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And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’” (Matt. 28:18–20, NKJV).

How much plainer could it be? Here is Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, the Jesus whom they worshiped (vs. 17), giving His people, in even the earliest days of the church, their calling and mission: make disciples in every nation of the world. Period.

It’s not hard, either, to see the link between these words, spoken to the eleven in Galilee, and the words spoken to John on the island of Patmos years later: “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’” (Rev. 14:6, 7, NKJV; see also vss. 8–12).

One could say that the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 are the Great Commission contextualized for the last days of earth’s history.

No question: God has told His church, His people, to reach out and spread the gospel to the entire world. It’s what we have been called to do. Spreading the truth about Jesus and what He has done for us (John 3:16), what He is doing now for us (Rom. 8:28), and what He will do for us (Rev. 21:4) is the Good News God wants His children to share with the world. What’s more, it’s an especially powerful story to tell in today’s world, characterized by so much unbelief and uncertainty. How much plainer could it be?
8:34), and what He will do for us in the future (1 Thess. 4:16) is, truly, our mission.

The word mission itself means “a sending or being sent to perform a service.” That is, people go away in order to do something. In the case of the Great Commission, what they do is to spread the gospel to the world.

This quarter we will look at mission first and foremost as God’s means for communicating the gospel to those who don’t know it. Mission is a core part of God’s sovereign activity in the process of redeeming humanity. Thus, we will study how God’s eternal purpose has been accomplished in the lives of individuals in the Bible whom He has used to be missionaries to the lost.

In the end, the Christian mission is God’s mission, not ours. It originated in the heart of God. It is based on the love of God. And it is accomplished by the will of God.

To better understand God’s mission commitment and involvement, this quarter’s lessons are based on the following model of salvation history:

1. God created men and women and gave them free will.
2. The first man and woman abused their free will by disobeying God, and they had to leave Paradise.
3. God could not use force to bring them back to Paradise.
4. God sent His Son on a mission to die in their place and reconcile them to Him.
5. God’s mission is to make the offer of salvation known to all people and, thus, open the way for them to have Redemption.

At its most basic level, mission is letting the whole world know about Jesus and about what He has done for each of us and about what He promises to do for us, now and for eternity. In short, we who know about those promises have been called to tell others about them, as well.

In the end, the Christian mission is God’s mission, not ours. It originated in the heart of God. It is based on the love of God. And it is accomplished by the will of God.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);  
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);  
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and  

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Apply: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Create: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
The Missionary Nature of God

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 1 John 2:16; John 3:14, 15; 2 Cor. 5:21; Matt. 5:13, 14.

Memory Text: “‘See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples’” (Isaiah 55:4, NIV).

Our world is a mess, and as humans we are the big reason it is such a mess. And that’s because we are sinners, fallen creatures whose nature, at the core, is evil. However much we like to think of ourselves as advancing, as improving, the history of the past century isn’t too encouraging. And here we are, not even a quarter of the way into this century, and things don’t look that bright from here either. If the past is a precursor to the future, all we can expect, to quote a former British politician, is “blood, toil, tears, and sweat.”

All is not lost though. On the contrary, Jesus Christ has died for our sins, and through His death we have the promise of salvation, of restoration, of all things being made new. “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Rev. 21:1, NKJV).

We have not been left alone, abandoned in the infinite expanse of a cold and apparently uncaring cosmos to fend for ourselves. We could never do it; the forces arrayed against us are so much greater than we are. That’s why God had the plan of salvation in order to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 4.*
God Created Man and Woman

One of the perennial questions humans have asked is, Where do I come from? In the first two chapters of the Bible (in fact, all through the Bible), we have been given the answer to what many would consider the most important question a person can ask. After all, only by knowing where we came from are we off to a good start in knowing who we are, why we exist, how we are to live, and where we are ultimately going.

Skim through Genesis 1 and 2 but focus especially on Genesis 1:26–28. What great differences appear in the creation of humanity as opposed to everything else seen in the texts? What is it about humans that stands out from other parts of this creation?

1. Man and woman were created last of all the creatures. They had the whole visible Creation in front of them to study and care for.

2. God’s mode for creating man and woman differed from that of the other creatures. Up to this point, the divine command had been, “Let there be” (light, firmament, water, fish and birds, animals, etc.). Now the command was turned into consultation: “Let us make man . . .” The Three Persons of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—consulted about it. Though these two chapters deal with the creation of the earth and the creatures on it, there’s no question that the main focus is on the creation of humanity itself.

3. Man and woman were created in God’s image and likeness, something not said about anything else that was created at that time. Though the text doesn’t say what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God, it must mean that humans in some way reflect the character of their Creator. Because humans have a moral capacity not seen in other creatures (butterflies might be beautiful, but they don’t struggle with questions of right and wrong), to be made in the likeness and image of God surely means that to some degree humans must reflect His moral character.

4. Man and woman were to have dominion, to represent God on earth, and rule over the rest of Creation. This calling entails responsibility.

Humans are introduced in the Bible in the first chapter, but not in isolation. We exist, but in relationship to God. What does this tell us about how central God should be to our lives and why we are not really “complete” without Him? See also Acts 17:28.
Free Will

Embedded in the Creation account is the warning God gave about not eating from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9). So, right from the start, we can see the moral element granted humanity, something not seen in any of the other living creatures. As we said yesterday, the capacity for moral judgment is one way that humans reveal the image and likeness of God.

What does Genesis 2:15–17 say about the reality of free will in humanity?

God could have created humans so that they automatically do His will. That is the way the other created things, such as light, sun, moon, and stars, were made. They obey God without any element of choice. They fulfill the will of God automatically through the natural laws that guide their actions.

But the creation of man and woman was special. God created them for Himself. God wanted them to make their own choices, to choose to worship Him voluntarily without being forced to. Otherwise, they could not love Him, because love, to be true love, must be freely given.

Because of its divine origin, human free will is protected and respected by God. The Creator does not interfere with the deepest, persistent choices of men and women. Wrong choices have consequences, sometimes very terrible ones, too, but it is against the character of our Sovereign Lord to force compliance or obedience.

The principle of human free will has three important implications:

For religion: an omnipotent God does not unilaterally direct individual will and choices.

For ethics: individuals will be held morally accountable for their actions.

For science: the actions of body and brain are not wholly determined by cause and effect. Physical laws are involved in our actions, but free will means that we do have a choice regarding our actions, especially moral ones.

What are some of the free moral choices you have to make in the next few hours, days, or weeks? How can you be sure you are using this sacred gift in the right way? Think through the consequences of the wrong use of it.
The Fall

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Gen. 3:6, 7, NIV).

Eating a little fruit was not a sinful act in itself. However, we have to consider the circumstances in which it was carried out. Adam and Eve were agents with free will, made by God in His image. This included the freedom—but also the duty—to comply with God’s expressed will. They ate the fruit, not out of any stern necessity but rather by choice. It was an act of Adam’s and Eve’s own free will in defiance of God’s clear and specific instructions.

Likewise, we must choose for ourselves whether or not to follow God and whether to cherish or to defy the Word of God. God will not force anyone to believe His Word. He will never force us to obey Him, and He can’t force us to love Him. God allows each of us to choose for ourselves which path we will follow. But, in the end, we must be prepared to live with the consequences of our choices.

By eating the fruit, Adam and Eve, in effect, told God that He was not the perfect ruler. His sovereignty was challenged. They proved disobedient, and as a result, they brought sin and death to the human race.

“So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:23, 24, NIV).

Adam and Eve had to leave Paradise. It was a necessary yet merciful consequence. The Lord would not allow rebellious humanity access to the tree of life. With loving care, He kept Adam and Eve away from the fruit that would make them immortal and thus perpetuate the terrible condition into which sin had brought them. (Imagine what eternal life would be like in a world filled with such pain and suffering and evil as ours is!) Adam and Eve were driven out from the lovely Garden to work the less friendly ground outside (vss. 23, 24).

In the context of today’s study, read 1 John 2:16. How were the elements that were warned about in this text seen in the Fall? In what ways do we have to deal with these same temptations in our lives, as well?
God’s Initiative to Save Us

The Bible shows that after the Fall of our first parents, it was God who came looking for them, not vice versa. On the contrary, the man and woman tried to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord. What a powerful metaphor for so much of the fallen human race: they flee the One who comes looking for them, the only One who could save them. Adam and Eve did it in Eden, and unless surrendered to the wooing of the Holy Spirit, people are still doing the same thing today.

Fortunately, God did not cast aside our first parents, nor does He cast us aside either. From the time that God first called out, “‘Where are you?’” to Adam and Eve in Eden (Gen. 3:9, NKJV), until today, He is still calling us.

“In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus.”
—Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 68.

Of course, the greatest revelation of God’s missionary activity can be seen in the incarnation and ministry of Jesus. Though Jesus came to this earth to do many things—to destroy Satan, to reveal the true character of the Father, to prove Satan’s accusations wrong, to show that God’s law can be kept—the crucial reason was to die on the cross in the place of humanity, in order to save us from the ultimate result of sin, which is eternal death.

What do each of these texts teach us about the death of Jesus?

John 3:14, 15

Isa. 53:4–6

2 Cor. 5:21

God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV). That is what it took in order for us to be made “the righteousness of God in Him” (NKJV). This idea has been called the “great exchange,” Jesus taking on our sins and suffering as a sinner so that we, though sinners, can be counted as righteous before God as Jesus Himself.
Metaphors of Mission

Mission is God’s initiative to save lost humanity. God’s saving mission is motivated by His love for each one of us. There is no deeper reason for it. God sent Christ on a mission to bring salvation for the whole world. John’s Gospel alone contains more than forty declarations of the cosmic dimension of Jesus’ mission. (See, for example, John 3:17, 12:47.) As Christ was sent by the Father to save the world, He in turn sends His disciples with the words “‘as the Father has sent me, I am sending you’” (John 20:21, NIV).

Read Matthew 5:13, 14. What are the two metaphors used for mission in these texts, and what do they stand for?

The metaphors of salt and light express core functions of Christian influence on humanity. While salt operates internally, joining the mass with which it comes in contact, light operates externally, illuminating all that it reaches. The term “earth” in the salt metaphor refers to men and women with whom Christians are expected to mix, while the phrase “light of the world” refers to a world of people in darkness and in need of illumination.

The children of Israel were encouraged to live up to the moral principles and health rules that God had given them. They were to be a light, illuminating and attracting—you are “a light for the Gentiles” (Isa. 49:6, NIV). Their collective existence in a state of health, prosperity, and loyalty to God’s Sabbath and other commandments would proclaim to the surrounding nations God’s mighty acts of Creation and Redemption. The nations, observing their prosperity, would approach them and learn to be taught of the Lord. (That was the idea anyway.)

When Christ came, He also talked about salt, another way to witness. By their influence in the world, Christians are to curb the world’s corruption. Unbelievers are often kept from evil deeds because of a moral consciousness traceable to Christian influence. Christians not only have a good influence on the corrupted world by virtue of their presence in it, they also mingle with people in order to share the Christian message of salvation.

How good of a witness are you and your church to the surrounding world? Is the light dimming? Is the salt losing its punch? If so, how can you learn that revival and reformation begin with you, personally?
**Further Study:** We have dealt with some aspects of the missionary nature of God. Mission is an enterprise of the triune God. Mission is predominantly related to Jesus Christ, whose Incarnation is central to Christian faith and mission. By His life and death, Jesus has paved the way for the salvation of all the human race. We, as His followers, His missionaries, have to let people know the good news of just what Jesus has done for them.

“The church of Christ on earth was organized for missionary purposes, and the Lord desires to see the entire church devising ways and means whereby high and low, rich and poor, may hear the message of truth. Not all are called to personal labor in foreign fields, but all can do something by their prayers and their gifts to aid the missionary work.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 29.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Think more about the question of origins. Why do origins matter? How does a proper understanding of our origins help us to better understand who we are and what the purpose of our existence really is?

2. How does the following quote help us to understand the existence of free will, love, and evil in our world? “Thus, if God wants to create loving creatures (in imitation of his perfect love), God has to create free beings who can cause suffering and evil in the world by their choices. The dynamics of love and freedom require that God allow us the latitude to grow in love through our human freedom. God’s only alternative to allowing free beings to choose unloving acts is to completely refrain from creating loving creatures.”—Robert J. Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy*, Kindle Edition (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), p. 233.

3. The death of Jesus was a single act that occurred in a small nation amid the vast Roman Empire almost two thousand years ago. Yet, this act is of eternal significance for every human being. What responsibility rests on us, who know about this act and what it means, to tell those who don’t know about it? How else will they learn of it if those who know about it don’t tell them?
The Gun Would Not Fire: Part 1

by Max de los Reyes, the Philippines

Fernando Lopez grew up in a town 60 miles south of Manila. Like many in the Philippines, Fernando’s family didn’t have much money. And like many young boys, Fernando quit school to help his parents by selling small items and running errands.

Fernando was active in his church, which helped to ease the boredom he often felt. More than anything, Fernando longed for an education so he could serve God better, but he knew that, humanly speaking, this wasn’t possible.

Then one day, Fernando heard about the 1000 Missionary Movement, a program to train volunteer missionaries who serve God for one year in the Philippines or in one of several countries. Excited, Fernando asked his parents’ permission to join. With their blessing, he applied and was accepted.

The training Fernando received helped to fill his desire for education and prepared him to serve God somewhere in the Philippines. When the training phase ended, he eagerly awaited his assignment to a territory but had mixed emotions when he learned that he was assigned to work in an area some four hundred miles from his home.

Fernando arrived in his new field and began seeking out those who were interested in learning more about God. Soon he was giving several Bible studies a week. Some of the people taking Bible studies lived in a small settlement in the mountains, a four-hour ride by bicycle from where he stayed.

Despite the hardships, Fernando became so involved in his work that he often spent most of his small monthly stipend to buy materials to build a Seventh-day Adventist church, leaving him without money to buy food. This tested his faith and prepared him for even greater tests that would come. But throughout his experience, his faith in God did not waver.

One of Fernando’s converts was Julie Taguinod. She and her sister, Essie, had studied the Bible with Fernando and then attended his evangelistic meetings. Julie and her sister had been baptized recently in spite of the objections of Julie’s husband, Lem.

Fernando knew of Lem’s objections to his wife’s interest in religion. Lem had forbidden Julie to attend church and had threatened to harm her if she continued going. But Julie had stood firm and continued to attend church. Fernando appreciated her sincere desire to honor Christ. And Lem began to ignore Julie’s church attendance. Perhaps he realized that his objections would not stop his wife from following Christ.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: John 17:18

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize that God’s mission to restore fallen humanity flows from His very nature; the all-powerful, all-loving Creator God of the universe is the God of mission.

Feel: Respond with a deep sense of gratitude to God’s relentless pursuit of His created beings.

Do: Undertake to place his or her talents and gifts at the service of the God of mission so that men and women everywhere will acknowledge and worship their Creator.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Our God Is Extroverted.

A. We teach our children that “God is love.” How does our understanding of God’s nature deepen to also remember that “God is missional”?

B. The Father sent His Son into the world on a redemptive mission, and He also sent the Holy Spirit to continue Christ’s work. How does this insight into the “sending dynamic,” within the very triune Godhead, help us to appreciate Christ’s prayer, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (John 17:18, NKJV)?

II. Feel: Our Mission DNA

A. How does your sense of responsibility for outreach increase when you consider how central mission is to understanding the God we serve?

B. At the same time, how do you feel when you reflect on the fact that mission belongs to God—that even though He invites us to share in mission, the outcome of our efforts ultimately rests in His hands?

III. Do: We Have Been Sent.

A. How have we sometimes tended to define mission narrowly, thus missing opportunities for involvement?

B. Be willing to pray, “Here am I, send me.”

Summary: God’s nature draws Him to seek us, to reveal Himself to us, and to draw us into a relationship with Him. Down through the ages, He has invited men and women to become His agents in this grand mission drama. How will we respond to His invitation today?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *John 20:21*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The grand narrative of God’s interaction with humanity is *mission*. Our God is a God of outreach. Through millennia, He has relentlessly pursued a relationship with His created beings. Just as God sent Jesus into the world as His ultimate “mission Agent,” so Christ gave His followers a critical mission assignment—to make God’s glory known through words and actions. How have we answered God’s call to mission?

**Just for Teachers:** When we think of the attributes of God—holiness, omnipotence, justice, compassion—we sometimes forget another essential characteristic: “missionary”—that is, God wants to be known and is actively working to reveal Himself to humanity. He is “extroverted” by nature. Today, explore this aspect of God’s personality with your class, prompting each member to ask, How can the mission impulse that flows from God’s nature find practical expression within my church and in my everyday life?

**Opening Discussion:** We naturally assume that today’s Internet culture is rapidly shrinking our globe. It seems self-evident that as we travel the vast online information superhighway we’ll bump up against people from many different cultures and backgrounds, and our worldview will expand.

But does this theory match reality? Some studies suggest that the way many of us use the Internet actually serves to maintain an insular worldview. We choose what’s comfortable rather than what’s thought-provoking. In short, we build a standardized online network that reinforces, rather than challenges, our existing worldview.

God intends His church to be the ultimate worldview expander. Through Scripture, He’s given us a big-picture view of the great controversy between good and evil and His redemptive plan for the world. Yet, the culture within our church can serve to either focus us outward on God’s mission or to focus our attention inward on our own interests and needs.

When we acknowledge God’s essential missionary nature, we embrace a mission-focused worldview. We won’t be content with a church that’s merely a social club for saints. We’ll want it to be a launching pad for mission.

How does a mission-focused worldview shape:

- Our relationship with other members of our church family?
- Our perception of the church’s activities and programs?
- Our relationship with members of our broader community?
STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Take the opportunity this week to explore the full biblical picture of God’s missionary nature. Often we concentrate on the New Testament, where God’s mission is clearly portrayed in the life of Jesus and in the early church. But the roots of God’s mission run deep into the Old Testament, and there are riches to be unearthed in God’s plan revealed as far back as Abraham, Moses, and the later prophets.

**Bible Commentary**

1. **A Missionary God** *(Review Matthew 5:13, 14 with your class.)*

   It has always been God’s desire to bring salvation to all His children. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible depicts Him as a seeking, searching, redeeming God. Throughout the Bible—from the Israelite nation to the early church—we see God’s efforts to enlist His followers in the same mission, to be salt and light to the people around them.

   In Deuteronomy 10:19, the Israelites are instructed to love those who are aliens. Later, the psalmist proclaims to God, “All the nations belong to you!” *(Ps. 82:8, NRSV).* And Micah paints a beautiful vision of what Israel’s influence on its surrounding nations should be: “Many nations will come and say,

   ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
   to the temple of the God of Jacob.
   He will teach us his ways,
   so that we may walk in his paths.’
   The law will go out from Zion,
   the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” *(Mic. 4:2, NIV).*

   In the book of Isaiah, God’s missionary call to all the nations is clear: “‘Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other’” *(Isa. 45:22, NIV).* In chapter 56, Isaiah pictures God’s temple becoming a “house of prayer for all nations” *(vs. 7).* And God says, “‘And my blessings are for Gentiles, too, when they commit themselves to the LORD. Do not let them think that I consider them second-class citizens’” *(Isa. 56:3, NLT).*

   God’s mission vision was larger than His people’s—which perhaps extended to the hope of reconciliation between Judah and Israel. But that was only a small part of God’s plan for His people: “‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept,’ ” He says *(Isa. 49:6, NIV).* The larger plan was this:
“‘I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth’” (vs. 6, *NIV*).

Isaiah further prophesied that one day there would be “an altar to the LORD in the heart of Egypt”—idolatrous, immoral, superstitious Egypt (*Isa. 19:19, NIV*). But if that weren’t enough, Isaiah also prophesied that the brutal Assyrians would join Egypt in forsaking their gods:

“The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth” (vss. 23, 24, *NIV*).

Sadly, too often Israel indulged in syncretism with, rather than mission to, the surrounding neighbors. Again and again, the prophets called them from immorality, self-indulgence, and disregard for the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the aliens in their midst.

The Hebrew verb “to send” (*shelach*) is found nearly eight hundred times in Scripture. While its usage is most often found in a variety of nontheological phrases, it is used more than two hundred times with God as the subject of the verb. In other words, it is God who commissions His people, and it is God who sends.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. To what extent do we resemble Israel in being so preoccupied with our own needs that we overlook mission?
2. Israel’s understanding of its mission role ultimately fell short of what God intended. In what ways could our vision for mission today be less ambitious or less expansive than God intends?
3. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has long identified itself as a “mission movement.” What attributes does this imply? What characteristics would not be consistent with a mission movement?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Do we treat mission as just one activity among many other equally important church activities? Or are we clear that mission is “what it’s all about”? Challenge your class to take a fresh look at the values and priorities that drive your congregation.

**Life Application:** Reflect on the following statement by Adventist missiologist Jon Dybdahl: “Jesus did not create a church and then give it mission as one of its tasks. The divine sending plan comes prior to the church. Mission gives birth to the church and is its mother. . . . If the church ceases to be missionary, it has not simply failed in its task, but has actually ceased being the church.”—*Adventist Mission in the 21st Century* (Hagerstown Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1999), pp. 17, 18.
Application Questions:

1. How do you react to the following idea? “It’s misleading for us to speak of the ‘church’s mission.’ We don’t own mission; God invites us to participate in His mission.”

2. What practical difference does it make that God’s mission preceded the church? What does it mean for how we set our priorities and use our resources? Does this change the way we think and feel about the outcome of mission? Does it change the way we understand God’s purpose for us? For our local congregation?

Activity: Draw two columns on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper. Ask the class, “Would a visitor attending Sabbath services at your church know immediately that this is a mission-minded church?” In one column write a list of those practices already in place that clearly reveal the mission orientation of your church. In the other column draw up a list of specific changes your church could make to better reflect the missionary nature of God.

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: When we talk about mission, we sometimes focus on the technicalities. We talk about “unentered territories” and “contextualization,” and we focus on demographics and statistics. While these practicalities are important, how could they cause us to sometimes lose sight of the “why” of mission? Conclude your class today by focusing on the ultimate purpose of our witness: to reveal the awesome majesty and praiseworthiness of God.

Activity: Ask three class members to read aloud Psalm 67:1–5, Jude 1:24, 25, and Revelation 15:2–4. Give the class a minute or two to reflect silently on the image of God these passages present. Then ask, “How do you personally respond to these passages? What feelings do they evoke?”

Ask the class to divide into groups of two or three to pray for the Holy Spirit to help us:

1. Catch a clearer vision of God’s endlessly loving and pursuing nature.
2. Find ways to engage in mission, personally and corporately, that will more effectively glorify our Creator and lead others to worship Him.
Lesson 2

*July 4–10

Abraham: The First Missionary

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gen. 12:1–3; 14:8–24; Gal. 3:6; Heb. 11:8–19; Gen. 12:6, 7; 18:18, 19.

Memory Text: “So also Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you’ ” (Galatians 3:6–8, NIV).

It’s no coincidence that three of the world’s major faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are sometimes called the “Abrahamic faiths.” That’s because all three, in one way or another, trace their roots back to this great man of God.

Though Abraham is admired as the defining example of faithfulness, this week’s lesson will examine this faithfulness from a different angle. That is, we want to view him as a missionary, as someone called by the Lord to go to another land and witness to the people about the true God, the Creator and Redeemer.

God gave Abraham, and his family after him (see Gal. 3:29), a three-fold purpose: (1) to be recipients and guardians of the divine truth of God’s kingdom that had been lost in the earlier history of humankind; (2) to be the channel through which the Redeemer would enter history; and (3) to be, as God’s faithful servants, a light to the nations, a light to those who needed to know the Lord.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 11.
The Call of Abraham

“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’ ” (Gen. 12:1–3, NIV).

Abram—whose name meant “the father is exalted” and whose name was changed to Abraham, “the father of multitudes”—grew up in Ur, in what is now Iraq. God called him to separate himself from his familiar social and spiritual context and migrate to an unfamiliar country, where God conducted a 100-year spiritual makeover, turning him into the “father of the faithful.” In the midst of personal and family struggles, Abraham became a prototype missionary to several people groups and a respected leader who witnessed to his faith in God.

Read through Genesis 12:1–3. What principles can you find here that could apply to any of us in our own particular situation; that is, what did Abraham experience that we might experience in our own way, as well? See also Heb. 11:8–10.

The patriarch was called to leave his past behind him, to step out in faith, to believe what seemed unbelievable, to do what God had called him to do. And as a result of his faithfulness, all the nations of the world would be blessed.

Many of us are tested, as was Abraham. Of course, we might not hear the voice of God speaking directly to us, but He calls us by the teachings of His Word and the events of His providence. We may be required to abandon a career that promises wealth and honor; we might have to leave congenial and profitable associations and separate from family; indeed, we might have to enter upon what appears only to be a path of self-denial, hardship, and sacrifice. But if called, how can we refuse?

In Genesis, the Hebrew reads literally, “And God said to Abram, ‘Go for yourself from your land.’ ” He was told to go “for himself”; that is, for his own sake. How should we understand what that means, and how can we apply it to ourselves?
Abraham’s Testimony to the Kings

Lot was a relative of Abraham and accompanied him on some of his travels. His choice of the well-watered Jordan valley brought him into the company of the wicked men in Sodom (Gen. 13:1–13). He was then rescued first by Abraham (Gen. 14:11–16) and later by two angels (Genesis 19).

When Abraham heard that his relative, Lot, was in trouble, he decided to help him. In rescuing Lot, Abraham headed a military force of more than three hundred men of his own household. Numerous kings were involved in the battle for Sodom, and Abraham came out the victor.

To the kings he conquered, Abraham revealed the power of God. Even during this rescue mission, the “father of the faithful” did not lose his divine call to be a blessing to the nations.

“The worshiper of Jehovah had not only rendered a great service to the country, but had proved himself a man of valor. It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham’s religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed. His heroic act gave him a widespread influence among the surrounding tribes. On his return, the king of Sodom came out with his retinue to honor the conqueror. He bade him take the goods, begging only that the prisoners should be restored. By the usage of war, the spoils belonged to the conquerors; but Abraham had undertaken this expedition with no purpose of gain, and he refused to take advantage of the unfortunate, only stipulating that his confederates should receive the portion to which they were entitled.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 135.

Think about your dealings with others. What kind of witness do they present to others about your faith?

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Exemplar of Faith

Though hardly perfect, Abraham was a man of God, and time and again in the Bible, even in the New Testament, he is used as an example of faithfulness and of what it means to be saved by faith (see Gen. 15:6, Gal. 3:6).

Read Hebrews 11:8–19. What does it tell us about Abraham and his faith that is so important for anyone who wants to be a missionary for God in whatever capacity possible?

The Lord wanted to use Abraham, but the first thing He had to do was get him to leave his past behind. The lesson there should be obvious to any of us, especially those of us who have pasts not in harmony with the will and law of God, which actually includes us all.

Amazing, too, was the fact that though Abraham left, “he did not know where he was going” (Heb. 11:8, NIV). Though most missionaries know where they are going, at least in a geographical sense, in another sense when we take a giant leap of faith and give our hearts totally to God, we really don’t know (at least in the short run) where we will wind up (though in the long run, we have absolute assurance). If we did know, it wouldn’t require that much faith; hence, not knowing is prerequisite for truly being able to live by faith.

Another crucial point here is that Abraham was looking to “the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (vs. 10, NIV). Abraham kept the big picture in mind; he knew that whatever he faced here, whatever toils and struggles, it would all be worth it in the end.

He knew, too, that he wasn’t just a stranger in “the promised land” but that he was one of many “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (vs. 13, NKJV). This world, and our lives in it, as precious as they appear to us now (it’s all we have now), are not the whole story, not by a long shot.

And, of course, the greatest example of faith in the Old Testament was what Abraham was willing to do to his son on Mount Moriah at the command of God.

In what ways have you experienced what it means to step out in faith? What hardships have you faced? What joys have you experienced? Knowing what you know now, what might you have done differently?
Abraham, the Wanderer

A study of Abraham’s life reveals that his faith included difficult struggles against doubt and disbelief in God’s power. Abraham’s ancestors were idolaters (Josh. 24:2), and perhaps this background explains why he did not always have full confidence in God’s power. Twice he showed cowardice and told Sarah to tell only a half-truth (Gen. 12:11–13, 20:2). He laughed (Gen. 17:17) when he was told that he would have a son with Sarah. Despite his faults, Abraham was still used by the Lord because Abraham wanted to be used by Him; and thus, the Lord was able to mold His character.

One means God used to shape Abraham into a reformer and missionary was his many wanderings. Traveling is an education in itself. It opens a person to new ideas and the possibilities of change. Pilgrimages to Jerusalem were an important and required part of Israelite worship. The changes the pilgrims experienced when they had to walk distances, sleep in other places, eat different food, encounter another climate, and meet other people enhanced their faith by their vulnerability. Their worship, with its sacrifices and offerings, sacred dances, and reciting of psalms, helped God’s people to confirm their identity and traditions.

In his travels from his birthplace in Ur to his burial site in Hebron, Abraham visited at least 15 different geographical areas. Most of the important reforming and missionary episodes in his life are connected with his journeys.

What were some of the spiritual lessons that Abraham experienced in the following places?

Moreh at Shechem (Gen. 12:6, 7)

Hebron (Gen. 13:18–14:20)

Mamre (Gen. 18:1, 20–33)

Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:1–14)
Abraham: A Missionary in His Own House

“Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him” (Gen. 18:18, 19, NIV). What important lessons about faithfulness and serving God do we find in these texts?

“God called Abraham to be a teacher of His word, He chose him to be the father of a great nation, because He saw that Abraham would instruct his children and his household in the principles of God’s law. And that which gave power to Abraham’s teaching was the influence of his own life. His great household consisted of more than a thousand souls, many of them heads of families, and not a few but newly converted from heathenism.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 187.

Missionary activities will be more successful when they are backed by a family life that is in harmony with the designs of God. Bible history and church history tell us that most early Christian churches were house- and family-based. One of the reasons Abraham was chosen was that God saw his ability to direct his children and his household in the way of the Lord. God’s purpose in the family equals His purpose in missions; namely, “to do what is right and just” (Prov. 21:3, NIV).

What examples of Abraham’s family can you find that showed that they were faithful to the Lord? See, for example, Heb. 11:11, 20.

Of course, in the Bible we can also find examples of godly men whose families didn’t follow the way of the Lord. Nevertheless, the point of the texts for today is clear: Abraham’s faith and example were strong enough that those of his household learned to “keep the way of the Lord” (Gen. 18:19).

To “keep the way of the Lord.” What does that phrase mean to you? How are we to “keep the way of the Lord”? 
Further Study: “God called Abraham, and prospered and honored him; and the patriarch’s fidelity was a light to the people in all the countries of his sojourn. Abraham did not shut himself away from the people around him. He maintained friendly relations with the kings of the surrounding nations, by some of whom he was treated with great respect; and his integrity and unselfishness, his valor and benevolence, were representing the character of God. In Mesopotamia, in Canaan, in Egypt, and even to the inhabitants of Sodom, the God of heaven was revealed through His representative.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 368.

Discussion Questions:

1. For thousands of years, the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah has thrilled and challenged the faithful while evoking scorn and ridicule among those who have seen it as an act of cruelty and barbarity. Read the story over again in Genesis 22. What great lessons can we take from it? What does it teach us about the Cross and the terrible cost of sin? What does it teach us about what taking a leap of faith entails? Why is the story so troubling to many?

2. Read Genesis 12:11–13, 20:2, two accounts where Abraham, a man of God, showed a lack of faith. What can we take away from these stories?

3. One of the most famous texts in the Bible is Genesis 15:6. What does it say? In what context is it given? How is this text used in the New Testament (see Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6, James 2:23)? What does it teach us about faith, works, and salvation?

4. Who were some of the great religious leaders whose family members didn’t follow in “the way of the Lord”? What can we learn from their stories that can encourage anyone who struggles with helping family members be faithful?
The Gun Would Not Fire: Part 2

by Max de los Reyes, the Philippines

Lem was a soldier, and his assignments often took him away from home. When he was home, he spent much time and money drinking with his friends.

One day Lem’s buddies began teasing him about his wife’s interest in religion. “What’s the matter, Lem?” one man challenged. “ Couldn’t you keep your wife from joining that church?” As the teasing grew more intense, Lem became agitated.

“You’re wrong!” he finally blustered. “I’ll prove to you that I can control my wife!” With those words Lem swaggered out of the bar and headed home.

That afternoon Fernando had been visiting homes of people interested in studying the Bible. He wasn’t far from Julie’s home when he decided to stop by to make sure Julie still planned on his visit the next day. As he neared her house, Fernando was startled by a loud blast that sounded like a gunshot. At first, he was not concerned about it, but when another shot rang out, he looked around to see who was shooting.

Just then he saw Julie running toward him. “Run! Get away!” she shouted. “Lem’s trying to kill you!”

Fernando took cover behind a large tree. He knew that Lem was an expert marksman, and if the man wanted to hit Fernando, he could do so easily. Julie ran back toward the house where she found her husband angrily yanking at his gun, trying to remove a bullet that had lodged in the barrel. As Julie saw what he was doing, she grew bold. “Lem, you know that God jammed your gun so you couldn’t hurt Fernando!”

None of Lem’s efforts could unjam the gun. Surprised by this unexpected turn of events, Lem put the gun down and listened to Julie explain how God had worked to save His messenger from death. When he cooled down and sobered up, Lem admitted that his wife was right. Fernando had done nothing to harm him.

Lem no longer objects when his wife and children attend church services. He has accepted Fernando’s friendship and has agreed to Bible studies. He has told his drinking buddies that he is glad his family attends church, and they have stopped teasing him.

Those who witnessed the events of that day agree that God truly worked a miracle to save Fernando’s life. But the change in Lem’s heart is no less of a miracle.

Max de los Reyes was the executive secretary of the Mountain Provinces Mission in the Philippines when this was written.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Hebrews 11:8

The Student Will:

Know: See clearly from Abraham’s life how God uses obedience, however flawed or incomplete, to dramatically further His mission plan.
Feel: Gain a fresh sense of excitement about the mission adventure that God has in mind for him or her.
Do: Be challenged to take risks and to become personally vulnerable for the sake of the gospel.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Adventure, With a Safety Net

A What would happen to the Bible if the story of Abraham were removed? How does this help us to understand the importance of the mission God assigned to Abraham?
B What do we learn about God’s nature from Abraham’s many missteps?
C Why do you think God engineered so many close encounters with Abraham at different points along his journey?

II. Feel: Mission Possible

A Are we allowing a sense of inadequacy to hold us back from engaging in mission? What lessons from Abraham’s experience should give us the confidence to launch out?
B How does Abraham’s enduring connection with God bring us reassurance and comfort when we feel like “strangers in a strange land”?

III. Do: Transformed Through Mission

A How can we do mission rather than simply be “thinkers” or “talkers” about mission? What will that mean for us, in a practical sense?
B As we look at Abraham at the beginning of his journey and then again at the end, what clues can we find about what God would like to achieve in our lives if we’ll let Him?

Summary: In many ways, Abraham’s mission journey prefigures Christ’s redemptive mission to bless the world through His sacrifice at Calvary. As we trace Abraham’s footsteps, we catch glimpses of the mission-minded nature of God, and we’re inspired to discover the mission purpose God has planned for us.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Galatians 3:6–8*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Through faith, Abraham accepted a mission from God that took him on an extraordinary journey—one whose consequences he could never have imagined. Today, God offers each one of us a mission assignment in His plan for the salvation of humanity. Like Abraham, we may not be “ideal” missionary material. But his story assures us that God can and will achieve His purpose through flawed humans. All He asks is that we be ready to “Go.”

**Just for Teachers:** The Christian as pilgrim or exile is a recurring image in Christian literature and music. Perhaps the clearest example of someone called on a pilgrimage is Abraham, who responded to God’s call to leave everything he knew (Gen. 12:1). In leading your class today, your purpose should be twofold: to draw key lessons for mission from Abraham’s epic journey of faith and to challenge the class to listen for, and to accept, God’s personal call to mission—whatever form that may take.

**Opening Discussion:** British explorer Sir Francis Drake sailed from England in December 1577 with six ships and 164 sailors. His mission? To become the first Englishman to circumnavigate the globe. Three years later, just one ship crewed by 59 surviving sailors limped into Plymouth Harbor. While ultimately successful in their mission, Sir Francis and his men had endured a litany of horrors—storms, shipwrecks, attacks by hostile forces, and starvation.

In light of his terrible journey, the words of a prayer traditionally attributed to Sir Francis seem especially poignant: “Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves. When our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little. When we arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore.”

When Abraham set out from Ur, he was beginning a journey that would take him “far from shore”—and seemingly without assurance of success. Of course, hindsight makes the outcome seem inevitable. Abraham was a giant of faith; a fearless explorer; the father of nations, both literal and spiritual. But consider how the story could have taken a very different turn. When Abram of Ur first heard God’s voice telling him to “Go,” he was simply a man faced with a choice. Should he ignore the Lord’s prompting and stay in Ur, with all that was familiar and secure? Or should he uproot himself and his extended household and head into the unknown? At the time, he could never have known how the consequences of his choice would ripple down through history.
Discussion Questions:

1. Before any epic journey comes a decision to go, how can we live in such a way that (a) makes it easier to hear God’s call to mission and (b) ensures we’re physically and spiritually ready to respond to the mission assignment that God gives us?

2. In what ways do we either individually or as a church “sail too close to shore” when it comes to engaging in God’s mission?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The great men and women of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11, including Abraham, all had a deep confidence in God’s long-range plan for humanity. This assurance allowed them to embrace vulnerability, sacrifice, and danger. As you explore the biblical narrative of Abraham, prompt your class to ask: “What things do I need to leave behind—fears, material possessions, sins, or anything else—in order to fulfill God’s plan for me to bless others?”

Bible Commentary

I. Blessing the World (Review Genesis 12:1–9 with your class.)

The theme of blessing weaves through the Bible with God showing Himself as anxious to bless the world. God blesses Abraham for a specific and monumental purpose—to bless all nations through him (Gen. 12:2, 3). Could there be a higher calling? Right from the start of the history of Israel, God signals His intention to bless the whole world. He chooses Israel not because they’re inherently special, not because they’re better than others, but so they can be His instrument of salvation and blessing to the world.

Abraham proved himself in some ways to be a fallible human. But his incredible faith earns him a prominent place among the heroes of faith (Heb. 11:8–19). Courage mixed with faith as Abraham, his family, and entourage moved as missionaries into the heart of Canaan—surrounded by immoral idol worshipers (Gen. 12:4–6). How would they even begin to witness of Yahweh in such surroundings?

Abraham builds two altars. Of course, performing sacrifices was nothing strange in the land of Canaan—but claiming to sacrifice to the One true God, Yahweh, was something startlingly new! And then the Bible says that Abraham “called on the name of the Lord” (vs. 8, NKJV). Young’s Literal Translation suggests a deeper meaning in this verse: Abraham “preacheth in the name of Jehovah.” Abraham was not only called to go
and live a life faithful to the promise, he was called to be a verbal witness to the Canaanite peoples.

**Consider This:** Abraham stood in a “privileged” relationship with God—yet, this bestowed on him as many responsibilities as it did blessings. For Seventh-day Adventists, what are some of the responsibilities that accompany the many blessings God has given us?

II. Reciprocal Blessings (*Review Genesis 12:1–3 with your class.*)

Blessings in the Bible flow two ways—from God to humanity and from humanity back to God. God’s blessings are to care for us as His children; our blessing is to express our thanks and appreciation for His blessings. This mutual, reciprocal blessing can be seen in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 1:3, NRSV*).

In the uneven mutual exchange of blessings, the only things of value we can give back to God are our lives, our service, and our praise.

The greatest blessing Israel could have given back to God was their obedience, including participation in His mission to the surrounding nations. Instead, too often, they got caught up in empty ritual. Sacrifices and offerings, which were supposed to be blessings back to God, instead became as an insult to Him (*Isa. 1:13–15*).

**Consider This:** In what tangible ways might God call us to bless our community? In what ways are we sometimes distracted from our mission to bless God and others?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** It has been said that being a missionary means being open to being changed, as much as you seek to change others. Abraham’s mission encompasses both a physical journey (from the ancient city of Ur into the land of Canaan) and a journey of spiritual growth (leaving behind a culture of idolatry and learning how to be a faithful follower of Yahweh). Explore with your class the idea that perfection isn’t a job requirement for mission work. What’s needed instead is a teachable spirit.

**Activity:** Divide the class into small groups and ask them to spend a few minutes writing a short job description for the “career” to which God called Abraham. List all the qualifications and skills you believe an ideal candidate should possess. Come together as a group and compare your lists. What
consensus can you come to regarding the two or three most essential qualifications? What characteristics would be detrimental?

**Discussion Questions:**
Briefly review the various episodes in Abraham’s life that show he was a spiritual work in progress. *(For instance, Gen. 12:11–13, 16:1–4, 20:2.)*

1. How would you characterize God’s response to these situations?
2. Why do you think God was so patient with His flawed ambassador? How does 1 Timothy 1:16 provide a clue to one reason?
3. How do you respond to the idea that God’s power is displayed in our weakness *(2 Cor. 12:9)*? Does this have a practical impact on our attitude to mission involvement?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** We often hear stirring tales of men and women who’ve felt a distinct, unmistakable sense that God wanted them to serve in some special way. Yet, we are all “called” *(John 15:16).* Explore with your class the many different ways God communicates His call to mission.

**Activity:** Is it possible to become better attuned to God’s mission promptings? Choose two or three individuals in your class to enact a charade. Choose an abstract idea for them to portray—such as compassion or hope—through actions only.

1. Is it easier for us to guess the message when the actors are people we know very well (that is, we’re in tune with how they think)? Why, or why not?
2. Would it be easier to guess the message if we received clues about it from multiple sources? Explain. (Perhaps if the actors were also allowed to talk, or draw a picture?)

For now, God’s communication with us can’t be face-to-face. As a class, discuss ways we can be more in tune with God’s voice. What various forms can God’s call take?

In closing, challenge members of the class to set aside specific blocks of time in the coming week—whether through study, prayer, worship, or fellowship—to do the following:

(a) Listen for God’s personal call to mission.
(b) Prepare spiritually to be ready for service.
Lesson 3
*July 11–17

The Unlikely Missionary

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 2 Kings 5; Mark 1:40–45; 2 Kings 2:1–15; John 15:5; Rom. 6:1, 4–11.

Memory Text: “And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:27, NIV).

The books of Kings, covering the history of the kingdoms of Israel from about 970 to 560 B.C., record exciting and dramatic events and far-reaching political upheavals touching God’s people. Woven in these accounts are the stories of Elijah and Elisha, daring prophets of God whose adventures have gripped the imaginations of children and adults in every age.

Also interesting are the similarities between the ministry of Elisha and the ministry of Jesus. In the ministries of both, dead persons were raised, lepers cleansed, and hungry people fed from small amounts of food.

This week’s lesson deals with one of these miracles: the healing of Naaman, a wealthy, powerful, and very proud idolater who, in his great need, came to experience the power of the living God and first did so through the witness of a very unlikely missionary.

Among the many spiritual truths that can be found in this account, we can get a model for cross-cultural witnessing in the midst of international tension and rivalry. We can see, too, in this story a model for how the plan of salvation works.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 18.
He Had It All . . . But

“Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy” (2 Kings 5:1, NIV).

This verse contains no fewer than four descriptions or titles that put Naaman in the top echelon of Syrian, or Aramean, society. He exerted major influence on the king of Aram, was held in high esteem, and was the king’s right-hand man in religious, as well as military, matters (vs. 18). He was also extremely wealthy (vs. 5).

However, verse 1 has a major “but.” All Naaman’s power, honor, and bravery paled in light of the most feared disease in those days, leprosy. And that is exactly what this poor man had, the major “but” that cast a dark shadow over all else he had achieved. This ailment, however, brought him into contact with God’s prophet, and through that contact he became a believer in the true God.

Read Mark 1:40–45, Luke 8:41–56, and Mark 2:1–12. Despite the obvious fact that Jesus did miraculous healings here, what is the common denominator in these accounts? What is it that brought all these people to Jesus?

Personal life disruptions, tragedies, and transitions can make people more open to spiritual truth and set them on a search for God. Physical, psychological, political, or other disasters can open people up to the reality of the Divine. Personal loss, national catastrophes, and wars are major motivators that cause people to seek a power greater than themselves. The church has long been aware that increased soul-winning results tend to come in areas in which people are struck by personal or societal suffering.

On one level Naaman appeared to have it all; on another he was a broken man without much hope. In what ways are we all like that, having good things and bad things in our lives? How can we learn to allow both to keep us connected to the Lord?
An Unlikely Witness

Read 2 Kings 5:1–7. What is going on here? Why would the Syrians even have listened to what a captive slave girl had to say? What might be the hidden implications of what transpired?

The Bible gives us no real details of how this young girl acted in the home, but it’s clear that there was something about her that caught the family’s attention. Think about it: on the word of a captive female child in his household, a wealthy and powerful military leader goes to his king, tells him what she said, and then gets permission from the king to go. Even more so, he loads up on gifts to bring to the prophet. Obviously, more was going on than what is explicitly stated in the texts. Nevertheless, God’s agent to plant the knowledge of Him in the ruling circles of Syria was an unnamed little Hebrew slave girl, cruelly snatched from her home by a Syrian raiding party. Instead of dwelling on the cruelty and meaninglessness of that act, and of her life of servitude, she shared her unshaken faith in the life-changing power of God, who was working through Elisha in Samaria (vs. 3). Thus, like Daniel and his companions in Babylon, she was able to turn her own adversity into a way to glorify God; and thus, God turned her captivity into an opportunity to share her faith. According to Ellen G. White, “The conduct of the captive maid, the way that she bore herself in that heathen home, is a strong witness to the power of early home training.”—Prophets and Kings, p. 245.

What should this tell us about how our faith, lifestyle, and actions can draw others to us and to the truths with which we have been entrusted?

What’s fascinating, too, in this story is the reaction of the king of Israel upon getting the letter. Am I God? Can I heal leprosy? His words reveal just how dreaded the disease was and why only a miracle could bring about a cure. For whatever reason, the letter implied the expectation that the king was to bring the cure. He knew that he couldn’t do that, and so he thought it was all a trick to instigate trouble.
Elisha, the Prophet

The ministry of the prophet Elisha in the ninth century B.C. comes to us in a series of 18 episodes, extending over more than fifty years. His ministry was conducted mostly as the head of the school of the prophets and was largely public. It included displays of signs and wonders at both the personal as well as the national level. Elisha was a prophet whose counsel and help were sought by both kings and commoners.

Read 2 Kings 2:1–15. What does this tell us about the calling and ministry of Elisha?

No question that Elisha was called of God; he had some incredible experiences that must have confirmed his calling in his own mind. More important, his request for a “double portion” of the Spirit showed his awareness that for him to do what he was called to do, he would need divine power, because in and of himself he would be helpless. Thus, even back then, this man of God understood what Jesus said many centuries later: “‘I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing’” (John 15:5, NKJV). It’s a lesson that we all need to recognize, no matter our position in the Lord’s work.

Obviously, as we can see from the story of Elisha’s calling, this power had, indeed, been granted to him. Thus, Elisha revealed that he had a healthy and honest understanding of his own role and calling when he declared to the king: let Naaman “know that there is a prophet in Israel” (2 Kings 5:8).

Also interesting must have been the scene when this military commander and his retinue showed up in all their glory at the door of Elisha’s house, probably something relatively small and modest in contrast to the luxury that Naaman enjoyed. Elisha, however, didn’t seem all that intimidated by Naaman and his troops. In fact, Elisha did not so much as step outside to meet his powerful caller; instead, he sent a messenger, who gave the military commander a command! The only reward for Naaman’s long trip from Damascus was the blunt directive to go to the Jordan and bathe! But it was accompanied by a promise: “‘you will be cleansed’” (vs. 10, NIV).

No doubt the pride of this important man was hurt. Perhaps, though, that was the point.
The Healing of Naaman

**Read** 2 Kings 5:11–14. What does this account teach us about Naaman and some of the lessons he had to learn? What can we take from this for ourselves as well?

Had the prophet Elisha personally met his prominent guest Naaman and employed exorcising gestures accompanied by magic formulas and other rituals so common in pagan religions, Naaman might not have hesitated. But two aspects of his reception insulted him. Not only did the prophet not personally come out of his house to meet Naaman, but he also directed him to the Jordan River as the place to get his leprosy cured.

From the viewpoint of protocol, Naaman was right. Elisha should have left his house to greet him. And the rivers in Damascus were undoubtedly better, since their water was clearer than the muddy Jordan’s. However, through Elisha, God directed Naaman to the Jordan, a river in Israel. The entire cure process was designed to demonstrate, first, that there was a prophet of the true God in Israel and, second, that God rewarded believing compliance.

Naaman’s retinue convinced him to submit to his new, divine “commander” and at least give it a try. Their argument, that if the suggested cure had been complicated he would have endured it, persuaded him. It must have been hard for Naaman to swallow his pride at having to listen to a slave girl, a foreign prophet who showed him little deference, and, finally, to his own servants. He was, though, desperate for healing.

“So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy” (2 Kings 5:14, NIV).

The initial requirements for Naaman’s healing were belief and compliance. As soon as he conquered his pride and complied with God’s expressed will by bathing seven times in the muddy Jordan, he was cured.

**Read** Romans 6:4–11. How does the story of Naaman reflect some of the principles taught in these verses? In what ways have you experienced the reality of a “new life” in Christ?
A New Believer

“Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant” (2 Kings 5:15, NIV). In what way do these words help to reveal the experience of salvation? See Rev. 14:12; 1 John 5:2, 3; Rom. 6:1.

It would have been easy for Naaman to return directly from Jordan to Damascus after his healing. However, as a gesture of thankfulness, he and his attendants returned to the prophet’s place. This time they met Elisha in person. The confession that the God of Israel is sovereign in the world is the main theme of the Bible. These words coming from a pagan constitute one of the high points in Old Testament revelation. Naaman’s conversion made clear that his new experience had to be tied to the God of Israel. The prophet was an Israelite, the river was the most important in Israel, and the number seven was a clear connection to the God of creation.

What we see with Naaman is an example of how true faith works: Naaman received something that he could never have earned on his own. The fact that Elisha refused the gifts (2 Kings 5:16) was a way of showing how salvation cannot be earned or bought but is wholly of God’s grace. At the same time, however, Naaman’s willingness to give something to Elisha for what he had done for him shows the response of faith, a response out of gratefulness for what had been given him. Elisha refused the gift. Here he followed the example of Abraham when he helped the pagan kings but refused rewards with the words that no one should be able to say, “I made Abram rich” (Gen. 14:23, NIV). Elisha knew that acceptance of a gift would have spoiled the lesson Naaman should learn. The healing was the work of God and an act of sheer grace.

“Let this point be fully settled in every mind: If we accept Christ as a Redeemer, we must accept Him as a Ruler. We cannot have the assurance and perfect confiding trust in Christ as our Saviour until we acknowledge Him as our King and are obedient to His commandments. Thus we evidence our allegiance to God. We have then the genuine ring in our faith, for it is a working faith. It works by love.”—Ellen G. White, Faith and Works, p. 16.

If others were to look at your life, what would they see in it that reveals your love for God because of what He has done for you in Christ?
Further Study: “Centuries after Naaman returned to his Syrian home, healed in body and converted in spirit, his wonderful faith was referred to and commended by the Saviour as an object lesson for all who claim to serve God. ‘Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet,’ the Saviour declared; ‘and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.’ Luke 4:27. God passed over the many lepers in Israel because their unbelief closed the door of good to them. A heathen nobleman who had been true to his convictions of right, and who felt his need of help, was in the sight of God more worthy of His blessing than were the afflicted in Israel, who had slighted and despised their God-given privileges. God works for those who appreciate His favors and respond to the light given them from heaven.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 252, 253.

Discussion Questions:

1. Throughout the years a great deal of discussion has ensued over what happened after the healing of Naaman. In 2 Kings 5:17–19, Naaman makes a powerful confession of faith, saying, “‘for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord’” (vs. 17, NKJV). However, right after, he says, “‘when my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord please pardon your servant in this thing’” (vs. 18, NKJV). What are the implications of Elisha’s reply? To what extent do Christian missionaries have to exercise patience and understanding to new converts, especially when they come to us from a different religious and cultural background?

2. How rapidly should enculturation of new converts take place? “The widow of Sarepta and Naaman the Syrian had lived up to all the light they had; hence they were accounted more righteous than God’s chosen people who had backslidden from Him and had sacrificed principle to convenience and worldly honor.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 416.

3. Healing and salvation came to Naaman by a faith revealed in his actions. Discuss more the whole question of the relationship between faith and works. Why is it so important to understand the crucial yet distinct roles both have in the Christian life and witness?
Twice Victorious: Part 1

by Nathalie Villanueva, the Philippines

The Villanueva family were devoted to one another and their church. Napoleon, the father, often worked far from home. After a while, a pattern of late-night socializing with his coworkers began. He began spending more of his paycheck and sending less money home.

Lolita, his wife, grew concerned by the dwindling checks. She knew something was wrong and went to see her husband. When she learned of his activities, she tried to reason with him but eventually returned home, frustrated and hurt.

Lolita found a Bible and began searching for guidance and comfort. One day as she read the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, the fourth commandment stopped her. “Remember the Sabbath day,” it said. She had always worshiped on Sunday. But if Christ died on Friday, rested on the Sabbath, and rose from the dead on the first day, Sunday, then the Sabbath day must be Saturday. She decided that if God had commanded His children to keep the Sabbath day holy, she would obey.

But she found it more difficult to obey the first and second commandments. All of her life she had prayed while looking at statues of Christ or a saint. “Lord,” she prayed, “I’m sorry, but I can’t pray without looking at You or a saint! Please give me a sign that I mustn’t pray to these statues!”

During the night, Lolita was awakened by the sound of breaking glass, followed by beating wings. She thought that the neighbor’s rooster had gotten into her house. But before she could investigate, she fell back to sleep. When she got up the next morning, she found that her statues of saints had fallen and were lying on the floor, broken into hundreds of tiny pieces. She fell to her knees and asked God to forgive her for doubting His Word.

Lolita found a Seventh-day Adventist church and decided to attend. She arrived long before services began and knelt quietly to pray. During the worship service, she wept. Afterward, a woman invited her to study the Bible. Lolita eagerly accepted and was soon ready for baptism.

Lolita invited her five teenage children to attend church, but they were busy. However, when they were free, they went with her. They found the church service to be long but enjoyed the afternoon youth meetings.

Napoleon returned home and learned that Lolita planned to be baptized. Out of respect, the family members attended church with her when they could. One by one, Lolita’s husband and children were baptized.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 2 Kings 5:14, 15

The Student Will:

Know: Understand that witnessing in a cross-cultural context requires moral courage and a willingness to let God surprise him or her.

Feel: Experience a renewed sense of gratitude for God’s grace to him or her, as well as a keener sensitivity toward those experiencing life’s turmoil.

Do: Be challenged to minister to the needs of others, even at the risk of his or her own safety and interests.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: God Makes the Powerless Powerful.

A It’s often said that we can effectively witness for God through our actions and our life. What can we learn from the fact that the Jewish slave girl also gave a verbal testimony?

B Can you find any parallels between the story of the healing of Naaman, an enemy of Israel, and the Samaritan leper healed by Jesus—the only one of ten healed lepers who returned to say “Thank you” (Luke 17:11–19)?

C What do we learn about God’s nature and approach to mission through His choice of a witnessing instrument (2 Kings 5:2, 3), His instructions to Naaman for healing (2 Kings 5:10), and the debacle with Elisha’s servant asking for “payment” for healing (2 Kings 5:20–27)?

II. Feel: Authentic Compassion Produces Genuine Trust.

A How does sincere empathy for our fellow human beings help to break down barriers, whether cultural, emotional, or spiritual?

B Even when circumstances seem less than ideal, how can our own experience of God’s grace fuel our witnessing endeavors?

III. Do: Being Available

A What practical steps can we take to build moral and spiritual courage? Why is this always a lengthy process rather than the decision of a moment?

B Have we told God that we’re available to be used by Him for His mission? How can we be ready for Him to take us at our word?

Summary: Effective witness doesn’t happen by chance; God’s Spirit brings together what He needs to draw men and women into His kingdom.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: 2 Kings 5:2–5

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God’s view of equality—which tells us that we’re all His children, equally loved by Him—flies in the face of our deeply held human prejudices and partialities. But in the story of Naaman, we find God relentlessly dismantling social, cultural, and national barriers in order for His mission to be accomplished. Can we do less?

Just for Teachers: Václav Havel, the famous Czech dissident who became president, spent decades urging individual citizens to take a stand against the ruthless power of his country’s oppressive regime. In a landmark essay, entitled “The Power of the Powerless,” he made a compelling case that no matter how oppressive a political regime, ordinary people could transform society if only they would demonstrate moral courage through simple, everyday acts of truth-telling. Do we sometimes believe that our ability to witness for God is dependent on favorable circumstances or finding the right opportunity? As you teach your class today, challenge your students with the example of a nameless slave girl whose moral courage did, indeed, create “waves of transformation” throughout the then-known world.

Opening Discussion: Do you feel more empathy for people from your own racial group? Since the 1950s, psychologists have studied the theory of in-group empathy—the idea that we’ll tend to feel more compassion and sympathy for those who look like us and who appear to share our own cultural background.

In a 2009 groundbreaking study, researchers at Peking University conducted brain scans of Chinese and Caucasian volunteers as they watched different video clips of people receiving painful needle jabs. The results were startling. The empathetic neural response—the activity in the part of the brain sparked by emotion and empathy—was consistently greater when volunteers watched someone with their own racial features endure the painful jabs (www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/06/090630173815.htm).

The witnessing hero of 2 Kings 5 is barely mentioned in the narrative, but her actions are at the center of what unfolds. Naaman’s healing turns on the incredible courage of the young Jewish slave girl who feels deep compassion and empathy for someone who couldn’t have been more different in terms of wealth, power, nationality, religion, and circumstances.
Discussion Questions:
Why is empathy such a powerful aid to witness? Can it be faked? How does prejudice—whether social, racial, or any other kind—damage us? Damage others? How can it distort and disrupt mission?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: One of the themes woven throughout the Naaman story is the idea of the unexpected. Every turn in the plot contains yet another “shocker” that demonstrates God’s Spirit at work in ways that surpass human assumptions or expectations. As you work through the biblical account with your class, stress how the story of Naaman’s healing would have challenged the original audience—the Jewish people. Draw parallels with mission in the twenty-first century that reveal God as a God of surprises; One who longs for us to see mission through the wide-angle lens of His love for all people, rather than through our own narrow perspective.

Bible Commentary

1. Mission in Exile (Review 2 Kings 5 with your class.)

The biblical narrative stresses the importance of Naaman. He was “commander of the army,” a “great man,” “highly regarded,” and “a valiant soldier” (2 Kings 5:1, NIV). Persuaded that the prophet in Samaria might be able to heal him of leprosy, he writes directly to the king of Israel, rather than trying to contact the prophet. And yet, one of the ironies of this story is that it’s not the important and powerful who facilitate in Naaman’s healing. Ironically, the powerful Naaman has slaves to thank—along with God and Elisha—for his healing. Not only does a slave inform her mistress of Elisha and his healing powers, but later, when Naaman is offended by Elisha’s instructions to bathe in the Jordan River and would have returned home still a leper, his servants persuaded him to swallow his pride (2 Kings 5:13).

At the time of Naaman, there were constant tensions and flare-ups along the border between Syria and Israel. During one of their border raids, the Syrians take a young Jewish girl captive. We know almost nothing
about her from the biblical account, but in the story of this “little maid,” we see her facing a question that all exiles must face: How do I live in a totally foreign cultural setting?

What a tremendous challenge for a Jewish girl to be thrust into the home of the military leader of the enemy of her beloved home country, Israel. But she avoids two extremes. On the one hand, she resists the easy path of just conforming to her new situation—forgetting the religion of her home. On the other hand, she resists the easy path of keeping her religion private. Instead, she brings her faith to her situation. She summons the courage to testify about the prophet Elisha: “‘I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy’” (2 Kings 5:3, NLT).

Let’s not underestimate the faith of this young missionary, with many negative cultural marks against her name. She was female, young, a foreigner, from an enemy country, and a mere slave. In a role where no doubt you were to speak only if you were spoken to, the girl boldly speaks up, suggesting that her master go to an enemy country for help. And what if she were wrong? Elisha was known as a miracle worker, but there was no recorded instance of him healing a leper.

Her spiritual courage results in a heathen leader bowing to Yahweh. Once again, God’s mercy crosses cultural and religious boundaries through a humble, faithful missionary.

**Discussion Question:** Many of us struggle to be witnesses even in relatively easy situations. How, then, can we account for the courage of this young servant girl?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Consider all the elements that seem subversive in the Naaman narrative.

1. Elisha is a public figure in Israel. He received his call to ministry amid the drama of a flaming chariot and the blessing of the great prophet Elijah (2 Kings 2:9–11). Yet, the pivotal mission moment in this story belongs not to Elisha but to a nameless, powerless slave girl.

2. The beneficiary of God’s healing is an “outsider,” undeserving in the extreme. Naaman is not only a member of an enemy nation but also one of its military leaders. (See Luke 4:27–29 for a hint at how deeply
the scandal of this clearly could touch a nerve in the Jewish psyche.)

3. There’s no unambiguous happily-ever-after. Second Kings 5:18 introduces an off-key note when, after declaring his faith in the one true God, Naaman informs Elisha that he must still perform his civic duty by accompanying his master the king when he goes into the temple of Rimmon (or Baal) to worship. Does God’s prophet respond with a fiery rebuke or a denunciation of the Assyrians’ idolatry? No. Elisha merely says, “Go in peace.” While theologians have long debated the significance of this response, at the very least, the scenario sketched out in 2 Kings 5 shows us that despite his conversion experience, Naaman is still a spiritual babe and will face many challenges.

Consider This: As a class, try to reimagine the story of Naaman in a twenty-first century setting. Who could be Naaman, and what would be his “leprosy”? Who could be a modern-day Elisha? Who could fill the role of the unknown slave girl? Consider also Naaman’s admission that he’ll continue to enter the temple of Rimmon with the Syrian king. Is there a contemporary equivalent that would require us to show patience to a spiritual newborn?

How does relocating the Naaman narrative in today’s world challenge our preconceived ideas about how we should approach mission or how we relate to unbelievers? Does it help us to see how God’s Spirit can work in unexpected ways?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The Jewish slave girl took a tremendous personal risk when she suggested God could heal Naaman’s leprosy. Yet, perhaps the most important part of her story came long before that moment. Moral and spiritual courage doesn’t appear out of nowhere. It has to be consistently nurtured through daily choices, large and small. Conclude your class with an activity that reminds students that witness always requires integrity and courage, qualities we must build before they’re needed.
Lesson 4

*July 18–24

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Jonah 1–4, 2 Kings 14:25, Isa. 56:7, Isa. 44:8, Matt. 12:40, Rev. 14:6–12.

Memory Text: “‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right’” (Acts 10:34, 35, NIV).

The Jonah saga is the account of a Hebrew prophet working well beyond his comfort zone. Alive during the reign of Jeroboam II, about 750 B.C. (2 Kings 14:25), Jonah is the only Old Testament prophet whom we know of who was directly called to be a missionary in another country. The truth that the Creator of all races did not intend to limit salvation to only His chosen people is stated repeatedly in the Old Testament, especially in Isaiah and the Psalms, even though popular Israelite theology at the time of Jonah did not accept that the Gentiles were also in God’s plan to partake in salvation. Even in New Testament times, it was a hard lesson for the Jewish believers to learn.

In the four chapters of Jonah, we read an honest record of Jonah’s reluctant pioneering experience as a foreign missionary, both the positive and the negative. Here a person’s inner, and very human, reaction to the call of God is preserved, along with a powerful appeal for the need of foreign missionaries. A few guidelines for foreign missionaries and cross-cultural witnesses emerge from the book, which also points to solutions for some of the issues and problems modern missionaries face.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 25.
The Flawed Prophet

**Read** 2 Kings 14:25. What does this tell us about Jonah? In what kind of light is he presented?

Outside the book of Jonah, the prophet is mentioned in one other Old Testament passage, 2 Kings 14:25. Here he is honored as a prophet that predicted Israel’s recapture of territory taken by Syria.

Jonah was born in Gath Hepher (Hebrew for “winepress at the water hole”), a town in Zebulun in northern Israel, only a few miles from Nazareth. This means that both Jesus and Jonah were Galilean prophets, separated by about 750 years.

**Read** Jonah 1:1–3, 9, 12; 2:1–9; 3:3–10. What kind of picture do these verses present about him, both the good and the bad?

Jonah emerges from his book a strange mixture of strength and weakness: self-willed and rebellious but also teachable and obedient. He was loyal to God, courageous, and a believer in prayer, but he was also narrow-minded, selfish, and vindictive. While Jonah was described as a servant of the Lord in 2 Kings 14:25, he cut a somewhat sad and tragic figure in the book bearing his name. It is a mark of the integrity and reliability of the Bible that he was described in such a candid manner. The natural, human tendency of a writer would be to obscure and hide less-acceptable aspects of biblical heroes. But under the Spirit’s inspiration, the Bible’s authors present the valiant along with the petty in the lives of people to illustrate the truth that, no matter how weak and unpleasant these characters may be, God is able to work through them if they are willing.

What other Bible characters did God use despite their personality flaws? What hope can we draw for ourselves from the fact that God uses flawed and damaged people to work for Him in reaching out to others?
An Early Missionary

“Go to Nineveh!” was God’s command to Jonah. In the Old Testament, the usual appeal to the nations was “come to Zion.” God’s original plan was for Israel to live their religion, making the nation so attractive that other nations would come to them for guidance (Isa. 56:7).

Jonah, as a forerunner of the disciples in the New Testament (Matt. 28:18–20), is told to go to Nineveh, which to him seemed an unclean center of idolatry, brutality, and totalitarianism. Jonah made detailed preparations to go west by sea even though God had directed him to go east by land. Jonah, the unwilling prophet, fled in the opposite direction.

Read Jonah 1:3–17. What lessons can we gain from this amazing narrative?

God’s response to Jonah’s flight came in the form of a mighty storm. The winds obey their Creator, even though His prophet does not (Mark 4:41). Jonah slept during the storm while the Gentile crew prayed (Jon. 1:5). In honesty, Jonah confessed that he caused the calamity, and he testified to the true God and Creator. Notice that his reply, “I am Hebrew,” referred both to his religion and his nationality. In their alarm at the ferocity of the storm, the Gentile sailors tried to save themselves and the passengers, and they showed compassion to Jonah in their reluctance to comply with his instructions to throw him overboard. (The reluctant prophet was willing to sacrifice himself to save others.) When they finally complied, the storm ceased and the sea calmed (vs. 15). The amazed sailors became Jonah’s first converts to his God, who could work through Jonah even while he fled from his call.

The salvation of Jonah was just as miraculous as was the salvation of the ship. God prepared “a great fish.” The original Hebrew doesn’t specify what sort of fish saved Jonah by swallowing him. Jonah in the belly of the fish is certainly the best-known episode of the story; however, it should not overshadow the book’s deeper message that God loves, cares for, and wills the salvation of all people.

In the end, there is only one God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth (see Isa. 44:8; 45:5, 6). Anything else anyone worships is idolatry and error. Any other “god” they pray to is imaginary, a lie. Why is this truth so important for us to realize and internalize for ourselves, especially in the context of mission?
The three-day experience in the belly of the big fish became a type of the death and resurrection of Christ (Jon. 1:17–2:10, Matt. 12:40). God provided and directed the great fish. Although there are accounts of people who survived at sea after having been swallowed by a whale, we must remember that God provided this particular great fish, as well as the miraculous power that sustained His servant while inside. In the end, this was a miraculous event that could have occurred only through the supernatural intervention of the Lord, who is revealed all through the Bible as a personal God who does indeed intervene miraculously in people’s lives.

There is evidence that the phrase “three days and three nights” was an ancient figure of speech expressing the time needed for the imaginary journey to Sheol, the Hebrew name for the realm of the dead. Considering what happened to him, Jonah indeed should have been as good as dead.

In the belly of the fish, Jonah began to pray. The captain had directed Jonah in vain to “call on your God” (Jon. 1:6, NKJV). Now in a hopeless situation, Jonah starts to pray, and seriously too. It took something this desperate to get him finally to do what he should have been doing all along. A summary of Jonah’s prayer has been preserved in the form of a psalm of thanksgiving. Such psalms typically include five parts: (1) introduction; (2) description of the distress; (3) cry to God for help; (4) report of God’s action; and (5) promise to keep any vow made and to testify to God’s saving action. That is, Lord, if You get me out of this, I promise to do such and such. Who hasn’t prayed like that before? The question is, Did you do what you covenanted to do?

Read Matthew 12:40. How does Jesus take the story of Jonah and apply it to Himself? See also John 2:19–22.

The chapter ends with the words: “And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land” (Jon. 2:10, NIV). God’s command to the great fish brought about what well-meaning sailors failed to do for Jonah. In the same way, Christ commanded the disciples after His resurrection to go into all the world; so, Jonah after his underwater adventure went to the Gentiles and became the most successful missionary in the Old Testament. Jonah’s rescue witnessed to God’s saving mercy. His seaweed-draped arrival on the beach testified to God’s determination to save even sinful Assyrians from death.
The Nineveh Generation

Read Jonah 3. What great message is found here in the context of outreach and evangelism?

“Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you’” (Jon. 3:1, 2, NIV). Two verbs are important in the text. First, this is the second time God says “Go!” God does not give up. He grants failing humans a second chance. Here again we have the New Testament mission concept, which is the idea of going to the nations, as opposed to expecting the nations to come to you.

The other important verb is “proclaim.” Proclamation has always been important in the Bible. It is still the most effective way of spreading the gospel message. God emphasized to Jonah that it should be “the message I give you.” That is, the message we proclaim must be God’s, not our own, nor even a tweaked, modified, or bowdlerized version of it.

God’s message is generally threat and promise, judgment and gospel. His stark proclamation was, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (vs. 4, NIV). That was the judgment. Yet, there was also the promise of hope, of deliverance, of salvation (there must have been because the people heeded the message and were saved).

Even with the “everlasting gospel” at the heart of it, Revelation 14:6–12 also warns about judgment. Gospel and judgment go hand-in-hand: the gospel offers us God’s way to avoid the condemnation that judgment would justly bring upon us all.

No preaching of the gospel is fully effective unless judgment is taught. “Political correctness,” which leads to a watering down of these stark elements and downplaying differences between religions or even between different Christian traditions, is risky. Though in mission we need to adapt our presentation for the people we are trying to reach (contextualization), we must never do so at the expense of the message God has given us to proclaim.

In Jonah 3:5–10, what happens? The Ninevites believed, acted on their beliefs, exercised their faith, and were saved.

God has given us some wonderful promises, and stern warnings, too. What should this story teach us about the conditionality of these promises and warnings?
Jonah’s Lament

Jonah 4:1–11 confirms that the greatest obstacle for God to get His prophet involved in world mission was not distance, wind, sailors, fish, or Ninevites. It was the prophet himself. Ninevite faith contrasted with Jonah’s unbelief and vindictive spirit. Jonah is the only person in the Scriptures who accuses God of being gracious, compassionate, and slow to anger, abounding in love and who relents from sending calamity. One would think most people would view these aspects of God with thankfulness.

“When Jonah learned of God’s purpose to spare the city that, notwithstanding its wickedness, had been led to repent in sackcloth and ashes, he should have been the first to rejoice because of God’s amazing grace; but instead he allowed his mind to dwell upon the possibility of his being regarded as a false prophet. Jealous of his reputation, he lost sight of the infinitely greater value of the souls in that wretched city. The compassion shown by God toward the repentant Ninevites ‘displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.’”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 271.

Read Jonah 4:10, 11. What do these texts teach us about the character of God in contrast to sinful human nature? Why should we be glad that God, not fellow human beings, is our ultimate Judge?

Jonah showed his anger twice in chapter 4. He was angry because God changed His mind and saved Nineveh’s more than one hundred twenty thousand inhabitants. He was also angry because the vine withered. In his selfishness, the prophet needed to get his priorities right.

God instructed Jonah to recognize human brotherhood based on the fatherhood of God. The prophet should have accepted his common humanity with these “foreigners,” although they were wayward. Were not 120,000 people more important than a vine?

Read again the Lord’s rebuke to Jonah. In what ways might the Lord be able to say something similar to us? That is, how often do we find ourselves more concerned about our own personal issues, many of which at times can really be trivial, than about the lost souls whom Christ shed His blood to save?
Further Study: “The book of Jonah is so significant for understanding the biblical basis of mission, because it treats God’s mandate to His people regarding the Gentile peoples, and thus serves as the preparatory step to the missionary mandate of the New Testament. But it is also important for catching a glimpse of the deep resistance this mandate encounters from the very servant Yahweh has chosen to discharge His worldwide work.”—Johannes Verkuyl, Contemporary Missiology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978), p. 96.

Discussion Questions:

1. “In the history of Nineveh there is a lesson which you should study carefully. . . . You must know your duty to your fellow beings who are ignorant and defiled and who need your help.”—Ellen G. White, The Southern Work, p. 80. What is our duty to these fellow beings?

2. Assyria was one of the superpowers dominating the ancient near east from about 885 to 625 B.C. Israel and Judah suffered repeatedly under her harsh rule. Israel’s King Jehu was forced to pay tribute to the dominating Assyrian ruler, Shalmaneser III. Israel finally fell to Assyrian forces about 722 B.C. No wonder Jonah was reluctant to go to Nineveh, one of the four chief cities of Assyria, and the center for the worship of Ishtar, goddess of love and war. God had called him to visit the very spiritual heartland of enemy territory to call on the warlike Assyrians to repent. What lessons are here for us in regard to missions?

3. How can the remnant church avoid the assumption that the counsels and blessings of the Lord in areas such as the Sabbath, health, and education are given to them for their own benefit, rather than for the benefit of the nations? Read Rev. 3:17, 18.

4. In what ways do the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12 reflect the message that Jonah had for the Ninevites?

5. Some people automatically reject the Jonah story, particularly the part where he is in the belly of the fish. What presuppositions would cause them to reject it out of hand? What presuppositions do you need in order to believe it?
Twice Victorious: Part 2

by Nathalie Villanueva, the Philippines

The Villanueva teens joined the Pathfinder Club. The club scheduled an outing to Mount Kitanglad, hoping to earn their mountain-climbing honor.

James Villanueva, age 16, eagerly started the six-hour trek up the mountain with his sisters and 12 other Pathfinders. Soon he found himself ahead of the rest and decided to wait. He stepped onto a tree stump to get a better view. Three wires, similar to those strung along the trail to guide hikers, hung above his head. He reached up and grabbed one of the wires for balance. When he saw his sisters approaching, he turned to swing off the stump. As his feet left the stump, a sharp pain flashed through his hand, and he crumpled to the ground.

James’s sister Nathalie saw him jump. She saw sparks shoot out from his hands as he fell. She raced to where he lay motionless. His hands and arms were so badly burned that the skin was peeling off.

“Someone get help!” she shouted. “James has been electrocuted!”

While someone ran for help, Nathalie tore off her shirt to make bandages for her brother’s arms. Toto, the Pathfinder leader, raced up the slippery mountainside. He ordered some Pathfinders to climb to the summit and call for help. He sent the rest down the mountain to summon an ambulance. Toto and Nathalie remained with James, praying that help would come in time.

Three men who worked at the summit came upon the accident scene. The men rigged a stretcher from a sleeping bag and began the dangerous trip down the slippery mountain.

It was dark when they reached the bottom. They placed James in an oxcart to carry him the two and a half miles to where an ambulance waited. James arrived at the hospital 12 hours after the accident.

Nathalie stayed with her brother until their parents arrived. The doctors wanted permission to amputate both of James’s arms, but Nathalie refused. When her parents arrived, she begged them to have James airlifted to Manila, where he could receive better care. But even there the doctors said that James’s left arm was too badly burned to be saved.

Through the difficult months following the accident, the family could have lost their faith. But prayers and the support of the church members helped to hold their faith intact.

James is already planning to go back and conquer Mount Kitanglad to earn his mountain-climbing honor. But in the eyes of many, he has already conquered more than a mountain.

Nathalie Villanueva is the daughter of Napoleon and Lolita Villanueva and the sister of James.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Jonah 4:10, 11

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Comprehend the magnitude of God’s love for outsiders and the mission responsibility of insiders.

**Feel:** Experience a renewed sense of personal responsibility to participate in God’s mission for the world.

**Do:** Show spiritual commitment to mission by supporting it through prayer, finances, and personal involvement.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God’s Borderless and Cultureless Mercy

A. Why would the nature of Jonah’s mission be so shocking to Jewish ears? What mission assignment could God give us today that would likewise offend our sensibilities?

B. The book of Jonah ends somewhat ambiguously, with God posing a pointed question (Jon. 4:11). What does this question tell us about God’s essential nature?

II. Feel: Being “Right” With God

A. What emotions do you think Jonah experienced as he was thrown overboard and sank beneath the waves, fully aware that he’d been unfaithful in his mission? Has God ever had to reach into the depths of the ocean to rescue you?

B. How does it feel when you know you’re in the place God wants you to be, doing what He’s asked you to do?

III. Do: Avoiding Spiritual Detours

A. What practical steps can we take to overcome a sense of spiritual self-centeredness or exclusiveness?

B. How can we avoid becoming modern-day Jonahs?

**Summary:** The book of Jonah shines a bright light on the wideness of God’s mercy and the depth of His patience, both for the pagan sinners of Nineveh and the reluctant prophet God chooses for His mission. As the drama unfolds, we’re left with no doubt that relying on our own wisdom and inclinations is a poor way to approach mission. Only through submission to God’s leading can we begin to understand the scope of His mission plan and our role within it.
Learning Cycle

&gt;**STEP 1**—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Jonah 1:8–10*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Down through the centuries, the questions posed by the pagan sailors to God’s prophet Jonah can be addressed to all God’s followers: “‘What do you do? Where do you come from?’” *(Jon. 1:8, NIV).* What is our identity? Are we true disciples of God? Are we involved in His mission? Or are we always running away to where it’s more comfortable?

**Just for Teachers:** As you teach this lesson, remind your class that Jonah is more than just an interesting story of some long-ago historical event—it’s full of spiritual applications for today. Encourage the class to find parallels within their own experience and to apply lessons to our current mission as a church.

**Opening Discussion:** The name *Jonah* means dove, and we are told that he was the son of Ammittai, meaning faithfulness. In addition, he was a prophet of God. So, the reader is led to expect that a faithful dove will be obedient to God’s call. But instead of heading east to Nineveh, he flies in the exact opposite direction. It’s easy to criticize Jonah from a distance of nearly three thousand years. But if we had been in Jonah’s shoes, might we not have done exactly the same thing?

A few years earlier, Assyria, of which Nineveh was one of the capitals, had brutally attacked and conquered Israel—an event that was still very much alive in the memory of the Israelites. According to Nahum, Nineveh was “the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims!” *(Nah. 3:1, NIV).* He asks, “Who has not felt your endless cruelty?” *(vs. 19, NIV).* No doubt Jonah was well aware that the Assyrians had finely nuanced ways of mass killing and were experts in impaling and mutilating human bodies. Perhaps he felt it wasn’t an ideal location for a public evangelist to begin a campaign. And yet God’s command was clear, and Jonah’s disobedience was flagrant.

But it wasn’t just fear that spurred Jonah’s disobedience. Historians tell us that Jonah would have felt a sense of cultural superiority and religious prejudice against the pagan Ninevites. It’s a human tendency that is alive and well today. As Christian author Anne Lamott puts it: “You can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”—Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), p. 22.


**Consider This:** What would a modern-day Jonah look like? What are the “Ninevehs” in our experience? To what extent is there an element of Jonah in each of our own lives?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** As you teach your class, bring out some of the playfulness and humor in the story of Jonah—which is full of irony and surprises. We know that Jesus rarely spoke without telling a story because He knew its power for conveying a spiritual message (*Mark 4:34*).

**Bible Commentary**

I. **Who Are You?** (*Review Jonah 1:7, 8 with your class.*)

At the height of the storm that leads to Jonah being tossed into the sea, the pagan sailors desperately ask about his identity (*Jon. 1:8*). For someone in the middle of disobeying God and doing the opposite of what he’s been asked to do, Jonah’s reply is ironic—with some dark humor, as well: “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land” (*Jon. 1:9, NIV*). God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh via a dry-land route. Jonah, instead, went to sea. But the sea and the land are all God’s domain, and God reaches out through pagan sailors to remind Jonah about his true identity.

**Consider This:** What are some of the hints given in the narrative that the pagan sailors were more spiritually faithful than Jonah?

II. **There Are No Outsiders** (*Review Revelation 14:6 with your class.*)

In Matthew 28:19, 20, Jesus’ disciples are commissioned to go into all the world, to make disciples of “all nations.” The Greek for this is *panta ta ethne*, which literally means “people groups.” No country, language, tribe, cultural group, or person is outside the scope of God’s love and grace (*see Rev. 14:6*). Early Adventists had no conception of taking the gospel to every nation, let alone every people group. According to their understanding, or perhaps rationalization, the people groups of the world were coming to
America—and so they could be reached right there, especially in places with many immigrants such as New York City. And even today, there’s a tendency among some Adventists to put certain religious and people groups into the “too hard” basket.

Perhaps the key theme in Jonah is God’s saving love for people we might consider outsiders, even nasty, cruel, barbaric people such as the Assyrians. The story is a corrective to exclusiveness, which the Israelites too often demonstrated. Clearly, God is in the business of redeeming His creation, and we have no right to simply sit back, enjoy our salvation, and forget the spiritual needs of the rest of the world.

Consider This: What remedy does the apostle John suggest to a church that has lost its first love (Rev. 2:4, 5)?

III. “Should I Not Be Concerned?” (Review Jonah 4:1–11 with your class.)

Jonah’s lack of empathy is perhaps his greatest sin. Throughout the book of Jonah, the writer often uses the literary device of satire. One way he does this is by setting up a series of contrasts. For example, he pictures Jonah being angry at God for forgiving Nineveh and sparing its inhabitants (Jon. 4:1–3). And then a few verses later, Jonah’s angry again—this time because his favorite shady plant dies (vss. 7–9). It’s another darkly humorous contrast. Jonah is upset about a plant but not about the deaths of more than one hundred and twenty thousand people. The writer then goes on to make a further contrast—this time between Jonah’s lack of empathy and God’s all-encompassing compassion. God asks Jonah, “Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh?” (vs. 11, NIV). And it’s with this question hanging in the air that the writer of Jonah finishes his story.

Consider This: When was the last time we were genuinely upset at the thought of millions of people not knowing Jesus? How can we learn to see these people through God’s eyes?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: In this lesson, we meet a character full of contradictions. On the one hand, he’s a missionary dwarf—he runs away from his mission assignment. On the other hand, when he finally fronts up to the job, he ends up leading an entire pagan city to conversion! Although Jonah was unfaithful,
he was willing to die to save the heathen sailors. He was a poet and grew emotionally attached to a plant; but he could also be callous in the face of the potential destruction of a city.

Invite the class to discuss what they think and feel about Jonah. Is he somebody they can relate to, despite the gap of centuries? Why, or why not?

**Life Application:** If Sabbath School mission offering trends are any indicator, then the grand narrative of global outreach has indeed lost a great deal of its shine for Seventh-day Adventists. In 1932, during the Great Depression, per capita giving to the church’s Sabbath School mission offerings was $5.83 per member for that year. More than eighty years later, with wages exponentially higher, the per capita mission giving was actually lower, with an average of $4.81 per member in 2010. (See Gina Wahlen, “100 Years of Mission Giving,” *Adventist World*, Nov. 1, 2012, pp. 16–19.)

What attitudes do you think are driving this trend? Which of our own attitudes toward the worldwide mission of the church do we need to reexamine?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** The church in Ephesus was reproved because it had lost its first love (*Rev. 2:4*). Consider with your class the extent to which we may have lost some of our missionary spirit as Seventh-day Adventists. Witnessing isn’t always easy. Remind your class that even the apostle Paul, after all he had done for the gospel, wrote from prison: “Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel... Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should” (*Eph. 6:19, 20, NIV*).

**Activity:** With your class, map out an evangelistic strategy for Jonah. The task given by God is clear: “‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you’” (*Jon. 3:2, NIV*). But how should Jonah deliver the message? What methodology should he use? Door knocking? A public meeting? Literature distribution? Discuss what approaches would and wouldn’t be appropriate. Make sure to discuss content as well as methodology. How should the message be shaped in a way that the people will understand? After all, like the sailors on Jonah’s boat, they are pagan and have probably never even heard of Yahweh. And remember, at the end you want to get out of the city alive if at all possible.
Lesson 5

Read for This Week’s Study: Daniel 1–12; Isa. 39:5–7; Dan. 2:44; Matt. 24:14, 15; Genesis 41.

Memory Text: “‘He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed’” (Daniel 7:14, NIV).

As a people of prophecy, Seventh-day Adventists believe in the soon coming of Jesus Christ. His coming will end this world as we know it and ultimately will usher in God’s everlasting kingdom, depicted in the book of Daniel this way: “‘The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him”’” (Dan. 7:27, NKJV). This kingdom is the culmination of our faith; it is what the book of Hebrews (Heb. 11:16) called the “better country,” the one that all God’s people through the ages have trusted will come, the one whose “builder and maker is God” (vs. 10).

But the book of Daniel is also a kind of handbook for missionary activity. From it we can draw lessons on how the Lord was able to use some of His people to witness to those who were steeped in spiritual and theological ignorance. Through their faithfulness and diligence and unwavering faith, these believers revealed the reality of the living God to those who knew only false ones and gave these pagans a chance at a place in this everlasting kingdom, as well.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 1.*
The Exile

Read Isaiah 39:5–7 and Daniel 1:1, 2. How are these verses related?

Daniel, whose name means “God is my Judge,” was force-marched from a defeated Jerusalem into the Babylonian capital. The book of Daniel gives glimpses of his life in the courts of Babylon and Persia. After three years of “education” in Babylon, Daniel was employed as a civil servant and royal advisor. Through the power of God, he rose above normal captive status to become a highly placed missionary to two superpowers.

The book of Daniel is more than a treasure of prophetic literature. The reader encounters some of the challenges facing Hebrews living in an alien culture that provided no apparent support for their loyalty to the God of Israel and, at times, was openly hostile. It also paints a beautiful picture of men who learned to live out their commitment to truth in the absence of the temple, the priesthood, and sacrifices.

Read Daniel 1:8–13, 5:12, 6:4, 9:3–19. What do these texts tell us about Daniel’s character that made him the great missionary he was?

“Every institution that bears the name of Seventh-day Adventist is to be to the world as was Joseph in Egypt, and as were Daniel and his fellows in Babylon. In the providence of God these men were taken captive, that they might carry to heathen nations the knowledge of the true God. They were to be representatives of God in our world. They were to make no compromise with the idolatrous nations with which they were brought in contact, but were to stand loyal to their faith, bearing as a special honor the name of worshipers of the God who created the heavens and the earth.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 153.

Think how easy it would have been for Daniel to have compromised, especially given his circumstances. What does his example teach us about how lame our excuses for compromise often really are?
Witnesses  
(Daniel 2–5)

In Daniel 2, Daniel had an opportunity, born out of necessity, to witness to the power of the true God, as opposed to the false ones of Babylon. After singing a hymn of praise with his Jewish compatriots and thanking God for answering their prayers (Dan. 2:20–23), he interpreted the king’s dream and testified to God’s greatness and dominion over all earthly kingdoms.

What does the king say that shows he learned something about the true God? See Dan. 2:47.

In Daniel 2, Daniel didn’t have a choice: either give the king what he wanted or face death. In contrast, in chapter 3, his three friends could have spared themselves the fiery furnace if they simply had obeyed the king’s command. Instead, by their faithful witness, they were able to testify to the power of the true God.

“How did Nebuchadnezzar know that the form of the fourth was like the Son of God? He had heard of the Son of God from the Hebrew captives that were in his kingdom. They had brought the knowledge of the living God who ruleth all things.”—Ellen G. White, Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, May 3, 1892.

In Daniel 4, what confession did King Nebuchadnezzar again make regarding the true God, all thanks to the witness of Daniel? See Dan. 4:37.

In Daniel 5, we have Daniel’s last appearance at the Babylonian court, where he is called upon to explain the extraordinary writing upon the wall of Belshazzar’s palace, foretelling the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire at the hands of the Medes and Persians. Though no doubt Belshazzar had been impressed by what Daniel did, it was too late: the king’s fate was all but sealed. The sad thing is that according to the Bible (see Dan. 5:17–23), Belshazzar had had opportunity to learn truth and to be humbled by it. As we know, he didn’t take advantage of those opportunities.

How important that we look at our own lives and ask ourselves, What kind of witness does my life represent to the world? What does your answer tell you?
Daniel in Persia

“And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?” (Dan. 6:20). The king called Daniel the “servant of the living God.” What is implied in those words?

In Daniel 6, with the change of empire and king, Daniel still kept his position and was even promoted, becoming one of three presidents to whom 120 satraps were to report. King Darius even considered appointing him vizier over his whole kingdom, arousing the antipathy of the other presidents and satraps. They induced the king to make an empire-wide decree that really was aimed at Daniel alone. He was thrown into a den of lions, but God dramatically intervened in a situation that even the sympathetic king could not reverse. Daniel’s deliverance so pleased the king that he issued an empire-wide royal decree exalting the God of Daniel.

“Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: ‘May you prosper greatly! I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions’ ” (Dan. 6:25–27, NIV).

Read Daniel 6. What in the chapter indicates that Daniel had already been a great witness to the king? Also, what in the king’s decree indicates that he knew more about Daniel’s God than he could have learned merely from the dramatic rescue? What does this tell us about Daniel’s witness to him?
Daniel and God’s Eternal Kingdom

Daniel was not merely an interpreter of other men’s dreams, significant as that was in this context. In Daniel 7–12, he had his own visions, which revealed the future of great world superpowers. Daniel’s visions especially emphasized that, despite earthly rulers and their plans and machinations, God retains final control of nations. In the end, He and His final kingdom will triumph, and that triumph will be complete (see Dan. 2:44).

Read Daniel 7:13, 14. What is being described in these texts, and how does it relate to the idea of Christians taking the gospel to the world?

Whatever else those verses are talking about, the central issue is the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom, which doesn’t come until after the return of Jesus. And what factor did Jesus Himself say was important in regard to His return?

“‘And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains’” (Matt. 24:14–16, NIV).

Jesus’ prophecies of the end of the world in Matthew 24 are linked to Daniel’s prophecies. The “abomination of desolation” predicted by Daniel (Dan. 11:31, 12:11) was further explained and applied by Jesus to His own day and beyond. The point is that Jesus closely linked the book of Daniel to the end times, which, of course, isn’t surprising, because Daniel in many places does indeed point to the end times (Dan. 8:17, 19; 11:35; 12:4, 13). And, according to Jesus, the end doesn’t come until “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world” (Matt. 24:14, NKJV).

The gospel is to be preached unto “all the world,” and only then will Jesus return. And we are the ones called to preach it. Some then argue that Jesus can’t return until we do our work. How are we to understand our role in the timing of Jesus’ return? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.
More Exiles as Missionaries

Daniel was an Israelite in involuntary banishment from Israel, as were Joseph and Moses in Egypt, Nehemiah in Babylon, and Esther in Persia. Their lives reveal that it is possible to live faithfully to God in spiritually and culturally unsupportive environments. With God’s direction, it was even possible to attain prominent administrative positions in these alien settings. Each lived a creative and rich life, skillfully negotiating complex religious, social, political, and economic dynamics far different from those of their home culture. They not only were loyal members of exiled Hebrew communities—they were also in their own ways effective missionaries for the God of Israel.

Witness while in exile included both passive presence and active proclamation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Esther</th>
<th>Daniel</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Did not identify as a Hebrew until called to reveal it.</td>
<td>1. Identified as a Hebrew.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kept her religion to herself until called to reveal it.</td>
<td>2. Made known his religious convictions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. God protected her and her family.</td>
<td>3. God protected him and his friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Witnessed in high places to save her life along with her people's.</td>
<td>4. Witnessed in high places to save his life along with other people's.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Helped establish religious freedom and the right to self-defense of a religious minority.</td>
<td>5. Indirectly influenced King Cyrus to allow exiled Hebrews to rebuild the Jerusalem temple.</td>
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Read through Genesis 41. In what ways was Joseph able to witness to the Egyptians? How does his story parallel that of Daniel and his companions in Babylon?

In what situations in which you find yourself can you witness for your faith? Are you giving a passive or active witness, or both? What are things you can either say or do that would make a more powerful impression on others about the goodness and love of our God?
Further Study: “Multitudes will be called to a wider ministry. The whole world is opening to the gospel. . . . From every quarter of this world of ours comes the cry of sin-stricken hearts for a knowledge of the God of love. . . . It rests with us who have received the knowledge, with our children to whom we may impart it, to answer their cry. To every household and every school, to every parent, teacher, and child upon whom has shone the light of the gospel, comes at this crisis the question put to Esther the queen at that momentous crisis in Israel’s history, ‘Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 484, 485.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the prophecies in the book of Daniel, especially Daniel 2, 7, and 8. In what ways are these such a powerful testimony, not only to the prophetic reliability of the Bible but to God’s foreknowledge? For instance, notice how, between Daniel 2, 7, and 8, three of the four main kingdoms are named for us. How should this help us to learn to trust in the Word of God and His promises to us?

2. In these accounts in the book of Daniel and some of the other stories (such as that of Joseph), there were some miracles that, of course, greatly added to the credibility of their witness to the pagans around them. At the same time, too, what aspects of their character lend even more credibility to their witness? That is, in what way can character and faithfulness, even more than signs and wonders, be a more powerful witness to others about the reality of God and what He can do in our lives?

3. As we saw in Wednesday’s study, Matthew 24:14 says that the gospel needs to go to the ends of the earth, and then the end will come. Does this mean that Jesus will not come back until we do the work that He has called us to do? Discuss.
A Gift From the River: Part 1

by Doneshor Tripura, Bangladesh

Doneshor was glad to be home, watching his father’s water buffalo. He had been away at school and had just completed his high school graduation exams. The day grew hotter, and Doneshor decided to go for a swim in the nearby river while the buffalo grazed nearby. He waded into the cool water, looking for a place that was deep enough to swim. It was the dry season, and the river was much shallower than usual.

Doneshor stood in the waist-deep water and looked upstream. He saw something floating in the water. It wasn’t unusual to find debris in the river, so he wasn’t sure why this object caught his eye. He waited as it bobbed closer to him, then he reached down and picked it out of the water. It was a Bible. He had never seen a Bible before, but instinctively he knew that this was a holy Book. He waded ashore and carefully laid the wet book in the sun to dry. As a few pages dried, he then turned to other wet pages and allowed the sun’s hot rays to dry them.

Doneshor came from a religious family. Every day they worshiped their gods, laying gifts of rice and incense on the altar in their home. Doneshor’s parents had taught him to respect all things holy, and that included the Book he had found in the river.

The Book wasn’t yet dry when evening came, so Doneshor took it home. The next morning he carried it back to the field and laid it open in the sun. After three days, the Bible was dry enough for him to read it. Curious, he turned to the first pages and began reading, “In the beginning God created . . .”

Doneshor was fascinated by the account of Creation and the first man and woman. He remembered reading about the first humans in the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu holy book. An idea struck him, and he began comparing the Bhagavad Gita with the Bible.

One day he read the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples and contrasted that to his own prayers. *I have done nothing but ask and ask, wanting something for myself or my family. Now I understand that Christians pray for others.*

As Doneshor continued reading, he discovered a God who searches out and invites people to accept His gift of salvation. This God is patient, and He loves to forgive. Doneshor thought how his entire life had been an effort to earn the favor of the gods by giving them expensive gifts and by making long and tiring pilgrimages to appease them.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Daniel 1:3, 4, 8, 19

The Student Will:

Know: Identify key lessons from the experience of biblical exiles about living faithfully for God in less-than-ideal circumstances.
Feel: Be inspired by the spiritual courage of characters such as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
Do: Determine not to withdraw from culture but to engage it in ways that draw attention to the values of God’s kingdom.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Anchor of Identity
   A In order to function as members of the Babylonian court, Daniel and the other exiles must have shed some of their Jewish cultural practices. What is the significance of the issues the exiles choose as nonnegotiables?
   B What are some historic markers of Seventh-day Adventist identity, and how do these serve to keep us anchored in our faith and mission?

II. Feel: Becoming Spiritually Flabby
   A How could feeling safe in the practice of our faith actually inflict harm on our spiritual health?
   B How do we feel when we exercise spiritual courage in a difficult situation? What emotions do we experience when we choose the easy way out?

III. Do: Exercising Our Spiritual Muscles
   A When was the last time you put God to the test in a way similar to Daniel’s ten-day diet experiment (Dan. 1:12–15)? How did it impact your faith?
   B Even if you don’t pray by an open window like Daniel did, can others tell that you are a person of prayer? If so, how?
   C How does Jesus’ prayer recorded in John 17:15–18 help us face with courage the everyday challenges of “living in exile”?

Summary: Feeling too at home in this world should serve as a warning sign for followers of Christ. But even though we long for our eternal home, this week’s lesson reminds us that we also have a mission to engage creatively with society and to demonstrate the transformative power of faith within our culture.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Daniel 3:17, 18

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Like Daniel and the other faithful exiles of Babylon, we have the opportunity to authentically represent God and His mission no matter where we live or the challenges we face.

Just for Teachers: Christian thinkers have debated for centuries how Christians should best relate to the culture around them. The easiest approach is to just assimilate. The book of Daniel doesn’t tell us how many Jewish exiles took this option. No doubt many chose the “safer” path of not making a fuss and just eating from the king’s table and bowing before the idol on the Plain of Dura. However, the Bible holds up for our example Daniel and his three friends, who took another approach. As you teach the lesson this week, explore how these faithful exiles found a balance between active engagement with Babylonian culture and principled refusal to compromise.

Opening Discussion: In 2007, the Washington Post newspaper conducted an experiment. They arranged for Joshua Bell, one of the world’s leading classical violinists, to play just outside the L’Enfant Plaza Metro station in Washington, D.C. They wanted to gauge the reaction of passing commuters. It was early morning rush hour on a cold winter’s day. Holding his $3.5 million Stradivarius violin, he played six pieces for about half an hour. During that time, only 7 people stopped to listen at least for a minute; another 1,097 walked by. People tossed loose change into his violin case, totaling $32.17—this to a world-famous genius who can earn $1,000 a minute playing in the great concert halls of the world. (For the full story see Gene Weingarten, “Pearls Before Breakfast,” Washington Post Magazine, April 8, 2007.) As Seventh-day Adventists seeking to play the “old, old melody” to the world, sometimes it can be discouraging. It’s like playing the violin to people who won’t stop to listen. We may be playing the most beautiful melody in the universe, but most people just walk on by.

Consider This: What lessons does this story teach? In what ways is living in a secular culture, or a culture dominated by another religion, like living in exile in a foreign country? How can we find better ways to play the “old melody” of salvation?
STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Daniel and his fellow exiles succeeded in their mission for several reasons—identity and integrity, engagement, and prayer. Explore with your class how we can exercise these principles today.

Bible Commentary

I. Identity and Integrity (Review with your class Daniel 3:17–19, 6:10.)

Exile is a painful theme weaving its way through the history of Israel.

In the New Testament, Christian believers are pictured as strangers in a strange land or, in the words of Peter, “aliens and strangers” in the world (1 Pet. 2:11, NASB). The apostle John warns us not to love the world or the things of the world (1 John 2:15), and James likens friendship with the world as hatred toward God. Paul quotes Isaiah, “‘Come out from among them and be separate’” (2 Cor. 6:17, NKJV).

And yet, Jesus said that even though we are not of the world, we must be in it. And that means guarding carefully our spiritual heritage and the truth God has given us (1 Tim. 3:14, 6:20).

Consider This: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego literally stood out from the crowd on the Plain of Dura; Daniel broadcast his faith by praying by an open window. Today, in what ways do we either stand out or blend into the general community? What are the outward characteristics that Seventh-day Adventists should display to identify us as people in exile?

II. Engagement (Review Daniel 6:3 with your class.)

Just how were the Jewish people supposed to behave in exile? Maintaining their Jewish identity was crucial, but it was not to be maintained through exclusivity. Speaking to the Jews about to be exiled to Babylon, God tells them not to set up a separate Jewish enclave hidden away from the rest of the Babylonian community: “But seek the welfare [shalom] of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare [shalom] you will find your welfare [shalom]” (Jer. 29:7, ESV).

The Hebrew word shalom is a beautiful, multidimensional word meaning “welfare, peace, prosperity.” God is telling the exiles to work and pray for the shalom of Babylon. We see this in action in the lives of Daniel and his
three friends. While remaining true to their beliefs and heritage, they become involved in the civic and political affairs of Babylon. Daniel ministers to the *shalom* of various Babylonian kings, interpreting their dreams and bringing them messages from God.

**Consider This:** Daniel’s example is often cited today as a model for how Christians can safely engage with the political or civic world. Do you think leadership in the public sphere—in politics, business, or the media—will always lead toward compromise? Why, or why not? What are the spiritual safeguards that can help us navigate these challenges?

### III. Prayer

(Review Daniel 6:4, 5, 10, 11 with your class.)

Throughout the book of Daniel, prayer is an indispensable part of Daniel’s identity and ministry, whether it be giving thanks (6:10), asking God for help (vs. 11), confessing (9:5–11), pleading for his land (vss. 16–19), or asking God for the key to the dreams of kings.

And yet, Jesus’ counsel to pray in private—in a closet, if necessary—could have been very appealing to Daniel in view of the death penalty for praying to anyone other than the king. It would have been so easy to rationalize—“I’ll still be praying, just not publicly”; “I can’t continue as a missionary for God here in Babylon if I’m dead”; “Nowhere do the Scriptures say I have to pray where I can be seen.”

But, of course, Jesus’ counsel was directed at those praying publicly to parade their good works. And for Daniel, such a man of integrity, it would have seemed like compromise to change his prayer habits. So, he stood firm.

**Consider This:** Daniel’s prayer life seems to have been marked by consistency—of time of day, posture, and place. What role do you think daily habits can play in either enhancing or disrupting your prayer connection with God?

### STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Sociologist Rodney Stark argues that the key to the rapid growth of the early church was its wholistic community ministry. Although exiles in a pagan culture, they didn’t just keep to themselves: “Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear, and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world.” —Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton
University Press, 1996), p. 161. So, for example, in times of plague and sickness, pagan priests fled the cities while Christians remained to help the sick and suffering. In an oft-quoted statement, the theologian Tertullian, a pagan convert, said, “‘It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. ‘Only look,’ they say, ‘look how they love one another!’’”—Page 87. The Emperor Julian wrote, “‘The impious Galileans support not only their poor, but ours as well; everyone can see that our people lack aid from us.’”—Page 84.

Consider This: How does your community view Seventh-day Adventists?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Remind your class that we are not just talking about something that “happened back then” or something that’s an interesting theological discussion point. We’re talking about how we can faithfully apply biblical principles to our daily lives—sometimes in difficult situations. As a class, explore the difference between just talking about our beliefs and living them faithfully, even as we feel the heat from the fiery furnace.

Activity: Depending on the size of your class, break into smaller groups or remain together for this activity. Consider the following situations that a Seventh-day Adventist might face (or come up with different scenarios that are more relevant to your local culture). Advise these individuals on how they can be faithful missionaries in spite of challenges they face.

1. An Adventist laborer in a developing country earns a couple of dollars a day cleaning streets—barely enough to support his family of four children. He is told that he must work Sabbaths. If he says No, he knows there will be several hundred people lined up to take his job, and he will have no source of income.

2. A young Adventist starts classes in a public university and for the first time is confronted with atheistic, materialistic worldviews that are presented in a compelling, attractive way. Her classmates all seem to just accept it. She has a crisis of faith, wondering how she will cope.

3. A young Adventist college graduate finds a job in a country town with no Seventh-day Adventist church. His only friends are at his workplace, and their gatherings always involve drinking and smoking. Should the young man resign himself to having no social life? Or can he attend these parties? Give reasons for your answers.
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SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “‘For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?’” (Esther 4:14, NIV).

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sther was used to carry out a high-level, specialized mission within the dangerous political heart of the Persian Empire. Her mission involved her in a series of striking contrasts. An orphaned female member of a despised ethnic and religious minority living in the superpower of her day, she became the wife of the Persian king. This was no rags-to-riches fairy tale. Rather, she was lifted from obscurity and groomed to carry out a highly specialized mission. It required of her the risky strategy of working, at first, undercover. Later she had to make a perilous full disclosure of her ethnicity and faith.

Supported by her cousin and foster father Mordecai, her daring witness at the intrigue-ridden court of the Persian Empire saved her people, reversed their low social status, and made them empire-wide objects of admiration.

No doubt as a result of her faithfulness, knowledge of the true God became more widespread among their heathen captors. Though not your “typical” missionary story, the narrative of Esther and Mordecai does present some interesting principles that can help us to understand what it means to witness in peculiar circumstances.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 8.
Esther in Persia

Read Esther 1:2–20. What is happening here? What things about this story are hard to understand from our perspective today? (As you read, remember that a lot of details are not presented.)

The weeklong banquet that King Ahasuerus gave for his nobles and officials seems extravagant, even for someone at the pinnacle of political power, far beyond what most Christians would find acceptable. The unrestricted consumption of alcohol (Esther 1:7, 8) was unusual, because drinking during ancient formal feasts was usually controlled by convention and ritual. In this case, it clouded the king’s judgment to the point that he ordered his wife Vashti to provide entertainment for the king’s drunken, all-male gathering. This was far beneath her dignity as a married woman and as a member of the royal family. Whatever her response, she faced the dilemma of losing status, and her courageous choice to retain self-esteem in the face of an autocratic ruler’s base desires prepares the reader to understand the power for good that a principled woman could exert, even in a male-dominated royal court.

Meanwhile, though, we have to deal with the actions of Esther. Esther 2:3 gives the impression that these women were not volunteers. The king issued the decree, and so Esther had to come. Had she refused, who knows the outcome?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. In what ways can we apply the principles seen in these verses to what happened with Esther? Or do they apply?

So far in the story the real heroine is Vashti, who then disappears from history. Her modesty and stand on principle opened the way for Esther. In some cases, though, principled stands don’t always lead to an obvious good. In the end, why should we take principled stands, even if we don’t know the outcome of our actions?
Esther in the Court of the King

Read Esther 2:10, 20. What situations might arise where nationality or religious affiliation should be hidden, at least for a time?

Read John 4:1–26, the story of Jesus and the woman at the well. Why did Jesus tell her so openly that He was the Messiah, when among His own people He was not so forthcoming? How does this account, perhaps, help us to understand Mordecai’s words to Esther?

Twice Mordecai charged Esther not to reveal her nationality and family background. This has troubled some commentators, who have questioned the need for this attitude of concealment, especially during a time when the Jewish people were not threatened. Could she not have been a witness about her God to these pagans if she were open about who she was and the God she worshiped? Or could it be argued that to be a Jew lacked credibility at the Persian court and that revealing her ethnicity would have hindered her in gaining access to the king when she pleaded for her people? It appears that even before the threat occurred, Mordecai had warned Esther not to reveal her identity. The fact is that the Bible does not tell us the reason for his words to her; however, as we can see with the example of Jesus, one does not have to reveal everything at once in every circumstance. Prudence is a virtue.

Meanwhile, why did Jesus speak so openly to the woman at the well and not to His own people?

“Christ was far more reserved when He spoke to them. That which had been withheld from the Jews, and which the disciples were afterward enjoined to keep secret, was revealed to her. Jesus saw that she would make use of her knowledge in bringing others to share His grace.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 190.

Have you ever been in a situation in which you deemed it prudent not to say too much about your faith or your beliefs? What reasons did you have? As you look back now, what might you have done differently, if anything?
“For Such a Time as This”

In Esther 3:1–5, the plot of the story starts to unfold. Mordecai, a Jew—following the commandment against idolatry—refused to bow down to Haman, a mere man. Furious, Haman sought a way to avenge himself for what he took as a slight. Mordecai, by his actions, in a way was witnessing among these pagans about the true God.

What excuse did Haman use to try to rid the empire of the Jews? What does this tell us about how easy it is to let cultural differences blind us to the humanity of all people? Esther 3:8–13; see also Acts 17:26.

As Haman’s plot was made known, Mordecai expressed his grief visibly, using one of the Jewish religious rituals mentioned in the book of Esther: “He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, . . . wailing loudly and bitterly” (Esther 4:1, NIV). In the meantime, Esther prepared to go before the king. She would become a Jewish breaker of royal Persian law by heroically entering the king’s presence without invitation, as part of a plan to foil Haman’s plot. The king admitted her and accepted her invitation to dine. Esther now takes the lead in the drama faced by the Jewish exiles across all of Persia. In this story, Esther showed self-denial and heroism (vs. 16), tact (Esther 5:8), and courage (Esther 7:6).

“Through Esther the queen[,] the Lord accomplished a mighty deliverance for His people. At a time when it seemed that no power could save them, Esther and the women associated with her, by fasting and prayer and prompt action, met the issue, and brought salvation to their people.

“A study of women’s work in connection with the cause of God in Old Testament times will teach us lessons that will enable us to meet emergencies in the work today. We may not be brought into such a critical and prominent place as were the people of God in the time of Esther; but often converted women can act an important part in more humble positions.”—Ellen G. White Comments, in The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 1140.

Read Esther 4:14, Mordecai’s famous words to Esther: “‘Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’” (NKJV). In what ways might the principle behind these words apply to you, right now?
Mordecai and Haman

According to Esther 5–8, how was Esther able to save her people?

The accounts of Esther’s two banquets bring the story to its crisis point. They also record the great reversal of the plotted ethnic extermination. On the way, the story exposes the difference between true honor and self-honor, and it records the punishment of the villain. These court intrigues had far-reaching consequences. They give us a glimpse into the behind-the-scenes workings of an absolute monarch and his court. Esther and Mordecai used their positions, their knowledge of the culture in which they lived, and their faith in God’s covenant promises to His people to bring about their deliverance.

Meanwhile, despite his quiet life of service, Mordecai let his faith be known, if through no other means than his refusal to bow down before Haman. People noticed, and they admonished him, but he refused to compromise his faith (Esther 3:3–5). This, surely, was a witness to others.

Read Esther 6:1–3. What does this tell us about Mordecai? What lessons could we draw about how God’s people can function, even witness, in foreign lands?

Though Mordecai obviously was following the Lord, nevertheless he showed allegiance, and loyalty, to the sovereign of the nation in which he lived. While refusing to bow before a man, he still was a good citizen, in that he exposed the plot against the king. Though we can’t read too much into the fact that he hadn’t been honored for this act, very possibly he did it and then just went on his way, not expecting any reward. In time, though, as the story shows, his good deed was more than rewarded. His example here is perhaps best expressed by these words: “ ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’ ” (Matt. 22:21, NKJV).
When Some Gentiles Became Jews

**Read** Esther 8. Focus specifically on verse 17. How can we understand this in terms of outreach and witness?

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No question, the book of Esther is not a “typical” story about outreach and witness. And yet, we can see something like this scenario happening here toward the end. As a result of the king’s edict on behalf of the Jews, “many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them” *(Esther 8:17, NIV)*. Some commentators argue that theirs could not have been a true conversion experience, since fear and anxiety should have no place in proselytizing. While that’s true, who knows in the longer run how these people, whatever their motives at first, might have responded to the working of the Holy Spirit, especially after seeing great differences between their beliefs and the belief and worship of the one true God?

**Read** Romans 1:18–20. How might the concepts taught here come into play with these people, especially in the context of this story?

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In the original decrees against the Jews, not only were the Jews to be killed, but the ones to do it were told that they should “plunder their possessions” *(Esther 3:13, NKJV)*. Also, when the Jews were given permission to kill their enemies, they, too, were told that they could “plunder” the possessions of their enemies *(Esther 8:11, NKJV)*. However, three times in the book of Esther *(9:10, 15, 16, NKJV)* it specifically says that the Jews did not “lay a hand on the plunder” *(NKJV)*. Though the texts don’t say why, the fact that it was mentioned three times shows the emphasis that was placed on this act. Most likely they refrained because they wanted it known that they were acting out of self-defense and not greed.

**How can we make sure that in our outreach and witness to others we don’t do anything that would cause people to question our motives? Why is this so important?**

“The decree that will finally go forth against the remnant people of God will be very similar to that issued by Ahasuerus against the Jews. Today the enemies of the true church see in the little company keeping the Sabbath commandment a Mordecai at the gate. The reverence of God’s people for His law is a constant rebuke to those who have cast off the fear of the Lord and are trampling on His Sabbath.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 605.

Discussion Questions:

1. What parallel can we draw between the edict that was brought against the Jews and what will happen in the last days as the issue of the “mark of the beast” comes to the forefront?

2. Both ancient Jews and Christians disputed the right of the book of Esther to have a place in the Old Testament canon. It did not appear in the Old Testament used by the community that produced the Dead Sea scrolls, nor in the Old Testament of the churches of ancient Turkey and Syria. The name of God does not appear in the book of Esther, while there are about 190 references to the heathen king. There are no references to sacrifice, temple, or worship, although fasting and prayer are mentioned. Finally, the covenant emphasis on forgiveness and mercy is not mentioned. And yet, the Lord saw fit to include it in the canon. Why? What powerful spiritual lesson can we take from it about how God can work in our lives for good, even amid what appear to be very difficult circumstances?

3. Dwell more on the idea of times during which missionaries and others doing outreach do not openly talk about their identity and work. What are some valid reasons (if any) for us to do that, especially in the context of mission? Sometimes, for instance, missionaries are very careful not to say who they are, especially in countries that are hostile to Christian witness. If we are impressed not to reveal right away who we are, how can we do it in a way that is not being dishonest or deceitful?
A Gift From the River: Part 2

by Doneshor Tripura, Bangladesh

Doneshor felt a fervent desire to know the truth. He decided to mark with a red pencil everything he found in the Bible and in the Bhagavad Gita that was good and helpful. Soon he realized that he was marking nearly everything in the Bible. Doneshor decided that one day he would be a Christian, though he had no idea how or when that would happen.

He entered college and had little time to read, but his desire to know God never left him. When he returned home after college, he met an old friend in the marketplace.

“I’ve become a Christian,” his friend told him. Doneshor was thrilled. He told him about finding the Bible in the river and then said, “Tell me how can I become a Christian.”

His friend’s face lit up, and he hugged Doneshor. Then he told him that in a city about thirty miles [forty-five kilometers] away, there was a church where Doneshor could learn how to become a Christian.

Early Saturday morning, Doneshor boarded a bus to the town where the church was located. He found the house church and went in. Everyone sat with their eyes closed. Doneshor didn’t realize they were praying. He looked at them. They look like normal people, he thought. When they opened their eyes, they were surprised to see Doneshor standing near the door. They welcomed him and invited him to join them.

Doneshor attended the church as often as he could, but he couldn’t go every week because the bus fare was expensive. But he felt great joy in what he was learning and began telling his friends about it. Some wanted to visit the church, too, so the little group agreed to take turns going, sharing the expense of the bus fare. Then those who had gone could teach the others what they had learned.

For a year, Doneshor and his friends attended church this way. Then Doneshor told the pastor that he wanted to be baptized. The pastor was happy to arrange the baptism but apologized because the little church had no baptistry. “We’ll have to baptize you in the Chengi River,” the pastor said.

“That’s wonderful!” Doneshor responded. “The same river that brought me the Bible will seal my covenant with God.”

Doneshor and 24 others were baptized in the river where his quest for God had begun. Among those other 24 were seven friends who Doneshor had invited to learn about Christ. They are the first Christians among the Tripura people.

Doneshor Tripura studied theology at Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College in Bangladesh.
The Lesson in Brief

▶Key Text: Esther 4:14

▶The Student Will:

Know: Recognize that God places His followers in certain places and times to promote life and the values of His kingdom.
Feel: Foster a feeling of selfless love and responsibility for the welfare of others.
Do: Undertake to use talents and gifts to promote God’s mission.

▶Learning Outline:

I. Know: For Such a Time as This

A Situations that the world would describe as accidental or coincidental may actually be God-given opportunities for service. How can we be more open to recognizing these opportunities for promoting God’s kingdom?

B Mordecai tells Esther that if she remains silent, deliverance will come “from another place.” Theologians have speculated whether this is a veiled reference for God. Although God’s name is not mentioned, what evidence do you see for His presence in the book of Esther?

II. Feel: Life-Giving Mission

A How does it make you feel to review God’s past leading in your life?

B Do you feel as motivated to care for the lives of others as you did when you first became a Christian? What might your response say about your connection with Christ?

III. Do: Becoming Involved

A In what ways might you be called to act as a modern-day Esther—not necessarily on as big a stage but in your daily life?

▶Summary: God today still calls on men and women to be available as His representatives in promoting life and the values of the kingdom of heaven.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Esther 4:14

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Only God can provide us with the strength and courage to make correct spiritual choices to promote life and His mission in stressful and desperate situations.

Just for Teachers: The book of Esther is frustratingly silent on many details, including the role of spiritual training in Mordecai’s house in forming Esther’s character and in the part God plays in the story. We have to read between the lines and see the evidence of God’s work. Of course, this is true of all history. As Ellen G. White reminds us: “In the annals of human history the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as dependent on the will and prowess of man. The shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, behind, above, and through all the play and counter-play of human interests and power and passions, the agencies of the all-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.”—Education, p. 173.

Take the opportunity this week to help your class “read between the lines” in Esther and find principles that can help guide our mission today.

Opening Discussion: The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. . . . To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:20, 22, NIV). In many ways this is a confronting passage of Scripture. What exactly does Paul mean by becoming “all things to all people”? The religious sect called “The Family” used to be known as the “Children of God.” In the 1970s, they began a recruiting practice that their founder, David Berg, called “flirty fishing”—basically using sexuality to lure people. Although no longer practiced, the David Berg Web site still defends this method of religious prostitution: “Over 100,000 people were led to faith in Christ because of the sacrificial love of Family men and women who were willing to go to such lengths to share the Lord’s love.”

Discussion Questions: What is meant by the apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 9:22? Did Esther go too far in becoming “all things to all people”? Why, or why not? Where do we draw the line?
STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Mordecai and Esther were strangers in a strange land. They were Jews in a pagan nation and had in one sense assimilated with their community—nobody knew they were Jews. In another sense, they had kept themselves as a separate Jewish community in Susa and kept their own fast (Esther 4:16). Use the story of Esther to explore with your class the ways that we as Christians should best interact in communities that do not share our religious beliefs.

Bible Commentary

I. The Need for Preparation (Review Esther 4:12–16 with your class.)

No doubt Esther’s spiritual training in the home of Mordecai had strengthened her character in preparation for the challenges life might bring (Esther 2:20). But they never could have envisaged the monumental task she would face in trying to save the lives of her people. But before risking everything by approaching the king, Esther decides to make a final preparation. She tells Mordecai to bring together all the Jews in Susa to fast for three days and nights. Only after this preparation will she feel ready to go to the king—and “if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16).

God’s preparation time can sometimes be long and uneventful. Moses spent 40 years in the desert caring for sheep. But the refining of our characters is essential to God’s plan for our lives. And Esther’s example reminds us of the importance of proper spiritual preparation instead of just launching, in our own strength, into important decisions and actions.

Consider This: In what ways have you seen God work in your life, preparing you for various tasks?
II. Our Weakness Made Strong *(Review with your class Esther 7:3, 4; Daniel 6:19–22; Genesis 39:2, 3.)*

In many ways, the story of Esther parallels that of Joseph and Daniel. In each case, the central dramas play out in royal courts on pagan stages far from Israel. Like Joseph and Daniel, Esther the orphan has been deprived of her family. Despite adhering to a foreign religion and having no status or influence, they all rise from obscurity to political prominence—Joseph and Daniel to top leadership roles, Esther to royalty. In all three stories, the king and Pharaoh have troubled sleep or dream dreams, which prove pivotal to the plot. And through these three people, God blesses nations and peoples.

The biblical narrative clearly outlines the role God plays in the trajectory of Joseph’s and Daniel’s lives. We learn that God causes an official to show favor to Daniel *(Dan. 1:9)*, gives Daniel knowledge and understanding *(vs. 17)*, and reveals to him the meaning of dreams *(Dan. 2:19)*. Daniel continually prays to and praises God *(vss. 20–23)*, and his influence leads pagan kings to acknowledge his God *(vs. 47)*. Likewise, the Bible repeatedly tells us that God was with Joseph *(Gen. 39:2, 21, 23)* and that God blessed Potiphar’s household through Joseph *(vs. 5)*. And again, Pharaoh, a pagan ruler, is led to acknowledge God *(Gen. 41:38, 39)*.

However, as has often been noted, God seems totally absent from the book of Esther—and is given no credit for what happens. Daniel and Isaiah were clearly observant Jews and public about their faith as they performed their roles. But Esther doesn’t reveal her religious hand, so to speak, until she is forced to do so.

Whatever the explanation for her reticence about God or the absence of the mention of His name in the book, Esther certainly rose to the occasion at the crucial time. And we can take comfort that God can work through all human beings, no matter their predispositions or weaknesses, to accomplish His mission.

**Consider This:** In what ways do we see the hand of God guiding our lives? Invite the class to share personal testimonies of how they believe that God has led them.
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Genocide is averted in the book of Esther. Yet, within this narrative development, God’s name is not even mentioned once in the text. Discuss with your class the challenge of keeping faith when God seems absent.

Application: The prophet Jeremiah says to God, “I would speak with you about your justice” (Jer. 12:1, NIV). At times the prophets asked very hard questions about God’s seeming lack of involvement and justice in human affairs, even His power to save (see, for example, Hab. 1:2, 3, 17; Jer. 14:9). At times, it is natural to get upset with God and even to question Him. But what is the line between this and losing faith? Can a Christian still be a Christian and doubt?

A few years ago, in a cover article, Time magazine told how Mother Teresa, long an icon of practical spirituality and selflessness through her work among the poor of Calcutta, had a dark night of the soul that may have lasted 50 years, where she often questioned God’s presence. Esther reminds us that, even when God seems particularly absent and uninvolved in situations, “He is there, and He is not silent.” Discuss with the class ways we can keep and build our faith, especially when God seems very distant or even absent.

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: As Seventh-day Adventists, whose faith is based on God the Creator and Life-Giver, we are called to defend life. God placed Esther in her position at such a time in earth’s history in order to stop genocide. Standing up for life could have cost Esther her own life, and yet we remember her today, thousands of years later, because of her courage. Like Esther, we must stand up for life today. In the following activity, explore with your class practical ways they can help promote life.

Activity: As followers of Jesus, our ultimate hope is that people will be led to accept His gift of salvation and be ready for His return. But while we wait for that great day, we are called to be His representatives on earth. We have been placed in such a time as this, like Esther, to work for physical and eternal life. Have a brainstorming session with the class about practical ways you can be life-promoters. You may wish to think about things like caring for the lives of widows and orphans, helping those dying from AIDS, or helping to relieve poverty.
Lesson 7

Jesus: The Master of Missions

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: 2 Tim. 1:8, 9; Dan. 9:24–27; Isa. 42:1–9; Luke 2:8–14; Matt. 10:5, 6; Acts 1:1–14.

Memory Text: “Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’ ” (John 20:21, NIV).

According to Scripture, a core activity of the Trinity is mission. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are involved in saving humanity. Their Word began at the Fall and continues through until the end. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will then restore this redeemed world to full unity with the divine will.

According to the Gospels, Jesus underwent the radical change into human form necessary for His mission to succeed. In Jesus Christ, the meaning of history comes into focus, the total mission activity of God becomes coherent, and the deepest needs of humans for meaningful existence are fulfilled.

In the New Testament, we are made acquainted with the purposes of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. We find here how He outlines the program for mission, and we get glimpses of how Jesus met people from other nations, people of other faiths. In the Word of God, we can see the incredible saving activity of God on behalf of fallen humanity.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 15.
Jesus in the Old Testament

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Tim. 1:8, 9, NKJV).

Besides being great verses about the futility of salvation by works, these verses reveal the eternal nature of salvation; they show that the plan for our redemption had been formulated long, long ago.

So, it is no wonder that all through the Old Testament, Jesus Christ is revealed in one way or another. Especially powerful are the prophecies, which clearly show that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

Read the following Old Testament texts, all applied to Jesus. What do they say about Him and His role as Messiah? Isa. 61:1, Dan. 9:24–27, Isa. 7:14, 9:6, 42:1–9.

The prophet Isaiah describes the mission of Jesus with these words: “‘Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. . . I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness’” (Isa. 42:1, 6, 7, NIV).

Dwell on the incredible idea that Jesus, the Creator, took upon Himself our humanity and in that humanity lived and died as He did. What great hope does this offer you in a world that, in and of itself, offers no hope at all?
The Desire of Ages

Jesus Christ is Lord of both the church and the world. His coming is a fulfillment of the Old Testament expectations of a saved community that would extend far beyond the Jewish people. The coming of Jesus, especially His suffering and resurrection, ushered in a new age in which the distinction between Jew and Gentile, as far as the gospel is concerned, disappears. Jerusalem would remain the center, at least for a while. However, the point of departure was no longer Herod’s temple in Jerusalem but the Jews converted to Christ; they had become the living temple. These Christian Jews would then be the “remnant” of Israel at that time in the early church, the ones called to bring the gospel to the world.

This announcement of the worldwide, universal mission of Christ as Savior of all nations was repeated at His birth, during His childhood, and at His baptism.

What do the following texts teach about the universal mission of Jesus to the world?

Luke 2:8–14

Luke 2:25–33

Luke 3:3–6

John 1:29

No question, Jesus came as the Savior for all humanity. What does this truth mean for us in the context of mission?

“The missionary spirit needs to be revived in our churches. Every member of the church should study how to help forward the work of God, both in home missions and in foreign countries. Scarcely a thousandth part of the work is being done that ought to be done in missionary fields. God calls upon His workers to annex new territory for Him. There are rich fields of toil waiting for the faithful worker.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 29.
Mission to the Jews

“‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel’” (Matt. 15:24, NIV).

Between His first public appearance and His crucifixion, Jesus focused His ministry almost solely on the Jewish people, particularly in Galilee. The Lord addressed Himself first to Israel. Before the Cross, there are very few messages of good news to the Gentiles. Apparently, Jesus wanted to awaken the Jewish people to their place, purpose, and role in God’s overall mission for lost humanity. Israel was to have the opportunity to be the witness of God’s message to the world.

Read Matthew 10:5, 6. Why would Jesus say here what He did? How do we understand these words in the context of the universal scope of what Christ came to do and in the context of missions as a whole? Contrast this text with Matt. 28:19.

When we consider the life and ministry of Jesus, we must observe a clear distinction between His thinking, ideals, principles, and planning on one side and the way He accomplished these purposes on the other. In His day-to-day life and ministry, He identified Himself with Jewish culture, just as the Old Testament predicted of the Messiah. But the impact of His incarnation was universally applicable. Through His death and resurrection, He would bear the sins of the world (John 1:29).

We detect here an important biblical principle for establishing mission. The first move is directed to creating a center in order to establish a strong and stable geographical and cultural base: Israel and the Jewish people. When that has been accomplished, mission should next develop outward from the center into ever-widening expanses.

Think about your home church. How well does it model the ideas expressed above—that is, a strong and stable base that eventually is able to reach out to others? How can you avoid the danger, which many churches face, of being self-oriented, worrying about your own needs to the neglect of witness and mission?
Mission to the Gentiles

Although Jesus spent the major part of His time among the Jews, serving them in their cultural context, He made clear in His teaching and ministry that His mission was universal. The gospel should be preached to the nations, with Israel as the initial base. The salvation of the Gentiles is part of God’s plan. It was embodied in Jesus’ teaching.

How do the following teachings of Jesus indicate mission to non-Jewish people?

Matt. 5:13, 14

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

Mark 14:9

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

Luke 14:10–24

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

Matt. 13:36–43

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

Despite the fact that Jesus ministered mainly among the Jews, there’s no question that from the very start His mission was for the whole world. Right at His baptism, John the Baptist said it clearly: “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (John 1:29, NKJV). The word world (Greek kosmos) occurs about one hundred times in the Gospels. About half of these refer to the worldwide scope of Jesus as the Redeemer.

In the parable Jesus told in Luke 14:16–24, those invited made all sorts of excuses for not coming. Read those excuses again. On one level, none appeared unreasonable, did they? What important lesson should we take from this for ourselves?
The Great Commission

Jesus spent the 40 days between His resurrection and ascension primarily in preparing the disciples and His church for worldwide evangelism. The best-known and most quoted resurrection account is Matthew’s. However, during this period there were other occasions during which the risen Christ could have given further details on the gospel commission. There were two appearances in Jerusalem, two in Galilee (one by the Sea of Tiberias, one on the hilltop), and the meeting reported in Acts 1:1–14.

There are five structured occasions in the Gospels in which the Great Commission narrative is dealt with from various angles: on a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16–20); at a table (Mark 16:14–16); in the upper room (John 20:19–23); on the beach (John 21:15–17); and just as Jesus was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:6–9). What key points do all these incidents have in common?

Under the power of the Holy Spirit and obeying the words of Jesus, the apostles quickly spread across the ancient world. Paul preached on the northern shore of the Mediterranean; Philip worked in Samaria. According to early Christian tradition, Matthew traveled to Ethiopia and Thomas to India.

Though starting out small, and with so much opposition, through the grace of the Lord these faithful followers were able to spread the gospel message to the world. Whatever their faults, weaknesses, fears, doubts, and struggles, they accepted the call and worked for the salvation of the world. That is, what they learned about Jesus, what they got from Jesus, they sought to share with others. Isn’t that what being a Christian is all about?

What have you been given in Christ? How should God’s gift to you through Christ influence your attitude toward witness and mission to others?
Further Study: According to Matthew, Jesus foretold that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14, NIV). At the same time, the Scriptures make another point clear: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matt. 24:36). Note also Jesus’ words: “‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority’” (Acts 1:7, NIV).

Thus, while the good news of the gospel has been preached and is being preached as never before, and while we believe that Christ’s coming is soon, we must not get caught up in dates and speculating about dates. “We are not to be engrossed with speculations in regard to the times and the seasons which God has not revealed. Jesus has told his disciples to ‘watch,’ but not for a definite time. His followers are to be in the position of those who are listening for the orders of their Captain; they are to watch, wait, pray, and work, as they approach the time for the coming of the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 189.

Discussion Questions:

1. Despite the clear teaching on not setting dates for Christ’s return, hardly a year goes by before we hear something in the news about some group of Christians setting a date for Christ’s return. Why do you think people insist on doing this, other than as a good fund-raising technique? (After all, if Jesus is coming on June 19 of next year [or fill in any date you want], then what good is your money now?) Why is it bad for the Christian witness in the world when these dates, year after year, are shown to be false?

2. Think of the obstacles the early believers faced in the first few years of mission, especially considering that they were so small in number. What are some of the obstacles we face in mission today? What can we learn from the success of the early church that can help us to do what we have been so clearly called to do?
Faithful Bride: Part 1

by Reena Murmu, Bangladesh

Shanti was raised in a Christian home in Bangladesh. She was still quite young when her father died. Her mother struggled to feed her family. When Shanti was 13 years old, her mother gave her in marriage to a Hindu man.

According to custom, when Shanti went to live with her husband’s family, she was expected to take his religion. But Shanti refused. Her husband’s family treated her badly, and everyone worked to separate Shanti from her Christian faith. But Shanti clung to her God.

Shanti was expected to serve her mother-in-law, who treated her as a slave, shouting at her and denouncing her. Because Shanti refused to give up her faith in God, she was considered unclean and not allowed to work with food or utensils in the kitchen. But her mother-in-law made sure there was plenty of other work for the girl to do.

Shanti’s husband, Bhudroy, was much older than Shanti and treated her kindly, but he was powerless to help his young bride, for he didn’t dare defy his mother’s orders.

There was no escape for the young bride because the couple was expected to remain with the family until after the first child was born. Three years after they married, their first daughter, Reena, was born.

Shanti tried to share her faith with her husband whenever she could, and over time he began to believe that Shanti was following the right religion. A Seventh-day Adventist pastor lived in the same village as Shanti. He visited the family and explained the church’s beliefs, hoping to make Shanti’s life a bit easier. Shanti’s mother-in-law refused to listen to the pastor, but her father-in-law listened. The pastor returned to visit the family often, sharing his faith and Bible promises with the family members who were open to hearing them.

As he worked in the village, the pastor found a number of people who were interested in learning about the Bible. The pastor arranged to hold evangelistic meetings. Without Shanti’s knowledge, her husband asked the pastor to study the Bible with him. Then he was secretly baptized. Shanti didn’t know about her husband’s interest until after he was baptized, but she was thrilled.

Shanti’s mother-in-law, however, was very unhappy to learn that her son had abandoned his gods to worship his wife’s God. She growled under her breath when she saw Shanti and Bhudroy going to church together. She often tried to prevent them from attending church. She would hide some household valuable and demand that the couple find it before they went to church. These searches often made the couple late.

When her pranks no longer worked, Shanti’s mother-in-law turned to her other daughter-in-law for help in breaking the spirits of Shanti and Bhudroy. This daughter-in-law was selfish and often bickered and fought. She made life bitter for everyone.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.
The Lesson in Brief

►**Key Text:** John 20:21

►**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Realize the vital importance of a wholistic approach to the mission God has given him or her.

**Feel:** Sense the responsibility of being sent as Christ’s ambassadors for mission here on earth.

**Do:** Demonstrate Jesus’ care for people that embraces the physical, spiritual, and emotional.

►**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Sent as Ambassadors**

A. What compels us to be God’s ambassadors for mission *(2 Cor. 5:14)*?

B. Our mission is to continue Jesus’ work on earth *(John 20:21)*. How does Paul describe Jesus’ mission *(2 Cor. 5:18)*?

C. True wholistic mission must balance physical and spiritual dimensions. Matthew tells us that Jesus looked on the crowds with compassion. How else does he describe Jesus’ ministry *(Matt. 9:35, 36)*?

II. **Feel: Compassionate Mission**

A. True mission is motivated by love, not a feeling of obligation. Why did Jesus have compassion on the crowds *(Matt. 9:36)*?

III. **Do: Becoming Involved**

A. How can you demonstrate Jesus’ love in your workplace or where you go to school?

B. How can we make our churches community-focused, where every member is engaged in some form of wholistic ministry?

►**Summary:** As Christ’s ambassadors, we’re called to a comprehensive mission that touches people’s lives here and now but also leads them to eternity.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Mark 16:15–20*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** In Jesus’ ministry of reconciliation on earth, He modeled a loving, wholistic approach that should guide the way we do mission today.

**Just for Teachers:** It’s been said that Jesus is “God spelled out in language human beings can understand.” Perhaps we could also say Jesus is “mission spelled out in language human beings can understand.” The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus has given us “the ministry of reconciliation” (*2 Cor. 5:18*) and that we are “Christ’s ambassadors” (vs. 20). Explore this week with your class what it means to be Christ’s ambassadors on earth, promoting His ministry of reconciliation and following His wholistic approach.

**Opening Discussion:** As a famous author and scholar, C. S. Lewis had an extremely busy schedule. But despite the heavy demands on his time, he personally responded—mostly by hand—to the thousands of letters he received from all over the world. He prayed for people who wrote to him, many of whom he had never met, and even sent money to those in need. People would sometimes just walk up to his home, and he would invite them inside and give them refreshments. He helped support students who couldn’t pay for their studies and opened up his home to needy children. For three months, a mentally disabled teenager stayed in his home—and Lewis personally taught him how to read. Here was a man who taught the world’s best students at Oxford and Cambridge universities and who wrote powerful apologetic works for Christianity—but who knew that in following Jesus, he must not only love in word but also in deed (*1 John 3:18*).

Discuss with the class practical ways that we can be witnesses in word and in deed.

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** The biblical concept of the good news is rich and multilayered—with implications for what God is doing now with His kingdom here on earth and what He plans to do in the future in the new earth. It includes the promise of eternal salvation to come and God’s liberating action in all dimensions of life...
now. N. T. Wright talks about the “transformative news of God’s rescuing justice to the whole creation.” He adds, “That’s a tightly packed definition, and every bit of it matters.”—Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 200. This week, discuss with your class the broad scope of God’s mission in the world. What does it involve, and what is included? In what ways is the message of the Bible good news for all aspects of our lives?

Bible Commentary

I. Jesus’ Wholistic Mission: Part 1 (Review Isaiah 42:1–9 with your class.)

This Messianic prophecy outlines Jesus’ wholistic mission. It’s a mission to several categories of people: the Gentiles, the blind, those in prison, and “those who sit in darkness.” And it’s a mission of liberation—to bring justice, share light, open eyes, and release captives.

This passage closely parallels the mission statement Jesus Himself gives in Luke 4:18–21, in which He quotes from another Messianic passage in Isaiah (chapter 61). Here, again, Jesus is involved in a wholistic ministry to the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed. It’s a ministry that proclaims “good news,” “freedom,” and “recovery of sight.”

It’s a mistake to read Jesus’ mission only in physical terms—a social gospel of helping the poor, the imprisoned, the disabled, the politically oppressed. It’s also a mistake to spiritualize the mission—seeing these categories as representing only those who are spiritually blind, imprisoned, impoverished, or oppressed. Jesus is here talking about liberation that is both spiritual and physical. He brings good news to all dimensions of life.

Commenting on the passage in Luke, Ellen G. White says, “Our Lord Jesus Christ was the majesty of heaven, yet he came to our world as a physician, a healer of physical and spiritual maladies.”—“The Work for Today,” The Gospel of Health, Sept. 1, 1898.

Consider This: In what ways can we make sure our mission to make disciples includes both physical and spiritual care? How do we avoid the dangers of ending up, on the one hand, preaching only a “social gospel” or, on the other hand, focusing only on individual salvation?

II. Jesus’ Wholistic Mission: Part 2 (Review Matthew 10:5–8 and Mark 16:15–20 with your class.)
In these verses, we read part of Jesus’ last few words of advice to His 12 disciples before He sends them out to minister. For many months now, they’ve been under His tutelage. He has taught them, mentored them, and personally modeled ministry. Now it’s time to practice what they’ve learned.

Jesus tells them to preach, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and drive out demons (Matt. 10:7, 8). Notice that the disciples are “sent out” (vs. 5) and told to “go” (vs. 7). They’re not instructed to try to attract people to some big event. Rather, they follow Jesus’ incarnational mission method of personally going to the people where they are.

Later, after His resurrection, Jesus instructs the remaining 11 disciples. He tells them to go into all the world to preach the good news, but, in conjunction with that, various signs and wonders will be performed, including demons being cast out and the sick being healed (Mark 16:15–18).

Ellen G. White beautifully summarizes, in five steps, Jesus’ method of ministry. First, the Savior “mingled” with people in a loving, caring way. Second, He showed “sympathy” for them. He then “ministered to needs,” “won their confidence,” and told them to “follow” Him. Mrs. White goes so far as to say that this method is the only ministry method that will bring “true success.”—The Ministry of Healing, p. 143.

Jesus didn’t just preach to people. In fact, He spent more time caring for their physical needs. For Him, ministry was wholistic—a balance between the physical and spiritual.

Today some people make a distinction between social and humanitarian care, on the one hand, and evangelism on the other. Jesus made no such separation. As followers of Jesus, we will hand people a cup of water, but we also long for them to accept the Water of Life. Of course, we must be careful to ensure that our care for people is not conditional on their becoming Christians. We pray and work to lead them to Jesus, but we will keep loving and caring for them irrespective of the path they choose.

**Consider This:** Reflect on each of the steps of Jesus’ model for ministry: mingling, showing sympathy, meeting needs, winning confidence, and inviting people to follow Him. Can any of these steps be safely discarded? Why, or why not? Consider a recent outreach effort by your church and whether or not all these elements of Jesus’ method were in place. If not, which steps were neglected?
STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize to your class that, in our witness, an intellectual approach to the good news isn’t enough. It has to connect with life—to what is vital, meaningful, urgent to people. If it doesn’t, it will have no power, and something else will take its place. Peter writes, “Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober . . .” (1 Pet. 1:13, NIV). Beliefs must connect with lives. We must enact what we believe. Peter spent much of his life acting with an unprepared mind. But the Holy Spirit changed his life and prepared him for action. He now dedicated his life to sharing the good news of his wonderful Savior.

**Thought Question:** What practical steps can we take to prepare our minds for action?

**Activity:** Select a few Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs for class discussion. Depending on the size of the class, you can break into small groups for discussion or stay together to discuss in a larger group. Invite each group to consider a fundamental belief and to discuss how it could be applied in a meaningful way to a current event or issue. Invite each group to share their thoughts with the rest of the class.

STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** The Latin counterpart for the word that Paul uses for ambassador is *legatus*—a word very familiar in the ancient Roman world (2 Cor. 5:20). Diplomatic legates, commissioned by the emperor, personally represented him in foreign lands. Whenever Rome conquered another territory, the legate went with the victorious general to arrange peace terms, determine boundaries, and draw up constitutional provisions. His task was to oversee the process of bringing this new territory and its peoples within the family of the Roman Empire. Discuss with your class how we, as ambassadors of God, have the wonderful privilege of leading people to become citizens of His kingdom and members of His family.

**Activity:** Invite class members to imagine that they are “drawing up the terms” for someone to become a Christian—a member of the family of God. What would the list look like? Discuss one another’s ideas.

Conclude the class today with a period of prayer. Encourage each person to pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our church as we represent Christ in our community.
Cross-Cultural Missions

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “‘Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles’” (Matthew 12:18, NKJV).

How interesting that Jesus spent so much of His earlier years in Galilee, known as “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Matt. 4:15), no doubt named because of the non-Jewish influence in the province. In this region, in Nazareth, Jesus spent the majority of His years before starting His public ministry. Thanks to its position, Nazareth was near major routes traveled by Roman army units, as well as merchant caravans. As a result, Jesus must have been in contact with non-Jews His whole early life (not to mention the time in Egypt).

After His rejection in Nazareth (see Luke 4:16–31), Jesus centered His ministry in the cosmopolitan Galilean city of Capernaum. Contacts with Gentiles and their world significantly impacted His ministry and teaching. Even though He focused on Israel, the wider world was His concern. During the more than three years of His ministry between His baptism and ascension, on at least six occasions Jesus had direct contact with persons from Gentile nations. We will look this week at the Gospel accounts of these contacts.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 22.*
The Samaritan Woman

In the time of Jesus, ancient Israel was divided into three provinces: Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Samaria was situated between Galilee and Judea. The Samaritans worshiped the God of Israel, but they also worshiped pagan gods imported from foreign lands. As an initial mission field, Samaria was ideal for the apostles because it was geographically close to Israel.

Read John 4:4–30. What can we learn from this story about how Jesus witnessed to non-Jews? In what ways did Jesus step outside the bounds of tradition in order to reach out to this woman?

The Samaritan woman was alert, was well-informed about the history of her people, and asked intelligent questions. She led the conversation with her questions. Jesus, however, responded to her questions and statements with the things that would benefit the woman spiritually. The only point where Jesus changed the conversation was when He told her to bring her husband, knowing that she wasn’t married but had been with several men. Of course, asking her to do this opened the way for Him to reach out to her, however uncomfortable she had become. Nevertheless, by doing this, He was able to witness to her in a powerful way.

Also, we shouldn’t miss what happened in John 4:27. The disciples were surprised because Jesus was talking with this foreign woman. Jesus transgressed a few Jewish customs: first, asking a Samaritan woman to give Him a drink; second, being alone with her. In Israel, a man could not be seen alone with a woman unless she was a family member. Jesus followed Jewish customs when in Israel. However, in Samaria, He was outside Jewish territory and not bound by Jewish traditions, even though as we have seen elsewhere, Jesus distinguished between human-made traditions and the commands and precepts of God.

How far out of your own “comfort zone” are you willing to go in order to minister to others? How far should you go?
The Roman Army Officer

Read Matthew 8:5–13 (see also Luke 7:1–10). What does this story teach us about how even the largest cultural divides can be breached for the sake of the gospel?

In Capernaum, a Roman officer of centurion rank (commander of 100 men) sought out Jesus. The Jews resented the occupying Roman army, and many Romans hated the Jews. Despite this vast cultural and political divide, we can see the close relationship here between this Roman and the Jews.

In Luke’s account, he said that the centurion went to the “elders of the Jews” (Luke 7:3, NIV) to ask them to bring Jesus. And, fascinatingly enough, they did just that, asking Jesus to come heal the man’s servant. Who were these elders? The text doesn’t say, but it seemed to have related to Jesus differently than did some of the other leaders.

Meanwhile, the centurion was obviously a man of faith; his words to Jesus, “speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed” (Matt. 8:8), were an incredible testimony to his belief in Jesus. The centurion “did not wait to see whether the Jews themselves would receive the One who claimed to be their Messiah. As the ‘light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world’ (John 1:9) had shone upon him, he had, though afar off, discerned the glory of the Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 317.

The centurion understood and respected Jewish religious sensitivities. He knew that according to law a Jew was not allowed to enter a Gentile’s house; so, he requested that Jesus minister from a distance. The servant was healed. The faith of the Gentile centurion was rewarded. Jesus pointed out that the centurion was a prototype of the great day when people from all over the world would join the Jewish patriarchs at the Messianic banquet.

Whatever else one can take from the accounts of this healing, we can see that vast cultural divides were not able to keep the Jews and this Roman apart. What lessons can we take from this about how we must learn to transcend whatever cultural differences we can (in good conscience) in order to reach out to others?
Dealing With Demons

Read Luke 8:26–39 and Matthew 15:21–28. How do these stories help us to understand how Jesus related to non-Jews? How do we understand Jesus’ words to the Canaanite woman? Also, what lessons should the disciples have picked up, seeing Jesus minister to those who were not part of the “covenant people”?

The region of the Gadarenes was an area formerly dominated by Greece, but it had become part of the Roman province of Judaea. The man in the tombs was obviously possessed, and his possession manifested itself in horrific ways. He truly needed divine aid, which he got.

That this liberation took place in Gentile territory is confirmed by the presence of the pigs. It is interesting to notice the reaction to this economic loss when the pigs drowned; the townspeople asked Jesus to leave their territory. Jesus in turn asked the healed man to stay. He was to witness to his own people about Jesus; no doubt, too, his changed life, even more than his words, would be a powerful testimony.

In the next incident, the child in the region of Tyre and Sidon was “‘demon-possessed and suffering terribly’” (Matt. 15:22, NIV). Her mother, a Canaanite, illustrated the cultural melting pot of that region. Her Canaanite ancestors were displaced from their land when Israel inherited it under the leadership of Joshua. Here, again, we see Jesus reaching out to those who weren’t of Israel proper.

In talking to her, Jesus used somewhat harsh language, likening her people to dogs, but it tested her faith and showed her humble willingness to get the help she needed.

“The Saviour is satisfied. He has tested her faith in Him. By His dealings with her, He has shown that she who has been regarded as an outcast from Israel is no longer an alien, but a child in God’s household. As a child it is her privilege to share in the Father’s gifts. Christ now grants her request, and finishes the lesson to the disciples.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 401.

The lesson was that, contrary to their understanding, the work of the gospel is not just for the Jews but is to go to other nations, as well.
Ten Lepers

**Read** Luke 17:11–19. What lessons are here for us, regardless of our nationality or origins?

Notice first that the unfortunate men all knew Jesus. They called Him by both name and title, pleading for intervention. What’s fascinating, too, is that they were not cleansed right then and there. They were told simply to go and present themselves to the priests, as specified in Leviticus 14:2. The fact that they just turned around and went showed that they believed in Him and His power to heal them.

Only the Samaritan, though, expressed appreciation for what Jesus had done. The nine did not forget to go to the priests, but they neglected to give thanks to their Healer. The Samaritan, as the text reads, turned around even before he got to the priests. Though the text doesn’t say that the other nine were Jews, the location makes it very likely; besides, the fact that Luke specifically mentioned that he was a Samaritan, and that Jesus called him “this stranger” (Luke 17:18), makes it likely that the other nine were, indeed, Jews. Although Jews normally had no dealings with the Samaritans, their malady transcended those barriers. Common misfortune and tragedy, what Albert Schweitzer termed “the fellowship of suffering,” had broken down an ethnic divide. Their common need for cleansing, healing, and saving had brought them, collectively, to Jesus.

Nevertheless, Samaritans and other foreigners were not the immediate goal for Jesus’ ministry—“‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel’” (Matt. 15:24, NIV). He planned first to establish a strong mission base among the Jews. Throughout His ministry, however, He gave His followers evidence that the gospel should go to the whole world. Although this point became clear only after His resurrection, even before then Jesus did things that were to open the minds of the disciples to the idea that world mission would become their main task.

Though all these men showed faith, only one turned around and thanked the Lord for what he had received. What does this tell us about the reasons that praise and thanksgiving are so important for faith? What are the things you have to be thankful for? Think about how much happier you’d be if you constantly kept them before you, and what better way than by thanking God for all that you have to be thankful for?
The Greeks and Jesus

“The Greeks came only days before Jesus’ crucifixion. They no doubt were amazed by His words about His suffering, death, and final victory. (The voice from heaven gave them something to think about, as well.) Jesus would have been encouraged by their desire to “see” Him. Their approach signaled the beginning of world evangelization. It was acknowledged even by the Pharisees, who had exclaimed, “The world has gone after Him” (John 12:19, NKJV).

What we see here are men, outside of Judaism, wanting to come to Jesus. What a sign that the world was ready for His atoning death! These Greeks, representing the nations, tribes, and peoples of the world, were being drawn to Him. Soon the Savior’s cross would draw the people of all lands and in all subsequent times to Him (vs. 32). The disciples would find the world ready to receive the gospel.

Read John 12:20–32. What is Jesus saying about losing your life in order to keep it? Why would He say that in this immediate context? How have you experienced just what He is talking about?
Further Study: “‘I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’” (Matt. 8:11, 12, NIV). Though these words were spoken in a particular context, in reference to a particular people, we shouldn’t miss the principle. Those who have been given great privileges, great advantages in terms of spiritual and theological truths, need to be careful. It’s easy to become complacent about truths that we have been given, truths that in some cases no one else is preaching and teaching. First, we need to make sure that we keep ourselves grounded in these truths; then, second, we need to be willing to teach these to those who don’t know them.

Discussion Questions:

1. The Cross has shown us the absolute universality of all humanity. Before God we are all sinners, and we all need grace for salvation. Nevertheless, many groups often do see themselves as superior to others. This is common and has been all through history. What about yourself and your own ethnic, social, financial, or cultural group? In what ways do you harbor (and don’t fool yourself—you do harbor) a sense of superiority to others different from you? What’s wrong with that attitude, and how can you learn at the foot of the Cross to change it?

2. The woman at the well went back and witnessed to her own people about Jesus. What does this teach us about missions and the importance of using those of a particular culture to reach their own people?

3. The Greeks wanted to see Jesus. No doubt they had heard about Him or had themselves seen some of the things He had done. Jesus, of course, is now in heaven, and the church, His people, represent Him here on earth. What does this mean for us in terms of the kind of life we live and the kind of witness we present?
A year after Bhudroy became a Seventh-day-Adventist Christian, his elder brother died. Then Shanti became seriously ill with malaria. She didn’t respond to medicines, and she became increasingly ill. When the fever left, Shanti’s mother-in-law accused her of pretending to be ill. Shanti pleaded with God, “Why are You allowing me to suffer so in this family?” Even her husband grew discouraged and blamed God for their troubles.

Shanti’s mother learned of her daughter’s grave illness from some other villagers, so she set out to see her daughter. Shanti’s mother-in-law greeted Shanti’s mother with a demand: “Take her home with you. She is no good to us.” Shanti’s mother took her daughter home, but her baby, Reena, remained with Shanti’s husband and mother-in-law.

Shanti’s mother took her to the hospital, where doctors could treat her properly. Meanwhile Shanti’s mother-in-law was sure that Shanti would die and began looking for a new wife for Bhudroy. But Bhudroy told them he was not interested in marrying someone else.

In time, Shanti recovered from her illness but, instead of returning to her mother-in-law’s home, she stayed with her mother.

Meanwhile her sister-in-law, whose husband had died, demanded that she be given her share of the family’s land for her three sons. While she had a right to the family land, her demand put her parents-in-law into crisis, because they could not survive without their land. The selfish daughter-in-law wanted everything she could get for herself and her sons. Slowly Shanti’s mother-in-law realized that Shanti had been a faithful daughter-in-law while her other daughter-in-law had been selfish and demanding. She asked Bhudroy to go bring Shanti home.

Bhudroy went to visit Shanti. He told her of his mother’s change of heart and invited her to return home with him. Shanti was eager to see her little girl again. She packed her things and returned with her husband.

She was overjoyed to find that her mother-in-law had changed so much. The older woman welcomed Shanti back into the home and treated her with respect and kindness. Shanti was determined to be the best Christian she could, hoping that her once cruel mother-in-law would give her life to Jesus. Several years later, Shanti’s mother-in-law gave her life to Christ before she died.

Bhudroy also renewed his commitment to Christ, and now the family lives together in peace as Christians. The faithful young bride had survived trials and taunting and led her husband and parents-in-law to Jesus.

Reena Murmu is the eldest daughter of Shanti and Bhudroy. She would like to become a physician.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Matthew 21:42, 43

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand key biblical principles that should guide cross-cultural mission.

**Feel:** Foster compassion for people from other cultures who have not heard the good news about Jesus.

**Do:** Find ways to support cross-cultural mission through prayer, finances, and, where possible, personal involvement.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Across All Cultures**

**A** Although Jesus spent most of His time ministering in Israel, on several notable occasions He ventured into non-Jewish territory and ministered to Gentiles. What principles of cross-cultural ministry can you find in the way Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman *(John 4:4–30)*?

**B** Is it possible to share the good news in another cultural setting without carrying your own cultural baggage with you? What steps can we take to make sure the gospel is expressed in a way that connects with a person’s cultural setting?

II. **Feel: Open-Heart Mission**

**A** What sorts of feelings could make someone reluctant to be involved in cross-cultural mission? What biblical principles could help change those feelings?

**B** How important is empathy for people in cross-cultural mission, and why is it not sufficient to just share doctrinal truth?

III. **Do: Becoming Involved**

**A** You don’t have to travel overseas to encounter a different culture. What are some of the different cultures you encounter in your neighborhood?

**B** What practical steps can you take to become involved in cross-cultural mission?

**Summary:** The good news of salvation was never intended to be limited to the Jewish people; it is good news for all people. As Christ’s followers, we are invited to join Him in His mission to all peoples.
Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Matthew 8:11*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The gospel commission is a call to every believer to be involved in the task of making disciples among all people groups. Jesus’ command to go is not a suggestion; rather, it should be a way of life for every one of His followers.

**Just for Teachers:** The apostle John paints a compelling picture of the results of God’s cross-cultural mission on earth in Revelation 7:9. Explore with your class the broad cross-cultural vision of God in which each one of us is invited to participate.

**Opening Discussion:** “Everything you’re sure is right can be wrong in another place,” says a character in Barbara Kingsolver’s book, *The Poisonwood Bible*, in which she describes a Baptist missionary family in the Belgian Congo in the late 1950s. In one scene, Nathan, the missionary pastor, tries preaching in the local dialect. “‘Tata Jesus is bangala!’ ” he declares, meaning to say, “Jesus is ‘precious.’ ” The problem is, in the Kikongo language, emphasis is all-important. Unfortunately, he doesn’t get it right, and his American accent changes the meaning of *bangala* from “precious” to “poisonwood tree.” The book is a ruthless attack on insensitive missionaries exporting culture along with their Christianity. This book is just one of many examples in popular culture where Christian mission is criticized.

Discuss the extent to which words such as *conversion*, *proselytizing*, and *missionary* have become dirty words where you live. How can we explain how something so wonderful—telling people about God’s plan for their salvation—is often treated with such suspicion and hostility? What are some basic steps we should take to guard against insensitivity—whether our mission is to a foreign country or within our local neighborhood?

►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** The incarnation of Christ signals a radical shift—in focus and activity—in the divine mission plan. As you lead your class today, try to draw out these two ideas: (1) that Christ came to affirm and continue the Father’s mission, and (2) Christ’s coming also jolted that mission plan into a brand-new era. Most important, lead your
class to reflect on how Christ invites each one of us to partner in His mission.

Bible Commentary

I. Jesus Breaks Down Cultural Walls. (Review Matthew 8:5–13 with your class.)

The incredible faith of the non-Jewish centurion astonished Jesus, leading Him to comment, “‘I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven’” (Matt. 8:11, NKJV). In Luke’s account of Jesus’ remark, he underscores even further that salvation extends in all directions: “‘People will come from east and west and north and south,’” and “‘there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last’” (Luke 13:29, 30, NIV).

Sitting at the heavenly feast will be giants of the faith: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As we know, Abraham was the father of many nations (Gen. 17:4–6), and it’s appropriate that he should be seated with people from every language, tribe, and people.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus made clear the good news extended to all peoples, and He prefigured the heavenly feast each time He sat down to eat with sinners. Jesus’ open-table policy riled the Jewish leaders. And, of course, when He threw the moneychangers out of the temple, He quoted from Jeremiah: “‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’” (Mark 11:17, NIV)—not just for the Jews.

Although God called a special people in Old Testament times, it was always His intention that they would share His Word and love to the ends of the earth. As His followers, we are called to reach out across cultures to all His sons and daughters—every kindred, tongue, and people.

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul shares a vision of God’s salvation going to people in places unreached by the gospel message. To make his point, he reaches back some eight hundred years and quotes Hosea: “‘Those who were not my people I will call “my people,” and her who was not beloved I will call “beloved.” And in the very place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” there they shall be called children of the living God’” (Rom. 9:25, 26, NRSV).

Consider This: In what ways are these passages a corrective to cultural or spiritual arrogance? The first followers of Jesus clearly needed to catch a broader vision for mission. But in what ways do we today need to be reminded that Jesus is the Savior of all people, everywhere?

II. Jesus for All (Review Luke 4:21–28 with your class.)
In the synagogue of His hometown, Nazareth, Jesus quotes from the story of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7–24) and the story of Naaman (2 Kings 5). He uses these stories to illustrate how God had found faith outside of Israel, not inside it—and makes the point that, in the same way, He would not find faith in His own hometown. This made the people so angry that they tried to kill Him.

**Consider This:** In what ways could Jesus’ words in this passage serve as a warning to us as Seventh-day Adventists?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** “Contextualization” is a term used by missiologists that’s widely misunderstood. Many people think of compromise and watering down the message when they see that word. However, rightly understood, it is a fundamental and essential principle of mission, demonstrated by Jesus, the apostle Paul, and others in the Bible. Basically, it means “dressing” the message in a way that will be understood and meaningful to people in different cultural settings. It reminds us that a method of sharing the gospel that works in North America, for example, may not be appropriate in the middle of China, and vice versa.

Ellen G. White points out: “The people of every country have their own peculiar, distinctive characteristics, and it is necessary that men should be wise in order that they may know how to adapt themselves to the peculiar ideas of the people and so introduce the truth that they may do them good.”—Testimonies to Ministers, p. 213.

**Life Application:** Jesus challenged His listeners by focusing on the “camels” of faith and relegating the “gnats” to lesser status. This is also an essential part of contextualization—identifying eternal principles that can be applied no matter what the cultural context.

Survey members of your class by asking, “Have you ever felt confusion between what’s vital to your faith and what’s culturally driven?” Ask those who are comfortable to share their experience. How did they resolve the issue and come to a deeper understanding of what obedience to God requires?

**Thought Questions:** Over the years, educationalists have debated whether teachers should tailor their efforts in the classroom to the student (focusing on individual needs and learning styles) or concentrate on the curriculum (focusing mainly on the content of what the student needs to learn). Could there be a spiritual analogy here? How do we find a balance between adapting our mission approach to the “student” (being sensitive to their cultural background and
understanding) and delivering the “curriculum” (the truths of Scripture)?

In trying to contextualize our mission approach, how do we make the message understandable and meaningful, yet avoid the pitfall of syncretism—where our message becomes so buried in the audience’s beliefs and practices that it loses any meaning?

STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Don and Caroline Richardson, missionaries to the Sawi people of Irian Jaya, found that just “preaching Jesus” as they would back in America wouldn’t work. They discovered that the Sawi elevated treachery to a virtue. So, in the story of Jesus, Judas emerges as the hero.—*Don Richardson, Peace Child, 4th ed. (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2005).*

Seemingly thwarted, the Richardsons finally discovered that the Sawi made tribal peace by having a father in each of the warring villages give one of their children as a peace child to their enemies. Immediately they saw the opportunity to tell the gospel story in terms the people could understand—Jesus, the peace Child, given by the loving Father. The missionaries contextualized the message, without compromising it, and finally they were able to convey the meaning of Jesus in terms the people could understand. In the following activity, explore the process of contextualization with the class.

**Activity:** Review with the class some of the parables Jesus told. Guide them in observing the way in which He adapted His stories according to the particular audience. For example, when talking to farmers, He told stories about wheat, animals, and sowing seed. He told fishermen stories about fish and nets. Invite the class to consider what kind of parables Jesus might tell today. If you have access to a blackboard or chalkboard, make a list of different audiences, such as the following (feel free to adapt for your local area):

1. Plumbers
2. Teachers
3. Computer programmers
4. Accountants
5. Doctors
6. Carpenters
7. Athletes

Ask the class to consider what sort of parables Jesus might tell to each audience to connect spiritual truth to their daily lives.
Lesson 9

*August 22–28

(page 72 of Standard Edition)

Peter and the Gentiles

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call’” (Acts 2:38, 39, NKJV).

Peter was the first apostle to proclaim salvation to the Gentiles. He continued to provide leadership in the church for a number of years after its foundation, even after Paul became the missionary to the Gentiles par excellence. Peter, together with Paul, helped the early church and its leadership, mostly Jews, understand the universality of the Great Commission.

Peter worked to bring about an integrated church, uniting Gentile converts, who were unaware of the finer points of Jewish culture, and Jewish converts whose customs tended to take on the character of divine absolutes. Like all pioneer missionaries, Peter had to discriminate between unchangeable divine absolutes and those practices that are cultural and relative and of no important consequence in the life of the believer, whether Jew or Gentile. Thus, it was Peter who, at the Jerusalem Council, declared of the Gentiles that God “put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9) and who helped work through the issues that threatened the early church’s unity.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 29.

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Peter at Pentecost

Jesus’ last words before His ascension were of a missionary nature: “Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Here, again, we see the mandate to spread the gospel into all the world. Only ten days later, this calling started to unfold, with Peter playing a key role.

Read Acts 2:5–21. How does this event show God’s intent for the gospel to go worldwide and the role that the Jews were to have in that proclamation?

The Great Commission found its first fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit had as its aim the evangelization of the world. This initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit gave great results on the Day of Pentecost. This was, however, only a foretaste of much greater results to come in the years that followed.

Peter’s sermon contained a few main points that remain relevant even today:

First, Old Testament prophecies and promises are fulfilled in Christ (Acts 2:17–21), a truth revealed through the powerful works and signs accompanying His ministry, as well as through His death and resurrection (vss. 22–24).

Second, Jesus was exalted, placed at God’s right hand, and is now Christ (the Messiah) and Lord of all (vss. 33–36). In Him, all who repent and are baptized will receive forgiveness for sins (vss. 38, 39).

Here we see the active and vocal disciple Peter standing up for his belief in Jesus. He was called by Jesus to be a strong leader in the church’s earliest days. Although less cosmopolitan, efficient, and adaptable to other cultures and religions than was the apostle Paul (see Gal. 2:11–14), Peter opened the way for the gospel to go to about fifteen nations, as he preached to Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem. In this way, he used a very important bridge to bring the good news to the Middle Eastern world of his time.

What does the story of Pentecost reveal about our utter need of the Holy Spirit in our lives? What choices can we make in order to be more attuned to the Spirit’s leading?
The Conversion of Cornelius: Part 1

Read Acts 10:1–8, 23–48. What does the story of this Gentile becoming a follower of Jesus teach us about salvation and witness?

The conversion of Cornelius, a pagan officer in the Roman army along with his household, has been termed the Gentile Pentecost. It is a crucial story in Acts, one that addresses the most divisive issue facing the early church: Can a Gentile become a Christian without first becoming a Jew?

The Roman army’s headquarters for all of Judea, including Jerusalem, was Caesarea. Cornelius would have been one of six centurions commanding the 600 soldiers that made up the Italian cohort based there. His name indicated his descent from an illustrious Roman military family that had earlier produced the commander who had defeated Hannibal, a Carthaginian general who wreaked havoc against Rome for years. More important, Cornelius was a God-fearing man who enjoyed spiritual fellowship with his family, prayed regularly, and was generous to those who were needy. God heard his prayers and sent an angel with a special message to him.

“Believing in God as the Creator of heaven and earth, Cornelius revered Him, acknowledged His authority, and sought His counsel in all the affairs of life. He was faithful to Jehovah in his home life and in his official duties. He had erected the altar of God in his home, for he dared not attempt to carry out his plans or to bear his responsibilities without the help of God.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 133.

Notice, too, what happened when Cornelius finally met Peter. He bowed down and worshiped him, an act that must have appalled Peter. Thus, what we can see is that this Gentile, favored of God, a devout man, still had a lot of truth to learn, even at the most basic level; no doubt, though, he was about to learn it.

What are some of the traits of Cornelius, even in his ignorance, that we all would do well to follow in our own spiritual lives?
The Conversion of Cornelius: Part 2

“Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right’” (Acts 10:34, 35, NIV). Though these words to us are not that revolutionary, for them to have come from the mouth of Peter was an astonishing confession. We have to remember who Peter was, where he came from, and the attitudes that he had and still struggled with. (See Gal. 2:11–16.) No doubt, though, his experience with Cornelius helped him to see even more clearly the error of his ways and helped him to get a better picture of what God intended to do with the gospel message.

Read Acts 10:33. What did Cornelius say to Peter that showed that he understood, even despite so much ignorance, that following the Lord also meant obeying Him?

____________________________________________________
____________________________________________________
____________________________________________________

Read Acts 11:14. What does it say that shows us the need to spread the gospel, even to such godly men like Cornelius?

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____________________________________________________
____________________________________________________

How does Romans 2:14–16 help us to understand what was going on with Cornelius?

____________________________________________________

As we have seen, Cornelius was a Gentile who “feared God” (Acts 10:2), though he still had a lot to learn (don’t we all?). Nevertheless, his fasting, his praying, and his giving of alms all revealed a heart open to the Lord; and thus, when the time was right, God worked miraculously in his life.

An important point to remember in this account is how, though an angel appeared to him, the angel didn’t preach the gospel to him. Instead, the angel opened the way for Cornelius to meet Peter, who then told him about Jesus (see Acts 10:34–44). We can see here an example of how the Lord uses humans as His messengers to the world.
Peter’s Vision

As we saw yesterday, by the time Peter made contact with Cornelius, he had a change in attitude regarding the Gentiles that other Jewish believers hadn’t yet understood (see Acts 10:44, 45). What happened that changed Peter?

Read Acts 10:9–22 and 11:1–10. What do the passages say about how entrenched Peter’s wrong attitudes were that it took something like this to open his mind?

Cornelius’s conversion and Peter’s role in the witnessing task were so important for the mission of the church that God communicated in a supernatural way with both the missionary and the missionary’s eventual host: while an angel visited Cornelius, Peter was given a vision.

Also, Peter stayed in Joppa with a tanner (Acts 9:43; 10:6, 32), a detail that we don’t want to miss. Tanning and tanners were repulsive to the Jews since they handled dead bodies and used excreta in their processes. Tanneries were not allowed in towns; note that Simon’s was located “by the sea side” (Acts 10:6).

Peter’s stay with a tanner indicated that already, before his vision, he realized that some of his previous attitudes were at cross-purposes with the gospel. Both Peter and the family of Cornelius needed to shed some cultural baggage. All people, represented by “all kinds of . . . animals” (NKJV) in Peter’s vision, are God’s children.

Peter’s call to witness to Cornelius implied that, although all people are acceptable to God, not all religions are equally acceptable. Cornelius was already a “religious” man, like nearly everyone else in ancient society. As a soldier, he would be acquainted with the worship of Mithra, and as an officer, he would have taken part in emperor worship. But these were not acceptable to God.

There is a lesson here today for those who approach non-Christian religions on the basis of equality with Christianity. Although sometimes it is done in a spirit of political correctness, such an attitude leads to a watering-down of the biblical claims of Christian uniqueness and finality.

How do we show respect for people whose faith we believe is wrong, without giving the impression that we respect those beliefs ourselves? What is the difference between respecting people as opposed to respecting their beliefs?
The Jerusalem Decree

Early success of the mission to the Gentiles raised some crucial questions for the early church regarding what requirements should be expected of Gentile converts—those grafted into the faith (Rom. 11:17). Tensions always appear when people from other religions and cultures join an established believing community. In this case, Jewish Christians, with their high regard for the requirements of the Old Testament laws and rituals, assumed that Gentile converts would accept and obey these laws and rituals. The main focus was circumcision, the fundamental indication of entry into the Jewish community for males, symbolizing compliance with all the requirements of Judaism. Should Gentile converts to Christianity be required to undergo circumcision? Some Jewish Christians in Judea certainly thought so and stated their conviction in stark theological language: to them it was essential for salvation.

**What happened at the Jerusalem Council that helped settle this important issue?** Acts 15:1–35.

Although the question of circumcision was the main reason for the Jerusalem Council, it dealt with a range of cultural practices that the gospel did not require of its converts. The decree of the council (vss. 23–29) provided a common platform where Jewish and Gentile Christians could coexist in fellowship. Jewish core values were respected, but Gentiles were allowed to avoid circumcision. The council’s decision was both practical and theological. It set a pattern for the church to deal with issues and problems before they became too divisive. Experienced missionaries learn to identify core Christian belief issues and keep the focus on them as opposed to getting bogged down with things that are not essential to the faith.

**What lesson can we take away from the Jerusalem Council that could help the church today as it deals with controversial issues?**

**What did they do that can serve as a model for us?**

“Peter told of his astonishment when, in speaking the words of truth to those assembled at the home of Cornelius, he witnessed the Holy Spirit taking possession of his hearers, Gentiles as well as Jews. The same light and glory that was reflected upon the circumcised Jews shone also upon the faces of the uncircumcised Gentiles. This was God’s warning that Peter was not to regard one as inferior to the other, for the blood of Christ could cleanse from all uncleanness. . . .

“Peter’s address brought the assembly to a point where they could listen with patience to Paul and Barnabas, who related their experience in working for the Gentiles.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 193, 194.

Discussion Questions:

1. Peter’s vision has been explained to support the argument that the dietary laws of the Old Testament are no longer valid—specifically, as justification for eating unclean meat. The meaning of the vision was clearly explained by Peter himself: “I should not call any [human] common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). The vision was not, therefore, about diet but about acceptance of other humans as God’s children, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, occupation, or religion. Why, though, do people use this as an argument in regard to diet? What should this tell us about how careful we need to be in how we handle Scripture?

2. Dwell more on Romans 2:14–16. How should we as a church relate to this idea in terms of missions? That is, why do we need to preach to those who have the law written in their hearts?

3. In Thursday’s study, we talked about the Jerusalem Council as a model for the church today. Read over the texts about the council (Acts 15:1–35). What are some specific things it did that provide a template for the church today? For instance, look at such things as (1) personal testimonies about witness, (2) the role of the gospel, (3) the role of the Scriptures, (4) the role of missions, and (5) how the people related to each other in the council.
Chen lived in a slum-like camp for displaced persons in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

One day Chen walked past a house and heard someone speaking to a group of people. Curious, she stared through a window. Was this a church? She wanted to study English, and she had heard that churches often teach English. She waited outside until the program ended. A man walked out and introduced himself as Pastor Hang.

“I want to learn English,” Chen said. Pastor Hang told her that an English class met at the house church on Wednesday afternoons.

On Wednesday afternoon, Chen returned for the English class. The teacher started the class with prayer, and when the class ended, he invited Chen to visit the church on Sabbath. She came to the worship service but knew nothing about God and didn’t understand the sermon. Nevertheless, she wanted to return. She continued studying English on Wednesdays. Two weeks later, Pastor Hang invited Chen to a Bible class on Friday afternoon. She enjoyed learning more about the Christian God and invited Pastor Hang to come to her home to teach her.

Chen told the pastor that she was having marital problems. She explained that she and her husband were not legally married, and her mother-in-law was trying to separate them so that her son could marry a Chinese girl. The couple moved, but then her mother-in-law took their two little sons and refused to allow Chen to see them.

And then her husband began refusing to give her money from his earnings to buy food. The pastor listened sympathetically to Chen’s sad story; then he offered a possible solution. He had noticed that Chen was a natural salesperson. He invited her to sell Seventh-day Adventist books to earn some money. Chen agreed to try. The pastor continued to study the Bible with her and led her to Jesus.

He taught her how to sell the books. Chen followed his directions, but she wasn’t able to sell any books. The best places to sell books are in restaurants early in the morning and during the evening meals. But it was the rainy season, and Chen could not get to these restaurants easily.

When the rains stopped, Chen prayed, “God, if You are the true God, if You want me to follow You, please show Your power by helping me to sell some books tonight.” Then she set a goal to sell three or four books for one dollar each.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Acts 11:1–10

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** Recognize that even after he or she has accepted Jesus as his or her Savior, there are still many things to learn and unlearn.
- **Feel:** Cherish the promise that God will help him or her to grow in the Christian life and to encourage our participation in His mission.
- **Do:** Resolve to find opportunities to move outside the Christian community to share God’s love with those who may never set foot in a Seventh-day Adventist church.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know:** Learning From Jesus

- **A** Peter’s life was a continual learning experience. How do you think Peter’s future ministry was affected by His betrayal of and forgiveness by Jesus?
- **B** Even the thought of eating unclean foods was anathema to Peter, an observant Jew. How can we make sure that we are open to God’s leading and willing to be pushed out of our comfort zones, if necessary?
- **C** In Cornelius’s home, Peter ate for the first time with Gentiles, which was a confronting experience for him. But why should this have been difficult for Peter when he had often seen Jesus sit down to eat with “sinners”?

II. **Feel:** Facing the Unexpected

- **A** Describe how you think Peter felt, eating for the first time in the home of a Gentile.
- **B** How can we experience a sense of willingness to make ourselves uncomfortable for the sake of the gospel?

III. **Do:** Ready and Willing

- **A** Pray that God will keep your heart and mind open to new thinking and to the opportunities He opens for you.

**Summary:** The apostle Peter made many mistakes, but his teachable attitude and his openness to God’s leading in his life is a powerful lesson to us today.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Acts 11:17, 18

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The story of what God achieved through Peter’s life and ministry is a comfort and encouragement to Christians today. If God could use stumbling, failing Peter, He can also use us.

Just for Teachers: Peter had a long and bitter experience trying to do things his own way: contradicting Jesus about His death (Matt. 16:22–24), taking his eyes off Jesus and sinking into the waves (Matt. 14:22–32), severing the ear of the high priest’s servant (John 18:10, 11), falling asleep in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–46), and finally denying Jesus just hours before His death (vss. 69–75). Take the opportunity to explore with your class ways in which Peter’s experiences could have impacted his later ministry and perhaps made him more open to the gospel’s going to the Gentiles.

Opening Activity: Compare and discuss these three quotes:

1. “[The church] was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 9.

There is a massive gulf between the Peter of the Gospels and the Peter of the book of Acts. The younger Peter is parochial and narrow-visioned, failing to understand Jesus’ broader mission (Matt. 16:21–23). The older, more spiritually mature Peter has a passion for mission that crosses all geographical and cultural barriers. This Peter declares boldly that God “accepts from every nation the one who fears him” (Acts 10:35, NIV).

Thought Questions: Is your congregation fundamentally outward looking or inward looking? What other types of activities can the church spend its time and money on that may be a distraction from its core mission? What practical steps can we take to stay focused on mission as did the apostle Peter and the early church?
STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Peter was broken by his own cowardice (*Mark* 14:29–31, 66–72), but through the grace and forgiveness of Jesus, he was reborn and given a fresh start (*John* 21:15–17). Within a short time, we see Peter preaching powerfully, healing the sick, and leading people to observe that he had “been with Jesus” (*Acts* 4:13, NIV). Perhaps the old Peter would never have agreed to go to Joppa to socialize with Gentiles. But the new Peter was open to God’s leading. Explore with your class this week how God can accomplish great things with the humblest person.

**Bible Commentary**

1. Simon, Son of Jonah (*Review Acts* 10:1–8 with your class.)

Theologian Robert Wall suggests that the story of the apostle Peter in this passage has many parallels with the story of Jonah.—Robert W. Wall, “Peter, ‘Son’ of Jonah: the Conversion of Cornelius in the Context of Canon,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 9, issue 29 (1987): pp. 79, 90. Of course, a hint that this might be the case is found in Peter’s Aramaic name—Simon Bar-Jonah (*Matt. 16:17, NKJV*).

In both stories, God tells His reluctant messengers to go from Joppa to the *goyim*—the Gentiles (*Jon. 1:2, Acts* 9:43). In Jonah’s case, the mission assignment is to a city—Nineveh. In Peter’s case, the mission assignment is to Cornelius and his family. Both initially protest—Jonah by action (taking a Mediterranean cruise instead) and Peter by word: “‘Surely not, Lord!’” (*Acts* 10:14, NIV). And in order to convince them to take the assignments, God has to intervene in dramatic ways. In Jonah’s case, it takes a storm and a big fish, while for Peter it’s the confronting vision of eating unclean food (*Jon. 2:1, Acts* 10:16). Note also that Jonah stays in the fish for three days, and God had to speak three times in vision to Peter.

God tells Jonah to arise and go (*Jon. 3:2*) and also tells Peter to get up and go (*Acts* 10:20) to deliver His message to the Gentiles. In both cases, the Gentiles believe and are forgiven (*Jon. 3:5, Acts* 10:43). Also, in both cases the conversion experiences generate hostile reactions. In Jonah’s case, ironically, it’s the prophet himself, the one delivering the message, who is upset (*Jon. 4:1*). In Peter’s case, it’s the “circumcised believers” (*Acts* 11:2). And
finally, God steps in to rebut the protests. “‘Should I not have concern for the
great city of Nineveh?’” He asks Jonah (Jon. 4:11, NIV). And “‘who was I to
think that I could stand in God’s way?’” asks Peter (Acts 11:17, NIV).

The parallels remind the reader that Jonah’s God, the One who forgave and saved
Gentiles, is also Peter’s God—a God who continues to extend His grace and mercy
beyond His chosen people. Of course, this is also a theme among the Old Testament
prophets. For example, in describing their mission, Paul and Barnabas quote Isaiah:
“‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the
ends of the earth’” (Acts 13:47, NIV). And Peter himself—a quick learner—says
to Cornelius and his family: “‘All the prophets testify about him that everyone who
believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name’” (Acts 10:43, NIV).

Thus, through Luke’s telling of the story, Cornelius’s conversion demonstrates
“the continuation of God’s merciful work at Nineveh” and that “‘Simon-Peter is
the bar Jonah, who is called by his ancestor’s God to convert the Gentile, and the
people of God should do nothing but praise God and say, “God has granted the
Gentiles repentance unto life” ’” (Acts 11:18).—Journal for the Study of the New
Testament, p. 85.

**Consider This:** How is “the continuation of God’s merciful work,” as seen
in Jonah and Acts, demonstrated in our church? In what way are we focused
on mission? On the other hand, what are some of the ways that demonstrate
that we are more interested in the maintenance of what we have?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** If we are honest, each of us has at least a little
of the early Peter inside us. In humans there is always a tendency to
try to do things our way rather than to trust God completely. But what
an inspiration it is to see the very human Peter transformed into the
instrument whom God used to help catapult the early Christian church
into new mission territory, literally and figuratively. Explore with your
class practical ways that we can strengthen our dependence on God.

**Thought Questions:**

1. What specific things led people to observe that Peter and John had “been
with Jesus” (Acts 4:13)? Would people who observe us and our lives make a
similar observation?
As we look at the mission challenge of rapidly growing cities, the 10-40 Window, the growing secular and postmodern populations, the task is daunting. What can we learn from Peter’s experience that can help us put things in perspective?

What sort of cultural prejudices might we have that are negatively affecting our mission as a church?

Activity: Ask each class member to list every activity that his or her church is involved in. This should include everything from Sabbath School classes to prayer meetings to having the church building maintained (if they have a church building). When they have finished, ask them to label those activities that are aimed at church members and those activities that are aimed at the community. Discuss the results.

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The early Adventist believers had a limited concept of mission. Until around 1870, they saw their mission as only extending to the Atlantic Ocean in the East and the Pacific in the West. But soon they accepted that their calling was to go to all the world.

In 1874, J. N. Andrews, the first official Adventist overseas missionary, aimed his ministry 100 percent to other Christians in Switzerland. It wasn’t until the 1890s that Adventist missionaries were sent to non-Christian lands. Explore with your class ways that we can expand our mission vision to include the “Gentiles” of today (for example, starting work in cities that have been neglected, working to reach people from non-Christian religions, reaching secular college campuses). Remind the class that any innovation or change in approach to mission will be open for criticism. Read Acts 11:2 where the “circumcised believers” criticize Peter because he went into a Gentile house and ate with them. However, discuss their reaction after Peter told them about his experience (Acts 11:18). How can we be open like these believers to new developments in mission?

Activity: Depending on the size of your class, invite members individually or in small groups to think of at least five practical steps they can take in the following week to extend their contact with nonbelievers. It may be strengthening their relationship with a neighbor they already know or initiating a relationship with one they don’t know. Invite the class to share and discuss the ideas they have listed.
World mission was the main concern of the risen Christ during the 40 days between His crucifixion and ascension. The New Testament preserves at least five of His great commission statements: Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47-49, John 20:21, and Acts 1:5-8. Together, they constitute the greatest assignment ever given to Christians. Among the commands was a geographical strategy for mission outreach, from its Jerusalem base to Judea and Samaria, then ultimately to the ends of the earth. This was a command that they, indeed, took seriously and set out to fulfill.

This geographical strategy is prominent in the mission work of Philip the evangelist. According to Acts 8, his work extended outward from Jerusalem in expanding circles. That is, it kept spreading farther and farther as time progressed.

Who was this Philip the evangelist? What does the Word of God tell us about him and the work that he did during the earliest days of the church? Finally, what lessons can we take away for ourselves from the inspired record of this early missionary?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 5.
Philip the Evangelist

“We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18, NKJV). Think about what Paul is saying here, especially as we study this week about Philip the evangelist, someone of whom we know little except for the few references in the Bible. As we will see, though, Philip did a good work, even though most of what he accomplished we know little about. Who are some people whom you know of who have done great things for God but with little outward recognition? Why is it always important to keep the principle of Paul’s words in mind, especially if we do a work that doesn’t garner much acclaim or attention? See also 1 Cor. 4:13.

Philip was a popular Greek name that means “horse lover.” In the New Testament, there are four persons called by that name. Two had the additional name “Herod” and were part of the Herodian ruling family, which exerted a generally harsh rule over Israel in New Testament times. The remaining Philips had outstanding roles in mission.

The first, Philip of Bethsaida, was a disciple who was instrumental in bringing Nathanael to Jesus (John 1:43–46). Later, he brought Greeks to Jesus (John 12:20, 21).

The second Philip was designated “the evangelist” in Acts 21:8, to distinguish him from Philip the disciple. He first appeared in the Jerusalem church as a “table waiter” (Acts 6:2–5) who turned evangelist and missionary (Acts 8:12). His missionary service, extending over twenty years and supplemented by his four prophesying daughters, is mentioned in Acts. We know little else of his background.

“It was Philip who preached the gospel to the Samaritans; it was Philip who had the courage to baptize the Ethiopian eunuch. For a time the history of these two workers [Philip and Paul] had been closely intertwined. It was the violent persecution of Saul the Pharisee that had scattered the church at Jerusalem and destroyed the effectiveness of the organization of the seven deacons. The flight from Jerusalem had led Philip to change his manner of labor, and resulted in his pursuing the same calling to which Paul gave his life. Precious hours were these that Paul and Philip spent in each other’s society; thrilling were the memories that they recalled of the days when the light which had shone upon the face of Stephen upturned to Heaven as he suffered martyrdom flashed in its glory upon Saul the persecutor, bringing him, a helpless suppliant, to the feet of Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, Sketches From the Life of Paul, p. 204.
Waiting on Tables

**Read** Acts 2:44–47, 4:34–37. What kind of picture of the early church is presented here?

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No question, things were for a time going quite well among the early believers. Of course, everyone is fallen, and before long some tensions started to rise.

**Read** Acts 6:1–7. What problems arose, and how did the church deal with those problems?

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Rapid growth of the Jerusalem church brought with it social tension. Philip was appointed to a team to deal with it. Converts included underprivileged and economically challenged persons whose participation in the daily common meals placed increasing demands on church leaders. A murmuring about unfair distribution of food to Greek-speaking widows emerged. This was especially sensitive because of reminders by the Hebrew prophets not to neglect widows and orphans.

To resolve this serious issue, all twelve apostles gathered the believers and proposed the appointment of seven men, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, who would literally “deaconize [Greek for “serve”] tables” so the Twelve could “deaconize the Word” *(see Acts 6:3, 4)*. All seven had Greek names, perhaps indicating a balancing of welfare service for the neglected Greek-speaking widows. Among them was Philip—the first time that this Philip is mentioned in the Bible.

The apostles argued that additional leadership was needed so that they should not be overworked by the administration of the resources necessary for communal life. They emphasized that their call was to devote themselves to the Word of God and to prayer.

**What are some of the potentially divisive issues in your own local church, and how can you allow God to use you to help ease them?**
Philip in Samaria

Saul, a future apostle and missionary, makes his first appearance in the Bible at the stoning of the deacon Stephen, the first Christian martyr. This wave of persecution only helped to further spread the gospel.

Read Acts 8:1–6. What was the result of the persecution of the church in Jerusalem?

Samaria was the first stop on the geographical spread of Christianity. Samaritans considered themselves descendants of Israelites left behind when Assyria exiled most of the Israelites in 722 B.C. The Jews, however, considered Samaritans to be descendants of foreigners that the Assyrians forcibly settled in Israel. Jewish-Samaritan relationships during the New Testament era were marked by tensions and outbreaks of violence. However, as we saw earlier, Jesus had already paved the way for mission work there when He dealt with the woman at the well, who, in turn, began to “evangelize” her own people.

Philip’s call to wait on tables now became that of a missionary evangelist to the Samaritans. As a refugee fleeing religious persecution in Jerusalem, he did not waste his time. He proclaimed that the Messiah, awaited by both Jews and Samaritans, had come (Acts 8:5, 12).

Read Acts 8:6–15. How successful was Philip’s ministry in Samaria?

Philip was used mightily of the Lord in this early foreign mission field. The statement of the woman at the well, that “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:9, NKJV), had now become a thing of the past.

What animosities, grudges, and prejudices that have poisoned your soul need to become “things of the past”? Isn’t it time to let it all go?
With the Ethiopian

According to Acts 8:26–39, Philip’s next contact was with the Ethiopian treasury administrator, bringing mission another step toward “‘the end of the earth’” (Acts 1:8, NKJV). Philip was the link between Samaria and the Gaza mission. From Samaria, north of Jerusalem, Philip was called to Gaza, which is south of the city. His work in the north focused on a group; here it focused on a single person. In Samaria, Philip could proclaim Christ only from the five books of Moses, for this was all the Samaritans accepted; here he could also use the book of Isaiah, probably in Greek translation.

Read Acts 8:26–39. As you read, answer the following questions: What were the texts in Isaiah (from Isaiah 53) that the Ethiopian was reading, and why would they have given Philip the perfect opportunity to evangelize him?

In contrast to Philip’s work in Samaria, where he did miracles (Acts 8:6), all he did with the Ethiopian was study the Bible. What point can we take away from this for ourselves as we minister to others?

The Spirit of the Lord called Philip away as soon as he had finished explaining the “good news about Jesus” and had baptized the Ethiopian. Philip had no opportunity to transmit his beliefs and teachings to his new convert. The Ethiopian was left to embrace the Christian faith in the context of his African culture, guided by the Old Testament and the Spirit of God, which had already been working in him, for he already was a worshiper of the Lord and a believer in His Word.

Philip explained to the Ethiopian crucial Old Testament texts about the death of Jesus. Why must Jesus, His death and resurrection, be central to the message we give to the world? What is our message without Him?
Philip as Evangelist, Father, and Host

Philip, clearly, was anointed to do the Lord’s work. Commentators are divided on what “the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip” (Acts 8:39) means, whether he was simply told to go to Azotus (vs. 40) or was miraculously transported there. Either way, the crucial point for us is that Philip was a man surrendered to the Holy Spirit; and thus, God was able to use him to do a great work for Him.

**Read** Acts 8:40. What does it tell us about Philip that helps us to understand why he was named the “evangelist”?

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**Read** Acts 21:7–10. What can we learn about Philip from these few verses?

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At this stage of the story, we learn that Philip was a family man with four unmarried daughters. Philip’s call out of the deaconate into evangelism involved him in extensive travel. We know about the journey from Jerusalem to Samaria, then on to Gaza, followed by “all the towns” on the 50-mile (80-kilometer) coastline between Azotus and Caesarea. There were probably unrecorded journeys. Like all the pioneering missionaries, he would have been harassed, inconvenienced, and subjected to the “ups and downs” such commitments entail. Still, he managed his family to the extent that four daughters were deemed by the Holy Spirit suitable to receive the gift of prophecy. This testifies to good parenting and true godliness in this pioneering Christian missionary family.

The text reveals that the apostle Paul stayed with Philip “a number of days” (vs. 10, NIV). Twenty-five years earlier, Paul, then named Saul, had been an aggressive and fierce persecutor of the Christians (Acts 9:1, 2). His persecution of Jerusalem believers forced Philip to flee to Samaria (Acts 8:1–5). Now, years later, persecutor and persecuted meet in the home of Philip, who hosts Paul’s visit. What an interesting meeting of brothers and fellow workers with Christ in the great cause of bringing the gospel to the non-Jewish world!

In our work for others, why is it so crucial to never forget our first obligation, our families?

“When they were scattered by persecution they went forth filled with missionary zeal. They realized the responsibility of their mission. They knew that they held in their hands the bread of life for a famishing world; and they were constrained by the love of Christ to break this bread to all who were in need.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 106.

“And when His disciples were driven from Jerusalem, some found in Samaria a safe asylum. The Samaritans welcomed these messengers of the gospel, and the Jewish converts gathered a precious harvest from among those who had once been their bitterest enemies.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 106, 107.

Discussion Questions:

1. As we’ve seen, the gospel breaks down barriers between people. At least, that is the ideal; the reality has at times been radically different. What is it about human beings, even among Christians—among those who understand that we are all the same before God, who understand that the Cross is the great equalizer—that we allow cultural, social, and other barriers to divide us to the great extent that they still do? How can the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which is so universal, discourage such prejudices?

2. As we saw, the persecution of the early church caused believers to flee, and as a result, the gospel started spreading in ways that it might not have done without persecution. Though God was able to bring good out of it, we must remember that religious persecution is never good, never right, never justified. What should our attitude be toward those who are facing religious persecution, even if we don’t agree with their religious beliefs? *See Luke 6:31.*
That night Chen sold five books for five dollars each. She was convinced that God is the true God. But a month later, her husband told her to stop selling books. “Your work is bringing shame on me,” he said.

Chen’s husband demanded that she stop believing in Jesus and stop selling books. “I can’t do that,” she told him. “I believe in Jesus; I have seen His power at work. And I am selling books to feed myself because you refuse to give me any money.”

“If you refuse to give up this nonsense, I will leave you,” he said. But Chen refused to give up her new faith. When she was baptized a few months later, her husband left her and went to live with his mother and his sons.

For several years, Chen has tried to visit her sons, but she hasn’t been allowed to see them. Although her life is difficult, Chen has not let her personal troubles discourage her. She continues to sell literature to support herself and invites people to the church when they show interest in the books she sells. When people are too poor to buy a book, she urges them to come to the church to meet God. She shares her testimony with them and testifies that God is faithful to those who trust Him.

One woman who used to pay Chen to paint her nails asked Chen why she had become a Christian. Chen smiled and told the woman that God is a loving and powerful God, and He answers her prayers. As the two women stood talking outside the woman’s home, the woman realized that one of her precious earrings was missing. “We must find it!” the woman said, feverishly searching in the dirt for the missing jewelry. “I inherited this from my mother. I must find it.”

The two women searched together for the earring. Chen knew that if they didn’t find the earring, the woman might accuse Chen and the church. The earring was found. The woman was so impressed that Chen’s God could help her find her earring that she asked Chen to take her to Chen’s church on Sabbath.

Chen was crushed when her husband told her that he no longer wanted her for his wife. But Chen put her trust in God; and recently she met a Global Mission pioneer, and the two plan to marry. “Truly God has provided for all my needs,” she says with a gentle smile.

Chenghorn Thean is a top literature evangelist and soul winner in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
The Lesson in Brief

►Key Text: Acts 8:26–39

►The Student Will:

**Know:** Understand that God can empower ordinary men and women for mission if they are faithfully committed to Him.

**Feel:** Be assured that God can give him or her the insight and wisdom needed to face challenges in his or her witness for Him.

**Do:** Open his or her heart and mind to God’s voice and recommit to responding to His call to service.

►Learning Outline:

I. **Know: Equipping the Ordinary**

A The early church was blessed and growing, but what happened that clearly showed they were still fallible human beings (Acts 6:1)?

B Philip was one of the deacons appointed to help with this crisis. How did the Holy Spirit later equip him even further—now to minister in Samaria (Acts 8:5–13) and to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–39)?

C Philip was the father of four daughters. How should we balance our priority to care for our family and the call to devote time to mission and service?

II. **Feel: Facing the Unexpected**

A When persecution of the church forced Philip to a city in Samaria, he took the opportunity to witness for his Lord. How do you think you would respond if persecution forced you to flee your home for another country?

B What comfort can we take from the way God worked in Philip’s life to equip him to face new mission challenges?

III. **Do: Available for Service**

A What practical steps could we take toward overcoming our fears and putting aside distractions to become more open to outreach and witness?

B What are the ways in which we are prepared to be available for whatever type of service God calls us to? How can we trust in His power rather than our own abilities?

►Summary: God equips His followers for all types of service and ministry; His only requirement is that we’re willing and open to His leading.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Acts 8:1–40

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Philip’s ministry takes place at a critical time for the early church, as the power of the gospel to reach all peoples begins to be revealed. It’s a time of radical adjustment for the church as the good news, for the first time, goes past Jerusalem and Israel—even, as Jesus foretold, to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). This opens the door to new questions and challenges, and the answers the early church found, and the way it responded, provide valuable lessons for us today as we seek to participate in God’s mission to the world.

Just for Teachers: This lesson introduces us to Philip, a faithful follower of Jesus who is suddenly plunged into an exciting life of missionary service that he could never have imagined. He fled persecution, confronted a sorcerer, preached to unbelievers, cast out demons, witnessed to a high official of the Ethiopian royal court, and discovered what it meant to be surprised daily by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Today, focus on the important mission lessons that can be drawn from the life of Philip. You have the opportunity to awaken in your class a sense of the excitement that gripped the early Christians as they began to understand Christ’s mission mandate.

Opening Discussion: As you read through the book of Acts, it becomes clear that there’s no way to stop the gospel. It finds its way to Macedonia, Ephesus, Damascus, and even to the heart of pagan Rome. Early in Acts, the apostle Peter’s rooftop experience signals that God has plans much wider than His Jewish people. And, sure enough, we see, through Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, God’s plans to reveal Himself to the ends of the earth.

For first-century Romans and Greeks, Ethiopians lived literally at the end of the earth. And now the first recorded African convert is returning to his home country, the end of the earth, carrying the good news of Jesus Christ.

Consider This: For the first-century Christians, the ends of the earth meant lands that were geographically distant to Jerusalem. For twenty-first-century Christians, what are our equivalent ends of the earth?
STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: In this week’s lesson, we see the transformation in Philip from deacon to evangelist. In fact, he becomes one of the most effective missionaries in the early Christian church. Take the opportunity to focus your class on those attributes that made Philip an ideal candidate for the mission he was given.

Bible Commentary

I. “Ready to Serve” (Review Acts 6:1–7 with your class.)

The Bible gives us a mere line drawing of Philip rather than a fully realized oil painting. But there are clues to Philip’s character and the depth of his commitment to the gospel of Jesus.

We know that Philip was a deacon and was one of the seven chosen to help sort out the complaints about distribution of food. Diakonos, the Greek word for deacon, is translated elsewhere as “servant” or “assistant.” When Jesus tells His disciples that if anybody wants to be great he or she must be a servant, He uses the word diakonos (Matt. 23:11).

Deacons played a serious and important role in supporting the early church. In his first letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul writes that candidates should first be tested before being given the assignment of deacon (1 Tim. 3:10). They should have proven themselves as good husbands and fathers (vs. 12, NIV) and hold “the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience” (vs. 9, NIV). They must be honest, sincere, “worthy of respect,” and temperate (vs. 11). Obviously, the role of deacon was not something to give just to the first people who put up their hands for the position. Philip was a well-respected, faithful Christian who was willing to serve.

Consider This: How does willingness to serve with humility prepare someone for mission?

II. “Called and Gifted” (Review Acts 21:7–10 with your class.)

When Philip fled persecution in Jerusalem, he was known as Philip the deacon. By the time he returned, he had been transformed into Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8). A lot had happened in the interim. We witness a humble man, willing to serve, who is endowed by the Holy Spirit for an important role (Eph. 4:11). We see that gift in action as he witnesses to the Ethiopian eunuch. We also learn that he was a powerful speaker and had the gift of performing signs and wonders.
Consider This: When Philip fled into Samaria to escape persecution, the Spirit was at work transforming adversity into opportunity. In what ways do we often fail to see the hand of God furthering His purpose through the challenges we face?

III. “Also for the Eunuchs” (Review Acts 8:26–40 with your class.)

A defining feature of Philip’s evangelism seems to be his work among outsiders, reflecting Jesus’ imperative to break down barriers that divide humanity (Eph. 2:14–22). The Ethiopian eunuch may have been rich and powerful in his home country (a region roughly corresponding with today’s Sudan), but among the Jews in Israel, he had two negative marks against him. First, he was a Gentile, and second, he was a eunuch—which automatically barred him from the “assembly of the LORD” (Deut. 23:1, NIV). (Some speculate, however, that the use of the word eunuch here simply could have meant a “court officer.”)

But a beautiful promise is found in the same book that Philip studied with the eunuch: “‘I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off’” (Isa. 56:5, NKJV). Philip was given the privilege of sharing that blessing with the African eunuch.

Consider This: Philip, born and raised within Jewish culture, should have had a natural aversion to associating with a eunuch. What in his ministry experience could have helped break down this barrier of prejudice? What are the lessons here for us today?

IV. “Meeting People Where They Are” (Review Acts 8:6–8, 8:30–35 with your class.)

One of the key principles of biblical missiology is to meet people “where they are.” When ministering to the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip immediately engages him at his point of interest by explaining a passage he is struggling with in the book of Isaiah. Philip takes the opportunity to give a Bible study.

In Samaria, Philip preaches, but he also breaks down barriers and brings joy to the city through the signs he performed (Acts 8:6–8).

Thought Questions: In what ways does effective mission require us to be as knowledgeable about the people we’re trying to reach as the message we’re trying to communicate? How have our mission efforts, in the past, reflected the importance of understanding our “audience”? In practical terms, what does this require from us?
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: With your class, explore the following question: In what ways can Philip’s ministry as deacon and evangelist serve as an example for our ministry today?

Application Questions:

1. Discuss with your class cultural differences that might exist in the church today. For example, a lot has been written recently about Christianity in the “Global North” (the developed countries) and the “Global South” (the less-developed countries). What cultural differences might the church face in these two regions? What principles should guide the church in maintaining unity, despite such differences and backgrounds?

2. Luke, the author of Acts, has a burden for those people living on the margins of society—the neglected, the ostracized, those looked down upon by the mainstream. He shows how the gospel is not only for fine, upstanding Jewish people. It’s also for the poor, the blind, the deaf, the disabled, and the foreigner. In the story of Philip’s ministry to the eunuch, Luke shows how Jesus is good news to a foreigner who would have been totally excluded from the Jewish community and temple. What practical things can we do to make our churches welcome all people?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: New Testament scholar F. Scott Spencer says that religion and society were both “sharply antagonistic to eunuchs in the Mediterranean world” at the time of Philip. So, the story of the Ethiopian eunuch’s conversion, baptism, and entrance into the Christian community would have been seen as “a radical transgression of prevailing cultural boundaries.”—F. Scott Spencer, “The Ethiopian Eunuch and His Bible: A Social-Science Analysis,” Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology, vol. 22, issue 4 (1992): pp. 155–165. In the following activity, invite the class to consider how we treat people on the margins of our community.

Activity: Ask the class who they think might be considered modern-day eunuchs—people who are on the fringes of society or perhaps looked down on by others. If possible, make a list on a chalkboard or sheet of paper. How do we as a church treat this group of people? How does this group view the church? What practical steps can we take to change attitudes and show the spirit of Jesus to them?
Lesson 11

Paul: Background and Call

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Acts 9:1; Phil. 3:6, 8; 1 Cor. 15:9, 10; Acts 9:1–22; 26:16–18; Gal. 2:1–17.

Memory Text: “But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’ ” (Acts 9:15, 16, NIV).

One of the most central figures in the New Testament was Paul, originally Saul of Tarsus. Paul was to the early Christian church what Moses was to the children of Israel. The difference is that while Moses brought God’s people out from the Gentiles in order that Israel would be able to do God’s will, Paul brought God’s Word from Israel to the Gentiles in order that the Gentiles could do the same; that is, to do God’s will.

More is known about Paul than any other first-century Christian. He is especially remembered for his significant contributions that have influenced Christian outreach during the past two millennia. His missionary visits and activities to the nations around the Mediterranean Sea set a powerful example for Christian missions in coming generations.

Paul is credited with lifting biblical absolutes from their Jewish culture, where civil, ritual, and moral laws were so integrated into the fabric of Jewish life that there was hardly any distinction between the Jewish custom and what they thought was God’s everlasting message to the nations.

This week we will take our first look at someone who, other than Jesus Himself, is thought by many to be the most important figure in the New Testament.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 12.
Saul of Tarsus

Saul was born in Tarsus, an important town on the trade route between Syria and western Asia (Acts 22:3). Tarsus was a multicultural center of industry and learning and home for a short time to Rome’s most famous orator and senator, Cicero.

Saul’s parents were Diaspora Jews (Jews who were not living in the land of Israel) from the tribe of Benjamin. His birth name was Saul (Hebrew sha’ul, “asked for [of God]”—though, after he began his mission to the Gentiles (Acts 13:9), he took the name Paul (Latin Paulus, name of a prominent Roman family). Also, since he was a Pharisee, Paul probably had a wife, though we know nothing about her. In fact, we don’t know much about his family at all, though a sister and a nephew are mentioned (Acts 23:16). Paul was also a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25–28).

Saul was probably educated in a synagogue school in Tarsus until 12 years of age, followed by rabbinic study in Jerusalem with the famous Rabban (this honorary title meant “our rabbi”) Gamaliel (vs. 3). Like most Jewish males, he learned a trade—in his case, tent making (Acts 18:3).

As already stated, Paul was a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5). The Pharisees (meaning “separated ones”) were known for insisting that all the laws of God, both those written in the books of Moses, as well as those handed down verbally by generations of scribes, were binding on all Jews. Their strict patriotism and detailed obedience to Jewish laws could make them appear to their fellow Jews as hypocritical and judgmental. Paul, however, did not hide the fact that he and his father were Pharisees (Acts 23:6).

Paul’s pharisaic background was an important element in his successful missionary work for both Jews and Gentiles. It equipped him with detailed knowledge of the Old Testament, the only Scriptures available to early Christians. It also acquainted him with the scribal additions to, and expansions of, the Old Testament laws. He was thus the apostle best qualified to discern between timeless, Scripture-based divine absolutes on the one hand and later Jewish cultural additions, which were not binding, and which therefore could be ignored by Gentile followers of Jesus. As we have seen, this issue would become a very important one in the life of the early church. Today, too, the role of culture in the church creates issues for the church to address.

Which of our Christian beliefs seem to conflict most sharply with the surrounding culture? How do you deal with the conflict without compromising what must never be compromised?
Paul, the Man

Personality traits are an individual’s typical responses to surrounding domestic, cultural, or educational circumstances. Character is the combination of traits, qualities, and abilities that make up what sort of person an individual is.

Read Acts 9:1; Philippians 3:6, 8; 1 Corinthians 15:9, 10; 1 Timothy 1:16; Galatians 1:14; and 2 Corinthians 11:23–33. What do these texts tell us about Paul’s character and personality?

Paul was clearly a man of great conviction and zeal. Before his born-again experience, he used his zeal to persecute the early church. He supported the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58), took the initiative in imprisoning Christian women, as well as men (Acts 8:3), made murderous threats against the disciples (Acts 9:1), and organized a raid on Christians in a foreign country (Acts 9:2, Gal. 1:13).

At the same time, too, we can see how Paul’s zeal and fervency were to be used for good, as he dedicated his life to the preaching of the gospel, despite incredible hardships and challenges. Only a man totally dedicated to what he believed would have done as he did. And though he lost all things for Christ, he counted them as “rubbish,” which comes from a Greek word that means something that is useless, like garbage. Paul understood what was important in life and what wasn’t.

Paul was also a humble man. No doubt, partly from the guilt of his former persecution of Christians, he viewed himself as unworthy of his high calling. And also as someone who preached the righteousness of Christ as our only hope of salvation, he knew just how sinful he was in contrast to a holy God, and such knowledge was more than enough to keep him humble, surrendered, and grateful.

“One ray of the glory of God, one gleam of the purity of Christ, penetrating the soul, makes every spot of defilement painfully distinct, and lays bare the deformity and defects of the human character. It makes apparent the unhallowed desires, the infidelity of the heart, the impurity of the lips.”—Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 29.

None of us is immune to pride. How should focusing on the Cross and what it means cure anyone of that sin?
From Saul to Paul

**Read** Acts 9:1–22, the story of Paul’s conversion. How was this experience linked to his missionary calling? *See also* Acts 26:16–18.

Right from the start, it was clear that the Lord had intended to use Paul to reach both Jews and Gentiles. No other event in Paul’s preparation as missionary and theologian compared in importance to his conversion; indeed, often in his witness he would talk about that experience.

“‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me’” *(Acts 26:16, NIV).* Paul couldn’t preach or teach about what he didn’t know. No, instead he would preach and teach out of his own experiences with, and knowledge of, the Lord, all the time in harmony with the Word of God. *(See Rom. 1:1, 2.)*

**Read** Acts 26:18. What would be the result of Paul’s work?

From this we can see five results of authentic missionary work:
1. Open people’s eyes. Make God and Jesus real, present, active, and appealing.
2. Move from darkness to light, ignorance to knowledge—a core gospel theme. *(See Luke 1:78, 79.)*
3. Turn from the power of Satan to God.
4. Receive forgiveness of sins. The problem of sin has a solution. This is the living, healing, core message of Christians.
5. Receive a place among the sanctified; this means membership in God’s church, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or nationality.

If someone were to ask you, “What about your own experience with Jesus? What can you tell me about Him?” what would you say?
Paul in the Mission Field

“From Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 15:19, NKJV). What crucial element for any kind of mission work can we find in this text? See also 1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2, Gal. 6:14, Phil. 1:15–18.

One thing is certain about all Paul’s missionary endeavors: no matter where he went, the preaching of Christ and Him crucified was central to his message. By making it so, he was being faithful to the call that Christ had first given him, that he should preach about Jesus. The message for missions today is obvious: whatever else we preach and teach (and as Seventh-day Adventists, we have been given so much that needs to be shared with the world), we must keep Christ and Him crucified at the front and center of all our outreach and mission work.

Paul, though, didn’t preach Jesus just as some sort of objective truth and then go on his merry way. Central to his work was to raise up churches, to start Christian communities region by region throughout his part of the world wherever he could. In the truest sense, his work was “church planting.”

There is another element to Paul’s missionary work, as well.

Read Colossians 1:28. What does it sound like Paul is saying? That is, is this evangelism or discipleship?

If one reads many of Paul’s epistles, it’s clear that they often are not evangelistic, at least in the sense that we use the term, that of reaching out to the unchurched. On the contrary, many of the letters were written to established church communities. In other words, included in Paul’s missionary endeavors was the work of pastoral care, edification, and nurturing the churches.

So, we can see at least three central elements to Paul’s missionary activity: proclaiming Jesus, church planting, and nurturing established churches.

Think about the last time you witnessed to someone, in whatever capacity. How central was Jesus to what you said? How can you make sure that you always keep Him central?
Mission and Multiculturalism

“Multiculturalism” is a recent term, first appearing in print in the 1960s, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. For many ancient peoples, there were only two categories of humanity—us and them, our tribe and not our tribe. For Greeks, all non-Greeks were “barbarians.” For Jews, all non-Jews were “Gentiles.”

As we have seen already, the success of the Gentile mission forced the infant church and its leaders to deal with the Jew/Gentile divide. The question, at heart, was whether a Gentile could become a Christian without first becoming a Jew.

Read Galatians 2:1–17. What happened here, and how does this account illustrate, in its own way, the challenge of “multiculturalism” in outreach and mission?

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“When Peter, at a later date, visited Antioch, he won the confidence of many by his prudent conduct toward the Gentile converts. For a time he acted in accordance with the light given from heaven. He so far overcame his natural prejudice as to sit at table with the Gentile converts. But when certain Jews who were zealous for the ceremonial law came from Jerusalem, Peter injudiciously changed his deportment toward the converts from paganism. . . . This revelation of weakness on the part of those who had been respected and loved as leaders left a most painful impression on the minds of the Gentile believers. The church was threatened with division.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 198.

Paul faced the issue with Peter and took a firm stand for what today could be called a multicultural church. His Gentile converts would not have to become Jewish in order to become Christian. Paul’s complex background as a devout Pharisee, student of Rabban Gamaliel, Roman citizen, fundamentalist persecuting zealot, and finally convert and apostle of Jesus Christ, eminently qualified him to distinguish timeless, unchanging divine absolutes on one hand and their temporary cultural and religious vehicles on the other.

How do you distinguish between the essentials of our faith and purely cultural, social, or even personal preferences?
Further Study: “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:22, 23, NIV).

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, NIV. Modern missiology applies the term “contextualization” to Paul’s mission methods stated here. Contextualization is defined as “attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people’s deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture.”—Darrell L. Whiteman, “Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge,” International Bulletin of Missionary Research, vol. 21 (January 1997): p. 2.

“The Jewish Christians living within sight of the temple naturally allowed their minds to revert to the peculiar privileges of the Jews as a nation. When they saw the Christian church departing from the ceremonies and traditions of Judaism, and perceived that the peculiar sacredness with which the Jewish customs had been invested would soon be lost sight of in the light of the new faith, many grew indignant with Paul as the one who had, in a large measure, caused this change. Even the disciples were not all prepared to accept willingly the decision of the council. Some were zealous for the ceremonial law, and they regarded Paul with disfavor because they thought that his principles in regard to the obligations of the Jewish law were lax.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 197.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read 1 Corinthians 9:20. What lessons can we draw from these words that can help us to understand and contextualize how we do mission, or even how we can do personal ministry and witness?

2. Despite Paul’s sinful, even shameful, past, God forgave Paul and used him in a mighty way. How can we learn to forgive ourselves for what we might have done and, claiming the righteousness of Christ as our own, seek to be used mightily of Him, as well?
I wanted to call a meeting of all the clergy in my town in Sri Lanka. I thought we needed to pray and fellowship together. I reviewed the list to be sure I hadn’t forgotten any pastor. I knew that some of the clergy wouldn’t be happy that I was inviting the Seventh-day Adventist pastor, for they thought Seventh-day Adventists were part of a cult, but I wanted to include every minister.

I hadn’t met many of the clergy before, and it was a good chance to talk with them. I was especially interested to learn more about the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When the Adventist pastor told me that his church worshiped on Saturday instead of Sunday, I was intrigued. But my interest was for a purely selfish reason. I decided to visit the Seventh-day Adventist church on Saturday and listen to the pastor’s sermons. Then I could use his material to help me preach a sermon on Sunday. It would save me a lot of work!

The next Saturday I visited the Seventh-day Adventist church. I was warmly welcomed by the pastor and his congregation. I listened closely to the sermon and took careful notes. The following day, I preached the same sermon I had heard in the Seventh-day Adventist church with just a few minor changes. This makes my life so much easier, I thought. The next Saturday, I went to the Seventh-day Adventist church again and took notes from the sermon. I used those notes to preach to my congregation on Sunday. The next week it was the same. Saturday night I went to sleep smiling at my brilliant idea to save work.

During the night, I awakened feeling a sudden sharp pain in my shoulder. I jumped up and turned on the light. I had been bitten by a snake. My wife and I frantically searched for the snake in our room, but we couldn’t find it. My wife took me to the hospital, but we couldn’t tell the doctors what kind of snake it was so they were not able to give me the right antivenom treatment. I lost consciousness, and the doctor thought I had died.

I was taken to the mortuary, and my brother brought a coffin. My family and friends started weeping over my body. After some time, someone touched me. Perhaps they felt warmth where the skin should have been cold, but they checked and found I still had a weak pulse. Excitedly, they rushed me into the hospital’s intensive care unit.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Acts 9:1–22

The Student Will:

Know: Consider ways that the apostle Paul’s past life and experience helped shape his mission to the Gentiles.
Feel: Appreciate how the wonderful grace and forgiveness Paul experienced became the major force in his life, motivating his mission strategy and service.
Do: Recall God’s work in his or her life and recommit to being open to God’s leading.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Apostle Paul’s Call

A The apostle Paul could never forget the origins of His Christian journey on the Damascus Road. Why do you think he kept talking about it? How did it shape the rest of his life?
B How did Paul’s background as a Pharisee and respected Jewish leader help his Christian ministry? Did it hinder it in any way?

II. Feel: The Apostle Paul’s Passion

A Paul often “boasts” of the radical changes God has made in his life (for instance, 2 Cor. 11, 12). Do you feel Paul boasts inappropriately? Do you ever boast of God’s work in your life?
B When you see the tremendous change in Paul from the “worst of sinners” to a great missionary, how does that make you feel? (1 Tim. 1:12–16). Do you see any parallels in your spiritual journey?

III. Do: Never Forget.

A Take regular time to reflect on your own spiritual history—the way that God has guided your life—and to pray that you will be open to His continuing leading for the future.
B Have you shared recently with someone else the difference Jesus has made to you? How does this type of witness impact your spiritual walk?

Summary: The apostle Paul drew strength from his experience of God’s mercy and drew on his intimate knowledge of unbelievers to better communicate with them about Jesus.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Acts 9:15, 16

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: There is no safer, more rewarding place to be than within the circle of God’s will. Having heard God’s call, Paul faithfully responded, and the world has never been the same since.

Just for Teachers: Paul was a mission powerhouse for the early church. He was a formidable organizer, strategist, and spiritual leader. Opposition seemed to shift him into high gear. Paul also seemed to relish the chance to engage with different philosophies and worldviews and to find ways to make the message of Christ known and understood in different contexts. On the other hand, his early life experiences had shaped him, making him humble and continually open to God’s leading. Today, examine the qualities that made Paul so effective in mission. But more important, prompt members of your class to consider: What more did Paul need beyond his innate abilities and obvious skills?

Opening Activity: Briefly review with your class the experience of the Old Testament prophet Jonah and then discuss together the parallels and differences between his experience and that of Paul. You should consider, for example, how both Jonah and Paul (then Saul) initially operated outside the will of God. Both were confronted by God; both carried a message from Him. Yet, the experience of each missionary was profoundly different. Concentrate especially on the difference between Jonah’s and Paul’s attitude toward people of different cultures and toward sinners in general.

Thought Questions: Why is our attitude toward people so critical in how we approach mission? Do we see nonbelievers primarily through the lens of their various faults and failings? Or do we first see them as struggling human beings, deeply loved by God? How can we learn to look at others through God’s eyes of compassion? How could our personal spiritual journey shape our witnessing approach and our attitude toward those we’re trying to reach?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: It’s easy to view Paul as a remote figure—a giant of the Christian church, a prodigy of intellect and leadership, incredibly
smart and driven, masterful in his method of communicating God’s message. In short, we think of him as someone far removed from us—in time, experience, and gifts. But Paul also was human, and Scripture provides many insights into the inner dynamics of Paul’s personal transformation into a missionary par excellence. Lead your class in exploring how an understanding of Paul the man can help us today in our mission task. How can trying to “get inside Paul’s skin” better help us to comprehend the foundational values that shape and drive mission?

Bible Commentary

I. The Power of Personal Experience (Review 1 Corinthians 15:10 with your class.)

There’s no underestimating the power of a personal testimony. Authentic personal experience makes our communication real and imbues it with power. Paul writes to the Corinthians: “by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:10, NIV), and throughout his ministry he constantly and consistently refers to his own personal experience, especially the story of what happened on the road to Damascus.

Even though Paul had experienced God’s wonderful grace and forgiveness, he could never get over his sorrow for his past life. He remembered the zeal he had for “the traditions of my fathers” (Gal. 1:14, NIV) and could never forget “how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it” (vs. 13, NIV). He confesses to Timothy: “I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man” (1 Tim. 1:13, NIV), “the worst of sinners” (vs. 16, NIV). And yet, rather than undermining the effectiveness of his mission, Paul’s testimony actually strengthens it. He stands open and vulnerable, a living testimony of the transforming grace that is the central topic of his preaching.

Consider This: Review 2 Corinthians 5:17–20 in light of Paul’s Damascus Road experience and his abrupt, radical transformation and subsequent zeal to preach the gospel. In what ways does this passage take on extra resonance in light of Paul’s conversion experience?

II. Church Gardening (Review Acts 26:15–18 with your class.)

With every fiber of his being, the apostle Paul felt a special call to share the good news with Gentiles. There were isolated examples of Gentiles
coming to Jesus, including Cornelius and his family. But the early church had no systematic program or plan for ministry to Gentiles. No doubt Paul had to prayerfully consider how to go about his mission and to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. It’s significant that Paul went to Arabia for a period of time (Gal. 1:17, 18) to commune alone with God and prepare himself for ministry.

Although Paul used a variety of methods, the key to his mission approach was to start new groups of believers in strategic urban areas. Today we would refer to Paul as a church planter, but this doesn’t fully capture his approach to establishing Christian communities. The biblical text reveals him as more of a “church gardener”—intent not just on planting the seed but watering it, pulling out dangerous weeds when necessary, and nurturing the plant into robust bloom. The book of Acts is fundamentally about church planting, and most of the apostle Paul’s other writings are basically letters to build up and support new groups of believers that he had established.

Today, Paul's mission approach is just as important for us. Church planting is, after all, a biblical mandate. The Great Commission of Matthew 28 is a call to make disciples—not in isolation but within the context of groups of believers.

Ellen G. White wrote, “New churches must be established, new congregations organized.”—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 24. From our earliest days, church planting has been seen not as an optional extra but the accepted way that we go about our business as a church. It’s a vital part of our Seventh-day Adventist heritage; our church has grown exponentially through the decades primarily because of church planting—intentional efforts to raise up groups of believers in new areas.

Studies show again and again that older, more established churches tend to struggle in attracting new members and nurturing new believers. Church plants tend to be more focused on the broader community, more attractive to unbelievers, and more dynamic in finding creative ways to reach into their communities with the love of Jesus. Today, every four hours a new Seventh-day Adventist church and many more companies and small groups are established somewhere in the world.

 Thought Questions: In planning for mission, how much effort do we put into the nurture and discipleship of new believers? How does this effort compare to the amount we invest in the initial outreach event or program?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: In 1990, Foster Cline and Jim Fay wrote a book
called *Parenting With Love and Logic*, coining the phrase “helicopter parenting.” This refers to parents who micromanage their children’s every move to make sure they won’t hurt themselves in some way. For anxious parents it can sometimes be difficult to get the right balance between protection and independence. As the spiritual father of many new congregations, Paul was like a hovering parent, praying night and day for their welfare. This week we see Paul’s love and care for the congregations he had established, many right within the heart of paganism. Through his ministry, they had turned from their idols. Now they were alive in their new life in Christ.

**Thought Questions:**

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of spiritual “helicopter parenting”? How do we find the right balance for new believers? Is a bigger danger the “helicopter parenting” of established believers? Why, or why not?

2. What leadership qualities especially stand out for you in the life of Paul?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Invite everyone to reflect on the lessons they’ve learned from Paul’s experience that may be relevant to their own lives. Are there aspects of our spiritual experience that perhaps God can use to help us be more effective witnesses? Do we feel inadequate? In the next activity, remind the class that God specializes in calling people for mission who don’t always feel up to the task. Emphasize that God always equips us with what we need to undertake the mission He gives us.

**Activities:**

1. Consider the following statement about the qualities an effective witness for God should possess. As a class, rearrange these qualities in order of their importance.

   An effective witness must be a logical thinker, humble, an eloquent speaker, sensitive and tactful, a competent organizer, a good debater, authoritative, obedient to God, and a person of prayer.

2. Write out the following verses on separate pieces of paper and hand them out to the class. A big class can separate into groups to discuss their verse, or a small class can just have individual responses: *Isaiah 6:5–7, Luke 1:28–38, Exodus 4:10–17, Jeremiah 1:6–9.*

   Ask the class to study their passage and identify each person’s reaction to God’s call and then share how God responded. Remind the class that when they feel inadequate for mission, that’s the way God prefers it.
Paul: Mission and Message

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Cor. 1:22–24, 1 Tim. 6:12, 2 Tim. 4:7, 1 Cor. 15:12–22, Acts 15:38–41.

Memory Text: “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13, 14, NKJV).

Drawing on Old Testament prophetic messages, Jewish history, and the life and teachings of Jesus, Paul developed the Christian concept of salvation history, all centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Because of his cultural background in both Judaism and in Greco-Roman society, Paul possessed sufficient insights to allow him to lift the gospel out from the complexity of Hebrew civil, ritual, and moral practices of Jewish life and make it more accessible to a multicultural world.

Paul’s 13 letters to the believers applied faith to their lives. He touched doctrinal, as well as practical, topics. He counseled, encouraged, and admonished on matters of personal Christianity, relationships, and church life. Nevertheless, throughout his letters his main theme was “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2, NKJV).

Paul was not only a man of letters. He also became known as the apostolic missionary par excellence, witnessing to the gospel from Syria to Italy, perhaps even to Spain. Within a decade, Paul established churches in four provinces of the Roman Empire.

This week we will take a look at Paul—both his mission and his message.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 19.
Greeks and Jews

Read 1 Corinthians 1:22–24. How do these verses help us to understand the different ways people relate to truth? What can we learn here that can help us in our witnessing to various people groups?

In the Exodus from slavery in Egypt, God worked remarkable signs of providential care for Israel. Later generations of Jews developed the expectation that any new messenger sent from God should make themselves known by signs and wonders and miracles.

In contrast, in line with their philosophical and scientific heritage, Greeks sought a rational basis for belief, one that would satisfy the demands of human wisdom.

Paul did not dismiss the cultural and spiritual heritage of his target peoples but used it as an entry point for proclaiming Christ crucified. Those who desired signs found them in the life and ministry of Jesus and in the early church. Those who wanted logical elegance and rationality found it in Paul’s arguments for the gospel message. Both types of persons ultimately had only one need, and that was to know the risen Christ and “the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10). How Paul brought them to that knowledge depended upon the people to whom he was witnessing.

When Paul preached to Jewish listeners, he based his sermons on the history of Israel, linking Christ to David, and emphasizing the Old Testament prophecies pointing to Christ and foretelling His crucifixion and resurrection (Acts 13:16–41). That is, he started out with what was familiar to them, with what they revered and believed, and from that starting point he sought to bring them to Christ.

For Gentiles, Paul’s message included God as Creator, Upholder, and Judge; the entry of sin into the world; salvation through Jesus Christ (Acts 14:15–17, 17:22–31). Paul had to work from a different starting point with these people than he did with the Jews (or with Gentiles who believed in the Jewish faith). Here, too, though, his goal was to lead them to Jesus.

Think about your own faith. On what is it based? What good reasons do you have for it? How might your reasons differ from those of other people, and why is it important to recognize these differences?
Soldiers and Athletes

As a skilled communicator, Paul in his mission work used the familiar to explain the unfamiliar. He took everyday features of the Greco-Roman world to illustrate the practical reality of new life in Christ. He drew especially from two areas of his converts’ world for his teaching metaphors—athletes with their games and the ever-present Roman soldier.

Fondness for athletic accomplishments gripped Paul’s world, much as it does ours. Ancient Greeks transmitted their love of competition by holding, over the centuries, no fewer than four separate cycles of Olympic-type contests, located in different parts of Greece. Romans inherited and further promoted athletic competition. Foot races were the most popular events and included a race of men wearing full suits of military armor. Wrestling also was popular. Athletes trained assiduously, and winners were richly rewarded. Ethnicity, nationality, and social class mattered little, since endurance and performance were the goals.

What key lessons for the Christian life would Paul’s readers have found in the following passages? 1 Cor. 9:24–27, Gal. 5:7, 1 Tim. 6:12, 2 Tim. 2:5.

Starting with Marius, Roman emperors replaced temporary soldiers with full-time career warriors, garrisoned them across the Roman Empire, and upgraded and standardized their armor and weapons. By Paul’s time, soldiers were recruited from various ethnic and national groups, whether or not they were Roman citizens. In return for rewards at the end of their term of service, soldiers pledged total loyalty to the ruling emperor, who in times of conflict personally led them into battle.

In the following passages, what comparisons did Paul make between soldiering and the Christian life? 2 Cor. 10:4, 5; Eph. 6:10–18; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3, 4.

In what is perhaps Paul’s final letter, he applied both soldiering and athletics to his own view of his life as a Christian missionary: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7, NIV).

In what ways is faith a fight and in what ways a race? How have you experienced the reality of both metaphors in your own Christian life? Which metaphor best describes your own experience, and why?
Paul and the Law

“Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law” (Rom. 3:31, NIV). What law must Paul be talking about here?

In English translations of Paul’s letters, the word law appears about one hundred thirty times, and in Acts of the Apostles, about twenty times. Paul endeavored to get his hearers and readers, regardless of cultural background, to understand that “law” carried several meanings, especially for Jews. Laws such as the Ten Commandments are in force for all people at all times. But Paul did not consider other kinds of laws in the Old Testament and in Jewish culture to be in force for Christians.

In his writings, the apostle used the word law broadly in reference to rules for religious ceremonies, civil law, health laws, and purification laws. He wrote about being “under the law” (Rom. 3:19) and about being “released from the law” (Rom. 7:6, NIV). He described a “law of sin” (vs. 25) but also “law [that] is holy” (vs. 12). He mentioned the “law of Moses” (1 Cor. 9:9) but also the “law of God” (Rom. 7:25). Confusing as these phrases may seem to non-Jews, for the Jewish believer brought up in the Hebrew culture, the context would make clear which law was meant.

Read Romans 13:8–10; Romans 2:21–24; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Ephesians 4:25, 28; 5:3; 6:2. How do these verses help us to understand that God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments, was not nullified at the Cross?

Paul realized that the ceremonial laws, detailing how one approached God through priesthood, Hebrew sanctuary, and sacrifices, ceased to be valid after the Crucifixion. They had served their purpose in their time but were now no longer needed. (This point would become especially apparent after the destruction of the temple.)

With the moral law expressed by the Ten Commandments, however, matters are different. In his letters, Paul quotes some of the Ten Commandments and alludes to others as universal ethical demands on all people, Jewish as well as Gentile. Having written against the practice of sin, Paul would not in any way have diminished the very law that defines what sin is. That would make about as much sense as telling someone not to violate the speed limit while at the same time telling them the speed limit signs are no longer valid.
The Cross and the Resurrection

“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2, NKJV).

No question, the cross of Christ was central to all that Paul lived and taught. But Paul didn’t teach the Cross in a vacuum; instead, he taught it in the context of other teachings, as well; and one of them, perhaps the one most intricately linked to the Cross, was the Resurrection, without which the Cross would have been in vain.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–22. What do these verses say that show how crucial the death and resurrection of Jesus are to the gospel? Why is a proper understanding of death as a sleep crucial for making sense of these texts? That is, if the dead in Christ are already in heaven, what is Paul talking about here?

Unfortunately, the majority of Christian traditions, as well as non-Christian religions, believe strongly in the immortality of the human soul. Against this belief, however, Paul emphasized repeatedly that:

1. Only God has immortality (1 Tim. 6:16);
2. Immortality is a gift from God to the saved (1 Thess. 4:16);
3. Death is a sleep until Christ returns (1 Thess. 4:13–15; 1 Cor. 15:6, 18, 20).

Worship in almost all religions includes numerous false teachings based on the false concept of the immortality of the soul. These errors include things such as reincarnation, praying to saints, veneration of ancestral spirits, an eternally burning hell, and many New Age practices such as channeling or astral projection. A true understanding of the Bible’s teaching on death is the only real protection against these great deceptions. How unfortunate, too, that those who show the strongest inclination against accepting this truth are Christians of other denominations.

A believer closes his or her eyes in death and, after what seems like a moment of darkness and silence, he or she is awakened to eternal life at the Second Coming. What does the truth about the state of the dead reveal to us about God’s character?
Getting Along

Paul was a hard worker with a strong personality and singleness of purpose. Such persons can be loners with few friends but many admirers. However, on his travels, two or three fellow workers often accompanied Paul. At least eight of these close fellow workers are mentioned by name (Acts 13:2; 15:22, 37; 16:1–3; 19:22; Col. 4:7, 10, 11; Philem. 24). To this must be added Paul’s greetings to 24 people in Romans 16, in addition to general greetings to households.

The apostle believed in teamwork, especially in pioneering situations. At the same time, however, he did at times have conflict with fellow laborers.

Read Acts 15:38–41. What happened here, and what does it tell us about the humanity of even these great workers for the Lord?

“The it was here that Mark, overwhelmed with fear and discouragement, wavered for a time in his purpose to give himself wholeheartedly to the Lord’s work. Unused to hardships, he was disheartened by the perils and privations of the way. . . . This desertion caused Paul to judge Mark unfavorably, and even severely, for a time. Barnabas, on the other hand, was inclined to excuse him because of his inexperience. He felt anxious that Mark should not abandon the ministry, for he saw in him qualifications that would fit him to be a useful worker for Christ.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 169, 170.

The account in Acts reveals that Paul expected his companions to persevere in the toils and perils of their mission. For Paul, the close team constituted a church in miniature. He stressed the importance of setting a good example, the imitation model of mission. Dutiful yet loving relationships among team members became a pattern for the churches, which were often based on households. The team also provided an ideal setting for the training of new evangelists and missionaries. Of course, at times things didn’t always run smoothly, as in the case of John Mark.

Read 2 Timothy 4:11. What does this text reveal about growth and forgiveness?

We all make mistakes. How can you learn to forgive those whose mistakes have hurt you? And think also about those whom you’ve hurt with your mistakes. How have you sought to bring healing in those situations? Or if you haven’t yet, why not do it now?
**Further Study:** The apostle Paul has been compared with the butterfly effect in chaos theory: “the flap of a butterfly’s wings in California causes a hurricane in Asia.” His work as a writer and preacher helped turn a Jewish sect in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire into a world religion. The ideas put forth in his 13 letters have probably exerted greater influence than any other ancient Greek literature of comparable size.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Paul avoided martyrdom by fleeing to Athens, the intellectual center of the Greco-Roman world. Cities provide shelter for refugees, including Christians. The apostle lost no time; after observing the city’s religious monuments, he reasoned with the Jews and preached in the marketplace. Read Acts 17:16–31. What approach does Paul take with these people, and how does it help us to understand the need to tailor the message for various people groups? At the same time, look at how Paul did not in any way water down or compromise truth in order to reach these people. In our attempts to reach others, how can we be certain that we don’t compromise core beliefs?

2. Why is the state of the dead such an important teaching? What are some of the many errors and deceptions that an understanding of this truth protects us against? What about your own culture? What are some of the beliefs against which this truth can be a bulwark?

3. Dwell more on the question of the role of signs in regard to faith and the role of logic and reason, as well. In class, let those who are willing talk about how they came to faith and what role such factors as signs or logic, and so on, had in their experiences. Also, what role should they have, not just in coming to faith but in maintaining faith?

4. What about the majority of people in your society? What kind of background do they have? What kind of beliefs are the most common? Based on your understanding of their beliefs and background, think through carefully the best approach to reach out to them. What are some entering wedges that will allow you to make contact in a way that will not immediately offend them?
The Stolen Sermons: Part 2

by Gamini Mendis

I remained in the hospital for two weeks in great pain but slowly began to recover. Many pastors came to visit me. Some said that God struck me down because I had visited the Seventh-day Adventist church. The Adventist pastor visited me several times and brought me a book entitled The Great Controversy. I had lots of time to read, and by the time I was discharged, I had finished the book. When the Adventist pastor came to visit me at home, I had many questions.

When I had recovered enough to preach at my church again, I went back to visiting the Seventh-day Adventist church to borrow the pastor’s sermon notes. Of course, I didn’t tell him what I was doing, nor did I tell my own congregation where I was getting my sermon material.

One Sabbath the Adventist pastor preached a sermon on the Sabbath. I borrowed that sermon too. After I preached, members of my church asked me why we worship on Sunday if Saturday is God’s holy Sabbath.

Suddenly, I realized that I was trapped by my own cunning. I needed more information so I could answer my congregation’s questions. I visited the Adventist pastor and asked him to study the Bible with me, beginning with the Sabbath. After we studied, I asked him all the questions I thought my congregation would ask. Then I called my church members together to give them the same Bible study on the Sabbath. Not all were interested in this new truth, but many wanted to learn more.

Word reached the church leaders in my denomination that I was teaching Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. They told me that if I insisted on preaching like an Adventist pastor I couldn’t continue as pastor in my church. By this time I believed in the Sabbath and other Bible truths I had learned through borrowing the pastor’s sermons.

I decided to become a Seventh-day Adventist, turn my church into a Seventh-day Adventist church, and bring as many members of my congregation with me as would listen. Sundays became Bible study days in my church, and several Adventist pastors came to help me teach the people. For three or four months, we studied the Bible intensely and tried to understand God’s will for our lives and our church. Then we held a baptism in which 20 members of my church joined the Seventh-day Adventist family. Later 13 more people were baptized. More than half the members of my little congregation have joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Gamini Mendis continues to work as a pastor in the same area of Sri Lanka where he once pastored a charismatic church. He now has three Seventh-day Adventist churches.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 1 Corinthians 1:22–24

The Student Will:

Know: Understand that God communicates His message in different ways to different people.
Feel: Appreciate that people differ in their cultural backgrounds and understandings and that God will reveal Himself to them in different ways.
Do: Choose to be open to new and creative methods of faithful witness, even if they may be untraditional and untried.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: People Think and Feel Differently.
   A. The apostle Paul contrasts the different approaches of Jews and Greeks to spiritual things (1 Cor. 1:22). What differences do you see even among your own friends and family?
   B. Paul says that he becomes “all things to all men” so that he can reach them for Jesus (1 Cor. 9:19–23). How did he demonstrate this in his ministry?
   C. If preaching Christ crucified was a “stumbling block” to Jews and “foolishness” to Greeks, were there ways Paul could have shared this doctrine in a more sensitive way with his audiences (1 Cor. 1:23)?

II. Feel: Sensitivity to Differences
   A. What practical steps could I take to become more sensitive to cultural differences when sharing with neighbors and friends?
   B. How often do we review our worship services for how “visitor-friendly” they are?

III. Do: Sharing in His Cross-Cultural Mission
   A. How can I sensitively practice Paul’s principle of “all things to all [people]”—adapting the message and delivering it in different ways, without compromise?
   B. What simple changes could we make to ensure that those from a non-Christian background are more comfortable visiting our church?

Summary: God invites us to share the good news of salvation in ways that will be attractive and meaningful to different people.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:22–24

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God’s message is timeless, but it must be expressed in different ways to different people in order to catch their attention, their understanding, and their hearts.

Just for Teachers: The apostle Paul adapted his language and missionary methods according to his audience. Throughout history, missionaries have followed his lead. When Adventist missionaries Fernando and Ana Stahl began working among the indigenous people in the Peruvian Andes, they tried selling literature door-to-door. They soon discovered this was not the most effective method among a poor population that was 95 percent illiterate. So, they changed their approach—starting schools, clinics, and markets.


Discuss: Encourage your class to consider principles of effective ministry from Paul’s example. How can they apply those principles today?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: As you explore the different ways that God’s Word is communicated to people, be sure to emphasize that this does not mean compromising the truth in any way. It’s all about reaching people in ways that are meaningful to them.

Bible Commentary

I. Master of Metaphor (Review 1 Timothy 6:12 with your class.)

“Fight the good fight of faith” is just one of the powerful metaphors in
this week’s lesson (1 Tim. 6:12). Metaphors, or word-pictures, help us see something more vividly and colorfully—they add an extra layer of meaning to communication. Some of Christianity’s most powerful imagery comes from Paul’s writings. Consider, for example, Paul’s statement: “So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child” (Gal. 4:7, NIV). What a beautiful way to picture the freedom and sense of belonging that comes through Jesus.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul uses the metaphor of a human body to describe the church: “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Rom. 12:4, 5, NIV). This is a rich image that helps us to understand better how the church functions under the guidance of God. Paul mines this image for further insights in his first letter to the Corinthians (vss. 12–26). Some of Paul’s metaphors are startling: he likens himself to a woman in the pain of childbirth (Gal. 4:19) and as a mother giving her child milk (1 Cor. 3:1, 2).

But perhaps Paul’s strongest metaphors are for describing salvation. In just a sample of these word-pictures, he likens salvation to the experience of being adopted (Rom. 8:15), reconciled (Rom. 5:10), justified (Gal. 2:16), liberated (Rom. 6:18), married (Rom. 7:2–4), redeemed (Eph. 1:7), and the recipient of an inheritance (Rom. 8:17).

Each of these mini-stories or metaphors of salvation provides a window to a truth about salvation. If we focus on just one of the metaphors, then we lose the richness provided by the others. For example, Paul’s metaphor of redemption and justification had a particular resonance for people steeped in the Roman system of law.

When we present the good news about Jesus, like Paul we must take care to express it in terms that people will best understand.

**Consider This:** If you were sharing the gospel with an unbeliever with no background in Christianity, what metaphors do you think would be most helpful? Which of Jesus’ parables might be appropriately used here?

**II. Meeting People Where They Are** *(Review 1 Corinthians 1:22–24 with your class.)*

Often when we think about our mission to the community, we think about methods to attract them to the church. So we talk about things such as compelling preaching, inspiring music, and friendly church members. And we invite the community to special church events that we think will appeal to them.
All these things are vitally important, but we must never forget that the whole idea of mission is for us to go to where people are, rather than expecting them to come to us. Jesus demonstrated this in His incarnational ministry when He came down from heaven and “made his dwelling” among us (John 1:14, NIV).

The apostle Paul follows Jesus’ example of going to the people. He traveled all over the then-known world, meeting people in the marketplace, in the streets, in the Areopagus. And he knew that an effective ministry must start from where people are, building on their current knowledge and experience, before leading them to where Jesus wants them to be.

In today’s passage, Paul says that he preaches “Christ crucified” to the Jews and Gentiles. While this is true, he adapted his message to his audience. For example, in Acts 14, he and Barnabas visit the pagan town of Lystra, and not once do they mention Christ crucified. However, a little earlier, when speaking to the Jews, Paul did talk about Christ’s death and resurrection (Acts 13:31–39). The time would come to share the story of Christ’s crucifixion with the pagans, but he needed to do some spiritual groundwork with them first.

Consider This:
1. How can we know when it is appropriate to share certain truths with people?
2. What guards can we put in place to ensure that in our desire to connect with people, we don’t water down our message?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Ellen G. White urges us not to be “stereotyped in one manner of working” but to adapt our methods of witness in creative ways.—Evangelism, p. 106. Yet, just because an outreach idea is new or imaginative, does it always follow that it will be effective in bringing people to Christ? Explore with your class different ways to assess whether new ideas for outreach are appropriate or not.

Application Question: Ellen G. White counseled, “Be very careful not to present the truth in such a way as to arouse prejudice, and to close the door of the heart to the truth.”—Evangelism, p. 141. How would you communicate an eternal truth such as the Sabbath or the state of the dead in a manner that doesn’t arouse prejudice?
**Activity:** Divide the class in three or four groups and assign each group a spiritual truth and a “difficult” audience. For instance,

- Spiritual truth—“The soon return of Jesus” and
- Difficult audience—“a group of educated professionals.”

Or,

- Spiritual truth—“God created the earth” and
- Difficult audience—“some young university students.”

Discuss: (a) ways to build bridges of trust and to attract interest in the subject, and then (b) specific ways to actually communicate the truth to this audience. Which step in the process is easier? Do we sometimes concentrate all our energy on the first step—building bridges—and not enough on the second—actually communicating truth? Come together as a class and discuss what you learned from this exercise.

**Thought Question:** One of the dangers of being overly cautious in our desire not to offend or speak inappropriately is that we never get around to actually sharing our faith. How do we find the right balance?

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**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Explore with your class the power of symbols in our everyday lives. Note how they’re even important on Web sites where symbols make it intuitive for people to know where to click for actions or certain information. For example, an envelope icon for “Send” or a shopping cart icon to look at your online orders or a little magnifying glass for “Search.” These icons are visual metaphors. Marketers know the power of metaphor. Discuss with your class its importance in our spiritual lives and the ways in which certain word-pictures will be more meaningful to different people.

**Activity:** Read with the class some of Jesus’ metaphors of the kingdom. (Review Matthew 13 for the largest collection of “kingdom parables,” such as the kingdom of heaven is like a net, a treasure in a field, yeast, etc.)

Invite the class individually or in small groups to work on some contemporary metaphors of salvation. What parables might He use today? Encourage them to be creative in their ideas (for example, the kingdom of heaven is like the Internet, or God is the Master Recycler). After a few minutes, invite some class members to share their ideas and discuss how these modern-day metaphors might impact people from different backgrounds.
Lesson 13  September 19–25

(page 104 of Standard Edition)

Must the Whole World Hear?

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Acts 4:12, Ps. 87:4–6, John 10:16, Rom. 2:12–16, John 14:6, Rom. 1:18.

Memory Text: “Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen” (Romans 16:25–27, NIV).

As we have seen, the Lord uses people to bring the message of the gospel to others. However, throughout the ages, millions have died without knowing the biblical plan of salvation. The fact is that a majority of those who have ever lived have not heard the story of redemption or known about the good news of God’s grace as revealed in Jesus Christ. This leads to two persistent questions. First, on the day of judgment, how is God going to deal with these billions who have not known Him? Second, is there salvation outside of someone’s knowing the plan of salvation as it is in Jesus?

Some would answer that there is salvation in a single Christian denomination only; in contrast, others believe that all religions are equally valid guides to God and eternal life.

In the end, the crucial point to remember is that Jesus has revealed to us the character of God, and this tells us a lot about His love for all humanity and His desire for as many as possible to be saved. God is a God of justice, and however He works it out, the shout will be heard across heaven: “‘Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!’” (Rev. 15:3, NKJV).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 26.
No Other Name Under Heaven

Some Christians have the conviction that only those who hear and respond positively to the Christian gospel can be saved. These people, sometimes called “exclusivists,” regard all non-Christian religions as constructs of fallen humans, which express willful rebellion against God. Non-Christians are, they believe for that reason, outside the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Some Christians take the further step of claiming that outside their specific denomination and doctrinal structure there is no salvation, even for other confessing Christians. For them, other denominations with their divergent beliefs have placed themselves outside the care of God and have no chance of entering the kingdom of heaven. For instance, in 1302 in his papal bull *Unam Sanctam*, Pope Boniface VIII declared “that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.” Some Protestants have taught something similar in regard to their own denominations, as well.

Read Acts 4:12. What is it saying, and how are we to understand these words?

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

The words of the Scripture here are very clear: salvation is found only in Jesus Christ and in no other name under heaven. It’s important, however, not to read into these words more than they specifically say.

Imagine a man in a building that is on fire; before being able to escape, he is overcome by smoke and collapses unconscious. A firefighter finds him on the floor, grabs him, and brings him outside, where the medics take over. He is rushed to the hospital, and a few hours later he regains consciousness.

The point is that this person, who was saved, had no idea who had saved him. In the same way, anyone who is saved—either before Jesus came in the flesh or after—will be saved only through Jesus, whether or not that person had heard of His name or of the plan of salvation.

“Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 638.
How Much Must One Know?

Picking up where we left off on Sunday, we can see that although the work of Christ provides the only means of salvation, some believe that explicit knowledge of Christ is not necessary in order for one to be saved. This does not imply that salvation is available apart from Christ but that God is able and willing to apply the merits of Christ’s work to whomever He wishes. Some believe that those who do not know Christ and have never been exposed to the gospel, but who under the influence of the Holy Spirit feel a need for deliverance, and act on it, will be saved. The quote from Ellen G. White at the end of yesterday’s study certainly implies this (think of Job and Melchizedek).

What light do the following texts shed on this idea?

Ps. 87:4–6

John 10:16

Acts 14:17

Acts 17:26–28

Rom. 2:12–16

“God ‘will repay each person according to what they have done.’ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life” (Rom. 2:6, 7, NIV).

Paul here declares that there are some outside of Christianity who will receive eternal life as a result of an “obedience-unto-life” principle (cf. Lev. 18:5). For those “Gentiles” who “show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts” because “their consciences also bearing witness” (Rom. 2:15, NIV), it will make a difference on Judgment Day because these people have responded to the work of the Spirit in their hearts.

Because we don’t know people’s hearts, why in all cases, either with professed Christians or non-Christians, must we be careful not to judge their souls’ salvation?
Universalism and Pluralism

Some people teach that in the end God is going to save all human beings, regardless of what they believed or even how they lived. “Universalism” is the conviction that all persons are so related to God that they will be saved, even if they never heard or believed the gospel. After all, John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world.” Thus, in this thinking, if He loves everyone, how can anyone be lost, especially if being lost means eternal torment in hell? How could God burn forever someone whom He loves? Hence, we can see how one false doctrine (eternal torment) leads to another (universalism).

Related to universalism is “pluralism,” the conviction that all religions are equally valid and lead equally to God and salvation. No religion is inherently better than, or superior to, any other religion, at least according to this theology. A pastor in a church in California wrote on the church Web site that his congregation “does not believe that Christianity is superior in any way to other religious beliefs.”

For pluralists, the vast range of religious rituals and beliefs, symbols and metaphors, are mere surface differences concealing a similar core of all religions. Pluralists point out, for example, that most religions emphasize love for God and love for fellow human beings, a form of the golden rule, and hope for a blessed future life. According to them, all faiths, at the core, teach the same thing; hence, they are all valid paths to God, and it is very chauvinistic and arrogant to try to push Christian beliefs upon those who are members of non-Christian faiths.

What does the Bible have to say about both universalism and pluralism? John 14:6; Rev. 20:14, 15; 21:8; Dan. 12:2; John 3:18; Matt. 7:13, 14; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10.

No question, both universalism and pluralism are contrary to Scripture. Not everyone will be saved; and all faiths do not lead to salvation.

What answer would you give to someone who argues that Christianity’s claim to be the only true path to salvation (see John 14:6) is arrogant and exclusivist? Share your answer with your class on Sabbath.
Sinners in Need of Grace

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17, NIV). What great hope is found in this verse for all humanity? How can we take this crucial truth and, first, make it our own? How then can we use it to motivate us to reach out to others?

According to the Bible, we are all sinners (Rom. 3:23), and God wishes for all to repent (Acts 17:30, 26:20, 2 Pet. 3:9) and be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). From the Fall in Eden onward, God’s purpose has been to save humanity from the devastation and ultimate eternal death that sin and rebellion have brought to humanity. What more proof do we need than the Cross to show God’s love for us and His desire to save us?

However, Scripture is clear that God will not save those who openly rebel against Him.

Read Genesis 6:11–13, Romans 1:18, 2 Thessalonians 2:12, Revelation 21:8, 22:15. What powerful warning is found in these verses?

God loves all people, but all people are sinners in need of grace, and this grace has been revealed in Jesus. He has called His church to spread the good news of this grace to the world.

“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 9.

In what ways can you personally (not the pastor, not the elder, not the deacon, but you) better learn to “show forth His glory” to a dying world? What must you change in your life in order to do this?
The Mission Call

“I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:22, 23, NIV). What important principle is Paul espousing here, and how can we reflect this same attitude in our own lives?

The Lord of missions, in His wisdom, chose to work through humans to bring the message of forgiveness and salvation to the world. God chose men and women, despite their weaknesses, to work together with the Holy Spirit and the angels. Israel was to be God’s steady “light” in Old Testament times, but too often they put their light “under a basket” (Matt. 5:15, NKJV). Too many times the blessings they received were kept inside Israel. Instead of mixing and sharing, they shut themselves away from the nations in order to escape “contamination.”

God’s next plan for world mission called for the salt method—to go “and make disciples” (Matt. 28:19, NKJV; Mark 16:15, 20; Acts 1:8). The history of Christian missions sparkles with stories of self-sacrificing missionaries who went as salt to the world, bringing the gospel of life to individuals, communities, and sometimes entire nations.

However, as with ancient Israel, too often these mission successes have been obscured by the human shortcomings of the missionaries themselves and their overall mission enterprise. These human shortcomings include (1) poor planning for outreach, inadequate understanding of the task; (2) narrow focus on mission only as education, health care, disaster relief, or development, which overshadow preaching the gospel; (3) underfunding and understaffing by the sending organizations; (4) missionaries unsuited to the task; and (5) nations that forbid the preaching of the gospel.

Of course, no one ever said that it was going to be easy. We are in the midst of a great controversy, and the enemy will work every way he can to thwart our outreach efforts, whether in our own neighborhoods or in the most “remote” corners of the world. We, though, mustn’t be discouraged, because we have been given many wonderful promises of power, and we can be sure that God will fulfill His purposes on earth. As we have been told: “‘So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it’” (Isa. 55:11, NKJV).

The New Testament employs two Greek nouns, accompanied by the adjective “all,” to express the worldwide extent of Christian mission: “all the *kosmos*” in Matthew 26:13, Mark 14:9, and 16:15, and “all the *oikoumenē*” in Matthew 24:14. While *kosmos*, the more general term for the realm of orderly existence, signifies the planet (with approximately one hundred fifty New Testament occurrences), the more specific *oikoumenē* focuses on the world’s human inhabitants.

How extensive was “the whole world” for the first Christians? Within a few years of the Crucifixion, they had reached modern-day Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Macedonia, Greece, and Italy. There is evidence that they propagated the gospel as far as southern Russia (ancient Scythia) in the north, Ethiopia in the south, India in the east, and Spain in the west.

Did the early Christian missionaries believe they had to reach the whole world with the gospel? According to Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the “birthday” of the Christian church, began to proclaim the “mighty works of God” to visitors from a list of nations, geographic regions, and ethnic groups (*Acts* 2:5–11). From its first day of life, the Christian church has been aware of the worldwide extent of its mission. If they had that understanding back then, how much more so should we today?

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, go over your answer to the final question on Tuesday’s study about Christian claims being exclusivist and arrogant. Does exclusivism necessarily translate into arrogance? If not, why not?

2. The church’s understanding of the size and extent of “the whole world” has expanded since the Day of Pentecost. Jesus’ gospel commission to “‘go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’” (*Matt. 28:19, NKJV*) will remain present truth for the church until Christ returns. How does the proclamation of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12 fit in with the Great Commission?

3. How would you answer this question: If people can be saved without ever having heard the gospel, what’s the point of risking life and limb in order to spread it to them?
Providential Bus Encounter

by KUSUMAWATHIE PERERA

One morning I was riding a bus to Colombo, the capital city of Sri Lanka. I saw Francis, a longtime family friend, sitting nearby. I hadn’t seen him in a long time and was surprised to learn that he had become a Seventh-day Adventist. I, too, had become a Christian two years earlier.

“I was paralyzed and unable to do anything,” I told Francis. “Then some Christians prayed for me, and God healed me. I attended their church, but some things they do in their worship service make me uncomfortable—jumping around, shouting, and rolling on the floor, and talking in strange languages. Lately, I haven’t gone to church.”

Francis offered to bring a friend to visit me. “We can study the Bible together. I’ll tell you a little about the Seventh-day Adventists and what we believe,” he offered.

A few weeks later, Francis came with his pastor. We had a pleasant visit, and the pastor talked about God and Jesus in such simple and easy-to-understand language that I felt very close to Him. Then he prayed for my family and me. His prayer was like a beautiful conversation with a friend.

Francis and the pastor visited me often and shared God’s truths with me. I enjoyed the Bible studies, but my husband wanted nothing to do with God.

One day, my husband came home drunk when the pastor and Francis were still there. My husband often got drunk, sometimes becoming violent, breaking up the furniture and terrifying the children and me.

When the pastor saw my husband’s condition, he prayed for him. I knew that my husband would never remember even seeing the pastor, but I was glad that the pastor was willing to pray for him.

The next morning, my husband was sober. He remembered almost nothing of the previous day’s drinking binge, but he remembered that the pastor had prayed for him. In some mysterious way that prayer had touched him, and he said he was healed from drinking. I wanted to believe him, but he had promised to stop drinking before, and it never lasted. But from that day on, my husband never touched alcohol again.

When the pastor and Francis visited again, I told them what had happened to my husband, and we rejoiced together. When I completed Bible studies, I was baptized and became a Seventh-day Adventist. Although my husband has not yet given his life to God, I know he believes, and one day he will come to the Savior.

KUSUMAWATHIE PERERA is a farmer’s wife in north-central Sri Lanka.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Matthew 8:5–13

The Student Will:

Know: Understand that God’s salvation is not limited to any special religious group and is not bound to any one culture or people group.

Feel: Foster compassion for those peoples who have not yet heard the good news about Jesus.

Do: Identify specific steps for sharing the good news with neighbors and friends who come from different cultural backgrounds.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: God’s Love for All People

A What does describing Abraham as the father of “many nations” tell us about God’s mission on earth (Gen. 17:4–6)?

B Prophets such as Isaiah share a vision for Israel to become a missionary people. What were the details of that vision (see, for example, Isa. 52:10), and how did Israel respond?

C Jesus shared not only with the righteous but also with sinners (Luke 15:2). What do the following passages tell us about Jesus’ attitude toward Gentiles and His vision of who will be saved (Mark 5:1–20, Luke 17:11–19, Matt. 8:11, 15:21–28)?

D In what ways did the apostles Peter (Acts 10) and Paul (Rom. 11:13) grow in their understanding of God’s mission?

II. Feel: The Responsibility for Unreached People Groups

A How does reading about the apostle Paul’s total dedication and sacrifice to share the good news with non-Jewish people make you feel?

B What do you appreciate most about Jesus as you read of the way He treated non-Jewish people?

III. Do: Sharing in His Cross-Cultural Mission

A Think of workmates or neighbors from different cultural backgrounds you may have. What practical steps can you take this week to start building bridges and closer friendships with them? How can you make cross-cultural mission work a regular part of your prayer life?

Summary: We are invited as Jesus’ disciples to love all people as He did and to join in His mission to share salvation to all people groups.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Romans 2:12–16

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: In His infinite love and justice, God will ultimately save many who have never even heard the name of Jesus, but this in no way diminishes the mandate that God has given us to go into all the world to make disciples.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson addresses a sensitive topic that has produced vigorous debate among theologians through the centuries. The Bible reveals certain key principles of how God will achieve His mission to the world, but we’re best to be cautious about specifics that have not been revealed.

Because of the grace they’ve received, Christians gladly accept the Great Commission given to them to go into all the world to make disciples. They do this even though they know God’s unfathomable love and mercy reach out in different ways to those who will never hear the gospel story.

Opening Activity: Many popular stories are based on the concept of “goodies” versus “baddies,” or “good guy” against “bad guy.” But in many of the stories Jesus told, He complicates the picture and mixes up the “goodies” and “baddies” in ways we wouldn’t have expected. Discuss the following stories with your class: the two brothers—illustrating how sinners would enter heaven ahead of the religious leaders (Matt. 21:28–32); the good Samaritan—where a reviled Samaritan is the hero (Luke 10:25–37); the wedding banquet—where those on the first invitation list miss out (Matt. 22:1–10). Discuss with the class the importance of these stories. What do they tell us about how God conducts His mission on earth?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: What is the correct balance between the all-encompassing grace and mercy of God and the clear teaching that not all people will be saved? How do we present the unique claims of the gospel without appearing arrogant or intolerant of others and their beliefs?

Bible Commentary

I. Hearing Versus Doing (Review Romans 2:12–16 with your class.)
In this passage, the apostle Paul makes a distinction between those who hear and those who do. In God’s eyes, according to Paul, there’s a mighty chasm between the two groups. God views as righteous those who obey the law, not those who hear the law.

This distinction between hearing and doing is a familiar biblical theme. James describes someone “who listens to the word but does not do what it says” (James 1:23, NIV) and warns, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (vs. 22, NIV). Titus refers to people who “claim to know God” but by their actions deny him (Titus 1:16, NIV). Jesus Himself said, “ ‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven’ ” (Matt. 7:21, NIV).

In this passage, the apostle Paul puts a twist on Jesus’ words and suggests that there will be people who enter the kingdom of heaven who have never said, “Lord, Lord.” These people have never had the opportunity to hear about Jesus, or the story of salvation, but they’ve been listening to their God-given conscience, and they’ve done something about what they’ve heard. In the eyes of God, that’s what really counts. As Ellen G. White says, these people “are in a more favorable condition” than so-called Christians who “by their daily life contradict their profession.” —The Desire of Ages, p. 239.

Churches are full of people who have heard hundreds of sermons, who hear Scripture read publicly each week, but whose lives and actions remain unchanged. According to the apostle Peter, although they have knowledge, they’re “ineffective and unproductive” in that knowledge (2 Pet. 1:8, NIV).

What we believe is important. Who we believe in is vital. But if our beliefs are merely intellectual and make no difference to our lives, they’re worthless. And in the wideness of God’s mercy, He makes provision for those of His precious children who have acted on their God-given consciences, even without a full knowledge of salvation.

Consider This: What is the difference between hearing the Word of God and doing it?

II. No Other Name (Review Acts 4:12 with your class.)

The Bible clearly identifies the Source of salvation. It’s not an idea. It’s not a philosophy. It’s not a sacred text. It’s not even a religion. The only Source
of salvation is a Person—Jesus Christ.

In Acts 4, Peter talks to the Sanhedrin, the leading religious body of Israel. Both he and John speak with such confidence and authority and show such bravery that Luke says the leaders were “astonished” and “took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, NIV).

Note the theme of all of Peter’s sermons and speeches in the book of Acts. They’re not about philosophy, psychology, or fine points of exegesis. They’re simply and profoundly about a Person—the One who had loved and forgiven him so much. His sermons are drenched in the topic of Jesus. Peter finishes his speech to the Sanhedrin by making a statement that is still controversial nearly two thousand years later—Jesus is the only name that can bring salvation. It shocked the first-century religious leaders, and it scandalizes many people today.

And yet, this is the unique claim of Jesus, that He is “‘the way and the truth and the life’” (John 14:6, NIV). God may plant seeds of truth in other philosophies and religions and in people’s hearts, but salvation comes through Jesus alone.

Consider This: What would you say to someone who dismisses Jesus’ claim as bigoted and insensitive to other religious paths?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Ask your class if there’s a difference between the following two ideas: (1) thinking that the church is responsible for God’s mission to the world and (2) seeing the church as a participant in God’s larger mission in the world? If a difference is perceived, why is that distinction important?

Activity: Invite seven volunteers to help reenact the parable of the good Samaritan from Luke 10. Participants are needed to play the following roles:

1. A narrator
2. Jesus
3. Expert in the law
4. The Samaritan (only speaking part is in a portion of verse 35)
5. The Levite (passes the beaten man on the other side of the road)
6. The priest (passes the beaten man on the other side of the road)
7. The victim
(If you do not have sufficient class members, a narrator can cover the parts of Jesus and the expert in the law.) After the reenactment, ask the participants to describe how they felt as they played their individual roles. Ask tangible questions. For example, ask the beaten man how he felt lying on the ground, seeing two men walk by without helping him. What did they look like from his perspective lying down? Ask the priest and the Levite about what they were thinking as they walked past. Were they emotionally torn in any way? Did they feel any guilt? And make sure to ask the expert in the law about how he felt when Jesus finished telling the story.

Discuss with the class the key meaning of this parable, which is not just about being nice to people. It centers on the question of our neighbor’s identity and stretches our understanding of who is included in the width-ness of God’s mercy and salvation. Discuss how each person felt during the reenactment. Ask the class about the significance of the expert in the law’s response to Jesus—“‘He who showed mercy on him’” (Luke 10:37, NKJV). Did he have trouble even saying the word Samaritan? Who would be the equivalent of Samaritans in our community today?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: An appreciation for God’s provision for those who have never heard the gospel story should not leave the class with an attitude of “Well, I don’t have to do anything if God is going to sort it all out anyway.” Use this final section of the lesson study to focus on the benefits of sharing the good news for those doing the sharing and also for those who hear it.

Activity: Draw two columns on a chalkboard or white board. (If you don’t have this equipment, just discuss with the class.) Make the headings “Sharing” for column 1 and “Receiving” for column 2. As the class participates in the discussion, summarize their ideas on the board.

Ask the following types of questions: What differences does it make in the life of a Christian when this individual witness shares his or her faith? Invite class members to share from their own experiences or from what they’ve observed in others. Can you be a Christian and not share your faith? Why, or why not?

After discussing the effects of witnessing on the person doing the sharing, now focus on the person receiving. What practical difference should it make in a person’s life when he or she hears the gospel? Again, invite personal testimonies of how hearing the good news has affected people’s lives.

Finally, invite the class to make a list of practical ways in which they can become involved in God’s mission to the world.
Illustrated for a new century, Ellen White’s classic set of five volumes, spanning time from before the earth’s beginning to the fulfillment of God’s plan for His people, is reintro-duced in hardcover and matching paperback bindings.