



Developing
a Culture of
Mission
in Your Church

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

The intent of this ebook is to give you a tool for teaching on missions. You can use these for preaching to a congregation, adapt them for youth group lessons, do a Sunday school or small group series on missions, or whatever you please. This is intended, as simply as I can say it, as a tool to teach and ultimately mobilize your church.

I (Adam Swenson) allowed the authors to shape their own lessons to reflect their personality, teaching style, and approach to ministry.

Each author started with a touchstone passage, one that significantly formed their thinking on missional life. I asked them for the passage, their thoughts and development on the passage, and some application questions.

All of these are meant to be adapted for you to teach on. Each person here was chosen because they bring something unique and good to the table in terms of their missional understanding.

Ramon Castellanos is a longtime Belizean pastor, now on staff with Thirst Missions. He brings many years of missional experience to his role as the Assistant Director for Puerto Rico Operations.

David Fletcher has 35 years of pastoral experience, has helped mobilize many teams, and led medical mission teams to Belize. He is a Church Relations Specialist with Thirst Missions.

Elizabeth Kilby has a diverse background in travel, ministry, logistics support, and education. She combines those in her new venture Custom Created Life.

Glorie Mai was born and raised in Belize. She has worked for Thirst Missions for 10 years and is a much-loved trip leader and excellent trip consultant.

Seth Martin has created an incredible program in The Road that mobilizes 50+ teams a year out of Faithbridge church in Houston. It is the single largest and most well-developed church missions program I have ever seen over thousands of conversations with US pastors.

Troy Merseal is a senior pastor with over two decades of pastoral experience and innovative thinking on how to teach missions (and build a culture of mission) in a church context.

Jason Pfingsten founded Thirst Missions, an organization that has gone on to lead 700+ teams and 12,000 members in locations around the world. He brings well over 25 years of missional experience.

Brandon Shook brings many years of youth pastor experience and a deep missions background. He is a gifted teacher and discipler as well as an avid outdoorsman.

Levi Smith is the founding pastor at Awaken Community Church in Anchorage, Alaska. In his spare time he hunts grizzly bears, is a builder, trains with kettlebells, and is a chaplain on the oilfields in the farthest north stretches of Alaska.

I (Adam Swenson) have traveled widely, done missional work in many different cultural contexts in Nigeria, Zambia, South America, Central America, Alaska, and the Caribbean, and now serve as CEO of Thirst Missions.

Paul Williams is a longtime Belizean pastor who serves as the Thirst Missions Director of Belize Operations. He is a gifted leader and developer of young staff, and a die-hard Cubs fan.

We are doing the "heavy lifting" so to speak, to give you lessons you can take and run with.

DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF MISSION IN YOUR CHURCH

What does it mean to “do missions?” To “be on mission?” The word missions has so many different connotations depending on who you ask. The term has certainly taken on new meaning as a new generation has tried to figure out what it looks like to share the message of Christ by helping our neighbor at home or abroad.

For us at Thirst Missions, we are engaged in short-term missions. Our goal is to send teams to specific places (usually for a week) to help in specific ways. The majority of time this means partnering with a local church in a unique, one-on-one partnership and helping in ways they have asked for. This can also mean disaster relief, as in the summer of 2019 we had 650 people go to Puerto Rico to help families whose homes were damaged by Hurricane Maria. Those teams were able to help restore and repair homes for 150 families and many of those homeowners came to a new or renewed faith in Christ through the powerful witness and sacrificial love of those teams.

If missions is done well, it can be meaningful, redemptive, and gratifying. It can build community in a group of people like nothing else. If done poorly (not well planned, poor local knowledge, not with a healthy philosophy) it can actually be harmful or simply a poor use of time and resources. (Much more on a healthy philosophy of missions shortly!)

It’s easy to want to shy away from missions because it can be complex and even scary. But Jesus calls us in Matthew 28 to “go and make disciples of all nations.” In Acts 1:8 We are called to go to “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

WHY WE GO

I have come to the belief that we are called to do this a). because this is God’s chosen method of spreading the gospel throughout the world, but also b). because something vitally important happens in us when we respond to this call.

We grow in ways that would be impossible otherwise when we respond to God’s invitation. This call may make us uncomfortable—it may challenge us and shed light on our desire for comfort and familiarity. “Comfort and familiarity” is nothing scripture calls us to. The life of faith is meant to be one of being stretched, finding that God is faithful when we take that step, and then being prepared for greater things.

No one who does great things for God starts doing great things on day one. The Christian life is a developmental process of building skills and competencies, “letting the word dwell in you richly,” and the practice and discipline of following God.

Mission trips have a way of creating the necessary forward-thinking and outward-looking dynamic in individuals. When people face up to something they are uncertain of, tap into God’s resources and strength, and lean on their community, they begin to learn what they are capable of. When this happens in a group context, incredible community can be built in a relatively short period of time.

I led an adult team in Alaska in 2018. They were from a large church. In a church this size most people don’t know each other. And this team was formed of strangers who said yes to going to serve in Alaska. That was their only real commonality.

Over the course of the eight days, they were met with many challenges and had many triumphs. They traveled together, ate together, debriefed together, laughed together, and ministered together. They trained people in chemical dependency recovery on Godly wisdom and how to lead in life and family, and then worked alongside them in the afternoons. Many amazing conversations, connections and relationships came out of that time. God was richly at work.

Team members poured out everything they had each day and were refilled by time in God’s word and by their company around a campfire in the evening. Within this group of strangers in eight days they formed an incredible community beyond what they could have formed in 15 years of Sunday morning church attendance.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Since 2008 Thirst Missions has led 700+ mission teams and over 12,000 people in Alaska, Belize, England, Minnesota, Puerto Rico, and Texas. We’ve brought teams to do relational ministry, VBS, pastor training, and discipleship and many, many other things. We’ve brought teams to do hurricane relief and minister in intensely practical ways to the widow and the orphan. We’ve hosted youth groups, families, “open to the church”/multigenerational trips, and nearly every permutation you can think of (including a 120-member choir in Belize).

This depth and breadth of experience has taught us a few things, and the focus of this humble ebook is to harness that experience for you.

5 STEPS ON A MISSIONAL JOURNEY

The life of faith isn't meant to be a spectator sport. Our Christian faith isn't a commodity to be consumed like a show on Netflix or a frozen pizza. It's an adventure to be lived out, something that calls us ever deeper. The goal of this book (and ultimately all we at Thirst Missions do) is to help your church live into that reality.

In our experience there are a few very concrete steps that can be taken to prepare a team for a trip and then help them implement what they've learned into their lives moving forward. Missions can have a "flywheel effect" - it can take some work to get it started, but once it is established a community grows up around it and it becomes a healthy spiritual practice.

STEP ONE: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

Before the team goes, it's important to prepare them well. For those of us with a formal theological education or those of us who have spent significant time in ministry it can be easy to forget that many people don't know some of the foundational passages to missions. This ebook aims to give you a means to teach on this.

(If you'd like to explore the idea of bringing a team to a specific location we serve in, please let us know with an email to info@thirstmissions.org. We've created a set of six emails we will send you—two per week—that give you the information necessary to make a good decision. Each email also has videos from some of our key people—location directors, trip consultants, and trip leaders—so you can hear directly from the people that make Thirst run.)

In your meetings before you go, you'll have a leader's manual from Thirst to help you understand your location and be able to teach on that. This ebook will give you helpful lessons to teach the theological foundations of missions.

STEP TWO: SERVICE/PRACTICE

In the months before taking a trip, fundraising is a big activity. This is a great opportunity to get people out serving together and start to build that culture in your team. Serving together is really enjoyable, knowing that you've made a real difference and had fun doing it. It's a great way to teach some practical lessons and lay the groundwork for the team to function well on the trip.

This also establishes an important precedent that missional work isn't only

something you hop on a plane to go do. It's our job as leadership to help those in our care start to see life through a missional lens.

STEP THREE: THE TRIP

Traveling together on a trip you've spent significant time preparing for is thrilling. It's the culmination of a lot of effort and the start of a great adventure.

What does a really great, well-planned trip look like? Here are a few things we try to make sure each trip has.

Practical Service

You're working on a project that is needed and wanted, and the project is well planned out. Materials are on site and it's appropriate to the skillsets of the team.

Relationship Growth

A trip is a great time to form deeper relationships with team members (and that certainly happens!) but also to get to know the host pastor, the congregation, and some of the locals. Getting to know believers from another culture is a great experience.

In this mix we are usually connecting with those who don't know God yet, giving us an opportunity to share "the hope that lies within." As 1 Peter 3:15 says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..."

Connecting with those who may not know God yet is why we go!

Discover New Skills, Use Existing Skills

If you have a skill, it feels great to use it. So we try to build in a good mix of relational ministry (people skills) and service projects (swinging a hammer). Bonus points if people on the team can develop new skills.

I (Adam) led a trip in Belize where a youth group from Indiana built a rustic kitchen off a stick-built home in Belize. We used rough timbers for the frame corners and made tin walls and a roof with windows for cross breeze. The team built a table and bought a small four burner camping stove for the family to use, and that allowed them to not have to cook over a fire any longer. The family was thrilled.

That was certainly a new experience and new skills were learned!

When you are really serving—really meeting a practical need for the "widow and the orphan"—it's an incredible sensation. You may feel more alive than ever before. We are wired to serve and to love serving: it's how God made us. We love helping people discover that truth.

Time in the Word/Time in Nature

Spend the first 30 minutes of the day in devotions. It makes a great start to the day and gets people in a good mindset for what they will experience. If they can do this outside in a beautiful setting, all the better.

Adventure

Being intentional about going somewhere takes us out of our routines and helps prepare us for new possibilities. We want to be sure teams traveling with us experience real ministry (which is its own adventure!) but also experience beauty in creation. In Alaska teams may sea kayak and mountain bike, hike to (and on) a glacier, and hike to a waterfall in the northernmost rainforest in the world. These experiences tend to expand one's thinking.

Growing Deeper

All of the mission trips I have ever gone on changed me in some way. They opened my eyes, built great relationships, and helped to show me where I was discontent though I live with great abundance (globally speaking).

There were times I was anxious and God showed up. My walk of faith absolutely grew. I developed new skills and learned to trust them.

Those of us who are in ministry are tasked with helping those in our care grow deeper in our faith, and a well-planned mission trip is a great way to help them see major progress in a short time.

STEP FOUR: PROCESSING/DEBRIEF

Since a mission trip takes us out of our normal routines, asks new things of us, and exposes us to new experiences, there are many great teachable windows. It tends to get people thinking about the bigger questions, like "What is God doing with me?" "What is my calling?" "What are my gifts?"

We build in a meeting each evening to recap the day's events, prepare for the next day, and do a little debrief. On the last night we do a longer debrief meeting with worship and remembering the events of the week.

A centerpiece of this meeting is "affirmations." During this time we will go around the circle, one by one. Maybe it goes from John to Mike. When it is Mike's turn, three people get the chance to speak into Mike's life and tell him what they saw in him this week, how they saw God in him. It's very moving and helps Mike to "own" these new skills and experiences and perhaps even a new calling.

STEP FIVE: IMPLEMENTING

(Spring Training vs. Regular Season)

I believe mission trips are kind of like spring training for baseball teams. During spring training, you get this group of guys that goes down to Florida and spends a LOT of time together getting to know each other, gelling as a team, and just generally getting really good at all the skills required for baseball.

Spring training is not the end in and of itself—it's preparation for the 162-game regular season that starts when they get home. In the same way a mission trip has a group of people going somewhere with a united purpose. We are going to live, and be, on mission together. We are going to work to accomplish God's purposes in the world. We are going to see the kingdom come. Why should that stop when we get home?

When you get a sense of what it means to listen to God, to serve well, to be open to new experiences, and to do this with a group of people, it's much easier to keep it going when you get home. You then have inertia.

This is, in my view, a cycle that creates a healthy culture of mission in a church.

TOWARD A HEALTHY MODE OF MISSIONS

OUR PHILOSOPHY FOR HEALTHY MISSION WORK

When you go on a mission trip with Thirst Missions, you are doing kingdom work in a way designed to greatly benefit the local church as well as your team.

Since 2008 we have led over 700 mission trips and over 12,000 participants. We have paired this field experience with a robust philosophy of missions to ensure your trip is safe, effective, and part of a long-term ministry focus.

Following are some of our core convictions.

CULTURE OF MISSION

We are committed to helping our sending churches develop a deep and rich culture of mission. To that end we provide resources that will help you develop missions in your church before you go and sustain missional work after your trip.

WIN/WIN/WIN

In any mission trip there are many different groups involved:

- The sending church
- The team leader
- Trip participants
- Host pastor
- Host church members
- Community members
- Thirst Missions

We believe a mission trip can and should be just as much a benefit to the mission team as it is to the host pastor. The trip can (and should) also be a part of changing the sending church culture for the better. With care and intentionality, each trip can be a win/win.

Let's look at the different entities involved in a typical youth group mission trip.

For the youth pastor we can do our very best to facilitate his pastoral work. This means giving him or her the time, place, and opportunity for discipling. We are creating space for that by taking care of details, and we are also setting the stage for that with the materials we are providing for them ahead of the trip.

For trip participants we are giving them a lens to look through, a time to practice intensively in community, and evening meetings in which discipleship can happen and these things can be really brought home. Our hope is that this will be a seminal event in their lives. As Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “One’s mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.”

For the host pastor we can (and should) bring intensely practical help (in ways they have asked for), encouragement, training, and fellowship. A team coming can be a great help in growing a church. Many pastors look forward to a team coming for months ahead of time. Often there is a unique peer-level bond between the mission team pastor and the host pastor that is very beneficial for both.

For those in the community, we should bring no-strings-attached help, delivered with agape love, at no cost. What greater kingdom value is there than that? What greater witness?

For the sending church, they should get back a group of people with a new perspective who will introduce a fresh vision and life into the body. Churches that don’t have fresh vision and experience can easily grow stagnant. Missions can be a very effective cure for apathy.

HEALTHY LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS

Our focus is to support the work of the local church with each team, enabling a pastor’s greater vision, and allowing the church to accomplish crucial projects or to grow. Your team will be a great blessing to the pastor and church alike and they are excited to have you come and work alongside them.

We greatly encourage teams to take a big picture view and embrace a long-term partnership with your partner church. We have facilitated many such partnerships over the years and each time God moves in mighty ways—we see great kingdom work happen in both the sending church and receiving church!

MUTUAL EXCHANGE

We strive to bring the gospel in a way that respects the local culture. Go expecting to give, but also to receive. There are tremendous lessons we can learn from the pastors we partner with and the people we meet on location as long as we are open to learning.

In one of my favorite sci-fi shows, *Stargate Atlantis*, small teams go through a “stargate” that transports them instantly to other worlds. Upon arriving they do an evaluation, asking a few questions: Is there life on this world? Are these people friendly? Will they need our help? Can we trade with them? Are they more or less technologically advanced than we are?

When we travel we have certain things to offer—our time, energy, and resources, ministries we have prepared—and we are receiving certain things. Pastors in our locations are amazing people and have taught me a great deal, things I never would have learned had I not gone. I have learned incredible lessons in resilience and work from Alaskans, perseverance through hardship from our friends in Puerto Rico, and contentment and community from our friends in Belize. Travel to each location has been incredibly enriching and there's no doubt that our staff and those who travel with us are better for it.

Be prepared to give, of course. Be prepared also to receive.

DO NECESSARY WORK

If we are putting a mission team to work on something, it is because that need was identified by a trusted location pastor or partner. No “painting the same wall” multiple times. Every year we have 80 church partners in Belize that need church partnerships. After Hurricane Maria and the earthquakes in Puerto Rico (and the economic downturn in 2020) there are thousands of families who need help restoring their homes and finding hope once again. We can and will put all of our teams to good use!

CUSTOM TRIPS, TARGETED MINISTRY

With few exceptions, teams who serve with us go on “custom” (private) trips. This means they have a unique partnership and have ministries planned out specifically oriented around the team's skills and gifts and a church's area of need. They have a mission trip consultant who works on planning their trip, and skilled and experienced field staff to lead their trip.

This is a labor intensive way of doing ministry, but in our eyes is the right way to do ministry. The rewards for both the teams and partner churches justify it, and our staff do it each day as a labor of love.

LARGER MINISTRY CONTEXT

If you come on a mission trip in Belize, you may simply see that trip in isolation. The reality is that we are working every day in a larger ministry context in our locations. In Belize (for example) most pastors are bivocational. They work incredibly hard, pastor for little or no pay, and often with little theological training. It is a tough job and can feel lonely.

We are partnering to “pastor the pastors” in Belize. Through the work of our location director and a partner ministry we are providing encouragement, support, and one-on-one discipleship to 80 pastors!

The funds that you put toward your mission trip also help to fund efforts like this one.

LET US HANDLE LOGISTICS

We handle the trip logistics starting with a consultant who handles the field logistics planning for you. When you arrive you'll be met by a trip leader and assistant leader (or leaders) who will guide you through your whole trip. They are experts in the local culture, know the area, know the pastor and church, and are fully up to speed on your trip before you arrive.

We do this so you can be free to do ministry, disciple your people, build community, and enjoy the experience fully!

WHAT TO EXPECT ON A TRIP

Expect to have a great adventure. God's call isn't for us to sit home in comfort, it is to be "the hands and feet of Christ." We want your team to experience the beauty of serving together, to get a taste for something real and formative.

Expect that we will host you well with great food, great leadership, and authentic ministry.

Expect that your team will build community beyond what you would believe possible in one week. The team leader will have an incredible opportunity for discipleship. Mornings have intentional time in the word, days are full of teachable moments, and meetings each evening give an opportunity to bring home the lessons of the day.

Expect that you will bring home a group of people changed for the better. We have led over 700 closing meetings, and each one has been an incredible outpouring of God's love for his people, and His call on to greater things.

DEVELOPING A MISSIONAL MIND

Matthew 9:35 - 36

By Paul Williams

"If you had the cure to cancer wouldn't you share it? ... You have the cure to death ... get out there and share it." – *Kirk Cameron*

"Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter." – *Charles H. Spurgeon*

As missionaries, we are building up the bride of Christ in another country so she can become stronger and better equip others.

We must live with an eternal perspective. We must take the focus off ourselves and put it on Christ. Then, we will get to understand what missions is all about. It's about Jesus and laying down our life for the advancement of His Kingdom.

"Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd." - *Matthew 9:35-36*

As we think of developing a culture of missions in our churches it is important to remember one very important thing that exists in the church in all countries: most believers don't think God is calling them to do missions.

What we need to remember is that while God may not be calling everyone to move their families to a foreign country and be a full-time missionary in that country, He has given each believer the responsibility of doing missions. As 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 says, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God."

You see we have been called to missions both locally and internationally. Once we help our church understand this truth, the church will be more committed to doing missions.

MISSIONAL MIND

Jesus had a mind for missions, and developed a mind of missions among His disciples. We see this in Jesus' final words to his disciples in Matthew 28:19 - 20 as he tells them to go and make disciples of all nations. He had practiced this in the flesh and now he was telling them to do as he had done. We are to share the gospel, and minister with compassion to the people we meet.

CHARACTERIZED BY COMPASSION

Our gospel witness becomes relevant and meaningful when we show compassion. There's a quote I love that says, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." It's very, very good advice for anyone in missions or in ministry.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why did Jesus do missions? (*Matt 9:35-36*)
- What did missions look like for Jesus?
- What did Jesus feel for those he was ministering to?
- Why did Jesus develop a culture of missions among His disciples? (*Matthew 28:19-20*)
- How can we be on mission in our communities?
- How can we do missions in other countries?

GOD'S CALL TO GO

Genesis 12:1 -4

By Adam Swenson

"God calls us each on a journey, an Abrahamic journey ... It will mean leaving the familiar, traveling in discomfort but being pushed to place our trust in God for ... everything." - *Dr. John Perkins, One Blood*

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. - *Genesis 12:1 -4*

My favorite thing in this passage is that God calls Abram to "go." Go to the land I will show you. There were many unknowns for Abram in this!

It starts with a call on his life that Abram was obedient to and it ends in Abram becoming a great nation and ultimately "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So there was a blessing attached to Abram going and being obedient to God, but that was a blessing for all people, and one we still participate in today.

Abraham was 75 years old when God placed this call on him. Just as Paul tells Timothy "don't let anyone look down on you because you are young," so we should also not devalue the contributions people have to make in their 70s and beyond! (Mission trips are often seen as "something for the youth" but in reality I've led many people in their 70s and 80s who had great trips and made significant contributions to the ministry.)

It's important also to note that Abram - in his going and obedience - was far from perfect. He made many mistakes as he was leading his people. Making mistakes and leading imperfectly is expected—it's normal even. The point isn't to be perfect, the point is to go and be faithful. Abram's journey to Abraham was long and rocky,

but it was also profoundly transformative. Can you imagine how the history of our faith would be different if Abram hadn't heeded God's call?

What does God have in store for you? The only way to find out is to say "yes" and be faithful and go.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What was Abram leaving to go? What was God calling him to do?
- On a scale of 1 - 10 how hard do you think that was for him?
- If God does have a plan for us, what happens in our own lives when we say no when he calls us to do something?
- What happens in the lives of others when we say no?

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:18-20

By David Fletcher

Note - In my lessons I am going to utilize the Discovery Bible Study Method.

“Living on mission means living on purpose. It looks like an embracing of a biblical identity and responding with biblical urgency.

Identity: Do you see yourself as one God has sent into your community with the gospel? The Bible teaches us that all Christians are called to be a part of the work of making disciples ...

Urgency: Our temptation when hearing this ... is to agree and resolve to prioritize this reluctantly. Okay, I'll make some changes here. I'll do it in the new year. But, the Bible won't let us do that, it actually teaches a sense of urgency.” - *Erik Raymond*

“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*

When you break down the components of these three sentences, you find the following:

- All heavenly authority has been given to Jesus
- All earthly authority has been given to Jesus
- Because of this, Go
- Make disciples of all nations
- Baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded
- Jesus is with us until the end of the age.

What would happen if every believer woke up to the fact that this command is directed to and expected of all Christians? What would happen if every believer saw the people around them every day as those who needed to hear the good news and simply shared it with their friends, family, coworkers, and acquaintances? Consider how your community might change if every believer realized that God really does expect them to be followers of Jesus who make other followers of Jesus.

Could it be that sometimes we get too caught up in evangelism programs and strategies: have we made the simple so complicated that most just give up and never try?

As we look at The Great Commission, let's look at it with fresh eyes and hear God's voice with fresh ears. Try to forget what you have always heard and always been taught about this text. Pretend that this is the very first time that you have heard this passage of scripture and let's explore it.

TEACHING PLAN

STEP 1

[for the group setting] Have one person read this passage out loud while the rest of the group follows along in their own Bibles.

STEP 2

[without anyone looking at the text] Have another person retell the story (text) from memory. It's okay if they leave out details. After this person is finished retelling the story (text). Invite other group members to fill in any missing details.

STEP 3

Now you will ask a couple questions - limit discussion to details from the text. Have a group member reread the text out loud, then ask, "What does this story tell us about God, Jesus, or God's plan?"

Follow up with a second question: "What does this story tell us about human beings?"

STEP 4

What other cross-references from scripture support the meaning that your group is discerning from this passage of text?

STEP 5

Personal application questions for each member to consider and for the group to discuss.

- From what we see in this text, what is it that you are personally doing well?
- What might you need to change in your life?
- Do you know anyone else who needs to hear this?
- How would you go about sharing this with them?

STEP 6

Pray together.

THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL

Matthew 9:36-38

By David Fletcher

Note - In my lessons I am going to utilize the Discovery Bible Study Method.

“Whether we want to admit it or not, we are dependent on other pray-ers. In Matthew 9:38 Jesus said, ‘Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.’ Am I a laborer because someone, some time, some place, obeyed Jesus' command and prayed that God would send forth a laborer to the field in which I'm working? This is a humbling thought and removes all the ego and pride about my ministry, my calling. Because somebody prayed, did I change into God's laborer?” - *Evelyn Christenson*

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.” - *Matthew 9:36 - 38*

Notice what the Lord is exhibiting in this passage of scripture. First, the Lord sees the crowd. He sees them, He sees you. God is not uncaring and too busy. The living and true God sees the people that He has created and He has “compassion” for them. Webster’s defines compassion as, “sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it.” Wow! What does that say about our God?

Next, we are told that Jesus has compassion for the crowd of people because they are “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” What does this tell us about the condition of the human soul outside of Christ? What does it tell us about our own hearts as God’s sheep?

To make the situation more urgent, Jesus next tells his followers that there is a plentiful harvest. The fruit is ripe and there is more than the eye can count. But, there is a shortage of laborers. There literally are not enough workers going into the orchard, the vineyard, or the fields to get all the fruit gathered in. Do you see the fruit around you in your housing development, in your city, in your county?

Jesus says that the fruit is there, you are literally surrounded daily by the harassed and the helpless. Maybe we can understand “helpless” better if we understand it as “hopeless.” These lost sheep are your neighbors, family members, friends, acquaintances. These are the people that you see every single day as you leave your own home and venture out into your daily life.

Jesus' solution to the problem? Pray that God will send out workers into the orchard, the vineyard, the fields. Keep praying earnestly that God will do this. Guess what will happen if you or any believer prays this way? You will realize that God is tapping you on the shoulder.

Every believer is called to tell the good news of the Gospel and to make other new disciples. It's not hard. It starts with prayer followed by obedience. The result? Fruit and grain will be gathered in and your life will be changed forever. The life of a genuine Jesus follower (disciple) is one of amazing adventure and seeing an almighty living God do the miraculous and change lives!

TEACHING PLAN

STEP 1

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STEP 4

What other cross-references from scripture support the meaning that your group is discerning from this passage of text?

STEP 5

Personal application questions for each member to consider and for the group to discuss.

- From what we see in this text, what is it that you are personally doing well?
- What might you need to change in your life?
- Do you know anyone else who needs to hear this?
- How would you go about sharing this with them?

STEP 6

Pray together.

THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS

Romans 10:14 - 17

By David Fletcher

Note - In my lessons I am going to utilize the Discovery Bible Study Method.

"We must never minimize the missionary outreach of the church. While this passage relates to Israel, it also applies to all the lost souls around the world. They cannot be saved unless they call on the Lord Jesus Christ. But, they cannot call unless they believe. Faith comes by hearing, so they must hear the message. How will they hear? A messenger must go to them with the message. But this means that God must call the messenger and the messenger must be sent. What a privilege it is to be one of His messengers and have beautiful feet!" - Warren W. Wiersbe

How then will they 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 10:14 - 17*

What does it mean to be a messenger? Some English translations use the word preacher and while this might technically be correct, the sentiment of the word used here in the original language is, in fact, messenger. What do messengers do?

Think back to the times in your life when you have born a message from one person to another person. In elementary school, did a friend ever call upon you to deliver a message to that one girl or guy that they liked? Did your friend ask you to wait around for an answer to bring back to them? Perhaps instead of saying the message verbally, you were carrying the famous (or infamous) folded note made from a piece of lined school paper with checkboxes for "yes" and "no."

Even later in life, have you ever been called upon to tell someone about the virtues and endearing characteristics of another person or friend? Perhaps you were talking to someone when they made disparaging comments about another friend whom you know well and you tried to give them a true picture of your friend instead of the gossip they were misinformed by.

If you stop to think about it, we are called upon and/or we take up the role of a messenger quite frequently in life. It is not usually a hard task. We often become a messenger and communicate our knowledge very readily. It is no different when sharing the saving Gospel of Jesus to others. If Matthew 28:18-20 refers to every believer (and it does), then you and I have been commissioned to tell others about Jesus, starting at our front door, expanding through our city and county, our state and nation, and even internationally as the Lord allows and makes a way. With internet and computer/phone technology today, it has never been easier for any single follower of Jesus to become a messenger of the soul-saving, life-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So tell me, have you been sharing the most important message of all as you go through your day to day life?

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What other cross-references from scripture support the meaning that your group is discerning from this passage of text?

STEP 5

Personal application questions for each member to consider and for the group to discuss.

- From what we see in this text, what is it that you are personally doing well?
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- How would you go about sharing this with them?

STEP 6

Pray together.

PEACE BE WITH YOU

John 20:19-21

By David Fletcher

Note - In my lessons I am going to utilize the Discovery Bible Study Method.

"It makes me boil when I think of the power we profess and the utter impotency of our action. Believers who know one-tenth as much as we do are doing one-hundred times more for God, with His blessing and our criticism. Oh if I could write it, preach it, say it, paint it, anything at all, if only God's power would become known among us." - *Jim Elliot*

"Surely those who know the great passionate heart of Jehovah must deny their own loves to share in the expression of His. Consider the call from the Throne above, "Go ye," and from round about, "Come over and help us," and even the call from the damned souls below, "Send Lazarus to my brothers, that they come not to this place." Impelled, then, by these voices, I dare not stay home while Quichuas perish. So what if the well-fed church in the homeland needs stirring? They have the Scriptures, Moses, and the Prophets, and a whole lot more. Their condemnation is written on their bank books and in the dust on their Bible covers. American believers have sold their lives to the service of Mammon, and God has His rightful way of dealing with those who succumb to the spirit of Laodicea." - *Jim Elliot*

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." - *John 20:19-21*

We have sixty-six books in the Bible. Included in these books are four gospels that define for us the mission of Jesus the Messiah during His incarnation of thirty-three years on this earth. So, you would think that we could easily tell one another what the mission of Christ was during his life on earth as the God-man. However, this is not usually the case. In the text above, the resurrected and glorified Jesus tells his followers, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

In 1 Peter 1:18-20, John 1:20, and Revelation 13:8 to name just a few places, we are told that before God created anything, His plan was that His Son would come incarnate to affect redemption for a lost humanity. Jesus had and has a very specific mission that He has called you and me to continue. Take a look at the following

passages of scripture: *Luke 19:10, Matthew 20:25-28, John 12:44-50, Galatians 4:3-7, 1 John 5:20, 1 Timothy 1:15-17, and 1 Timothy 2:3-6.*

While this list of scriptures is by no means exhaustive, the New Testament makes it clear, the mission of Christ was to save the lost, to gather the sheep of God, and to make the truth of Romans 10:9-10 a present reality "... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved ..."

And, Jesus makes it abundantly clear before His ascension back into heaven that He is now giving that same mission to His followers. Not to a special group of followers, but to every one of His followers. Understanding this, what should your priorities be in day to day living?

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STEP 6

Pray together.

HERE I AM, SEND ME

Isaiah 6:1-8

By David Fletcher

Note - In my lessons I am going to utilize the Discovery Bible Study Method.

“God is always looking for faithful men and women that He can support and empower to accomplish His will and purposes on this earth (2 Chronicles 16:9). He has given us a commission to be active in making disciples and to teach them all that He has commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). He wants workers, and He asks that we would pray for more workers to go out into the harvest (Luke 10:2). God’s method in building His kingdom is by using willing and obedient servants, people who avail themselves to God’s call upon their lives. For some, the call may be to foreign missions or to the ministry, but for most of us, we will be called to be ministers of the gospel even though our career paths might look much different. Wherever we are and in whatever we do, God is looking for people whom He can support to build His kingdom. He has missions for us to do, but the question is whether or not we will accept the call.” - *Relevant Bible Teaching*

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for. And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” - *Isaiah 6:1 - 8*

I remember the first time I ever really read this passage. I was nineteen and a student at university. I had recently surrendered my life and future to Jesus Christ

for ministry in His service wherever, whenever, and however He chose and saw fit. I had not come from a Christian home and even though I received Christ as my savior during a revival when I was ten years old, I had never really been regular in church or disciplined until my late teens.

This passage of scripture floored me. This was my story, this had really happened in my life! At a college retreat, I had surrendered it all and seen Christ as "... high and exalted ..." My words were not nearly as poetic as the ones that the Holy Spirit gave to Isaiah, but they meant the exact same thing. In realizing the pointlessness of life lived for me by myself, I told the Lord God that I would give up all my dreams in order to go and do whatever He wanted of me.

Now, for a nineteen-year-old student, those dreams were not too grandiose, but they included a good career, a wife and family, and just peaceful success—no riches or glory. But the moment I said wherever, whenever, however... it all changed. I saw the Lord high and lifted up and all of a sudden the entire world of possibilities lay before me.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that this is the experience of a person called to pastor or be a career missionary. Not at all. I am saying that this is the experience of a "normal christian life" (read the book by the same name authored by Watchman Nee).

No matter what your vocation is or what skills and talents God has crafted in you, your avocation is to be a bearer of the gospel message every place you go -- wherever, whenever, however. Does this sound like your experience to date?

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THE MISSION OF GOD IN THE BIBLE

Acts 1 and 2

By Ramon Castellanos

Editor's Note - This is a teaching of Acts 1:8 that would be appropriate for an adult team, or a somewhat more advanced team. It's such an important passage that we have a teaching for youth by pastor Troy Merseal as well.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." - Acts 1:8

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." - Acts 2:42 - 47

In the book of Acts, the community of the messiah changes from a group of followers to a group of missionaries. The book relates the first steps of extension of the followers of Christ.

Missions without the church is not right, as is a church without missions. But why is it so important to a church to know what their mission is?

In this study we will meditate on the missionary extensions of Acts (from Judea to the ends of the earth) and see the Pentecost as a model for the future.

THE MISSIONARY EXTENSION FROM ACTS

Pentecost (the receiving of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2) is a model of the future. The book of Acts represents the beginning of the effort of an evangelist started by the first followers of Jesus. Acts 1 shows the start of "being witness." It also shows the importance of waiting for the power and presence of God so we can complete the task entrusted to us.

THE COMMISSION OF JESUS IN ACTS

Acts 1:8 represents the plan for the extension of the followers of Jesus. They should start where they are, Jerusalem, and from there move out. Historically the

order (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth) has been understood that the ends of the earth is a missionary project for all the world. This text doesn't only represent a challenge geographically but also confronts the first believers with the challenge of cultures and theologies!

The Jews considered themselves the special people of God. The salvation of the Messiah was for them and not for others. Act 1:8 breaks with ethnocentrism to call out the believers to extend the offer of salvation to the Samaritans and the world, to go beyond the cultures and religion. It was hard for the new generation to have the vision to see in the Samaritans or gentiles a person worthy of the salvation of God in Jesus Christ.

ACTS 2 GIVES US A RICH THEOLOGY FOR THIS NEW MISSIONARY PROJECT

We see people in expectation of the work of God. The mission is of God and it needs to be done in the power of the Holy Spirit that manifests when the community begins its new work of the promises of Jesus to follow.

In the day of Pentecost Jews and proselytes from all parts of the world are present. In this new project of God we are given the solution to the division of the people of the world that is seen from Babel. The Holy Spirit works so that the disciples can represent the messages of the Gospel in all languages represented there.

The preaching of Peter clearly demonstrates that all of these were a part of God's plan. God is working through the history of Israel, his project still goes ahead in the person and work of Christ, and now goes in a new stage in the community of the churches whose mission is to continue the divine work.

The result of the preaching on the day of the Pentecost was 3,000 people baptised. The number is excellent, but not the most significant thing. It goes beyond the number this new community that is forming. Acts 2:41-49 represents a community that lives in the future kingdom of God today. This community lives in the word that is manifested in the power of God. They adore God in the community and share everything for the benefit of everyone.

STUDY QUESTIONS

What new challenges might we face in this new mission? (Name at least two)

- Who is our helper in this mission?
- What do you understand about the missionary extension from Acts 1:8 from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria? Where is Judea and Samaria for you?
- What do you understand as "the ends of the earth?" Is there a place you feel called to serve?
- What did you learn from this study?

FROM JERUSALEM TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Acts 1:8

By Troy Merseal

Note - I wrote this to be taught to a mission team from a youth pastor's perspective.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." - Acts 1:8

[Youth pastor asks to group] I have a couple of questions I would like to hear from each of you which will lead us into our passage of scripture today.

First, what was your reasoning for coming on this mission trip?

Second, what do you hope to return home with from this mission trip?

I know these are extremely broad questions but they will help in identifying what this passage of scripture is all about and why it is relevant to each of us today.

(A few of the answers you will typically get: I wanted to experience what a mission trip was like; I wanted to bless others; my friend invited me; my parents wanted me to learn something; I do not know.)

Awesome. Here is an illustration for you. When we hear the word "mission," we may think of a developing world country or an impoverished area where mission work needs to be accomplished. If you get the opportunity of hearing a calling from God to go minister in that mission field, then by all means do it! Yes, you are ministers in mission. You do not have a fancy white collar or wear vestments such as a robe, but you are ministers for Christ in whatever you are wearing and wherever you are going.

When we look at this passage of scripture, when Jesus was with His disciples during the last week or so of His life, He told them, "I'm leaving you and a friend of mine, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will come be with you."

Don't you think that made for some questioning? I mean if I told you I am going to leave you and in a few days one of the adult leaders were going to come and take over, wouldn't you question this? The disciples had been learning under Jesus for three years and He had taught them much, performed miracles for them, and He also tells them that they have a mission field.

Our mission field on this mission trip is [the place they are on mission to]. Jesus told his followers that they weren't just supposed to stay in Jerusalem but they were to go throughout Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

Let me teach you this way. Suppose for visual circumstances, Jerusalem is our hometown of _____. We are comfortable here. Our friends and family are here. Our school and baseball field and dance academy and our favorite restaurants are here. Mission is needed here. We may tend to say, "I'll stay here."

Jesus knew that after His death, His disciples would be confused. So he said, go into the entire state. Look at the map. Here is Jerusalem ... our hometown. Judea is a territory ... much like our state. Jesus told his disciples and He is telling us, there is mission work to do here as well. There are people hurting, starving, longing for attention, and we look for ways of being Jesus' hands and feet in our state.

He then says, we go to surrounding states where there is mission work. I find it rather neat that Samaria is mentioned. When the disciples followed Jesus, the Jewish folks and Samaritans didn't play well together. As a matter of fact, they would go around the territory of Samaria—miles out of their way—for their safety. They were prejudiced against the Samaritans, but we are told that mission work happens there. The renewing of our hearts and the hearts of many happen in that community as well.

We are then told that the Holy Spirit could lead us to the ends of the earth. Where is the end of the earth for you? C'mon where is the end of the earth for you? We are to bring Jesus into the lives of those living in darkness. Maybe it is and maybe it isn't literal darkness—most importantly it means those living in the dark places of their lives. Maybe that is you today. Maybe one of the reasons you came on this mission trip is for you not only to shine God's light into the darkness but for you to discover Jesus' light in you.

Tonight, we are going to have what we call "God-sighting" night. Each of you are asked to tell of one instance on this trip where you saw God at work. It could be as simple as the birds singing, could go more in depth about a conversation you had with a person, or it could go even deeper as you found God in yourself. You have come on this mission because the Holy Spirit is with you and you are bringing Jesus by representing Jerusalem (our town) to Judea (our state) to Samaria (where the mission is happening) and eventually to the ends of the earth.

Let us pray: God, I ask that you be with each of us this week as we are asked to bring light into the darkness, your light O God. I pray for each of these youth, that they will be bold and honor you in a mighty way this week as they are on mission for you. May each of us grow closer to you this week. In Jesus name. AMEN

A BUSY, WELL-PLANNED DAY

Matthew 20:29 - 34

By Jason Pfingsten

Editor's note: Jason Pfingsten is the founder of Thirst Missions and has well over 20 years of missions experience in many countries.

"As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. "Lord," they answered, "we want our sight." Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him." - *Matthew 20:29-34*

One thing we pride ourselves on at Thirst Missions is being organized. Well planned. Our groups deserve our best. Our mission trips are planned out by the hour. For every trip we have a week-long grid we fill in that accounts for every hour on the mission trip. There is time scheduled for meals, meetings, transportation, recreation, and rest. And of course there is plenty of time scheduled for ministry. Ministries that are planned well ahead of time. Ministries where we prepare, bring materials, and have prayed over the plans for months in advance. A well-run mission trip deserves the professionalism of great planning and preparation.

As much as it breaks his heart, God knew his plan to have his son die on the cross for our sins needed to take place. It had been prophesied for over 1,000 years before Jesus walked the earth. Jesus knew God's plan as well. God's plan that had his own life ending with death on the cross at Golgotha and rolling away the stone at the tomb three days later. During the week leading up to his death and resurrection Jesus had a lot going on. A lot to accomplish. He had a plan for the last days of his life on earth. He was leaving Jericho with a busy, well-planned day ahead and well ...

Matthew 20:29-34 picks up the story: "As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. "Lord," they

answered, “we want our sight.” Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.”

Did you catch that? Jesus—in the midst of his plan for his last week and in the midst of a very busy day, with a large crowd following him and the disciples—stopped. He stopped and altered his plan for the day because he heard and then saw two men who called out to him with a great need. They were blind. They needed and then received his touch. And of course they were healed. They received sight. He stopped and altered His plan because His love for people in need superseded his plan for the day. Specifically the two blind men. His love for them wouldn’t allow him to just walk by, and as a result, they were healed.

During our mission trips, and in our lives, let’s model our time and plans like Jesus. We have plans for each day, things to accomplish, things to do. And that’s good. But to live like Jesus, we need to be open and even look for opportunities the Holy Spirit puts in front of us to alter our plans and minister. To put people before plans. To put immediate and strong needs of others in front of our own plans and desires.

Advanced mission work and having a culture and attitude of missions in our lives and on our mission trips involves leaving room to call an audible. To change plans at the last minute to minister to those in need. It’s not always easy or comfortable to do so, and others may not understand. But Jesus does. He modeled loving people as a first priority, above his own plans and schedule. Let’s strive to do so on our mission trips and in our lives as well.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Let’s say Jesus kept walking. What would that have communicated to the men calling for help?
- What would Jesus refusing to stop have communicated to his disciples?
- What do you think motivated Jesus to stop?
- What does that teach us about his character?

REDEMPTIVE FRIENDSHIPS

Colossians 4:2-6

By Levi Smith

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.
- *Colossian 4:2-6*

Ever since we planted Awaken Church in Anchorage, Alaska, I have been challenging myself and the people who have joined our church to engage in something called a redemptive friendship. This idea is inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus, the Apostle Paul, and the culture of the early church.

In Colossians 4:2-6, Paul describes how to go about engaging in redemptive friendships. We are called to pray specifically for redemptive conversations with others. We are to pray for clarity and confidence during those interactions. We are to carefully consider how our words and actions affect our opportunity to persuade our friends to follow Jesus. We are to strategically arrange our lives around the goal of having spiritual conversations. And when we get into the conversation, we lead with grace and we react with grace—this allows us to always have the right answer and always be winsome in our persuasive efforts.

In our day, these friendships wear different skin, but underneath the heart is the same. Remember, Jesus spent so much of his ministry time engaging with people in a personally redemptive way giving us an example of how the gospel spreads most effectively. Consider the woman at the well, Zaccheus, Nicodemus, and many others that Jesus pursued not with preaching, but with friendship—a foretaste of fellowship.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How can you remind yourself to make it a daily habit to pray for opportunities to share Jesus with your friends?
- What does it look like to orient your life around creating spiritual conversations with your friends?
- What is the most gracious way to start a spiritual conversation?
- How does humility keep you curious rather than judgmental?
- Have you ever been offended by someone asking personal questions when you felt they were simply curious?
- Have you ever been offended by someone asking personal questions if you know they are being judgmental?

OPEN OUR EYES

Matthew 20:29 - 34

by Seth Martin

Editor's Note: There are two lessons on Matthew 20:29 - 34. We've included both because both are very helpful and instructive takes on the passage, one from the point of view of Jesus, one looking at those who called on him. Teach one or both, or combine them.

As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 33 They said to Him, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened." 34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him. - Matthew 20:29-34

We as Christ-followers have a tendency to make mission about the moment, not the lifestyle ... about the singular act, not the singular purpose. This passage paints a beautiful contrast between those who can see, and those who can't. With such a large crowd of those following Jesus, it's safe to assume that the motives of those gathered were many. Some of them were hungry, physically. Some were looking for greater needs to be filled, such as happiness, love, meaning, purpose. Some were curious. Some were doubtful, cynical. Some wanted to see miracles. Some were hoping Jesus would overthrow the government. It is likely that very few eyes were open to see Jesus for who he is: a Messiah, son of God, with an ultimate purpose, the reconciliation of mankind to Himself.

But in verse 30, we see two blind men who have clearer vision than any of the rest. They see a savior who grants mercy to the broken and brings sight to the blind. In verse 34, Jesus is moved with compassion, touches their eyes, and the men regain their sight and immediately follow Him.

These men recognized the greater purpose of Jesus was not to satisfy their immediate need of sight. Missions is not a single moment or act of service, but a representation of a greater purpose of reconciliation carried by the vessel of service in love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When you first encountered Jesus, who were you "in the crowd?" Why did

you follow Him?

- Concerning missions, it is easy to get wrapped up in the moment over the greater purpose. Why is that?
- How does a missional lifestyle and emphasis of the Gospel take us beyond transactional mission into transformational mission?

THE FAITH OF DANIEL

Daniel 6:7 - 24

by Elizabeth Kilby

*There will be no peace in any soul until it is willing to obey the voice of God.
- D.L. Moody.*

“All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.” Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, “O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?” The king answered and said, “The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.” Then they answered and said before the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.”

Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, “Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.”

Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent

the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm." Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. - *Daniel 6:7-24*

There are many times in our life that we don't understand the circumstances that we are dealt. There are things that are outside of our control. The reasons for pain, hardships, indifference, or suffering. This rings true for Daniel. Throughout Daniel we see him as an outsider in many ways but always obedient to God and his leading.

During this time we see the decree that the king has signed prevents worshipping any God other than the king. This did not stop Daniel from following his faith. We see in verse 10 that "He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously." The key point I see in this passage is not that he prayed but that it takes time to notice that this was not the first time that Daniel prayed.

This prayer was not in defiance to the king's ruling but it was obedience to the consistency he had created with his relationship with God. This was a habit, a practice that Daniel did frequently. Because of this habit, Daniel was brought to the king and was thrown into the lion's den. Then the passage continues and it says that God closed the mouth of the Lions. How cool is that? God, on behalf of Daniel, stopped harm from coming upon him.

Let's think about how certain habits in our lives have led to certain results: we became fit because we worked out. We became healthy because we made the right food choices. We learned something new because we took the time to study a topic we did not already know. We forget sometimes that God does many things on our behalf because God is a good father wanting the best for His children.

This is how mission trips work in our lives: we are stretched in our faith because of our obedience to God to go and serve. We are shown His love in new ways

because we have traveled out of our comfort zone.

We press pause to our world of hustle because we are forced to stop and converse with people who are different from us and learn about their world. Our world expands because we choose to practice leaning into where God leads. Mission trips stretch us to the reality that missions can be done in our backyard as well as globally.

Think of how these habits extend to our relationships: God created us to crave relationships and connection. This is hardwired in us. We have a yearning in our hearts and a longing to be loved and accepted. This longing can be met in a healthy way in a good church or as a part of a mission team.

Sometimes we can try to meet this need in unhealthy ways that mean compromising our belief systems to gain acceptance. When we do this the compromise of our values causes us more harm than the acceptance causes good. God wants more for each of us, and encourages us in His word to create spiritual habits that will lead to increased connection with Him, connection with others, and fruitful ministry.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Where in your life are you sacrificing your obedience to God for acceptance or approval?
- What areas can you create or refresh habits that can bring you closer to God and His plan for your life?
- Is He leading you in a direction that is counter to the way in which you are currently living?
- What is the one thing that you can do in your life that such by doing will bring you closer to God than you have ever been?
- Do you have the courage to do that one thing?

God can provide clarity when we ask Him to, when we sit with him and search for the ways our lives can be the best vessel for Him. God can and will use us to move mountains and to make a difference in the lives of others for the gospel if we let him.

We have the joy of being the hands and feet of God and sharing in ministry with Him. He is big enough to do all of these things without our assistance, but the beauty of God is that He desires relationship with us. We find His favor when we follow in faith.

MISSIONS: WHY? WHERE? WHEN?

By Glorie Mai

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them. - *James 4:13-17*

In this teaching we will ask three different questions regarding missions: why we go, where we should go, and when. Let's dive right in!

WHY IS MISSIONS AN OBLIGATION AND NOT AN OPTION?

During the prophet Ezekiel's time, Israel was going through a very difficult season as they were captives in Babylon and very far from obeying God. It is not much of a difference from those times and the times we are now living in because God is still asking for us to do what He asked people 2,000 years ago.

God now calls us all to obey Him, and He does not choose a specific person to do so but all Christians. All of us. When we receive Christ we have a lot of benefits (such as salvation, healing, peace, and hope) but we also have obligations such as preaching and doing missions is another.

James 4:17 lays it out for us when it says, "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." Ultimately we give account for what we do, but also what we do not do.

Matthew 28:16-20 is the Great Commission. Jesus doesn't call us only to come to Him but to also go for Him. "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations ..." When Jesus left earth He asked this was the last thing He asked. This was important to Him and He didn't want His disciples to forget.

WHERE SHOULD WE DO MISSIONS?

Acts 1:8 says "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Where should we do missions? We are called to our own communities (Jerusalem),

to our country (Judea), to other cultures (Samaria), and to other nations (the ends of the earth).

Missions is not only when we leave the our city or our country. It is about talking to Jesus in our own daily surroundings: with your friends, at school or work, and at home with your family.

WHEN SHOULD WE DO MISSIONS?

Does mission happen yesterday? Tomorrow? Next week? When you go on a mission trip? When the Holy Spirit comes?

I've got good news for you—the Holy Spirit is here already ... today. Therefore it is today that I need to be talking about Jesus to the people around me.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does this short reflection speak to my life?
- What can I do differently now that I understand that I do not need to go somewhere to do missions?
- Who can I reach out and talk to about Jesus this week?

CONCLUSION

By Adam Swenson

As you have seen, being on mission can happen anywhere and anytime. The specific approach we take, and the journey we ourselves go on, has a lot to do with what God is doing with us in that time. Ultimately our task is to communicate the good news of God's redeeming and reconciling love to others.

We can communicate that to someone by working on their home or serving them a cup of coffee. Maybe we visit an elderly person in a home or do a sports camp for youth in Belize. Like most things, ministry is something you get better at—something that becomes more natural—the more you practice.

As my daughter always says, it's easier for her to be motivated to do something once she understands the why behind it.

It is my sincere hope that these lessons, philosophy, voices of experience, and all of these key scriptures around the why will help your church develop a deep and lasting culture of mission.

LET'S GO!

We would love to host you for a great adventure in ministry in one of our locations.

If you'd like to explore the idea of bringing a team to a specific location we serve in, please let us know with an email to info@thirstmissions.org. We've created a set of six emails we will send you - two per week - that give you the information necessary to make a good decision. Each email also has videos from some of our key people - location directors, trip consultants, and trip leaders - so you can hear directly from the people that make Thirst run.

*In His Will Is Our Peace,
Adam Swenson
CEO of Thirst Missions*