worse. Only to the extent that sending churches grasp both biblical theology (the lost really are lost and have no hope of salvation apart from receiving and believing the gospel) and biblical discipleship (biblical Christians die to themselves and to everything that the world values, and live only for his glory) will they be effective in rolling back the darkness of the unreached world.
7. Non-Western Missionaries. By the grace of God, new churches in people groups who were unreached not long ago are now sending out missionaries of their own. Korean, Filipino, Chinese, Latin American, South Asian, and African believers, among others, are now taking the gospel to those who have not yet heard the gospel. For many of these churches, training and missionary support are major challenges, but there is no question that the evangelical missionary workforce is now multiethnic and multicultural.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What changes in technology helped the growth of Protestant missions at the start of the Great Century?

Question 2:

What changes in technology are occurring today that could help the spread of the gospel?

Section

Group Discussion: Our Family Story

SUGGESTED OUTLINE (90 MINUTES)

1. Scripture Memory & Prayer (5 min)
2. Summary & Discussion (40 minutes)
3. Group Activity (20 minutes)
4. Prayer (10 minutes)
5. Before You Leave (15 minutes)

i SCRIPTURE MEMORY & PRAYER (5 MIN)

Ask someone in your group to recite Matthew 9:36-38 from memory.

Pray and give thanks to God for the example of men and women throughout history who've played a critical role in the spread of the gospel. Pray that your group (and church) would learn from their successes and failures, and would think creatively about how to address the issues facing missionaries in the 21st century.

i SUMMARY & DISCUSSION (40 MIN)

SUMMARIZE

Ask members of the group to read through these summaries of the week's lessons:

Lessons 1 – 2: The history of Christian missions began with a small group of believers in one city in the Middle East, and it is now taking place all over the world.

The first Christians had nothing in terms of influence, wealth, or worldly power, but they had the message of the gospel, the Holy Spirit living inside them, and the testimony of their own lives. With these things, they turned the ancient world upside down.

By the end of the third century AD, there were Christians as far north as Britain, as far south as Ethiopia and South India, as far west as Spain, and as far east as Central Asia and Western China. The conversion of Constantine, the emperor of Rome, in the early fourth century gave Christians rest from persecution, but it also greatly weakened the purity of the church. The merger of church and state has always proven to be bad for the church.

In Asia, Christianity never became the official religion of any country. For a time, the missionary zeal of the church in the East carried it far across the vast Asian continent, but after many centuries, the church lost the gospel, their purity, and their zeal, and they were powerless to stand up against the persecution that decimated them in the 14th century.

In Europe, under state sponsorship, Christianity spread through a combination of real missionary work and political and military

enforcement. The rise of Islam in the 7th century swallowed up traditional Christian lands in the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern Europe, effectively encircling “Christian” Europe.

Lessons 3 – 5: By the end of the Middle Ages, things did not look good for the Christian religion. Two things changed that picture. One, on a spiritual note, was the tremendous revival of gospel faith known as the Reformation. The other, on a secular note, was the discovery of the sea route around Africa to Asia and the discovery of the route across the Atlantic to the new world. These two developments led, on the one hand, to the military imposition of Roman Catholicism on Central and South America and the Philippines, and on the other hand, to Protestant missions, which went worldwide during the Great Century.

Protestant missions went first to the coastlands of the unreached world, then to the interior, and finally to people groups. Today, there are evangelical churches in virtually every country in the world. However, nominal Christianity haunts many traditionally “Christian” countries, and there are still thousands of people groups with no access to the gospel.

DISCUSS

1. What were the factors that spurred on the growth of Christianity in the ancient world? Do these factors describe your church as well?
2. What happened in church history when church and state were united, or when the Christian religion was imposed by force? What is the difference between “Christianization” and biblical missions?
3. What is nominal Christianity? Do you find nominal Christianity in your community? In your church? What effect does nominal Christianity have on the advance of the gospel?
4. What can we learn from early Protestant missionary efforts like the Danish-Halle Mission in India, the Moravians, and the Puritan missionaries to the American Indians?

5. What were the three phases of Protestant missionary work, beginning from the start of the Great Century? Why did each matter?
6. What changes in technology helped the growth of Protestant missions at the start of the Great Century?
7. What changes in technology are occurring today that could help the spread of the gospel?
8. Looking back over history, how did the gospel get to you? How and when were missionaries part of that story?
9. Has mission work been hard or easy? What role does a willingness to suffer play in fulfilling the Great Commission?

i GROUP ACTIVITY (20 MIN)

Review the major issues facing missions today, listed for you below. Discuss in small groups of 3-4 what your church can do to address each of these issues. Share aloud with the whole group at the end.

- **Unreached People Groups:** Despite the spread of the gospel over the last two centuries, there are still literally billions of people in the world who belong to people groups with no witness to salvation in Jesus Christ.
- **Creative Access:** Unreached people groups remain unreached because it is hard to get to them, often because they live in countries that restrict or forbid overt missionary activity. Discovering and resourcing creative ways of gaining access to these people will be key to reaching the unreached.
- **Resurgent World Religions:** Islam, in particular, has experienced a renewal of confidence and activism, but the same thing could be said of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions. Many of these religions have developed their own apologetics against Christianity, and some are actively trying to convert the nominal Christian world to their faith.
- **False Teaching:** Missionary teaching has not always succeeded in penetrating below the surface of culture to transform a people's world view, and as a result, almost everywhere, there is some degree of mixture

of biblical Christianity with non-biblical cultural elements (known as syncretism). For example, one common element in popular religion all over the world is the idea that the purpose of religious practice is manipulate the spiritual world into giving you what you want in this life. This idea has blended with Christianity all over the world to produce the Prosperity Gospel movement. This is actually no gospel at all, but a perversion of the gospel that contradicts biblical teaching at essential points.

- **Inadequate Biblical and Theological Training:** In much of the world, church leaders have no opportunity to receive the kind of training in Bible and theology they need, either because it does not exist in their language, or because it is out of reach because location or expense. Church leaders in these new churches need solid teaching that is rigorously biblical, that speaks to their cultural setting, and that is delivered in creative ways that work for them.
- **A Wobbly Missionary Sending Base:** For most of the last two centuries, missionaries have been sent from Western churches to the non-Western world. As the West has become less and less Christian, missionary support has dropped. The rise of consumer Christianity has made the situation worse. Only to the extent that sending churches grasp both biblical theology (the lost really are lost and have no hope of salvation apart from receiving and believing the gospel) and biblical discipleship (biblical Christians die to themselves and to everything that the world values, and live only for His glory) will they be effective in rolling back the darkness of the unreached world.
- **Non-western Missionaries:** By the grace of God, new churches in people groups who were unreached not long ago are now sending out missionaries of their own. Korean, Filipino, Chinese, Latin American, South Asian, and African believers, among others, are now taking the gospel to those who have not yet heard the gospel. For many of these churches, training and missionary support are major challenges, but there is no question that the evangelical missionary workforce is now multiethnic and multicultural.

i PRAYER (10 MIN)

Read **Acts 20:24-32**, **Acts 6:5-8**, and **Acts 7:54-60** out loud together, and spend some time praying for the following:

1. Pray specifically for your senior pastor and other pastors/elders:
 1. That God would grip them with His passion for His glory among the nations
 2. That God would give them Spirit-inspired wisdom to know how best to lead your local church on global mission
 3. That God would give them the Spirit-empowered courage to obey His leading
2. Pray specifically for this same wisdom and courage in one another's lives as you obey God's call on your life to participate in His global mission.

i BEFORE YOU LEAVE...(15 MIN)

Last week, you brainstormed ways your group might care for the missionaries you prayed for. Today, decide as a group how you can care for your missionary(ies), and how each person in the group can play a part. Assign somebody to follow-up and develop a plan of action based on the group discussion.

HOMEWORK:

Select a date to visit a nearby **international restaurant** together as a group (or in smaller groups) in the next week or two. Use a mobile app like Zomato to locate international cuisine in your area.

Select a TRUE international restaurant where the owners and/or workers are from another country (Taco Bell is NOT an international restaurant).

Homework Tips

When visiting the international restaurant...

1. Go during a slow business time so you can talk to the owners and/or workers about their culture

Talking to Internationals About their Culture

When getting to know internationals, be genuine and show interest in their home culture. Here are a few starter questions you can ask:

1. *Where are you from?*
2. *When did you move to this country?*
3. *Why did you move to this country?*
4. *What have been a few similarities and differences you've noticed between this country and your home country?*
5. *What languages do you speak/know?*
6. *What foods are most commonly eaten in your home country? Are there foods that should never be eaten?*
7. *What things are considered particularly unlucky in your home culture?*

2. Invite the owners and/or workers to your group's community event

The goal of this outing is both to study another culture and to meet internationals in your area. Although a restaurant may serve international food, its owners and workers may not be from that country. Do your best to locate a restaurant (using the app) that is owned and operated by someone from a different culture, and be intentional with your time.

Section

Missions and the World Today



David Platt emphasizes prayer as the starting point for your involvement in God's mission.

Section

Intro: Looking Back

Version: English Standard Version

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

So far in this course, we have studied the theme of the nations in Scripture, and we have seen that missions lies at the very heart of the big story of the Bible. We have learned that the basic command of the Great Commission is to make disciples out of all the people groups on earth. We have explored what it means to be and make biblical disciples of Jesus Christ. We have examined the core tasks of mission work: engaging the lost, sharing the gospel, discipling believers, planting multiplying churches, training leaders, and working ourselves out of a job. We have surveyed our family history and learned what worked well, what worked poorly, and what worked against the faithful spread of the gospel over the last 2000 years. We are now ready to look at issues facing Christian missionary efforts in the world today.

Looking Ahead

First in this section, we will probe more deeply into the issue of people groups, and we will gain a clearer picture of the task that still remains to be done in the process.

We will then consider the other religions of the world and reflect on the attitude and approach we should have toward them. Third, we will examine the role that culture plays in communicating the gospel message, and we will present strategies for crossing cultural barriers effectively. Fourth, we will look at the place of the local church in the mission God has given us. Finally, we will discuss suffering as a factor in fulfilling the Great Commission.

In each of these lessons, we ask you apply what you learn on three levels. First, how will this affect your own life in your church and among the lost people that God has placed you with? Second, how will this affect the way your church operates in your community where you live? Third, how will this affect the way your church engages cross-cultural missions internationally?

The answers to these questions will help you to grow as a disciple yourself and to shape a strategy for reaching the lost.

Section

Lesson 1: Unreached and Unengaged People Groups

Defining Terms

Let the peoples praise you, O God; Let all the peoples praise you!

Psalm 67:3

In Unit 4, Lesson 1, we described people groups as used in the Bible. Just as a refresher, for the sake of missions, we defined a people group as the largest group of people within which the gospel could flow freely without running up against a significant barrier, and the barriers we labeled as significant were ethnic identity, language, religion, culture, shared history, and/or geography. We saw that there are far more people groups in the world than there are political countries. We learned in our exploration of our family history that people groups became a major issue in missions strategy in the 1970s, and this issue has remained high on the priority list of missions strategists ever since. In this lesson we will look at how this plays out on the mission field.

Reached and Unreached People Groups

Some people groups have thriving, evangelizing churches already living among them. Odds are, if you are taking this course in a local church, your people group falls in this category. We refer to these as reached people groups. This does not mean that everyone in the people group is a believer. It doesn't even mean that everyone in the people group has heard the gospel. It simply means that there are disciples and churches within the people group who are able to finish the task. It means that lost people in that people group have access to the gospel, whether they have actually heard it or

not. Disciples and churches within that people group can evangelize and disciple the people around them better than anyone else, and that responsibility rests on them. An unreached people group (UPG) is one that does not have Christian disciples and churches in it that are able to carry the gospel to the rest of the group. It may have no believers in it at all. It may have a few, but they are too few and too new in the faith to finish the task without outside help. Lost people in this people group have no access to the gospel, and the vast majority of them will live and die without ever meeting a Christian, ever seeing a Bible, or ever hearing the only message that can rescue them from the condemnation we all deserve. The responsibility for sharing the gospel with these people groups falls squarely on the global church.

Engaged and Unengaged People Groups

Some unreached people groups already have cross-cultural workers who are laboring to get the gospel to them. They are still unreached, because there are few or no believers, and the churches are too few and too untrained to finish the task without outside help. These people groups need cross-cultural workers who will live among them, learn their language, understand their culture, build relationships with them, and share the gospel. They also need disciples from other people groups who will train new disciples, plant churches, and train leaders. However, these people groups have been engaged with the gospel. We regard a people group as engaged when there are Christian workers actively pursuing a church planting strategy among them, but until the resulting church matures to the point that it can carry on without help from outside workers, it is still considered unreached. There are thousands of people groups in the world that fall in this category. There are thousands more that no one is engaging with the gospel. These are unengaged unreached people groups. They have no access to the gospel, and no one is trying to do anything about it. These people will live, die, and go to eternity in hell without ever hearing the good news of a Savior who can rescue them.

Global Statistics

How does this break down in terms of numbers? At present, we believe that there are approximately 11,490 people groups in the world. Of these, over 6,700 fall in the

unreached category, and over 3000 of those are also unengaged by anyone with the gospel. In terms of population, over three billion people (out of a total world population of seven billion) are in unreached people groups, and almost a billion of those are members of unengaged unreached people groups. That means that almost half of the population of the world has no access to the gospel, and there is no one even trying to reach a third of those.

UPGs and Missions Strategy

Unreached people groups are unreached for a reason. They are hard to get to. This may be for political and religious reasons, like much of the Muslim world. This may be because they live in hard places, like deserts, mountains, jungles, or war zones. In every case, they are unreached because we haven't taken the gospel to them. Some peoples are considered resistant to the gospel. However, from a biblical perspective, everyone is resistant. Before Christ, everyone is spiritually dead, enslaved to sin, and unable to understand the things of God or to please God. Everyone needs the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to be saved. People in Afghanistan are no more dead in sin than people in Alabama, and it takes the same miracle of rebirth for a person in Chicago to be saved as it does for a person in China. God is the same God, and the gospel has the same power to save, everywhere in the world. In the experience of seasoned missionaries, every place we have ever gone, stayed, learned the language, and built relationships, we have seen people come to faith in Jesus. This is true in the places that appear the most hardened against the Christian faith. The issue is not their resistance. The issue is our disobedience. Mission strategy therefore focuses on the unreached (UPGs) and unengaged unreached people groups (UUPGs) of the world. Because they are hard to get to, creative engagement strategies will be needed. Because they live in places that are difficult, those who go must be willing to endure hardship in the process. The easy people groups and places have already been covered (if any place has ever been easy before the gospel got there!). It simply is not right to continue to send the gospel to people who already have access to it when there are billions of people in the world who do not.

Group Discussion

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

Look at your own community. How many gospel-preaching churches are there in your community? How many church members are there? How does this compare with the condition of unreached and unengaged people groups globally?

Question 2:

What internationals live in your community? Are any of them from unreached, or even unengaged, people groups (you can use the IMB research website to discover the level of evangelization of every known people group)? What can you do to reach them with the gospel?

Section

Lesson 2: Other Religions

The Major Religions

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

There was a time when most people in North America had a pretty narrow experience when it came to world religions. They were Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Jewish, and the only other people they knew came from those religious groups as well. In some parts of the country, one religious group dominated almost completely.

Those days are largely gone. As international students, foreign workers, and immigrants from all over the world have settled all over the North American continent, Protestant Evangelical Christians now find themselves rubbing shoulders with Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. God has brought the great religions of the world to us, not so that we can fear them, but so that we can love them and give them the gospel.

Overseas missionaries, of course, have faced other religions for centuries. Even today, most of the unreached peoples of the world follow one of the great non-Christian religious traditions. Although there are quite a few smaller religious groups, the largest are Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese traditional religion, and animism. We will add Judaism to the list, because even though the Jewish population of the world is small, it has a significant presence on the North American scene.

If we are going to be effective in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, we need to know something about the religious alternatives that have captured the hearts and minds of so many around the world. Below is a picture tutorial of major world religions. Additional information on each is presented at the bottom of this page.

Islam



The holy book of Islam is the Qur'an, which is only authoritative in the Arabic language. Muslims recite their confession ("There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his prophet"), pray in Arabic five times a day while facing the city of Mecca in Arabia, give alms to the poor, fast from sunup to sundown every day during the holy month of Ramadhan, and go on pilgrimage one time in their life to the city of Mecca. These are known as the Five Pillars of Islam. Their lives are governed by their religious law, or Sharia. Sharia law covers every area of life, and most of it is quite mundane, covering things from inheritance rules to how you should clean yourself.

Hinduism



The goal of Hinduism is to escape the wheel of reincarnation and lose your personal awareness and identity in the state of Nirvana. You perform worship (puja) as an individual at a shrine, and you do it to earn merit as part of your karma. Hinduism has holidays and celebrations like Diwali and Holi, but it does not have weekly communal worship.

Buddhism



Buddhism began as a reform movement within Hinduism, and it is based on the same philosophical foundations. However, Buddhism rejects the Hindu caste system, but it

operates on the same understanding of reincarnation and karma, with Nirvana as the goal. Buddhism has two major groupings. Theravada Buddhism is found in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, while Mahayana Buddhism is found in China, Tibet, Mongolia, Korea and Japan.

Chinese Traditional Religion



Chinese traditional religion is a mix of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Because none of these religions are exclusivist, popular religion in China is a blend of all three, with a large dose of animism mixed in as well. There are over a billion Chinese in the world, with most living in China, but large Chinese populations are scattered all over the world.

Animism



Animism is the religion of spirits, demons, and multiple gods. An animist believes in the world we can all see and touch, and he or she may also believe in a supreme God above every other spiritual being, but the most important reality for an animist is the middle realm of spirits who actively shape and control what happens in the visible world. Animism is the type of religion found in most isolated non-literate societies, on every continent in the world.

Judaism



Unlike other religions, the origins of Judaism lie in the Bible itself. Our Lord Jesus was a Jew, as were the biblical prophets before him and the apostles after him. The Jewish Bible constitutes the beginning of our Bible. However, no one can be saved apart from trusting in Jesus, and that includes Jews.

i Islam

Islam began in Arabia in the seventh century AD. A man named Muhammad became convinced that he was receiving revelations from God (Allah is simply the Arabic word for God that was used by Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians for centuries before Muhammad borrowed it). Islam believes that there is one and only one God, and that Muhammad is the last and seal of the prophets of God. It believes that Jesus was also a prophet, but it denies that he is God the Son, and it also denies that he died on the cross as payment for our sins.

The holy book of Islam is the Qur'an, which is only authoritative in the Arabic language. Muslims recite their confession ("There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his prophet"), pray in Arabic five times a day while facing the city of Mecca in Arabia, give alms to the poor, fast from sunup to sundown every day during the holy month of Ramadhan, and go on pilgrimage one time in their life to the city of Mecca. These are known as the Five Pillars of Islam. Their lives are governed by their religious law, or Sharia. Sharia law covers every area of life, and most of it is quite mundane, covering things from inheritance rules to how you should clean yourself.

Muslims are found in many countries, but the greatest concentration of them is in a band across northern Africa, through the Middle East and Central Asia, down into South Asia (especially Pakistan and Bangladesh, but all over India as well), and into the Southeast Asian countries of Indonesia and Malaysia. Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa are mostly Arabic, but the

majority of all Muslims are not ethnic Arabs and do not speak the Arabic language, but rather are Persians, Turks, Afghans, or one of the many South and Southeast Asian people groups.

i Hinduism

Hinduism is the main religion of the South Asian subcontinent. Hindu society is divided into a complex caste system, and a strict Hindu will observe the rules and regulations for his or her caste. Hinduism has millions of gods and hundreds of sects, but certain things can be said of the religion as a whole.

The holy books of Hinduism include the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita, along with numerous other sacred texts. Hindus believe in reincarnation, but they do not want to be reincarnated. Each time you are reincarnated, your new state in life is determined by karma, or moral cause and effect. Basically, you reap what you sow through the process of reincarnation.

The goal of Hinduism is to escape the wheel of reincarnation and lose your personal awareness and identity in the state of Nirvana. You perform worship (puja) as an individual at a shrine, and you do it to earn merit as part of your karma. Hinduism has holidays and celebrations like Diwali and Holi, but it does not have weekly communal worship.

Within that basic framework, the actual practice of Hinduism takes a variety of forms, from sects focused on individual gods to philosophical speculation. At a popular level, much of it is animistic, with religious practice used to manipulate the spirit world to give the worshipper what he or she wants. India is the heartland of Hinduism, but the religion is also found in places where Indians have emigrated in large numbers, like eastern and southern Africa and Southeast Asia.

i Buddhism

Buddhism began as a reform movement within Hinduism, and it is based on the same philosophical foundations.

Siddhartha Gautama lived in the sixth century BC near what is now the India/Nepal border. After attempting and failing to reach enlightenment through severe asceticism, he meditated under the Bodhi tree and became the awakened one, or Buddha. He then began to teach others the way to enlightenment, based on the Four Noble Truths: 1) life is suffering; 2) suffering is caused by desires; 3) suffering is ended by the renunciation of all desires; and 4) the way to achieve renunciation of all desires is to follow the Eightfold Path, which is Right Understanding, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Vocation, Right Effort, Right Awareness, and Right Concentration. Technically, since Buddhism believes that Gautama achieved Nirvana, he no longer exists as self-conscious individual, and he is not a god.

Buddhism rejects the Hindu caste system, but it operates on the same understanding of reincarnation and karma, with Nirvana as the goal.

Buddhism has two major groupings. Theravada Buddhism is found in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, while Mahayana Buddhism is found in China, Tibet, Mongolia, Korea and Japan.

i Chinese Traditional Religion

Chinese traditional religion is a mix of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism.

Confucianism is based on the teaching of Confucius, a Chinese philosopher and politician from the sixth century BC. His teaching focused on practical philosophy, with a special emphasis on propriety in social relationships.

Confucianism as a movement came to be wedded to the processes of state administration in China and had a profound influence on Chinese culture. As in many parts of the world, it is often difficult to distinguish between the religious, philosophical and cultural elements of Confucianism. The Analects of Confucius are their main religious text.

Taoism is more mystical and less rational than Confucianism. The opening line of the Tao Te Ching, their main holy text, is, "The Way that can be spoken of is not the eternal Way." The Tao (pronounced "Dao") can be roughly translated as "The Way," and it is the unity of "yin" and "yang," which are the opposites of dark and light, female and male, passive and active, and so on. Taoism has many gods which are worshiped in Taoist temples.

Mahayana Buddhism is also a significant factor in Chinese religion. Because none of these religions are exclusivist, popular religion in China is a blend of all three, with a large dose of animism mixed in as well. There are over a billion Chinese in the world, with most living in China, but large Chinese populations are scattered all over the world.

Animism

Animism is the popular religion that lies behind most formal religions.

Animism is the religion of spirits, demons, and multiple gods. An animist believes in the world we can all see and touch, and he or she may also believe in a supreme God above every other spiritual being, but the most important reality for an animist is the middle realm of spirits who actively shape and control what happens in the visible world.

Success and failure, health and sickness, even life and death are in the hands of these spirits, who are often amoral and capricious. Religious activity is

designed to keep the spirits and gods from harming you, and hopefully to convince them to do good things for you. In most animistic society, there are persons of power—witchdoctors or shamans or similar types of leaders—who have special abilities to control the spirit world.

Animism is the type of religion found in most isolated non-literate societies, on every continent in the world. It also persists even after one of the major formal religions comes on the scene, and blends in with it, so that folk Catholicism, folk Islam, and folk Buddhism have large amounts of animism in the mix. Elements of animism can be found in Protestant Christianity in the form of Prosperity teaching. Forms of animism have always existed as superstition in the Western world, and there is a resurgence of neo-paganism in such forms as Wicca in the present day. Animism is everywhere.

Judaism

Judaism falls in a category of its own.

Unlike other religions, the origins of Judaism lie in the Bible itself. Our Lord Jesus was a Jew, as were the biblical prophets before him and the apostles after him. The Jewish Bible constitutes the beginning of our Bible. However, no one can be saved apart from trusting in Jesus, and that includes Jews.

Judaism continued to develop after the time of Jesus, and much of that development was in reaction against Christianity. Modern Judaism is largely universalist, believing that everyone (or perhaps all “good” people of all religions) will go to heaven. Jewish scholarship has developed its own interpretations of the Old Testament texts which Christians regard as pointing to Jesus. The Jewish experience of centuries of “Christian” persecution, culminating in the Holocaust during World War 2, has given them a deep suspicion of Christianity.

On the other hand, Jews live all over the United States, and have for a very long time, so it is more likely that an evangelical Christian has Jewish friends than friends from any other religion. Many Jews in North America regard their Judaism as more of a cultural identity than as a personal faith, with support for the State of Israel as a big concern. The largest Jewish populations in the world live in Israel and the United States, but Jews can be found all over the world.

Section

Lesson 2: Building Relationships

How are we to relate to people from other religious backgrounds?

3. Everyone in the world is a sinner who needs to be rescued from condemnation. Jesus is the only way of salvation for anyone. No one can be saved by any of these religions. Everyone needs the gospel.
4. At the same time, we are supposed to love both our neighbor and our enemy. That includes Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, Taoists, and animists. The fact that someone believes an unbiblical religion is never a reason to hate that person or to treat them badly. Instead, we are supposed to love them and do good things for them.
5. The gospel is the very power of God for salvation. We should never be afraid of people from other religions, nor should we be afraid to share the gospel with them.
6. Go out of your way to love people from other religions. Show them hospitality. Invite them to your home, and accept invitations to go to theirs. Help them in practical ways.
7. Learn more about the religious beliefs and cultural customs of the people you meet from other religions. Ask them open-ended questions, and do a lot of listening.
8. Show sensitivity to people from other religions. If you invite a Jew or a Muslim to dinner, don't serve pork. If you go to their home and see that they take off their shoes inside the house, do the same. Treat them the way you would like to be treated.
9. Talk about your faith regularly around people of other religions. Include Scripture in your conversations and your observations about life. Relax about it and make it normal. For most people in the world, it is normal

to talk about the things that are important to you, so if your religion is important to you, they expect you to talk about it.

10. Share the gospel with your friends from other religions. Don't worry about being able to answer all their questions. The gospel has power, in and of itself, and the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts people of their need for Jesus. Pray before and after you share, and keep loving people whether they come to Jesus or not.

Group Discussion

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

Are there mosques, or temples belonging to other religions, in your community? Do you know members of other religions? If so, what can you do to love them and share the gospel with them?

*Section***Lesson 3: Crossing Cultures****Understanding Cultures**

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

1 Corinthians 9:20-22

The Cultures of the World

Everyone in the world lives in a culture. Culture is the structure we share with others in our society that gives shape to the way we think and live. For the most part, we don't notice it. Culture is like a skeleton. It gives our bodies their form, and it enables us to get things done, but the skeleton itself cannot be seen. Culture only becomes obvious when it comes up against another, different culture. When that happens, stress happens, along with serious grounds for miscommunication.

Missionary work, by definition, is cross-cultural work. How should we understand the issue of culture and how can we cross cultural lines well?

The Cultures of the Bible

First, we need to recognize that our culture is different from the culture of the New Testament. In fact, it is not really accurate to speak of one single culture of the New Testament, because Jesus and his apostles lived in more than one cultural setting. The Jewish community in Palestine had one culture, but the Greek cities where Paul

planted churches were quite different from Palestine and from one another. When we read and interpret the Bible, we are already doing something cross-cultural, because we are reading a book written for a different culture and then applying it to ourselves in ours.

When we do ministry cross-culturally, there are three cultures involved: ours, the culture of the text of Scripture, and the culture of the people we are trying to reach. We always need to remember that our goal is not to remake people in the image of our culture. Our goal is to remake them in the image of Jesus.

Section

Lesson 3: Levels of Culture

Level One: Behavior and Products

Culture exists on several levels. The top level, which is the easiest to see, is the level of behavior and cultural products. Some cultures eat with knives, forks and spoons, some eat with chopsticks, and some eat with their hands. Different cultures eat different foods. Different cultures have a different sense of how close you can stand to someone else and still be comfortable while talking with them, or how loud or quiet you should be in public. Different cultures dress differently and furnish their houses differently. One of the most obvious differences between cultures is language. Languages are structured differently, so language actually affects the way a person thinks. These are the sorts of things a person notices first when they are around a different culture.

Level Two: Beliefs

The next level down in cultural depth is the level of consciously-held beliefs. Most Americans believe that democracy is the best form of government and that some form of free-market capitalism is the best economic system. Communist countries explicitly believe that a socialist economic system with a highly authoritarian government is best. Christians and Muslims will both tell you that they believe in God, but what they believe about him is quite different. Secularists will either tell you that they don't believe in God, or else they will tell you that they believe that religion should be an entirely private matter. These are the beliefs that people know that they have, and they know that there are other people in the world who believe differently.

Level Three: Worldview

The deepest level of culture is worldview. This is the largely hidden foundation that shapes the layers above it. Most people don't even realize that they have a worldview, so it guides their thinking and behavior without ever being examined.

Your worldview tells you how to think, how to feel about things, what is real and what isn't, what is possible and what is not, what is good and what is bad, what is beautiful and what is ugly. Worldview includes the system of logic or reasoning you use, how you form your identity, what you think about the natural and supernatural worlds, how you understand time, and how you make decisions. It is like the operating system on a computer. Most people neither write nor understand computer code, but that code determines what the computer can do and how it does it.

Your worldview profoundly affects what you believe, what you value, and how you live. Because all people are sinners, and because sin has affected every part of human life, including culture, every culture's worldview is twisted by sin. That is as true of our own culture as any other, and a big part of growing as a disciple is having our worldview transformed by God's perspective.

So, to give a few examples of areas in the typical North American worldview that are out of sync with Scripture, North American culture assumes that the supernatural either doesn't exist or that it has no bearing on the natural world. Many Christians act as though that were true, even though they profess to believe otherwise. North American culture is deeply materialistic, and many Christians live as though accumulating possessions were a high priority, even though their official belief system says otherwise. The examples could go on.

There are two important points to be made:

First, we must not assume that our own worldview is automatically right. It is only right as far as it is consistent with the word of God, and we are all in need of having our perspective reshaped to line up with God's.

Second, our discipleship needs to address beliefs and behaviors, but it needs to go deeper and aim at transforming worldviews as well. Our discipleship should not just change the surface, but should change the unseen foundations also.

Section

Lesson 3: Relating to Other Cultures

All of us tend to think that our way is best. This is true of culture, and when we run into a culture that is different from our own, our natural tendency is to think that we are right and they are wrong. When we find ourselves immersed in that different culture, it produces culture shock. How should we relate to different cultures, either with internationals in our own country or when we ourselves go somewhere else? These points should be helpful.

Distinguish Between Moral Issues and Cultural Differences

First, recognize that different is not always wrong. Sometimes, different is just different. This is especially true of the upper level of culture, the level that is most easily observed. There is no moral difference in whether you eat with a fork, or chopsticks, or your hands. (Jesus and his disciples almost certainly ate with their hands, and not with forks.) There is no spiritual significance in whether you eat Chinese stir fry, or Italian pasta, or Indian curry, or fried insects. Personal space issues may make you uncomfortable, but the Bible does not dictate how close you can be to someone else when holding a conversation with them. If the Bible does not speak clearly to something, begin with the assumption that it is simply different, not that it is wrong.

On the other hand, when the Bible draws a line, we must draw it, too. You may be assured by your new neighbors overseas that every man in the neighborhood has a mistress, and that everyone in their culture thinks it is fine, but it is not fine, because the word of God says it is wrong. We cannot go there. We want to adapt to the culture of the people we are trying to reach as much as possible, but never at the expense of obedience to Scripture.

Ask Good Questions

Try to go beneath the surface, and understand the beliefs and worldview assumptions that lie underneath outward behaviors. Ask open-ended questions, and listen a lot. Probe what your new friends think about God, and the supernatural world, and what it means to be human, and what are the most important factors in their personal identity. Find out what things they think are right and what things are wrong, and what makes them so. Ask them to share their proverbs with you, because those can give you significant insight into what they value and what they don't. Get at their worldview foundations, and begin speaking Scripture into those.

Re-examine Your Own Culture

Use your experience of relating to others cross-culturally to discover more about your own culture and worldview. Many times we do not notice how we operate culturally until we see it contrasted with someone else's. Look particularly at your worldview assumptions, and scrutinize them in the light of Scripture. Be willing to experience some discomfort, and be willing to change.

Address Worldview Issues

As you share the gospel with someone, be willing to take the time to address the worldview issues that undergird it. If the person you are sharing with has a faulty view of God, or no understanding of the nature and severity of sin, or an unbiblical perspective on human destiny, the gospel will not make sense. Likewise, when discipling a new believer, bring the entire word of God to bear on the entire structure of their worldview. Don't leave them with a thin coating of Christian beliefs and behaviors over a deep well of unbiblical assumptions.

Act in Love

Finally, do all this in love. Do not approach someone from another culture with an attitude of superiority, and do not be quick to criticize. Even when you disagree with them (and you must, if you are going to proclaim the gospel), do so with courtesy and respect. People will listen far more to someone they know loves them than to someone who thinks they are better than they are.

Group Discussion

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What elements do you see in the worldview of your community that contradict the worldview of the Bible? What do you see in yourself?

Question 2:

Have you ever experienced culture shock? If so, describe it to your missions course study group. What brought it on? What did you do to get through it?

*Section***Lesson 4: Missions and the Local Church****The Role of Churches Through History**

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 3:8-10

The task of missions belongs to the local church. Mission agencies exist to be an arm of the local church, not to replace them in mission work.

The Early Church

In the New Testament, we have already seen the example of the church in Antioch, whom God led while they were fasting and praying to send out Paul and Barnabas to take the gospel to cities where it had never been heard. The church at Antioch sent them out, and when their journeys were over, they came back to Antioch to report on all that God had done through them. New Testament missionaries were sent by local churches, they planted local churches, they were financially supported by local churches, and they remained accountable to local churches. This is the biblical pattern.

Churches Through History

In the history of missions, however, once missionaries had been sent, the ongoing involvement of the local church was limited by the transportation and communication technology available to them. Transportation was by ship. As it could take months (in the days of sailing ships) or at least weeks (once steam engines had been invented)

to get to the mission field, short term trips were simply impossible, and pastoral visits were few and far between. Communication happened through handwritten letters carried on those same ships, so the missionaries were left, by and large, to their own devices.

Churches in Recent History

All of this changed with the advent of reliable air travel in the years following World War 2. Suddenly, you could get anywhere in the world in a matter of hours, not weeks or months. First telegraph, then telephones, made instant communication possible. The rapid development of the internet at the end of the 20th century revolutionized communication even more. Now, it is possible to chat face to face with people in almost every city on earth. Suddenly, local churches can be involved in missions in ways never possible before.

Section

Lesson 4: The Role of Churches Today

The previously presented factors combine to make this a critical time for churches. They have the responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission, and now they have opportunities to engage in mission work like never before.

So what should a church do?

Own the Task

First, the church needs to own their responsibility. This should be true of both the leaders and the members of the church. If members of the church do not have a vision for the world, the leaders of the church should pray, teach and exhort the congregation until there is one. Missions cannot be one special interest among many things the church does, pursued by a small group out of the whole. The entire church needs to own it, from the pastor to the whole congregation.

Engage Strategically

The church needs to engage in missions wisely. Often, once a church gets excited about the world, they try to do everything everywhere at once. Instead, it is better for the church to educate itself about missions and about the world, and then to choose a people group or place to invest their energies. If at all possible, it is best to do this in partnership with missionaries on the field in that place or among that people. This partnership needs to be long-term in duration in order to make a significant impact for the gospel.

Pray For the World

The church must commit itself to prayer for the global advance of the gospel. It should pray broadly for global needs and specifically for the work it has adopted. It should

pray for the world every time it meets, in every setting—Sunday worship, Sunday School classes, midweek small groups and any other gathering of church members. God uses prayer to advance his work, and he also uses it to change the hearts and minds of the people who pray. Prayer is central to the advance of the gospel.

Teach Biblical Missions

The church should teach on missions throughout the year. This should not just happen once a year on a special missions emphasis Sunday, but whenever the subject of missions, or the nations, comes up in the text for the Sunday sermon or the portions of Scripture being examined in church Bible studies. These themes are woven throughout the fabric of Scripture, so they should come up often in the teaching ministry of the church. As the church prays constantly for missions and studies about it regularly in the Bible, they will catch on to the reality that this is central to the life of the church.

Give to Missions

The church should give generously to the cause of missions. The average local church spends most of its money on itself. But giving should have a global impact as well as a local one. Right now, there are people ready and willing to take the gospel to unreached peoples in hard places, but the resources aren't there to send them. This should not be. The level of financial support a church gives to missions should reflect the biblical value of missions.

Care for Missionaries

The church should stay in regular contact with their missionary partners on the field. With modern communications technology, this is easier than ever before. Missionaries need encouragement and accountability, and the members of the church need the regular challenge that comes from contact with people on the front lines of the gospel. Both sides profit greatly from regular communication.

Participate in Short-Term Missions

The church should go on short term mission trips to support the work that they have partnered with. They need to be careful that their trips contribute to the work and do not detract from it. Their work overseas needs to be fully under the control of their field worker partners. They need to be careful about information security, especially when working in places where open missionary activity is not allowed. They also need to be careful not to use their money to create dependency among local believers and churches. Given all that, few things revolutionize the life of a church more than taking its members to live and work directly among unreached peoples.

Send Long-Term Missionaries

The church needs to send its members to labor long-term on the mission field. The congregation as a whole should pray that God would raise up workers from among them. The leaders of the church should encourage people to wrestle with the mandate of the Great Commission. Christian parents should raise their children to care deeply for the nations, and they should affirm and encourage them when they express a desire to go. Leaders in the church should identify people who seem gifted and qualified for cross-cultural ministry, and they should proactively encourage them to pursue missionary service. The church should train and nurture people who sense a call to missions, and they should carefully examine and screen anyone who wants to go. The local church is the real missionary sending agency, and it should function as such, even though formal missionary boards can add tremendous value to what the church can do.

Missionaries are disciplined by churches and sent by churches to plant churches. Ultimately, that means that the cause of global missions is directly tied to the health of the churches that support it. The local church is the key to the entire missionary enterprise.

Group Discussion

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

What has your local church done in the past to support and engage in missions? What is it doing now?

Question 2:

What would you like to see happen in your local church to engage in missions better?

Section

Lesson 5: Suffering for the Gospel

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, not of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

2 Timothy 1:8

North American culture is a culture of entitlement. We are raised to believe that we have the right to have what we want. Specifically, we are raised to value comfort and convenience very highly, and to value health and safety above everything else. For that reason, verses like 2 Timothy 1:8 sound strange in our ears. Even for those who have not embraced the heresy of Prosperity Teaching, the gospel has been presented all too often as though it were all about us, and we expect God to give us an abundant life.

Would God really command us to suffer for the gospel?

Suffering As A Christian

Most of our fellow Christians throughout history and across the globe have known better than to think the way we do. For most people, suffering is simply a part of life.

Suffering in a Fallen World

Suffering can come from several sources. The most common source of suffering is simply because we live in a fallen world. Because of the rebellion of our first parents, this world is now a place of disease and natural disasters. Because of the sin that inhabits the hearts of all people, the world is also characterized by hatred, violence, crime, and oppression.

These things can happen to everyone. God gives no guarantee anywhere in Scripture that he will shield his people from danger or suffering. Christians get sick and die. Christians are the victims of crime. Because of our technological advances and the rule of law in our society, they happen less often and less obviously to us in the Western world than they do to most people globally. We have often fooled ourselves into thinking that we have a right to be sheltered completely from such things. We do not, however, and sooner or later everyone will experience the results of the curse of sin.

Suffering For Following Jesus

For us as Christians, the situation is actually more sobering, and not less. The New Testament both assumes and states that suffering is a normal, expected part of what it means to follow Jesus.

Given what the Bible says about the fallen condition of the world, this should come as no surprise. In Jesus, God became a man and lived among us—and the world responded by murdering him. Far from seeking God, fallen men and women hate God and are trying to get away from him. Anyone who reminds rebellious sinners about the true God, or who exposes their self-righteousness for the sham that it is, brings on themselves the same hatred that fell on Jesus. He made the connection clear. “Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20).

Paul made the same point when he said, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (II Timothy 3:12). Suffering for the sake of Jesus is even seen as a gift: “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29). We are told that the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy of suffering for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:40-41). The churches in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), Galatia (Galatians 3:4), Philippi (Philippians 1:29), Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:14), and Asia Minor (1 Peter 4:12) all experienced suffering, as did the believers who received the letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 10:32). Paul went through horrible suffering (2 Corinthians 11:23-29). So did the other apostles (Acts 5, 6, 7, 8).

In the Bible, the call to follow Jesus is a call to abandon the safety, security and comfort of this world in order to embrace the cross. This is not the picture of some extraordinary super-faith. This is the biblical picture of the normal life of the normal Christian.

Sharing in Christ's Sufferings

Scripture tells us that those who trust in Christ are now themselves "in Christ." Part of what it means to be "in Christ" is to share in the fellowship of his sufferings. Paul links knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection with sharing in his sufferings, as though they were a package deal (Philippians 3:10). He tells the Corinthians, "As we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort, too" (2 Corinthians 1:5). Peter echoes this same theme, saying, "Rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4:13). In Romans 8:17, Paul goes so far as to say that believers are "heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Suffering with Christ is so closely connected with enjoying his glory that the two things cannot be separated. Unless Paul contradicts what he says elsewhere, this cannot mean that our sufferings somehow save us, but it does seem to show that suffering with Christ is such a normal part of being in Christ that Paul cannot conceive of one without the other.

What About Christians Who Don't Suffer?

Does this mean that comfortable, well-off Christians in the West should go out and try to provoke unbelievers to persecute them? No. Believers are nowhere commanded to seek out persecution. However, their condition should alarm them. It is dangerous and abnormal.

They need in particular to beware the temptations of respectability and prosperity. They need to beware the subtle idolatry of making Jesus a means to the end of their own enjoyment of this life. They need to beware the worldliness of setting their hearts

on things below and valuing possessions and health and security more than the glory of Christ. They need to examine themselves honestly and often to see if the desire to maintain their lifestyle has caused them to compromise their obedience in any way. They need to be ready to lose anything and everything at a moment's notice for the sake of the surpassing value of Christ.

Affluence and safety are dangerous conditions in which to be a disciple of Jesus, and those who live in them need to be especially careful. The normal condition of a follower of Christ is to share in the fellowship of his sufferings, and those who don't always need to ask themselves why they are not.

Section

Lesson 5: Suffering as a Missionary

If it is true that following Jesus is a hazardous undertaking, advancing the gospel into the unreached world is even more so. Those who take the light of Christ into the darkness of a rebellious world seem to experience an intensified level of suffering.

Paul's Suffering

This was certainly Paul's experience. At the very beginning of his Christian life, when Ananias was sent to Paul in Damascus to restore his sight, God linked his missionary calling with these words: "For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:16). Paul understood that link, and expressed it to Timothy at the end of his life when he said that he suffered the way he did because of his work for the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10-11).

Timothy's Suffering

Lest anyone think that this connection between suffering and the service of the gospel was unique to the apostles, Paul applied it to Timothy as well: "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:3). Indeed, so close was this connection that Paul actually uses "share in suffering for the gospel" where the context clearly indicates that he is talking about sharing in the work of the gospel (2 Timothy 1:6-9).

The Missionary's Suffering

This pattern has continued down to the present. Those who take the gospel where it has never before been heard have always been the special targets of opposition and suffering. Those who take the gospel where Christ is not yet known must do so with their eyes wide open to what may lie ahead.

Furthermore, disciples of Jesus in the Western world must embrace the truth that the gospel is worth any price God may ask us to pay, and we must abandon our instinctive aversion to discomfort or danger. The Great Commission will not be fulfilled without suffering. If one part of the Body of Christ demonstrates that it is not willing to pay that kind of price, God will pass over them and use those whose values are more in line with his.

Section

Lesson 5: The Joy of Suffering

For the Joy That Was Set Before him

So far, this discussion has been pretty somber. Does all of this mean that biblical Christianity is grim and unpleasant? By no means! That is not what God is like. There are eternal pleasures at his right hand (Psalm 16:11). The Christian life is a matter of “joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Peter 1:8). Even when talking about the suffering of Jesus, the Book of Hebrews tells us that he endured the cross “for the joy that was set before him” (Hebrews 12:2).

To Live Is Christ, To Die Is Gain

Biblical Christianity does not value suffering for its own sake. It is simply a matter of a transformed value system. For the sake of real treasure, the believer is willing to let go of lesser things like possessions, or comfort and security, or even this life. The point is not what you lose. The point is the surpassing value of what you gain.

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

– Jim Elliot

Paul summarized this perspective in his letter to the Philippians. Paul realizes that he might be executed for his faith, but he says, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). His greatest treasure in this life was to know Christ. If he died, he would be with Christ, which he regards as far better than anything this life can provide (Philippians 1:23). Either way, Christ is everything. He is the treasure hidden in the field worth selling everything to get (Matthew 13:44). He is the most valuable thing that has ever existed on this earth. He is true life, true joy, true peace, and true satisfaction. In him the believer has forgiveness of sin, new birth, reconciliation with

God, adoption into God's family, the gift of the Holy Spirit, progressive transformation into the image of Christ, and the guarantee of eternal life in the infinite joy and glory of God's presence.

This is real treasure, and it is treasure that cannot be lost. All the things that the world values—possessions, comfort, health, even life itself—are things that everyone will eventually lose. What rational person holds on as long as they can to things they must eventually lose, at the expense of things of far greater value that can never be taken away from them? Seen from the perspective of God's truth, the truly sane person is the one who endures whatever temporary losses go along with genuine, eternal treasure.

An Eternal Weight of Glory

Once believers grasp the incredible value of Christ and his gospel, and the comparatively small and passing value of the good things of this life, they can see with the same eyes as Paul, who after all that he went through could write, "For slight, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

No One Can Serve Two Masters

The problem, of course, is that what we can see is immediate and attractive, while what we cannot see can only be grasped by faith. Those who have a lot of good things that they can see here and now often have the hardest time grasping the superior value of what they cannot yet see.

Most people, of course, would prefer to have their cake and eat it, too. They would rather enjoy the good things of this life and the better things of the life to come. In his wisdom, however, God knows that we cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). He does not call on his children to renounce all possessions or pleasures, and he certainly does not command them to pursue suffering for its own sake. Everything he created is good, including possessions and pleasures when they are rightly used.

He does, however, call on his children to look at things rationally. He calls on them to value that which is infinitely and eternally valuable over that which is small and temporary. He calls on them to invest what they have in this life in the things of the next. He calls on them to recognize that they are not their own, but that they live only by his grace and only for his glory. Once that perspective is grasped, the call to endure suffering for the sake of the gospel ceases to be grim news and becomes a reasonable part of our joyful calling in Christ.

Jesus Is Worth It

Christians who have grasped the mindset of the Bible are willing to suffer for the advance of the gospel in the world because Jesus is worth it. Those are the kinds of people who will be useful in global missions, and those are the disciples who will know the greatest joy.

Group Discussion

Answer the question(s) below in preparation for group discussion.

Question 1:

Did the lesson on suffering challenge you in any ways? If so, describe them to your missions course study group.

Question 2:

What temptations or entanglements do you face that could keep you from being fully useful to God in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth?

Section

Group Discussion: Missions and the World Today

SUGGESTED OUTLINE (90 MINUTES)

1. Scripture Memory & Prayer (5 min)
2. Summary & Discussion (50 min)
3. Group Activity (20 min)
4. Prayer (10 min)
5. Before You Go... (5 min)

i SCRIPTURE MEMORY & PRAYER (5 MIN)

Ask someone in your group to recite Matthew 24:14 from memory

Pray that God would use this final meeting to open your eyes to His plan to redeem a people from every nation in spite of current global realities. Ask God to enable the members in your group to consider their role in His plan and to respond in obedience to His Great Commission.

i SUMMARY & DISCUSSION (50 MIN)

Summarize Unit 6 with your group, using this text as a guide and reference:

In this unit, we have looked at some of the significant factors in missions

in the modern world. We examined the current state of the advance of the gospel in terms of unreached people groups and unengaged unreached people groups. We saw that at least three billion people in the world live without access to the gospel. We looked at the other religions in the world and considered ways of relating to people from those religions that would lead to gospel conversations. We explored the nature of culture and its impact on how we present the gospel. We explored the role of the local church in global missions. Finally, we faced the role of suffering in the advance of the gospel, and we looked at it in light of a biblical worldview that stands in stark contrast to the perspective of the world around us.

Discuss

1. Look at your own community. How many gospel-preaching churches are there in your community? How many church members are there? How does this compare with the condition of unreached and unengaged people groups globally?
2. What internationals live in your community? Are any of them from unreached, or even unengaged, people groups? (You can use the IMB research website to discover the level of evangelization of every known people group.) What can you do to reach them with the gospel?
3. Are there mosques, or temples belonging to other religions, in your community? Do you know members of other religions? If so, what can you do to love them and share the gospel with them?
4. What elements do you see in the worldview of your community that contradict the worldview of the Bible? What do you see in yourself?
5. Have you ever experienced culture shock? If so, describe it to your missions course study group. What brought it on? What did you do to get through it?
6. What has your local church done in the past to support and engage in missions? What is it doing now?

7. What would you like to see happen in your local church to engage in missions better?
8. Did the lesson on suffering challenge you in any ways? If so, describe them to your missions course study group.
9. What temptations or entanglements do you face that could keep you from being fully useful to God in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth?

i GROUP ACTIVITY (20 MIN)

Make a list of 3 non-believers in your life for whom you would like to commit to pray and share the gospel. In Groups of 2-3, quickly take turns discussing how you know each person. Answer the following questions about each of these people:

1. When do you usually see this person?
2. How does natural conversation with them usually begin/end?
3. Do you know anything about their life story? Do they know anything about yours (Do they know you're a follower of Jesus?)?
4. What are specific ways can you serve them (or let them serve you)?
5. In what setting would you have the best opportunity to engage them on a deeper level with the gospel?

In your group, pray that God would give each of you wisdom to seek out opportunities in the coming weeks to be witnesses of His gospel to the names you listed. Pray for boldness to share faithfully when those opportunities come. And pray that God would soften the hearts of those who hear so that they might put their trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin.

i PRAYER (10 MIN)

Read Matthew 24:14 and Revelation 7:9-12 out loud together, and spend some time praying for the following:

1. Pray for the accomplishment of the Great Commission. Specifically, pray:
 1. for disciples to be made
 2. for churches to be multiplied
 3. for Christ to be magnified in every nation.
2. Pray for the return of Christ, and for faithfulness in your local church to His global mission until He returns.
3. Pray for your upcoming group event and any unbelievers you expect to be there.

i BEFORE YOU GO... (5 MIN)

Discuss any final details for the group event you have been planning. Be sure to invite non-believers with whom you are hoping to form deeper relationships for the sake of the gospel.

HOMEWORK:

Pray for the attendees this week, and ask God to use your interactions with them to testify to His love and mercy in the gospel of His Son.

Section

Final Charge by David Platt



If you are a follower of Christ, **God has equipped your ordinary life with his extraordinary power for his global purpose.** But all of this leads to the question, “What now?” In other words, “How do I begin to put God’s global purpose into practice right where I live?” In answer to that question, as this course comes to a close...

This is the picture of the church that we see on the pages of the New Testament. And this small band of twelve men responded to a life-changing invitation from Jesus: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:17). Over the days that followed, they watched Jesus, listened to him, and learned from him how to love, teach, and serve others the same way that he had done. Then came the moment when they saw him die on a cross for their sins, only to rise from the dead three days later. Soon thereafter, he gathered them on a mountainside and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). Just like Jesus had said from the beginning, these followers would now become fishers of men. His authoritative commission would become their consuming ambition.

Not long after Jesus' ascension, they gathered together with a small group of others, about 120 in all, and they waited. True to his promise, Jesus sent his Spirit to every one of them, and immediately they began proclaiming the gospel. From there, they scattered out from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth, and within one generation, they grew to over four hundred times the size they were when they started.

How did this happen?

The spread of the gospel in the book of Acts took place primarily because ordinary people empowered by an extraordinary presence were proclaiming the gospel everywhere they went. To be sure, God did appoint well-known apostles like Peter, John, and Paul for certain positions of leadership in the church. Yet it was anonymous Christians (i.e., not the Apostles) who first took the gospel to Judea and Samaria, and it was unnamed believers who founded the church at Antioch, which became a base for mission to the Gentile world. It was unidentified followers of Jesus who spread the gospel throughout all of Asia. Disciples were made and churches were multiplied in places the apostles never went. The Good News of Jesus spread not just through gifted preachers, but through everyday people whose lives had been transformed by the power of Christ. They were going from house to house and in marketplaces and shops along streets and travel routes, leading people to faith in Jesus on a daily basis.

This is how the gospel penetrated the world during the first century: through self-denying, Spirit-empowered disciples of Jesus who were making disciples of Jesus. Followers of Jesus were fishing for men. Disciples were making disciples. Christians were not known for casual association with Christ and his church; instead, they were

known for complete abandonment to Christ and his cause. The great commission was not a choice for them to consider, but a command for them to obey. And though they faced untold trials and unthinkable persecution, they experienced unimaginable joy as they joined with Jesus in the advancement of his Kingdom.

I want to be part of a movement like that. I want to be part of a people who really believe that we have the Spirit of God in each of us for the spread of the gospel through all of us. I want to be a part of a people who are gladly sacrificing the pleasures, pursuits, and possessions of this world because we are living for treasure in the world to come. **I want to be part of a people who are forsaking every earthly ambition in favor of one eternal aspiration: to see disciples made and churches multiplied from our houses to our communities to our cities to the nations.**

This course was designed to compel this kind of movement in followers of Christ and their churches. Regardless of who you are, if you are a follower of Christ, I hope that you see have seen that God has equipped your ordinary life with his extraordinary power for his global purpose. But all of this leads to the question, "What now?" In other words, "How do I begin to put God's global purpose into practice right where I live?" In answer to that question, as this course comes to a close, I want to encourage you in four specific ways.

First, **make disciples right where you live.** God has put you in the place and position where you find yourself right now for his purpose. He wants the people around you to know his love. God loves them so much that not only did he send his Son to pay the price for sin two thousand years ago, but he sent you as his child to live alongside them today. Picture the people in and around your home, in and around your workplace, and in and around your community. You have the greatest news in all the world to share with them: death has been defeated and eternal life is possible for every one of them who believes in Jesus! And you have the most important news in all the world for them: if those people don't hear and believe this news, they will spend eternity in hell apart from God. Needless to say, the stakes are high, so start by sharing the gospel with those around you. Pray for opportunities to share, and then pray for their openness to believe. As you talk with God about them, then talk with them about

God. Moreover, in light of the specific content in this course, cultivate relationships across cultures with people who aren't like you, and look for opportunities to share the gospel with the nations in your neighborhood. Make disciples right where you live.

Then, second, **make disciples wherever God leads**. As you make disciples where you live, open your heart and life up to the possibility that God may lead you to make disciples somewhere else in the world in the days to come. In Scripture, we see You have seen in this course the numbers of people and places who don't even have access to the gospel today, and you have seen how throughout history God has called many of his people to leave their homes in order to spread his glory around the world. To be sure, God won't call every Christian to do this, but he could call any Christian to do this. So open up your life to this possibility, surrendering your future to God in a fresh way and telling him you want to make disciples wherever he might lead you. This may be a hard prayer to offer before God, knowing that "wherever" could mean any number of places around the world, even places that are hard to the gospel and hostile to Christians. But remember the One to whom you are praying. He is the God who saved you, who loves you, and the God you have trusted with your life forever. If you can trust him to deliver you from your sins for all eternity, certainly you can trust him to lead you on this earth. So open your life, family, and future to making disciples wherever God might lead.

Third, **mobilize others to make disciples**. Now that you have been through this course, you see and know God's overarching purpose in the world, and the part you have to play in it. So show others the same thing! Who in your church or sphere of influence could you take through this course? How can you help your family, friends, small group, and the church around you to make disciples right where you live? And how can you help the same people open their lives to making disciples wherever God leads? God has not opened your eyes to the reality of who he is and what he is doing in the world just so that your life might be changed; he has done this so that others' lives might be changed through you. So put God's global purpose into practice by mobilizing people right around you on mission.

Finally, [connect with the International Mission Board](#). The International Mission Board (IMB) exists to partner with churches and mobilize Christians to do all of the above, specifically to make disciples around the world with a particular focus on people who have never heard the gospel. In other words, we exist to help you and your church put God's global purpose into practice. So let us help you. We have other resources available to help you take next steps in making disciples, including a [6-month course](#) designed for you and others to walk through the New Testament as you live on mission. Then, as God calls various people to consider taking the gospel to unreached people around the world, we have various tools to help you and your church assess whether or not God is leading you in that direction. If he is, then we offer training and support to help you follow him accordingly. We have pathways for all kinds of different people to go to all types of different places. From students to professionals in a plethora of different fields to retirees, the opportunities are limitless for you to be involved in spreading the gospel to the nations, whether that's for a week or two, a month or two, a year or two, or for the rest of your life. We exist to see every unreached people group in the world reached with the gospel, and we want to help you and your church play a part in making this goal a reality through praying, giving, sending, and going. Go to imb.org/next-steps in order to connect with us on these levels and many more.

Indeed, a global disciple making movement involves all of us. Every single follower of Christ fishing for men. Every single disciple making disciples right where they live and wherever God leads. Ordinary people spreading the gospel in extraordinary ways all over the world. Men and women from diverse backgrounds with different gifts and distinct platforms making disciples and multiplying churches through every domain of society in every place on the planet. **This is God's design for our lives in his church, and as disciples of Jesus, we must not settle for anything less.** So let us rise in obedience to our God and join him in what he is doing among all nations for the glory of his great name.

