The Missionary Nature of God

“‘See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples’” (Isa. 55:4, NIV).
He dialed the number with excitement and could hardly wait for his mother to pick up the phone. His wife was next to him so they could begin singing “Happy Birthday” at the faintest sound of “Hello.” Thousands of miles away, Mom was happy to be greeted with such fanfare, but her heart really erupted with joy when the couple said, “Mom, we have the greatest birthday present for you. You are going to be a grandma!”

The world rejoiced. People cried. There was great relief.

Some news cannot be kept a secret. By the time Jesus was born in Bethlehem, all heaven exploded, singing in the dark sky of Judea. For us, living in this remote corner of the universe, the news could not be better. The angels sang that the arrival of this Child would bring peace to earth. This is something we all intensely desire, but it seems impossible to achieve at all levels, from the global to the individual. The Child would also bring life, something that we relentlessly try to extend through improvements in health and medicine. But above all, the Child would bring God Himself in flesh and blood to live among us and to disclose to us who He really is.

On October 13, 2010, the rescue of 33 men trapped in an underground mine in Chile drew worldwide attention. Seventeen days after the accident, a note from the miners, brought back by an exploratory drill, triggered an international rescue operation without parallel. Every effort was made to rescue the men buried 700 meters (2,300 feet) underground. On the sixty-ninth day of the ordeal, the world tuned in to watch on live television as the miners emerged from the depths.* The world rejoiced. People cried. There was great relief.

The human ordeal is not very different. The choices Adam and Eve made in the beginning led to the hopeless condition of the human race. We are trapped in the depths of human sin, unable to see the light or breathe the breath of life. But God is on a mission to rescue us—a mission to bring peace to the human heart and to restore hope and life. Jesus, the Son of God made Son of man, set the record straight about who God is and what He expects from us. Jesus embodies God’s love. This is truly great news, news that God desires to make known to everyone. Let us find out God’s plans to break the news to every human being alive.


Klebert Feitosa, New Market, Virginia, U.S.A.
God Is a Missionary (Ps. 19:1–6; Rom. 1:20)

Skeptics often criticize Christians for being missionary minded. Many people find it confusing, and even offensive, that the followers of Jesus believe they must tell others about their faith. This brings us to an important question: If God loves everyone and if He is all-powerful, why does He ask us to teach others about Him?

Can't God communicate with people Himself? The answer is Yes. Bible scholars use the phrase *general revelation* when they are talking about how He does this. Psalm 19:1–6 says that the heavens declare the glory of God and His works. Sir Isaac Newton expressed this by saying, “This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being.”* The apostle Paul picks up on this in Romans 1:20 when he states that “since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse (NIV). He even goes on to say that these qualities are so clearly evident by creation that none of us can ever say that we cannot know about God. Titus 2:11 states that God’s grace has appeared and offers salvation to all people. For some people, general revelation will be all they ever hear about God, and some people will be saved because of its powerful testimony about Him.

We all have unique stories to tell about how we met Jesus and accepted His salvation.

God whispers to the heart of everyone. He speaks clearly through historical events and divine providence in the life of everyone. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has put eternity in the heart of every person. So then, why were we given the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19? Because God doesn’t seem to want to settle simply for the testimony of general revelation.

The Need for Clarity (Gen. 3:9; Ezek. 28:12; Rom. 1:25; 1 John 2:16)

The shooting guard on the basketball team caught a pass at the top of the three-point line, jumped, and shot the ball. As the ball left his hand, he began to turn around and celebrate as if he had made the shot before the ball even went in the basket. To his horror and embarrassment, he turned around at the last second to see the ball bounce off the rim. He had missed.

Has overconfidence ever led you to believe something that wasn’t true? This is exactly what happened when sin began with Lucifer in heaven. Ezekiel 28:17 says that his thinking became corrupted because of his pride. His mind was closed off because of his selfishness. All of us are born into a sin-
ful world, so we all have a propensity to worship the creations and thoughts of our own minds rather than God’s truth (Rom. 1:25). We are easily confused. This confusion often makes us doubt and misunderstand the character of God. This is exactly why Adam and Eve hid themselves from God after they sinned. He had never given them a reason to fear Him, yet they ran. Confusion due to selfishness has made a mess of our relationship with God. This is why He doesn’t settle only for general revelation. Even though its messages are clear, our minds can easily confuse them. God wants to give us every opportunity to understand Him as clearly as possible.

When God Makes It Plain (John 3:16–21; Heb. 1:1, 2)

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe” (Heb. 1:1, 2, NIV).

God uses many ways to speak to humankind. A specific form of communication is called special revelation. This includes miracles, Scripture, messages from prophets, and, best of all, Jesus Himself. God explained Himself clearly in the life of His Son. Jesus came so that every person may know God without a doubt and without confusion. Jesus’ special mission is the basis of His words to Nicodemus in John 3:16–21. Special revelation many times removes doubt because it is God’s way of being clear and specific. Ultimately, special revelation makes it easier for people to choose to love God.

So where do we fit in to all of this?

The Lord’s Army (Isa. 55:4; John 1:9–14; Acts 1:8)

Jesus says, “‘You will be my witnesses’” (Acts 1:8, NIV). A witness is someone who has seen and experienced the power of “the light” of Jesus. Accepting this special revelation truly changes someone’s life. God is a very personal God. He convinces us and nurtures us all differently. Because of this, we all have unique stories to tell about how we met Jesus and accepted His salvation. Our stories reveal the truth about God, and this truth removes confusion about Him.

Sharing what Jesus has done for you can make it easier for someone else to choose to be saved. This is what being a part of God’s army is all about. We don’t conquer people. Instead, we renounce darkness and invite others to do the same. The church is to invite people to love the Savior who has made God so accessible, so understandable, so real. Witnessing is indeed a privilege. We get to tell people what God is really like, because we know Him personally.

REACT

1. What part of your story reveals the truth about who God is?
2. How has special revelation removed confusion about God from your mind?


Dustin Hall, Elmira, New York, U.S.A.
“The divine Author of salvation left nothing incomplete in the plan; every phase of it is perfect. The sin of the whole world was laid upon Jesus, and divinity gave its highest value to the suffering of humanity in Jesus, that the whole world might be pardoned through faith in the Substitute. The most guilty need have no fear but that God will pardon, for because of the efficacy of the divine sacrifice the penalty of the law will be remitted. Through Christ the sinner may return to allegiance to God. How wonderful is the plan of redemption in its simplicity and fullness. It not only provides for the full pardon of the sinner, but also for the restoration of the transgressor, making a way whereby he may be accepted as a son of God.”

“Through the plan of salvation we are united with the agencies of heaven.”

“We should meditate upon the Scriptures, thinking soberly and candidly upon the things that pertain to our eternal salvation. The infinite mercy and love of Jesus, the sacrifice made in our behalf, call for most serious and solemn reflection. We should dwell upon the character of our dear Redeemer and Intercessor. We should seek to comprehend the meaning of the plan of salvation. We should meditate upon the mission of Him who came to save His people from their sins.”

“There is a connection between earth and heaven through Christ, the mystic ladder that Jacob saw in his vision at Bethel. When we were separated from God, Christ came to reconcile us to the Father. In pitying love He placed His human arm about the fallen race, and with His divine arm He grasped the throne of the Infinite, thus connecting finite man with the infinite God; through the plan of salvation we are united with the agencies of heaven. Through the merits of a crucified and risen Redeemer, we may look up and see the glory of God shining from heaven to earth. We should be grateful to God for the plan of salvation. We have been blessed with many blessings, and in return we should give to God our undivided hearts.”

**REACT**

1. Describe what the understanding of the plan of salvation means to you personally.
2. What can we remember when we feel separated from God?

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2. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 34.
3. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 239.

Ashley Wagner, Whitesboro, New York, U.S.A.
Nicodemus's meeting with Jesus is one of the highlights of John's Gospel. There we find a wealthy and influential member of the Jewish ruling council engaged in a candid conversation with someone who he thought was a remarkable new preacher. During their conversation, Jesus revealed some of the most profound truths about God and Himself.

He was ultimately crucified.

The greatest aspiration of any Jewish person in the days of Nicodemus was to witness the advent of the Messiah, the Anointed One, who would proclaim freedom and the release of prisoners, start a new era of God's favor, and, above all, bring the vengeance of the Lord upon the Gentiles and all other enemies of His chosen people (Isa. 61:1, 2). God, however, had very different plans. In the conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus declared that love was God's motivation for sending His Son. His purpose was to offer not only the Jews but anyone a new chance at immortality (John 3:16). And then He added, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (verse 17, NIV). This was a far cry from the deeply rooted notion about a vengeful Messiah.

Throughout His life, Jesus exposed and corrected common misconceptions about God. Whereas the Jews expected joy in heaven for the birth of a son of Abraham, Jesus pointed out that there is greater joy in heaven for a sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people (Luke 15:7). When they desired condemnation for the rebellious son, Jesus revealed that the Father desired to celebrate the return of the lost son (verses 31, 32). While the Pharisees were ready to accuse and stone the woman caught in adultery, Jesus was ready to forgive and deliver her (John 8:1–11). Jesus—the Messiah—did not fit the mold.

It is quite telling that when Jesus read the passage of Isaiah 61:1, 2, He left out the statement about the vengeance of the Lord. The ire of the people and particularly of the leaders was a result of the great dissonance between their expectations of the Messiah and the person of Jesus. They failed to understand and accept that God sent Him not to condemn the world but to save the world through Him. He was ultimately crucified.

**REACT**

1. How do you react when you discover that a perception you have about God is truly a misconception?
2. Jesus’ role when He came to earth was to be an emissary to the world for salvation. How can you fill that role to others?
When we study the life of Christ, we cannot help but marvel at the endless giving of Himself for others. He always put Himself last. He was always ready to help and to give everything for our salvation. He did not seem to be affected by the various stressors of everyday life that so often cause us to stumble. Yet He was tempted in all things as we are (Heb. 4:15). The Lord declared in Exodus 3:14, “‘I am who I am’” (NIV). The assurance we find in following Christ is that He is always the same. His actions may vary, but who Christ is remains unchanged. And His desire to reach us, to save us, and to bring us into His kingdom is not something He simply does. It is an integral part of who He is, and He ultimately proved that in His sacrifice on Calvary.

He didn’t just act like the Son of God. He was and is the Son of God.

The traditional view of a missionary is someone who goes forth and tries to reach people for the kingdom. Christ repeatedly showed us in His time on earth how important His identity as the Son of God was to Him. Everything He said and did stemmed from this identity. He didn't just act like the Son of God. He was and is the Son of God. His missionary nature is just that. It's who He is.

From the life of Christ, we learn that a true missionary spirit is about being connected to God, and as a result, being able to witness to others. For in truth, a true missionary spirit cannot be separate from a true conversion and daily walk with the Lord. This concept is expressed throughout Scripture.

The Bible teaches us about God's character and His missionary nature:
1. It calls us to strive for a similar nature, and He does not leave us alone to do so. We are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13, 14). He became sin for us, that we might become righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). He will make us fishers of men (Matt. 4:19).
2. The goal is not to put good actions by the wayside but to be sure that our actions stream from the fact that we are God's children and therefore His missionaries.

REACT
Explore the Bible for examples of how Christ expressed His missionary nature during His time on earth. What do you learn about Christ's character from these situations?
Imagine that a person named Jack asks you to help him find a missionary. You agree to do so. The two of you embark on an intense search in local churches. As you walk and talk, you discover that Jack is searching for someone to help him share with his community what he is learning from the Bible. Jack believes a missionary seems like the ideal person to help him. Eager to assist him in his search, you both are disappointed that you found no missionaries in the local area. Disheartened, you prepare to bid your new friend farewell but are surprised when Jack turns to you and asks, “Would you be willing to be the missionary instead?” How do you respond?

Are you ready to take that step from being just a member to being a disciple?

It may seem like a simple question with an obvious answer, but all too often we struggle with saying Yes to a question like the one above. It often requires that we step outside of our comfort zones. Many times we think of missionaries as individuals who travel overseas to share God’s Word with an unreached people group, when in reality the Bible says we are all expected to be missionaries. Whether we are speaking with a classmate or chatting with a neighbor, we are representing God. In the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16–20), Christ placed no constraints on His command. It is an unmistakable command to all who call themselves His followers.

However, the role of a missionary is not just sharing the Word of God. It also involves helping to meet the needs of one’s community. To meet these needs, God gives each of us certain talents and abilities. It is far too common to find a church where ministries are struggling for volunteers, even when the pews are full of members. Some pastors have begun programs to prepare their members to move from membership to discipleship. This is how one becomes a fully committed disciple of Christ.

Are you ready to take that step from being just a member to being a disciple? It may seem frightening. Stepping out of one’s comfort zone often is, but you don’t have to do it alone. Christ assures us, “‘Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’” (verse 20, NKJV).

REACT

1. What can you do beside giving a Bible study to share Christ with your community?
2. What skills or talents do you have that may be useful in your local church?
CONCLUDE
A war veteran complained to his nurse in the recovery room, “I don’t deserve the kind treatment you’re giving me.” His nurse responded, “Neither you nor I deserve the kind treatment we receive; that’s why we need a Savior!” As pitiful humans, neither you nor I need to be afraid of our past, present, or future. The awesome news is that everyone has a Savior! God uses the natural world and the Holy Scriptures to reveal this good news about Himself directly to us. However, God is particularly happy to delegate His missionary work to people already benefiting from His role as their Savior.

CONSIDER
• Taking a hike in nature. Find a quiet place to sit. Prayerfully observe and listen for God to reveal Himself to you.
• Researching Christian people who have faced problems similar to what you or someone you know is currently struggling with.
• Contacting someone who recently has been in your thoughts. Share with that person in some way the good news that he or she does not have to be afraid of the past, present, or future, and why.
• Listening to Casting Crowns’ song “The Voice of Truth” on YouTube. Ask God to reveal the places in your life where you need to believe the Voice of truth.
• Inviting a friend to go with you on an expedition. What examples of the good news do you find? Share what you saw on a social media bulletin board.
• Going to a quiet place to be alone with God and His Word. Also bring a journal. Spend some time confessing your sins and inviting Him to talk to you about anything He wants to discuss. Read the Bible, and journal your conversation with Him.
• Baking some cookies or loaves of bread. Wrap them with paper that has Bible verses written on it, and deliver the baked goods to people who will benefit either from the physical food and/or the scriptural verses that come with it. Prior to making the delivery, pray over the gifts.

CONNECT
Deuteronomy 4:9, 10; 6:6, 7; 7:17–21; Matthew 10:5–15.
Beth Moore, Praying God’s Word.

Lisa Poole, Elbert, Colorado, U.S.A.
Abraham: The First Missionary

“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’”

(Gal. 3:6–8, NIV).
I remember the day I left home to go to a boarding school. Although the day was like any other day for most people, it was quite different for me. I was born and raised in a rural suburb. So leaving this suburb was a milestone in my life—a milestone that came with new responsibilities and many changes. Home had been good. I had shared many good times with other age-mates in our area. However, when the time came for me to move, I did so, even though I knew there would be challenges ahead.

For many people, leaving home and relocating to a different place is no easy achievement. “East or west, home is best,” the saying goes. In many instances, we find it difficult to pull up roots. We must leave friends and a familiar environment. We may even have to adjust to different foods. And surely we will miss the old familiar places we used to go to. We, therefore, find ourselves identifying with that environment and its contents.

My leaving home reminds me of when God instructed Abraham to leave his home and go to a foreign land. Abraham had a family, relatives, and friends with whom he shared a life in his ancestral land. Perhaps this call came as a shock to him. Moving to a different country would mean adapting to a new way of life and facing all the other challenges that would come along the way. Nowadays, if you move to a foreign country, you sometimes have to go through a rigorous screening process to determine your eligibility to travel to that country. This may include obtaining certain documents and fulfilling all the legalities related to your travel.

However, Abraham did not need a visa, passport, or plane ticket in order to accomplish his mission. Neither did he have to confirm his eligibility to travel to the land that God would show him. He did only one important thing: he chose to obey the voice of the Lord. He began his mission with a few possessions and a few family members. Armed only with two weapons—faith and God’s word—Abraham traversed different regions as a missionary, planting the Word of God as he went in areas that needed to know God.

This week we will study about Abraham and his work as a missionary. Back then, his efforts as the first missionary did not go unrewarded. Thousands of people came to know and believe in God through him. What does it mean for us in this generation to leave home for a noble cause as Abraham did?

Mark Gift, Nairobi, Kenya
A missionary can be defined as “a person sent by a church into an area to carry on evangelism or other activities, as educational or hospital work.”\(^1\) When we consider the world we live in, we realize that there are many parts of the world that still need to hear God’s Word. As Christians, we have the responsibility to share what we know about Him with others. Some people purposely travel to foreign countries to spread the Word of God. However, let us never forget that we can be missionaries no matter where we live and work. Abraham became our first example on how to trust God. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (Heb. 11:8, NKJV). As Abraham’s faith advanced, God entrusted more resources to him so he could accomplish this goal.

“The final instruction Jesus gave to His disciples was to ‘go... and make

**World mission is all about building our church at the grassroot level.**

disciples of all the nations’ (Matt. 28:19; cf. Acts 1:8). As Christ was sent into the world by the Father so He sent His disciples (John 20:21). Their primary task, as well as that of the church, has always been the sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the world. The members of the church have been called out of the world to be sent back into the world with a mission and a message. The call to evangelism springs from an unequivocal command of the Lord of the church.”\(^2\)

As in the days of Abraham, God still blesses individuals or groups of people today to achieve His objective of blessing many others. He gives us talents and responsibilities so we can share Christ. The greatest gift to share about Christ is His saving grace, which each person is entitled to, as long as a person chooses to follow Him. Our role as missionaries is to step out in faith and trust God for everything we need that will help us to share Christ. World mission is all about building our church at the grassroot level as well as carrying the gospel to far-flung areas of the world where the Word of God has not reached.

**REACT**

What are the requirements of being a missionary?

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2. Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, p. 549.
The Great Call (Gen. 12:1–3)

As much as it might have been a simple instruction to the recipient, Abraham’s call was a special one, with a deeper meaning not only for him but for generations to come. As a normal villager attending to his duties on a daily basis, Abraham had no inkling that God would call him to be His servant. God looks at people from a different perspective than what most people would normally take. This is because He is able to examine our hearts.

When God called Abraham, He gave him one command that was loaded with promises. Many times, we prefer our comfort zones and would do everything to stay grounded in them. However, God instructed Abraham to leave all of his comfort zones in order to follow His directions. For many people, such a task would be too difficult. Abraham, however, obeyed.

God did not hesitate to mention the promises tied to the call: (1) that He would make of Abraham a great nation and name, (2) that He would bless him, and (3) that Abraham would be a source of blessing to all families on the earth.

From Abraham’s call, we learn that in order to serve God as missionaries we must be ready to leave our comfort zones and faithfully obey God’s instructions.

The Role of Faith in Mission (Gen. 15:6; Gal. 3:5, 6; Heb. 11:8–10)

From Abraham’s example, we learn that faith is the brick and mortar that build missions. Abraham did not have prior knowledge of where he was to go. However, because he believed in what God said, he followed His directions. The faith we have in the engineers who build bridges or in chefs who cook for restaurants is the same faith we need to exercise when God calls us to serve as missionaries. Abraham demonstrated a pattern of faith and obedience that is necessary for every Christian to serve God effectively.

Long after Abraham showed this kind of faith, Paul wrote, “Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? Consider Abraham: ‘He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness’” (Gal. 3:6, NIV).

Mission is not without its challenges. Yet Abraham believed God would provide solutions to every problem, an alternative route to every obsta-
cle, and an appropriate answer to every question. If we are to serve God, then faith must be a quality that also dominates our characters.

A Missionary Is Often a Wanderer (Gen. 12:6, 7; 13:1–14:20)

Abraham was to take the gospel to both remote and urban areas. He did not have a permanent home in this world. Instead, he “waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10, NKJV).

Whenever God calls you to be a missionary, do not expect much in terms of temporal possessions. Abraham survived in tents and moved from place to place. Christ highlighted this issue when He said, “‘Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head’” (Matt. 8:20, NKJV). This is yet another illustration of getting out of one’s comfort zone to witness effectively for Christ. Mission requires a willingness to go where most people would not go. As Abraham went from his homeland to Shechem through the plains of Moreh to Canaan, so we should traverse the vast places where the Word of God is still unknown. As we do so, we are bound to meet many challenges along the way. However, just as God provided for Abraham, He will provide for us. Like Abraham, let us remain loyal and obedient. Let us perform our missionary duties in faith, knowing that God is in control.

Being a Missionary in Your Own House (Gen. 18:18, 19; Heb. 11:11–20)

When we become missionaries, we become role models. Our immediate family members need to see the missionary in us so that they can be inspired to make wise decisions about serving God. God saw Abraham as a role model for his household. Through his faith, his wife Sarah was able to conceive, although she was past the age of childbearing. Abraham’s example of faith enabled Isaac to bless his two sons, Jacob and Esau.

If we are to be effective missionaries, our characters must shine with a spiritual brightness that sheds light on the hearts and minds of those around us. We can practice this in our families, churches, schools, colleges, and places of work.

REACT

1. How would you feel if today God called you to be a missionary? Explain your answer.
2. Why is it sometimes easier for us to exercise faith in worldly things than in spiritual matters?
3. How would you overcome any challenges you might encounter as a missionary?
4. What is the goal of being a missionary?
"The message of God came to Abraham, 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.' In order that God might qualify him for his great work as the keeper of the sacred oracles, Abraham must be separated from the associations of his early life. The influence of kindred and friends would interfere with the training which the Lord purposed to give His servant. Now that Abraham was, in a special sense, connected with heaven, he must dwell among strangers. His character must be peculiar, differing from all the world. He could not even explain his course of action so as to be understood by his friends. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and his motives and actions were not comprehended by his idolatrous kindred. . . .

"It was no light test that was thus brought upon Abraham, no small sacrifice that was required of him. There were strong ties to bind him to his country, his kindred, and his home. But he did not hesitate to obey the call. He had no question to ask concerning the land of promise—whether the soil was fertile and the climate healthful; whether the country afforded agreeable surroundings and would afford opportunities for amassing wealth. God has spoken, and His servant must obey; the happiest place on earth for him was the place where God would have him to be."¹

"Wherever he pitched his tent, close beside it was set up his altar, calling all within his encampment to the morning and evening sacrifice. When his tent was removed, the altar remained. In following years, there were those among the roving Canaanites who received instruction from Abraham; and whenever one of these came to that altar, he knew who had been there before him; and when he had pitched his tent, he repaired the altar, and there worshiped the living God."²

In the footsteps of Abraham, we are the pilgrims of this generation. Let us respond to God's instructions in faith and obedience, for only then can we fulfill what we need to accomplish before Christ returns.

**REACT**

1. What are some similarities between Abraham’s calling and ours?
2. What “altars” are you leaving behind you, and what will people learn about you and your relationship with God based upon these altars?

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² Ibid., p. 128.
Abraham's decision to be a missionary unfolds in a life full of faith. Upon his calling, he did not have any proof that the life he would find in Canaan would be great. However, he believed what God had told him. Abraham did not yield to God's instructions to achieve his own goals. His example shows that he was willing to do what God wanted. In His divine plan, God intended for Abraham to share the message of salvation with others.

His Word should be all the proof we need that He is in control.

One lesson we can learn from this is that as much as God chooses to use a person to accomplish His divine goals, the person chosen must be willing to follow God's instructions. Abraham totally surrendered to God. His obedience unfolds when God tests him yet again by asking him to sacrifice his only son (Gen. 22:1–18). This was just a continuation of his character of faith. From his example, we can learn the following lessons that can help us in our own mission:

Mission should begin at the initiative of God. God's sovereignty is clearly illustrated in the call of Abraham. Abraham was going about his normal duties when God called him. If it happened to Abraham, it is possible that it can happen to us today.

Mission depends on God's divine support. Abraham acknowledged God's call. He also depended on Him to provide everything he needed for his mission to be successful. Likewise, after we accept God's call to carry His message to the world, we need to believe that He will support what He has started.

Mission is a pilgrimage. Abraham lived as a pilgrim, depending on God's providence (Heb. 11:8–10). Neither do we really have a permanent home in this world. We also live for the city which is to come (John 14:1–3).

We need to ground our mission in the reliability of God's Word. When Abraham left his home in Ur, he believed God. Likewise, once we accept God's call to be His missionaries, His Word should be all the proof we need that He is in control.

REACT

1. Why do we have to accept God's call before we can step out as missionaries?
2. What are some of the personal benefits of being a missionary?
3. What role does faith play in mission?
After reading about Abraham’s call and his subsequent missionary work, I feel that I must define my position as a present-day missionary. Based on Abraham’s call, it is clear that mission is not confined to any specific age or time. We need not wait until we are retired to have a mission. Instead, the common thread that binds us as Christians when it comes to spreading the gospel of Christ also qualifies us to be missionaries any time, in any place.

Wherever you are now, you can engage in mission activities.

Our obligation to proclaim the gospel is rooted in the covenant between God and Abraham. God blessed Abraham as the father of the faithful and promised to bless him and his future generations. Consequently, Abraham became a great missionary who desired righteousness and showed obedience and respect to God above all else. Since then, the mission torch has been passed down from one generation to another. Today, our generation continues to wear the mantle of mission handed down to us from Abraham.

Wherever you are now, you can engage in mission activities. In our institutions of learning or places of work and within our communities, we can be missionaries in all that we say and do.

Because of his steadfastness and obedience to God’s instructions, Abraham is a true pioneer of mission and an excellent example for us to follow. It is important for us to realize that the world around us needs the gospel and that it is our responsibility, as the religious descendants of Abraham, to share the gospel with others who are still in the dark.

“The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His Second Advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness.”*

**REACT**

1. What can you do to support mission work in your community?
2. If mission is an inherent part of being a Christian, why do we so often hesitate to be a part of the mission work?
3. How can you be a missionary wherever you are, all the time?

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*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . ., 2nd ed., p. 181.

Jane Oreso, Homa Bay County, Kenya
CONCLUDE
While relatively few people are called to be missionaries to far-off countries, everyone is called to be missionaries to their local surroundings, no travel shots or visas required. In fact, mission work is a universal Christian calling, with each mission field tailored to the individual Christian. No one has better access or the ability to work in your mission field than you do. You are intimately familiar with its territory and the people who occupy it. In partnership with Christ, you will be able to identify and meet the needs of the people you are serving.

CONSIDER
• Drawing a map of Abraham’s journey. Trace his path, putting in the names of the places he traveled through. Then draw a map of your own mission field. Outline its physical boundaries in red. Make it as detailed as you can.
• Dedicating a pocket (or your purse) to a Gospel of John to give to someone each day. You can order pocket testaments from the Pocket Testament League (ptl.org).
• Prayer walking through your local mission field. As you walk, pray for the people, businesses, homes, and institutions you pass. Ask God to open a way for you to witness to your neighbors.
• Subscribing to Adventist Frontiers magazine (http://afmonline.org/resources/our-magazine) and reading about people in the mission field in order to gather outreach ideas for the mission field God has given you.
• Praying each morning for God to open doors for you to witness.
• Baking for your neighbors or coworkers as a way to introduce yourself and to establish relationships with them.
• Analyzing your areas of mission by making a computer graph that can be updated monthly. Keep track of how many people you make contact with and which methods of outreach work best for you.

CONNECT
Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:13–15.
Mark Finley and Ernestine Finley, Fulfilling God’s End-Time Mission (Pacific Press®, 2013).

Céleste Perrino-Walker, Rutland, Vermont, U.S.A.
The Unlikely Missionary

“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).
Time and again we hear stories about wealthy people who are proud of their wealth and who claim that it was all due to their hard work. But eventually, they are taught a lesson in humility, because they failed to recognize God’s gifts to them. It is important to acknowledge that it is His mercy that helps us to live this life and to accomplish our dreams. He does not need our praise or our gratitude, but He surely does deserve it.

Second Kings 5:1–12 tells us wonderful things about Naaman, but it also tells us that he had leprosy. We recognize the transition in verse 1. He was honorable, but there was something holding him back. His sickness was not only physical. It was also spiritual. He was filled with pride. He “had his own thoughts, but these were not the thoughts of God. He had heard of a man who could cure him of his leprosy, and immediately he came to his own conclusions as to exactly how this should and would be accomplished. He made a plan of his own, and then expected that God would work according to that plan.”

Elisha was God’s prophet. When he sent his servant to tell Naaman to wash in the Jordan River, Naaman became angry. After all, he was the captain of the Syrian king’s army.

Little did Naaman know about the God we serve, that He does not judge us based on our earthly accomplishments, but on our love for Him and on our deeds as an outgrowth of that love. “Naaman did not see himself as a servant. He was in charge of the army, he was a master. What about you? How do you see yourself? Are you a servant? God was in the process of stripping away Naaman’s pride in order to make him into a servant. God may be stripping something away from your life in order to make you into a servant. Naaman still had a lesson to learn in order to become a true servant. He still had to learn to obey God.”

As we study this week’s lesson, let us remember that there is a lesson in every blessing and a blessing in every lesson. We each need to have a personal relationship with Christ.


Claudia McDonald, St. Catherine, Jamaica
Willingness to Minister (Eph. 4:7, 11–13)

It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon at Bailey Creek Seventh-day Adventist Church. The young people were gathered under an old oak tree planning their Youth Day program. Finding a preacher for this event was proving difficult, but finally, a sixteen-year-old nervously volunteered to give the sermon. Everyone was uncertain of his ability to do so, but John was willing, even if he was a bit anxious about it.

Finally, the day arrived. John stepped up to the podium and wiped his sweaty hands on his trousers. He took a deep breath, said a short prayer, and then plunged wholeheartedly into his sermon. That Saturday, the church received the most power-packed homily ever, and three precious souls were saved.

Ministering, whether it is to a large or small crowd, can sometimes be difficult, but if you allow Him to, God can use you in ways you never imagined possible. Bringing the gospel to other people can stretch your faith and reward you in many different ways. Whether it is on your front porch or in a third-world country, God calls us all to spread the good news, because His purpose for our lives is not just to save us but to have Him help us save others as well.

The Secret Weapon (Rom. 5:1, 2; Heb. 11:1–6)

Our faith grows only insofar as we get to know God personally. Do you talk to Him as you would talk to a close friend? Do you share everything with Him, from your joys to your sorrows? Is He your best Friend? When will we truly experience God for ourselves and believe that He will always be there for us, regardless of the circumstances?

We have always heard that faith "as small as a mustard seed" can move mountains (Matt. 17:20, NIV). But do we really understand what this verse is saying? Just an ounce of faith can do amazing things! It can work miracles. It can save souls. It can even help you to be a testimony to others. What great work we could accomplish if we only trusted God more. Trusting Him may not always seem like the most important thing to do. Sometimes our problems seem so large that we forget that simply trusting Him is always the solution. However, the realization that God is stronger than any problem we have is an assurance that can be achieved only through Him. People who seek God and truly believe in Him find their reward, for He Himself is the reward.
**Power to Those Who Believe (2 Kings 5:1–19)**

The story of Naaman is well known to children and adults alike. He was captain of the host of the king of Syria and a mighty man in valor, but he was also a leper. Leprosy was (and still is) a terrible disease. The "outstanding feature of leprosy is anaesthesia—loss of feeling. The result is gradual wear and tear attrition of hands, face, and feet. . . . The loss of sensation, when once established, remains. While the infection may be cured, the scars that result from the loss of sensation remain for life."¹

Naaman's master sent him to the prophet Elisha so that he might receive help with his condition. However, when Elisha instructed Naaman to wash himself in the Jordan River seven times, Naaman became quite angry! He could not understand why Elisha would not come out himself and heal him right there on the spot. Naaman's reaction proved that his faith was not strong. But what a mighty thing it is when we make ourselves available to Jesus Christ! We become a testimony, and we open ourselves up to God's awesome power and saving grace.

After receiving wise counsel from his servants, Naaman finally heeded Elisha's instructions. And after he dipped himself seven times, “his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (verse 14, NKJV). Naaman had finally trusted God to heal him of his leprosy, and through his faith, he was healed!

We all can be available for God to work through us. Just look at the maid of Naaman's wife, Elisha the prophet, and even Naaman himself! "Naaman had heard of God through the testimony of the Hebrew maid, but now he had become acquainted with Him through his own personal experience. Faith had become knowledge. . . . He knew now that outside of Israel there were no gods."²

**The Mission (Mark 16:15)**

Spreading the gospel is also our mission in today's world. We are to let people know what God has done and what He promises to do. Christ's mission on earth was to do the will of His Father (John 3:16, 17), and He did it without hesitation, even though it resulted in great pain and suffering. This should be powerful enough to put us into action! We, who have come into contact with God, know the awesomeness of His power, and it is through that power that we are transformed into new creatures. God calls us to go into the world and proclaim the gospel to people. We have the truth that the world needs. Let us make ourselves available to be used by God so we can go into the world and rescue precious souls for the kingdom of heaven.

**REACT**

1. How can you personally make yourself available to be used by God?
2. Would you be willing to stand up in a large crowd and start sharing the good news? Why, or why not?
3. Name seven Bible characters who allowed God to use them. What impresses you about each one?

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¹. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Leprosy.”

Joanna Johnson, St. Catherine, Jamaica
“True love is not merely a sentiment or an emotion. It is a living principle, a principle that is manifest in action. True love, wherever it exists, will control the life. Thus it is with the love of God. ‘God is love;’ and in all His works, in all His dealings with mankind, His character is revealed.”

Fight back with the love of Christ.

“Ben-hadad, king of Syria, had defeated the armies of Israel in the battle which resulted in the death of Ahab. Since that time the Syrians had maintained against Israel a constant border warfare, and in one of their raids they had carried away a little maid who, in the land of her captivity, ‘waited on Naaman’s wife.’ A slave, far from her home, this little maid was nevertheless one of God’s witnesses, unconsciously fulfilling the purpose for which God had chosen Israel as His people. As she ministered in that heathen home, her sympathies were aroused in behalf of her master; and, remembering the wonderful miracles of healing wrought through Elisha, she said to her mistress, ‘Would God my Lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! For he would recover him of his leprosy.’ She knew that the power of Heaven was with Elisha, and she believed that by this power Naaman could be healed.

The important lesson that we all should take away from this little maid is never to allow our circumstances to dictate whether or not we should share the love of Christ to a dying world. She had every right to be angry with Naaman and to find joy in his sorrows. Instead, she showed compassion. And that is exactly what Jesus would have done.

As Christian soldiers on the battlefield of life, Satan will use our neighbors, coworkers, and family members to drive hatred into our hearts, to fill our minds with angry thoughts. When that happens, do not retaliate; employ a different strategy. Fight back with the love of Christ. Only then will our mission be a success.

REACT

1. How can we show love to others without actually saying, “I love you”?
2. Is there a special class of people who don’t deserve our love? Explain your answer.

2. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 244, 245.

Renaldo Mcleod, Kitson Town, Jamaica
We are called to be missionaries, to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to a dying world. Even though she was taken from her homeland and brought to the Syrian kingdom to be a maid, the young girl was a missionary for the living and true God of Israel. “If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy’” (2 Kings 5:3, NIV). The powerful Syrian captain had it all, except his health. Though honored and respected, he was restricted by his sickness. However, the good news gave him hope. Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said (verse 4), and the master’s life and the lives of those around him were changed forever.

Teaching others to walk with Jesus is our mission.

Many people in this world are sick with the leprosy of sin. As Christians, we are missionaries, just as Jesus was when He was on earth. And as missionaries, our responsibility is to point a dying world to the cure that is found in Jesus. Now we may not be abducted from our homeland, but many people have chosen to leave their jobs, their families, and the comfort of their homes to spread the gospel. Starting with the missionary work of J. N. Andrews, the Seventh-day Adventist Church currently has a presence in more than 200 countries due to dedicated yet ordinary men and women of God. Teaching others to walk with Jesus is our mission.

Missionaries like Rhonda Bowen said, “On the long list of occupations that most children dream about, teacher didn’t even register for me.” Yet from October 2010 to September 2011, she served as an English teacher at the Seventh-day Adventist language school in Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand. She left her family, job, friends, and the comfort of her home to serve in an area that, for her, was out of the ordinary. Called by God, the experience changed her life and the lives of those around her. As a result, many people were baptized into lives with Jesus.

Being a missionary of the gospel is the responsibility of every Christian. No matter how large or small your contribution may be, it will play an important part in accomplishing the healing of the sickness that is sin.

REACT

1. How can you be a missionary where you are?
2. In what way/s are you a missionary now?


Shandel Lawrence, St. Catherine, Jamaica
A little maid was taken captive by the Syrians and brought to a strange land. But despite the different culture and religious beliefs of this new environment, she stood firm in her faith (2 Kings 5:2, 3).

She was certain that God was with a prophet in Samaria and that if only her master Naaman could go there, he would be cleansed of his leprosy. As such, she brought a message of hope to these idolaters (verse 3). She was taken captive, yet she allowed the tragedy of her captivity to accomplish a greater good.

The following are traits we all should possess as we spread the message of hope to others.

Be convicted by the Holy Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit inspire you. Let Him guide and direct you to win lost souls.

Be rooted and grounded in the Lord. Before you witness to others, believe, trust, be hopeful, and have faith in Christ. Let your roots grow deep into the “soil” of Jesus so that no storm or wind can blow you away.

Be confident. Just like the little maid, be courageous. Be sure of your belief and faith, and know that God is able to do what He says He will do. Do not give in to doubt. Instead, be firm. Step out in boldness, certainty, and great assurance in God through Jesus (verse 10).

Be loving, willing, and considerate. As a witness for Christ, always be prepared to help someone when the opportunity arises. Always let God work through you as you look for ways to share Him. Give your whole heart, mind, and soul to the cause of God, and be joyful as you seek lost souls with “fervent charity” (1 Pet. 4:8).

**REACT**

1. What do you think would happen in our homes, schools, and society in general if more individuals were like the little maid?
2. In what ways are you willing to witness to others in spite of the challenges and consequences you might face?
Second Kings 5:1 reads, “Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper.”

Naaman gained recognition among men, but he was an idolater and a leper. The gods he served could not render assistance. Neither could his position or recognition help him. What was he to do? Elisha sent a messenger to him with instructions regarding how he was to be cured. It upset Naaman that Elisha did not extend the pleasantries that Naaman expected; and of all the rivers, Elisha chose the Jordan, even though there were better rivers available.

Salvation supersedes rank, race, and social status.

Naaman had his own expectations of how he should be healed, and washing in a river was not one of those expectations. As Christians, we must always be cognizant of the fact that God loves us and that He does what He knows is best for us. We must remember that our feeble minds are unable to fathom all the things our God can do. It is by His grace we exist. It is by His grace that Naaman was healed.

Thankfully, Naaman’s servants were able to convince him to obey Elisha’s command. In Naaman’s case, both the maid and his servants were subordinates. Yet in both situations, they offered wise counsel. From this we can learn that regardless of who any of us are, salvation supersedes rank, race, and social status. Salvation is for all who will accept it.

When Naaman washed himself in the river, he was cured physically of his leprosy. He was also healed spiritually. Prior to this washing, he was an idolater, consumed by pride. This “new” man acknowledged the one true God. “He had a second chance. This shows the divine patience. Thousands of people reject Christ, and then, when they come, by and by—they find the way still open. They have a second chance. God waits long to be gracious even to the sinner who has often refused the invitation of mercy.”*

REACT

1. Read Romans 6:1–11. How does the story of Naaman correlate to some of the principles found in these verses?

2. What are three principles you personally can learn from this story?

CONCLUDE

God yearns for us to go the extra mile—or two. He wants us not only to pray but to “live out” our prayers. For instance, if you pray for your house to sell but never put it on the market, you may be stuck with a dreadful mortgage. You need to do your part. Naaman had a similar problem. His prideful heart hurt his quest for healing. When he heard of a solution, he ferociously and stubbornly refused to comply. His will had become stronger than God’s. It was only after he humbled himself and put his pride “on the market” that he was cured and became a blessing and testimony to others.

CONSIDER

- Dipping into a pool or lake and acting out the healing miracle Naaman experienced by submerging yourself seven times in the water. Consider how great it must have felt to be completely renewed. Reflect on how God washes our sins clean when we accept His salvation and humbly follow His commands.
- Reading the story of Naaman (2 Kings 5:1–15) to a friend who is physically sick. Encourage him or her to make every effort possible to receive the best treatment. Emphasize that even though a Naaman-type miracle may not be experienced in his or her lifetime, one day pain will be in the past (Rev. 21:4).
- Befriending someone on Facebook and encouraging him or her spiritually through your wall posts, pictures, and messages. Make an intentional effort to reach out to this person.
- Being an unlikely missionary wherever you are. Live out 1 Timothy 4:12 by assisting someone with homework, doing the dishes after potluck, volunteering at a hospital, preaching at church, and so on. You are never too young to “live out” God.
- Bringing mustard seeds to Sabbath School class. Share Jesus’ analogy on how even a little bit of faith can move mountains (Matt. 17:20). Distribute a mustard seed to each member and have them place it in an area where they can often see it.

CONNECT

Matthew 6:8; Romans 12:12.
Ellen G. White, Conflict and Courage, p. 228, or online at https://egwwritings.org/.
E. Lonnie Melashenko and David B. Smith, A Suitcase Full of Faith.
The Jonah Saga

“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’”

Mr. Robinson had just witnessed Matthew throw an eraser across the classroom, hitting me on the side of my face.

That did it! I had had enough of this guy! Nearly every class we were in together, there seemed to be an endless supply of erasers, pencils, or sharpeners that I would eventually take possession of.

In a stern voice, Mr. Robinson said, “Matthew, stand up!” Then his voice softened as he said, “Don’t let me see you do that again.”

I could not believe it! It looked as though Matthew was going to get away with it again! I had complained so many times about him, but no one ever did anything about it.

“But, sir! He does something like this in every class!” I shouted.

As Mr. Robinson looked over at my distressed face, he replied, “Matthew, that will be a detention! See me after class.”

I glanced over at Matthew, thinking I should have called for a harsher sentence. A detention was some consolation, but I knew Mr. Robinson too well. The next day I found out that he had forgotten to write the detention in Matthew’s record book. So Matthew managed once again to avoid punishment, and my dislike for him continued to grow.

Jonah felt the same way toward the people of Nineveh when God spared them, even after He said He would destroy them. The prophet found himself boiling over with anger at the fact that God didn’t do what He said He would do.

As we study this week’s lesson, let us remember that God’s rescue mission, His plan of salvation, is for everyone, even the “Matthews” and the “Ninevehs” in our lives, even for those whom we dislike, even for those whom we think are undeserving, even for those whom we wish we didn’t have to face every day. Let us remember that there will be many times when God will choose us to deliver the good news to them.

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Kris Williams, London, England
During the eighth century B.C., Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the greatest power in the Middle East. It was located on the left riverbank of the Tigris River, northwest of Mesopotamia (what we now call Iraq). The Assyrians at that time were noted for their evil and ruthless acts. Among the gods they worshiped was Ashur, and they were well known for the torture they used against their enemies. They would hang the heads of their victims along roadways as a warning for other nations.*

God gave a clear message to Jonah: “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me” (Jon. 1:2, NKJV). Jonah knew who the Assyrians and the inhabitants of Nineveh were. He knew about their cruel acts, so he refused to go and preach the message God had given him. Thus, to avoid his assigned mission, Jonah decided to go to Tarshish, the extreme limit of the then-known world, and most likely the farthest point away of any place he knew about.

As a prophet, Jonah also knew about God. However, his heart was full of selfish feelings regarding God's bountiful love and mercy.

The Bible confirms that God sent His messengers not only to the children of Israel but also to the pagan nations. He does not want anyone to perish. He desires for everyone to repent (2 Pet. 3:9). As Creator of the human race, God's love and compassion compel Him to send His message of redemption to every kindred, tribe, and nation.

The book of Jonah helps us to understand that even though we cannot comprehend the magnitude of God's love and grace, He is capable of overcoming all of our evil so that we can accept His salvation—a gift that is beyond our reasoning.

Despite the evil and the hatred in many humans, we are not called to judge. Instead, our mission is to take the message to everyone.

**REACT**

1. What does God’s grace mean to you? Do you think it has limits, or is it based on our actions? Be able to explain your answer.

2. The world is full of groups known for their evil acts and indifference toward God. What strategies do you believe can be used to share the message of salvation with these groups?

The Flawed Prophet (Jon. 1:2–16)

The story of Jonah is a clear example of the wide and deep love God has for every human soul. Throughout many years, much emphasis has been placed on the fact that Jonah ran away when God sent him to Nineveh and on his selfish desires to see it destroyed. But there is more to this amazing story.

God clearly knew Jonah’s heart and thoughts. He definitely knew Jonah would run away, but at the same time, He also knew the great results Jonah’s actions would yield. As we read the story of Jonah, we probably look at him as a selfish, cowardly prophet. However, God saw in his defects a great opportunity for evangelism and missionary work.

Jonah, as naïve as he could be in thinking he could really run away from God, finds himself in a boat with sailors headed to Tarshish. As he rested on the bottom deck, convinced that his plan was actually turning out well, God saw in his escape a perfect scenario to remind him that he could never escape from God’s presence and that through his imperfection, God could still accomplish His plan.

Before God unveils His amazing rescue strategy for Jonah, He grants him an opportunity to testify of the God he serves. The sailors are aware that the great storm they are experiencing is abnormal. They question Jonah, and he answers in Jonah 1:9: “I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land” (NIV). As they throw Jonah out of the boat after trying other options, they are able to confirm the validity of his answer. The sea becomes quiet. God has shown His power. The sailors are now worshiping Him, and Jonah has witnessed through his imperfection.

Jonah’s Revival (Jonah 2)

Jonah’s rescue illustrates all the influence and power God is willing to use to save one perishing soul. God could have easily decided to use another prophet to carry the message to Nineveh. He could have made Nineveh’s king fall into a deep sleep and then show him a vision of what would happen to his nation if the people did not repent. Instead, God never gave up on Jonah and the purpose He had for him. He understood that Jonah wasn’t perfect and that he needed time to understand his important role in the plan of salvation that God had for Nineveh.
Even though the second chapter of the book of Jonah reveals a short prayer he made to God, keep in mind that he spent three days and nights in the belly of a great fish. The first day must have been full of amazement, not only because he was literally inside a fish but also because he understood how important he was to God. He clearly realized he had a purpose, and he acknowledged how naïve he was in trying to run away from God.

In Jonah's prayer, we clearly see that the prophet is amazed at how God listened to him when he called out in his distress (verses 1, 2). He acknowledges that God is giving him a second chance (verse 6) and that he is grateful and ready to fulfill God's command (verse 9).

**Out and Saving (Jonah 3, 4)**

After his exclusive three-day retreat and revival in the belly of the fish, Jonah returned to dry land, ready to obey God's instructions. Once in Nineveh, his message must surely have been strong and direct, for only into one day of preaching, “the Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth” (Jon. 3:5, NIV).

As the Ninevites hastily acknowledged their wrongdoing, God became filled with compassion and decided not to destroy them as Jonah had warned (verse 10). This makes for a perfect ending to the story: the prophet called on a mission runs away and is thrown into the sea. The sailors are impressed by God's power. The prophet is rescued, experiences a deep revival, preaches God's word, and thousands are saved.

Nevertheless, Jonah was still unhappy. Just as he couldn't believe how compassionate God was, sometimes we, as God's chosen missionaries, cannot understand His amazing kindness toward others. It's hard for us to understand that the kid who always bullied us in elementary school will be saved. It's difficult for us to understand why people who've done so much wrong should have the opportunities to at least listen to the Word of God and to choose between eternal life or eternal damnation.

We question God's system of justice and mercy, and sometimes we even try to give God some recommendations on how to judge His people.

Yet like Jonah, in our selfishness, we overlook how important we are to the fulfillment of God's redemption plan on earth. Let us always remember the role God has given us in this great judgment. We are neither the judge nor the advocate. Instead, we are the witnesses of His great love and compassion.

Nineveh was a city of more than 120,000 people who couldn't discern their right hand from their left (Jon. 4:11). It was Jonah's duty to lead them in the right path, to share with them that beam of light called salvation.

Jesus said, “‘You are the light of the world’” (Matt. 5:14, NIV). It is time for us to experience true revival like Jonah. It is time for us to come out of the belly of the great fish God has kept us in. And it is time to spread His message of salvation throughout the world.

Johann De Dier, Panama City, Panama
As the prophet thought of the difficulties and seeming impossibilities of this commission, he was tempted to question the wisdom of the call. From a human viewpoint it seemed as if nothing could be gained by proclaiming such a message in that proud city. He forgot for the moment that the God whom he served was all-wise and all-powerful. While he hesitated, still doubting, Satan overwhelmed him with discouragement.

"In the charge given him, Jonah had been entrusted with a heavy responsibility; yet He who had bidden him go was able to sustain His servant and grant him success. Had the prophet obeyed unquestioningly, he would have been spared many bitter experiences, and would have been blessed abundantly. Yet in the hour of Jonah's despair the Lord did not desert him."1

Does this sound familiar? We are modern Jonathans. We get discouraged easily. But just as God had a plan for Jonah, He has a plan for us.

"My brethren, there is no reason for discouragement. The good seed is being sown. God will watch over it, causing it to spring up and bring forth an abundant harvest."2

"Let us be hopeful and courageous. Despondency in God's service is sinful and unreasonable. He knows our every necessity. He has all power."3

"Be strong, and talk hope. Press your way through obstacles. You are in spiritual wedlock with Jesus Christ. The word is your assurance. Approach your Savior with the full confidence of living faith, joining your hands with His. Go where He leads the way. Whatsoever He says to you, do. He will teach you just as willingly as He will teach someone else."4

Let us not think like Jonah. Let us not look at people's sins. People with different beliefs and backgrounds need God's correction. Let us look at our Redeemer who removes every sin. Let us do our part with faith and boldness. God will do the rest.

**REACT**

Think about your personal Nineveh. Do you try to avoid it? Share with your class Bible passages that give you courage to speak about God's love to a lost world.

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Margarita Latibeaudiere, Panama City, Panama
As a student, you often receive assignments from your teachers that you must turn in on a specific date. Nevertheless, there are days when you leave your homework at home or in the dorm. Then when the teacher calls your name to turn in your assignment, you must say that you forgot it. Trying to avoid a bad grade, you ask your teacher to let you turn it in late. Your teacher looks at you with a smile and replies, “Bring it tomorrow.” What a relief!

God’s love has no limits.

Just as God gave Nineveh a second chance, so, too, does He give us successive opportunities to share with others the great things He has done for us. The world needs us to grasp the opportunities God gives us to speak about Him. The same Jesus who told His disciples to go and make disciples from every nation (Matt. 28:19) is asking us not to be afraid to take the gospel to people who don’t know about His marvelous character.

There are four important things we need to learn from Jonah’s experience:

1. God gave Jonah a second chance (Jon. 3:1). He also can give you a second chance. You might have a friend whom you’ve never dared to talk to about God’s love. God will give you the opportunity and the courage to do so. It’s your choice to grasp that opportunity and accept God’s help.

2. God empowered Jonah to give Nineveh a message (verse 2). God also can empower us to overcome our pride and fears. He will give us strength and faith to obey His commands.

3. God can transform the toughest heart (verse 8). Even though the people of Nineveh were wicked, when they heard God’s message through Jonah, they experienced true repentance. There might be people in your environment who seem reluctant to hear the Word of God. However, remember that as you deliver His message, God can work miracles in their hearts.

4. God’s love has no limits (verse 10). The plan of salvation is for you and for every single person around you. God wants everyone to be saved and to enjoy eternal life.

Every day is an opportunity to be a missionary and to share the gospel with those who don’t know our Savior. All you need to do is plant the seed, and God will reap a beautiful harvest from each person’s life.

REACT

1. Why did God send Jonah to Nineveh? Why didn’t He just give the king a dream that had the same message?

2. What can you do to share God's message more effectively?
Imagine that you're deep in prayer, when suddenly you feel God talking to you. As you pray, He makes Himself quite clear. He wants you to go to Las Vegas and speak against the evils of that city. You do a double take. God wants you to go to the place known as Sin City and tell people to stop gambling, drinking, and sleeping around with prostitutes? If you're like most people, you'd immediately start wondering whether there was a way out of this situation.

That's probably how Jonah felt when God told him to go to Nineveh, a city that belonged to the Assyrians, and tell its citizens that God was planning to destroy their city because of their wickedness. There was no way Jonah was going to do that. The Assyrians were one of the cruelest nations around, and in Jonah's eyes, a people as wicked as they were did not deserve such an ultimatum from God. He was perfectly all right with them being wiped off the face of earth. If someone was going to preach to the Ninevites about their wrongdoing, it certainly wasn't going to be him!

Well then, what did Jonah do? He fled. Or at least he tried to, because no one can ever completely flee from God. He packed his bags and went to Joppa, a port city. There he boarded a ship headed for Tarshish, more than 1,000 miles in the opposite direction of Nineveh. Clearly, he wanted to put as much distance as he could between himself and the Assyrians. Jonah thought this was the last he would hear of going to Nineveh, but God always finds a way to fulfill His will, even if it means that He must employ strange methods.

God doesn't ask for us to be perfect in order to serve Him. Jonah certainly wasn't flawless. He turned his back on God and ran away, in more ways than one. However, God was able to use Jonah to witness about His grace to others—all while He taught and transformed him in order to help him better understand His perfect character. God can do the same for us if we want Him to. All we need is to give Him full control of our lives. Then He will do the rest.

**REACT**

1. Why does God ask us to step out of our comfort zones when witnessing?
2. In what ways does God help us work through our flaws as we witness for Him?
CONCLUDE

Jonah's story showcases God's love in its many splendored extensions. God's incredible plan to have Jonah witness to sailors shows that He can use any one of us despite our weaknesses. Jonah's repentance and revival began inside a great fish. He was selfish with God's love and mercy, but his story reveals that God is long-suffering and willing to give us many chances without showing favoritism. Jonah's experiences remind us that we are not called to judge but to share God's salvation with all people.

CONSIDER

• Drawing a picture of an intimidating or life-threatening scenario that could have caused Jonah to be afraid of preaching God's message in Nineveh.
• Comparing Jonah's fear of preaching the warning message to Nineveh with your own obstacles that discourage you from sharing the plan of salvation.
• Performing a play using the book of Jonah as your script.
• Brainstorming how God can use your weaknesses for His glory.
• Praying earnestly every day for one month for friends or family members who are not Christians.
• Painting a symbolic illustration of how God's love can transform tough hearts.
• Planting seeds and journaling the progress they make and how the process of growing seeds reminds you of God's plan of salvation.

CONNECT

Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 144–150.
Ruthie Jacobsen, 5 Secrets for Peace in a Storm, chap. 1.
Jack J. Blanco, Witness, chaps. 5 and 6.
Exiles as
Missionaries

“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”
(Dan. 7:14, NIV).
My brother was 13 when we moved from New York to Washington, D.C. When he learned that our new city of residence had a legal working age requirement of at least 16 (rather than New York's age requirement of 14), he was so devastated that he wept. “Why did you have to bring us here?” he cried to our mother.

For a child, involuntary removal from home, school, friends, and goals is comparable to the exile imposed upon the northern tribes of Israel who were taken into captivity by the Assyrians, and the southern tribes of Judah who were taken into captivity by the Babylonians.

Have you ever felt like an exile? Perhaps at times you were excluded from your peers or social clubs, or you were picked last in a team sport. Or maybe it was an exile of the heart in the form of rejection. Or was it another type of exile altogether? What were your responses during those times? Did you give up hope and accept your reality? Did you share your miserable feelings with others?

For some biblical figures, exile became an opportunity for mission. They turned their circumstances around by following God’s will. God used exiles such as Daniel and Esther to tell or show others about the true God of heaven and His love for us. Though Daniel was living in exile, he was steadfast in remaining true to worshiping God. He stepped out in faith to proclaim his beliefs to those who had power over his life (Dan. 1:8; 6:10–22).

We also are called to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who do not know the truth (Matt. 28:18–20). This mission will undoubtedly place us in uncomfortable situations with persons we are unsure of. During such times, we must rely on our faith in God. We must let Him be our strength, because the adversary will most certainly press against us all the more for it.

In this week’s lesson, we will discuss exiles and the role their faith has in their ability to make something good out of terrible circumstances. As you study, may you learn to recognize when you are exiled from your comfort zone and then how to comfort others with the truth of the gospel and the hope that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.
Conquered Yet a Conqueror (Dan. 1:1–8)

A person bewildered by circumstances can still be a conqueror in the mission field. Throughout history, nations have conquered and have been conquered. One of those nations conquered was Judah, which was seized by the kingdom of Babylon. A young man named Daniel was living in Judah at that time. He was gifted in all wisdom and possessed great knowledge.

You might wonder what possessing great wisdom and knowledge can amount to if someone has conquered your country and taken you away to live somewhere else. Well, even if Daniel was not living where he wanted to be, God was dwelling in his heart, and he purposed in his heart not to defile God. Only people with the Holy Spirit in their hearts and minds can be at peace enough to represent God to those who take them captive. God honors people who honor Him in prosperity or adversity.

Witnesses (Daniel 2–5)

We cannot witness to others about God if we do not spend time getting to know Him. Daniel and his friends were captive in a land where idolatry, licentiousness, and lawlessness reigned.

Yet God had a reason for them to be there—to witness to those who had gone astray. He is in the business of saving lives for eternity. As cliché as that may sound, it is the truth. He wants to save us from our sins, but He can do so only if we ask for forgiveness. As the Bible tells us, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

“The miraculous deliverance of the three men [from the fiery furnace] made a deep impression on [King Nebuchadnezzar] and altered his earlier and erroneous opinion . . . about the God of the Hebrews. Nebuchadnezzar now spoke in praise of the might of this God, announcing publicly that this God had saved His worshipers, and decreeing that anyone who dishonored this God would be punished by death ((Dan. 3:29). His acknowledgment revealed progression in his concept of God (see . . . 2:47 . . . ).”

Daniel and his friends remained loyal to God despite the life-threatening consequences. They remained committed to His ways and refused to be shaken regardless of what the leaders and king wanted them to do. Thus,
God honored them by saving them in the midst of various trials. What better way is there to witness?

No Excuses or Boundaries (Daniel 6)

A witness should not make excuses, because someone's life depends on that witness's testimony. Christian Friedrich Hebbel explains “whoever wants to be a judge of human nature should study people’s excuses.”

Despite the governors and satraps attempt to get Daniel out of office, they could not find any faults against him because he remained faithful. He continued to pray as was his custom, without making any apologies for doing so. Because he courageously stood for God, he was thrown into the lions' den. Such loyalty can only be achieved by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. To be a witness despite any hardships that might occur as a result, a person must be totally, unreservedly connected to God. There can be no boundaries.

Other Missionaries Without Boundaries (Gen. 12:1, 2)

The Bible contains many examples of missionaries. Each of these missionaries had a unique calling from God. Each had a unique temperament and a distinctive life story. The first missionary that we find in the Bible is Abraham. The Lord said to him, “ ‘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. 1:1, 2, NIV). And so Abraham left his comfort zone to go to an unknown place. A missionary without boundaries will go even to the outermost place of the world in order to do God’s will. Abraham was faithful and left his home. As a result, he was greatly blessed.

When you go to God’s place of calling, He will not only bless you but He will bless others through you. We generally think of the blessing we will get when we follow God’s command, but the better part is that you are to be a blessing to someone else and that person may come to know God because of your faithfulness.

Jonah, Paul, Peter, Esther, and Elijah are examples of missionaries who, in obeying God’s call, reached people who would not have been reached were it not for their willingness to accept God’s call.

Are you willing and ready to accept the call?

REACT

1. What are some ways you can serve others who live outside of your comfort zone?

2. List at least three traits you need to develop in order to be a missionary without boundaries.

1. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 785.

Juan A. Cabrera, Keedysville, Maryland, U.S.A.
“Among the children of Israel who were carried captive to Babylon at the beginning of the seventy years’ captivity were Christian patriots, men who were as true as steel to principle, who would not be corrupted by selfishness, but who would honor God at the loss of all things. In the land of their captivity these men were to carry out God’s purpose by giving to heathen nations the blessings that come through a knowledge of Jehovah. . . . In prosperity and adversity they honored God, and God honored them.”

Daniel and his friends are excellent examples of how to live in a secular society. But how exactly does one follow their example today? “The spirit of Jesus should pervade the souls of the workers; for it is the pleasant, sympathetic words, the manifestation of disinterested love for souls, that will break down the barriers of pride and selfishness, and show to unbelievers that we have the love of Christ, and then the truth will find its way to their hearts. . . .

“All coarseness and roughness must be purged from us. Courtesy, refinement, and Christian politeness must be cherished. Guard against being abrupt and blunt. Do not regard such peculiarities as virtues, for God does not so regard them. But seek in all things not to offend those who are not of our faith. Never make the most objectionable features of our faith stand out prominently, when there is no call for it. Such a course is only an injury to the cause.

“All should seek to have the softening, subduing influence of the Spirit of God in the heart—Christlike tenderness and love for souls. Those who are sent out to labor together should put away their peculiar notions and set ideas, and seek to labor together, heart and soul, to carry out God’s will. They must plan to work in harmony in order to work to advantage.

“We want more, much more, of the Spirit of Christ, and less, much less, of self and the peculiarities of character which build up a wall to keep us apart from our fellow beings. We can do much to break down these barriers by revealing the graces of Christ in our lives.”

REACT

1. It can be tempting to overemphasize one’s feelings of peculiarity due to one’s religious faith. With that in mind, what do you have in common with those who don’t share all of your beliefs?
2. What values do you think help to bring you closer to these people?

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Robert Fuller, Arlington, Virginia, U.S.A.
This quarter, we have been studying about some of God’s people in the Bible who were exiles in foreign lands and who, because of that, were able to witness to several different types of people. Their experiences teach us that God will never put us where we are not supposed to be.

God calls us to be “missionary exiles,” just as He called Daniel, Moses, Esther, Nehemiah, and Joseph. As children of the heavenly King, planet Earth is not our home. God has made us who we are, and He has given each of us missionary work to do for Him. Jesus is our great hope. His mission is our mission.

“Throughout the Bible God is a God of sending, of mission.”

Every one of us has a purpose to fulfill on earth. That purpose is to share the love of Christ with others, to tell them about Christ’s death on their behalf, and to teach them how to be godly disciples for Him.

Often we find ourselves being drawn away from God, neglecting and even forgetting our mission in life. That mission is threefold: (1) to praise Him, (2) to thank Him for sending His only begotten Son to earth to die on our behalf, and (3) to share the good news of salvation with others. Jesus’ mission was, and still is, to be our Savior. He forfeited His power and authority in heaven and came to earth to show us the way to eternal life by conquering death. He is our hope and future. This world is not our final home; the coming kingdom of Christ Jesus is. Daily we should commit ourselves to stand firm in our mission just as Jesus stood firm in His. We must continue to spread the gospel.

“Throughout the Bible God is a God of sending, of mission. His characteristic approach to humans is by sending someone to speak to them for Him. ‘From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day,’ He said to the people of Judah (Jer. 7:25; . . .). In the fullness of time He ‘sent forth his Son’ (Gal. 4:4), again with a clear purpose. The Son, in turn, ‘sent out’ the twelve, and later the seventy, with a message regarding the kingdom of God (Luke 9:1, 2; 10:1, 9). To this mandate Christ added the post-Resurrection commission recorded in Matthew 28:19, 20; Luke 24:46–48.”

* Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, p. 549.
This week's lesson has presented us with exiles who were able to be missionaries in extremely adverse circumstances. Not everyone who went into exile, however, was as successful. Many of them succumbed to fear, despair, and apathy. One of the things that made a difference for exiles such as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah was their steadfast commitment to God.

If we want to be as effective in our missionary work as these exemplary exiles were, then we must be committed to God. This commitment is key. However, we live in a society that promotes fickleness. Like the Israelites in the past, if we are not 100 percent committed and faithful to God, we will not prosper. How then, can we increase our commitment to Him? Here are some tips that may help our quest:

Spend quality time with God each day. What this means may vary from person to person. The key words here are quality and each day. Even spending five minutes of quality time each day with God can make a huge difference in your life. You can measure quality time by your reaction to the encounter. If you are left speechless and humbled by the greatness and awesomeness of God, you are definitely on the right track. This can happen by studying the Bible, talking with God in prayer, seeking Him in nature, listening to religious music, or even thinking about God while you are driving.

Be active in your church. We all have busy schedules. But if we want God to be the center of our lives, we must set aside time to spend with Him and to do things for Him. Serving God according to His will shows that we are committed to Him. Even if He asks you to do things that are unnoticeable to others, or if you just lead a song service once a month, you are being of service. Nothing you do for God or for others in His behalf is ever in vain.

Be ready to make sacrifices. You are probably familiar with the motto “No pain, no gain.” Like everything else in life that is worthwhile, if you are ready to commit to God, you will make sacrifices along the way. For example, are you willing to wake up 15 minutes earlier or to go to bed 15 minutes later to spend time with Him in prayer and Bible study?

**REACT**

1. Do you agree that commitment to God is essential to successful missionary work? Explain your answer.

2. What are some small, specific steps you can take toward improving your commitment to God?

Cecilia Ramos, Kensington, Maryland, U.S.A.
All missionaries are exiles, but not all exiles are necessarily missionaries. Exiles are people who are taken from their homes and thrust out of the world they once knew. By choice, a missionary goes out into the world and leaves the familiar behind. They are called to deliver God's message of salvation in Jesus who is the Christ. These persons are known as missionaries and witnesses unto Christ (Acts 1:8). Exiles and missionaries are simply two sides of the same coin. What separates them is not just a matter of perspective regarding their circumstances, but rather more a matter of choice.

Choose to cross the line!

It has been said that if something is easy, it is not worth doing. It has also been said that God does not always place us in comfortable situations. Because He wants us to grow, He places us in uneasy circumstances that can make for a rocky journey.

What are some of these extreme and difficult situations? Yes, there are places abroad where you can go to perform your missionary work. You could travel to the deepest parts of jungles and find the most isolated villages in Siberia. You could find some cave-dwelling nomads somewhere on the Tibetan Plateau who haven't seen the light of day for decades. That's all well and good, but what about the people in your own neighborhood who haven't heard about salvation? What about some of the people with whom you grew up?

So often we seek to become missionaries to people who live far away from us because we fear that we may offend those around us. But I say go ahead and take a chance. Place them and yourself outside of your comfort zone, and introduce the truth to them. It might not be easy. It might take a great deal of planning on your part and an even greater measure of faith. Consider Joseph. He had a character unlike the characters of his brothers, and he was not afraid to show it (Genesis 37–43). Daniel, too, had a strong character in the Lord, and he let it be known to the detriment of his earthly life. He reflected God's character so much that even others proclaimed it (Dan. 5:12).

Be a humble example. Go into the difficult areas where you live so that the people in these areas can see Jesus in you and desire to have Him in their lives. The line between exile and missionary is a thin one. Choose to cross the line!
CONCLUDE
Scripture highlights the rugged faith and spiritual fortitude of many exiles who remained faithful under extreme circumstances. Figures such as Joseph and Daniel found ways to share their faith in foreign lands under demanding, even traumatic circumstances. Whether your mission field is in a foreign land or in the unknown corners of your own town, you can draw strength from the stories of the Bible’s exiled missionaries. A Daniel-like spiritual endurance is needed to face the risks of taking the gospel to the unreached. But remember, because Daniel was able to touch Nebuchadnezzar’s heart, the Lord became visible to an entire nation.

CONSIDER
• Visiting the Web site http://www.adventistmission.org/adventist-missionary to learn more about modern-day missionaries who are carrying the Lord’s message to the unreached. Commit to supporting a missionary or a missionary family with a letter of encouragement or a monetary gift.
• Researching maps of the 10/40 Window—an area of the world that has the highest population yet the lowest number of Christians. Make a list of the countries in this area, and put the list in your Bible. Refer to it during your regular prayer times.
• Choosing a country that has always interested you. Use the Internet to look up this country’s traditional music style. Also cook a traditional recipe from this country that you find online. How do these activities help you better understand this country?
• Setting aside one full day to isolate yourself from all other people. Dedicate this time to earnest prayer and Bible study. It may be difficult, but you may begin to connect with the feeling of being a spiritual exile.
• Organizing a discussion group (perhaps in Sabbath School) to compare and contrast the lives and sacrifices of two or three biblical characters who were exiled missionaries.
• Setting daily alarms on your phone or watch to go off at three different times each day. Each time the alarm sounds, stop what you are doing and say a prayer. Like Daniel, pray for strength and wisdom. Try this for a week. Who knows? It may become a lifelong habit.

CONNECT
Zdravko Stefanovic, Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise, chaps. 1–3.
Sally Pierson Dillon, Exile of the Chosen: God’s Heroes From Solomon to Malachi.
Craig Mattson, Lake Tapps, Washington, U.S.A.
“‘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).
My favorite stories have always been those with strong female leads. I feel empowered by the heroines who do as much rescuing, if not more, than the heroes. Historical figures such as Marie Curie, Joan of Arc, and Mother Teresa have inspired me to action. They each had a place in shaping the world around them. As a young woman growing up in the 21st century, I have my work cut out for me if I want to make a difference.

No moment need ever pass in vain.

From the time I was 16, I felt the call to ministry. The last five years have been a series of adventures as I figure out where God wants me to work. Even though I had read the mission given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19: “‘Go and make disciples of all the nations,’” I still believed that to do ministry would require me to do some kind of specialized work (NIV). Over the years, however, God has shown me, in many ways, that I can win people for Him wherever I am, whether as a student, a registered nurse, a musician, or as any other type of person I find myself to be. I don’t necessarily have to become a pastor or a full-time worship leader. All I need to do is be where the people are, and let God do the rest.

Looking at the story of Esther, I see a young woman who was given a great responsibility when she least expected it. Yes, she saved her people from destruction and stepped into the Hall of Fame with the other leading ladies of history, but she also saved countless others. By admitting to being a Jew, she also gave testament to a faith and belief that went much deeper than her bloodline. Her witness brought many outsiders to the faith (Esther 8:16, 17).

God’s work can be accomplished anywhere, in any capacity, by anyone. All that is required of us is a heart full of willingness to serve. The gospel can be spread when and where we least expect it, even in the face of impending genocide—as was the case for Esther—or in our day-to-day experiences in 2015. No moment need ever pass in vain.
I called her “Aunt Mordecai,” the friend and mentor who guided me through one of the more challenging periods of my life. I had returned from a break to discover that I had unexpectedly been assigned a new roommate. It was immediately apparent that we had nothing in common. Our interests, habits, and personalities were completely different. I went looking for the dean, hoping that this mistake could be corrected. However, I couldn't find the dean and, for one reason or another, didn't succeed in tracking her down in the following days. A few weeks into the school term, we got snowed in and found ourselves enjoying an unplanned holiday. As my roommate and I sprawled out on our dorm room floor playing a game, I finally started to get to know her and realized that maybe I had misjudged her.

I went looking for the dean, hoping that this mistake could be corrected.

As we became acquainted, she told me about the personal problems she was confronting, and I began to suspect that God had orchestrated an “Esther” episode when He brought us together. With encouragement and wisdom shared by Aunt Mordecai, I did my best to support my roommate through some rather difficult days. At the end of the year, we were able to praise God for—as we clearly recognized in hindsight—the ways in which He had led us both.

We know that God may place a person in unusual circumstances to perform a special task. Esther’s calling differed somewhat from that of other missionaries, such as Jonah, who were dispatched from their homes to convert unbelievers in foreign lands. She was selected as an agent of deliverance for her own community, the chosen people, the ones who already knew about the true God. Why would God send a missionary to the Jews?

Many stories in the Old Testament (Exodus 12–14; Judges 6; 7; and 1 Samuel 17 for example) recount occasions when God rescued His doubting people, repeatedly reminding them of His continuing love. Jesus Himself spoke of being sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 15:24), and He spent relatively little time with non-Jews. The parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8–10)—which disappeared in the owner’s home—also illustrates God's concern for those of His children who may seemingly fall through the cracks.* Those already “inside” the house and those still “outside” are equally precious in His sight.

* For this insight, I am indebted to Pastor Marquis Johns of the Metropolitan Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hyattsville, Maryland, U.S.A.
Opulence and Arrogance (Esther 1)

The book of Esther is an unusual work. Like the Song of Solomon, another explicit love story, it contains no direct mention of God. Furthermore, it features morals that at first glance seem to better fit a fairy tale than a Bible story. A man banishes his wife for refusing to display herself before his friends. He rebounds by having his servants bring in a host of attractive young virgins, each to spend the night with him so he can pick a favorite. Our heroine is the girl the king finds most attractive—who, on the advice of her cousin Mordecai (named after the Babylonian god Marduk), hides her ethnic and religious background. So complete is her denial of her heritage that she trades her Jewish name, Hadassah, for Esther, after the Babylonian god Ishtar. Esther may mean “star,” but she hardly starts out by letting her light shine.

However, that’s all on the surface. As we dig deeper into this far-ahead-of-its-time work of literature, we find sharp critiques of chauvinism, self-absorption, and conspicuous consumption. Our story kicks off with a king throwing the most lavish celebration in history. Belshazzar’s blasphemous bacchanal lasted just one night. Xerxes’s festival lasts six months. Sure, he’s celebrating the kingdom, but he’s really celebrating himself. Persia’s decadence makes a sharp contrast with the fasting Esther and her fellow Jews engage in as they prepare to stand up for themselves.

The Stars of Our Story (Esther 2; 3)

Beauty treatments, special food, superficial attributes—Esther’s saga starts out as the flip-side of the story of Daniel and his friends. Unlike Daniel and company in the court of Babylon, Esther doesn’t try to buck the system. Instead, as a woman trapped in a sexist system where her “beauty” and “lovely figure” (Esther 2:7, NIV) are her best tools for survival, she adapts. It’s a model she’s learned from her cousin and guardian Mordecai, who just happens to take the exact opposite tactic. Mordecai doesn’t hesitate to stand up for his principles, but being a member of an ethnic and religious minority that’s made a few enemies over the centuries, he knows he’s taking a risk. The Bible doesn’t make clear his motives for refusing to bow to Haman, the Agagite, but he senses that Haman is a threat to his people.

While we may associate bowing with a simple measure of respect or courtesy, and throughout the Bible people bowed to others without sacrilege,
Scripture it also symbolizes allegiance and worship. In the book of Daniel, Daniel’s three friends refuse to bow to Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image. Though a faithful servant of the king of Persia, Mordecai takes a firm stand against submitting himself to Haman. Perhaps Mordecai sensed that Haman’s prideful character made him poorly suited for such honor. Haman takes offense, and, since Mordecai refused to so honor him based on religious conviction, he decides to use his influence to destroy not only Mordecai but anyone else who might be like-minded.

Mordecai has watched over his cousin Esther since she lost both parents at an early age. Esther was most likely a young teen when she entered the king’s house, and so Mordecai dedicates himself to watching over her, despite the seclusion of the harem. He can only get news about her through his contacts in the palace, but he’s clearly well connected, as he learns of a conspiracy against Xerxes. And now Esther is his connection to the king.

**Going Public (Esther 4–6)**

When Haman tricks Xerxes into signing an edict to slaughter all of the Jews in Persia, Mordecai rips his clothes and puts on sackcloth and ashes. He walks the streets wailing in anguish, and wherever the edict is announced, Jews throughout the empire do the same. When Esther orders a servant to find out what’s going on, Mordecai relays a message: “Plead to the king!” Esther responds that she hasn’t seen the king for a full month, and Mordecai replies with some of the most potent words in Scripture:

“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 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 4:13, 14, NIV).

Hearing this directive from Mordecai, Esther asks for all the Jews of Susa, the Persian capital, to observe a strict fast for three days as she prepares to reach out to the king. He’s delighted. She invites the king—and Haman—to a banquet. Mischief ensues.

**End Game (Esther 7; 8)**

Esther is a story that continually undermines our expectations. A heroine who hides her heritage. A queen whose beauty is far more than skin deep. A king who declares that all women must obey their husbands—yet who is saved from folly and potential civil war by his wife. In contrast, the advice of Haman’s wife pushes him to his destruction.

Esther shows us that God’s will is not stymied by circumstance. God can work through any event or personality. It is up to us, however, to seize the opportunities God provides.
Esther was a girl, an orphan, and a Hebrew in exile when she was chosen as queen in what must have been a lengthy and awkward beauty pageant. She did not possess any inherent power with which to improve her situation or that of her people. She was, however, trained for God’s service by her cousin, Mordecai, and was ready for action when she realized her place in God’s army.

It’s fascinating that God calls all types, including pageant princesses, to be missionary soldiers for His cause. “All who enter the army are not to be generals, captains, sergeants, or even corporals. All have not the care and responsibility of leaders. There is hard work of other kinds to be done. Some must dig trenches and build fortifications; some are to stand as sentinels, some to carry messages. While there are but few officers, it requires many soldiers to form the rank and file of the army; yet its success depends upon the fidelity of every soldier.”

“The crisis that Esther faced demanded quick, earnest action.”

It must have taken more than human boldness for Esther to stand in front of the king and plead for the lives of her people who had just been condemned to death under a genocidal decree. “The crisis that Esther faced demanded quick, earnest action; but both she and Mordecai realized that unless God should work mightily in their behalf, their own efforts would be unavailing. So Esther took time for communion with God, the source of her strength. ‘Go,’ she directed Mordecai, ‘gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.’”

Esther’s courage resulted in her people’s ability to fight against any who meant them harm. She not only saved her people but was instrumental in the revival of monotheism in Persia. “For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them” (Esther 8:16, 17, NIV).

**REACT**

1. In what circles of influence have you been an instrument in God’s plans?
2. How was Esther able to keep a close walk with God in her mission field?

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Amie Regester, Greenbrier, Arkansas, U.S.A.
Esther became a secret missionary in the Persian court. In a certain sense, she was God's spy. Her survival in the royal court and as queen to the Persian king Xerxes lay with God’s protection and her knowledgeable cousin, Mordecai. The lessons we can learn from Esther’s experience are valuable for us to remember when we have the opportunity to witness to others.

*Listen to those who are more knowledgeable about the environment you are entering.* Silence can often be the best method for learning and for finding one’s place in life. Esther listened to the knowledge that Mordecai offered her. The key to her survival as a concubine in the king’s court was to remain silent about her background, her people, and her life. She was to tread carefully and listen to those who knew the lay of the land before offering advice.

Carefully choose what information you do share and how you share it. Sharing incorrect information, or only part of what you should share, can have serious negative consequences. Always consider the impact of what you say and how you say it. And be sure that what you share is true and not just hearsay.

*We may not always understand why things happen.* God told Abraham to leave the land in which he was living (Gen. 12:1). Ruth went with her mother-in-law to her mother-in-law’s land without knowing she would meet Boaz (Ruth 1:6–22). God sent Moses back to Egypt to save his people (Exod. 4:1–23). Esther was first selected to be a concubine and then chosen to be a queen by a king who had deposed his last queen (Esther 1:19, 20).

*Esther prepared herself before God.* When the time came for Esther to face the king and plead for her people’s lives, she did not just race in. She prepared herself by fasting for several days. Before embarking on a momentous mission, we should first connect with our heavenly Father, requesting His guidance. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6, 7, ESV).

*Know when to end the silence.* The right time and place to do so can impact one’s entire world—in Esther’s case, her people. Esther was the secret linchpin to the entire mission.

**REACT**

1. Why did God choose Esther to save His people? What abilities and traits of character did she bring to the situation?
2. What God-given abilities and traits can you use for others today?
As a child, I thought the story of Esther seemed so straightforward, like a Disney movie—an orphan girl saves a nation by being beautiful, truthful, and smart. However, the reality of Esther’s story holds many shades of gray. First of all, she was taken from her cousin and forced into a harem with its inferred consequences. She was advised to lie by omission about her ethnicity and religion. When her people were threatened, she did not volunteer to stand up, but reluctantly agreed to Mordecai’s reasoning. Neither God nor prayer are mentioned in the book. So how can her story be the inspiration for so many children’s books and Christian films?

Esther is an honest, yet messy portrayal about a young woman who takes a stand; and in some way, each and every person knows how difficult that is. Thus, it is the stand she takes that we admire. It is the angst she expresses that we relate to. She did not impulsively burst onto the scene. Instead, she made a plan.

During any given week, we hear stories about individuals facing oppression. Elie Wiesel wrote, “We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must—at that moment—become the center of the universe.”*

Jesus repeatedly made a stand for people who were being treated poorly, as did the apostle Paul. Paul asserts, “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22, NIV).

Early Christians recognized that standing up to tormentors deflates power and ultimately gives the persecuted a platform upon which to stand tall and to spread the gospel. By taking a stand, Esther saved her people, increased her rank, and helped Mordecai to be named second in command to the king of Persia. Thus, her bravery was rewarded many times over.

REACT

Think of a time when you had the opportunity to take a stand against oppression. What did you do? Did you act on it or sit quietly? Did you share God?

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CONCLUDE

Like Esther, we can be used by God even if we are not perfect. It is when we feel our lack that He is able to give us His power and use us to be blessings to others. As the saying goes, “God is not looking for ability but for availability.” God used Esther to save the Jews from the kingdom of Persia. Our mission is even greater—to prepare the world for the last days and for Jesus' second coming. What people has He put in your path? What mission has He given to you?

CONSIDER

• Graphing the story of Esther, showing the high and low points of her life.
• Using a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the lives of Esther and Joseph.
• Researching in the Bible, with the help of a concordance or online tools, people or people groups who have participated in a fast. What was the purpose of each fast? What was the outcome?
• Listing the choices Christians can make that will help them stay true to God, even when they are living in a godless environment.
• Looking through hymn nos. 592–621 of the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal and singing the hymn you feel best describes the mission God has given you in these last days.
• Experiencing your own three-day fast, during which you focus on your relationship with God. The object of your fast could be food, Facebook, television, music, negativity, or some other area of your life that takes up a lot of your time.
• Brainstorming how God could use you to be a blessing to other people. List your ideas. Then choose one of those ideas to carry out during the next week.
• Thinking back on your life to identify times when God turned apparent disappointments or tragedies into blessings.

CONNECT

John Bradshaw, Confidence in Chaos.
Lee Strobel and Mark Mittelberg, The Unexpected Adventure.
Jesus: The Master of Missions

“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’ ” (John 20:21, NIV).
It's the age of discovery, and you're at a dock swamped with ships. You watch the many explorers disembark with curious cargo. They attract quite a crowd. And you're no exception. However, after a few blinks, you find a massive sea of people around the explorers. With interest, you try navigating through the sea of people. The difficulty of doing so leads you to a plan. The explorer with the most intriguing treasure will win your regard. Tiptoeing and performing acrobatic hops, you steal glimpses of each one. Some have colorful birds with sunsets on their wings. Others show glimmering rocks, almost like hand-sized stars. There is a savage, whom you lock eyes with, after which you are flooded by waves of goose bumps. You have heard about such savages, but seeing always trumps hearing. You decide to go there.

But then a familiar voice throws you off course. Curiosity, pushing you through the crowd, reveals that the speaker has a bruised side and scars on His head, wrists, and feet. Your mind, still wanting more than this Man and His words, is soon touched by a realization of your heart—He is the peculiar treasure that your soul really desires. You now are a ship anchored by His words, quieting your heartbeats. With eyes closed, you realize that hearing has trumped seeing.

Then He says something that echoes in the empty atriums of your heart, quickening your pulse. “I have found ‘the hope of all hopes, the dream of our dreams.’” Then it hits you. Who is this Man?

The same question, I imagine, was asked about Hernán Cortés. The king of Castile probably would have answered, “An explorer of Spain, a missionary for mother Mary.” Ask the Aztecs and they would have said, “The Messiah Quetzalcoatl.” But more than explorer, missionary, or messiah, Cortés was a typical 16th century exploiter, looking to gain glory, gold, and girls.

However, in the 1st century there was another “new world” explorer thought by many to have been the Messiah. Though He was not the first Messianic figure that history had heard passing in the sea of time at the docks of civilizations, He was the first to actually be the Messiah, arriving to reform, reclaim, and rescue the continent of human souls. His name was Jesus Christ, the great Explorer—the true Messiah and Master Missionary. Where Cortés authored the fall of the Aztec kingdom in God’s name, Christ established the kingdom of heaven in God's name.

Jesus Christ, the Master Missionary, was and still is “the desire of all nations” (Hag. 2:7).
The Necessity of the Incarnation (Gen. 3:14, 15; Isa. 9:6; John 3:16, 17)

Will we ever understand the mystery of the Incarnation? It is vital to the mission of the Godhead to fulfill the promise of Genesis 3:15. The very God who created Eve would be born as her offspring, a human baby destined to crush the serpent’s head. Jesus could not fulfill His mission to rescue the fallen race unless He became one of us. In the scope of the great controversy between God and Satan, only God Himself could answer Satan's charges that He is self-serving and demanding, that His system of government is hopelessly flawed. Rather than defend Himself, God sent Himself in Jesus—the unique, one-of-a-kind Being—the monogenes. Jesus’ mission could be fulfilled because He came not just to be with us but also to be of us. God answered Satan's charges through the Incarnation, giving the Son to humanity forever. This was the only way. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16, 17, NIV).

The Universality of Jesus’ Mission (Isa. 42:1–4; 53:5; 61:1–3; Rom. 4:23–25; 1 Pet. 3:18)

Jesus' mission to rescue us from the paralyzing grip of Satan was accomplished through the way He lived His life on earth as the God-man. Isaiah 42:2–4 describes Him this way: “He won't call attention to what he does / with loud speeches or gaudy parades. / He won't brush aside the bruised and the hurt / and he won't disregard the small and insignificant, / but he'll steadily and firmly set things right. / He won't tire out and quit. He won't be stopped / until he's finished his work—to set things right on earth” (The Message). Isaiah 61:1–3 describes Him as filled with the Spirit of God and anointed by Him. “He sent me to preach good news to the poor, / heal the heartbroken, / announce freedom to all captives, / pardon all prisoners. / God sent me to announce the year of his grace— / a celebration of God's destruction of our enemies— / and to comfort all who mourn” (The Message).

At Jesus’ birth, the angel messengers announced that Jesus’ mission would bring peace to all people and provide a bridge between heaven and earth. At Jesus’ baptism, John called the attention of the multitudes to how Jesus would do this—by becoming the “Lamb of God,” whose death on the cross would take away the collective sins of a race doomed for destruction.
Jesus’ mission to rescue us from the paralyzing grip of Satan was accomplished through His death on the cross (Isa. 53:5; Rom. 4:25; 1 Pet. 3:18).

**A Foundational Principle (Matt. 9:35, 36; Phil. 2:4–7)**

Philippians 2 identifies a foundational principle of mission: self-sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed Himself when He became a human being. Jesus was “in very nature God.” Yet He did not hold on to this equality; “rather, he made himself nothing / by taking the very nature of a servant” (Phil. 2:6, 7, NIV). Jesus emptied Himself of self by becoming human. Then He voluntarily surrendered His life to a despicable, brutal death. For us, Jesus sacrificed His divinity and His humanity. No other god in any of the world’s religions has had such a mission or has demonstrated such self-sacrificing love. Our great need motivated Him. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36, NIV).


A final act of Jesus’ mission while on earth was to commission His disciples: “‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matt. 28:18–20, NIV). It was the glorified Christ (Luke 24:26) who gave His followers their mission to go to the whole world. Jesus gave His followers specific tasks such as feeding His sheep, baptizing, and teaching. He provided the power to accomplish these tasks through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), who poured gifts upon them (Eph. 4:11–13) that empowered them to fulfill their mission. Lastly, Jesus gave His disciples the assurance that He would always be with them.

Like a relay team leader, Jesus passed the baton to us. His mission is now in our hands. Just as He responded to the desperate needs of a rebellious planet, we, too, can respond to the great needs of our world. Our mission from Jesus today is to do as He did—die to self and live for others. Instead of being full of ourselves, we can choose to make room for the Holy Spirit to work in and through us by emptying ourselves. Only then can we participate in Jesus’ mission to seek and save the lost. The choice is ours. Jesus has a mission for you: “‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’” (John 20:21, NIV). Will you go?

**REACT**

1. What are you doing to reach the marginalized people in your culture?
2. How can you follow Jesus’ example of emptying Himself?
3. Why is participating in Jesus’ gospel commission as vital for the church today as it was in the early church?

Kathy Goddard, Chattanooga, Tennessee, U.S.A.
“Go to work, brethren. . . . The humblest effort of unselfish love will be crowned with His blessings, and receive its great reward. Do what you can, and God will increase your ability. . . .

“Take up the work anywhere and everywhere. Do that which is the nearest to you, right at your own doors, however humble and uncommended it may seem. Work only for the glory of God and the good of men. Let self sink out of sight, while with earnest purpose and solemn prayers of faith you work for Him who has died that you might live. . . .

If God has asked you to go, then trust Him and go.

... One soul is of infinite value; for Calvary speaks its worth. One soul, won to the truth, will be instrumental in winning others, and there will be an ever-increasing result of blessing and salvation.”*

Jesus set out on the greatest mission trip of all time to show humanity the character of the Father and to seek and to save the lost. But before returning to the Father, He commissioned His disciples, along with you and me, to “’go therefore and make disciples of all nations’” (Matt. 28:19, NKJV). However, we sometimes feel inadequate in responding to this great assignment. We think that we’re just not that good at giving Bible studies or that we have no experience with mission work. More time is dedicated to thinking about our inabilities than to what God can do through us. These were my sentiments when God called me to pastoral ministry, but then I realized that God’s promises are true, despite my feelings or supposed inabilities (Rom. 1:17). God called Jeremiah to be “’a prophet to the nations’” (Jer. 1:5, NIV). However, he, too, doubted. “‘Ah, Lord God! / Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth’” (verse 6, NKJV). Yet God promised that He would be with him (Jer. 7:7–9).

We, too, are called to make disciples—in the local church, on the job, among friends and family, in foreign missions, or any other settings in which we find ourselves. If God has asked you to go, then trust Him and go. Don’t worry about any lack on your part. Claim Jesus’ promise that He is with us always.

REACT

1. How did the Bible champions of faith (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Mary, Paul, and others) display their trust despite their circumstances?
2. Based on your circumstances, what would responding to God’s promise to always be with us look like?

In Exodus 15, Moses and the Israelites sing a song of praise to God after He parts the Red Sea. This event saves them from the hands of the Egyptians. Exodus 15:13 says, “‘In your unfailing love you will lead / the people you have redeemed. / In your strength you will guide them / to your holy dwelling’” (NIV).

The use of the simple future tense in the word will denotes several meanings. With the addition of an action verb, will can mean several different things, such as (a) the speaker is offering to do something voluntarily; (b) it is the implication of a promise; (c) it can be a response to a complaint or a request for help; or (d) it is a prediction of the future.

His Word guides us, and His death and resurrection are our hope for the future.

Here in Exodus, we can see that God has freed His people according to His will. He has promised to lead His people. He has heard their cries and called Moses to be their leader. And He has told them that He will guide them to the promised land of Canaan.

While verse 13 is part of a praise song to God, it also reveals His character. Knowing we would sin, He provided a means to restore us to Himself. He became one of us so that we might know Him better and that, through the death of His Son, we might understand the consequences of sin. In addition to responding to our sinful predicament by giving of Himself freely, He also promised to lead and guide us to His holy dwelling. God’s mission is to restore us so that we might be in heaven with Him. His Word guides us, and His death and resurrection are our hope for the future.

Why and how does He do this? He does it out of His unfailing love for us, which is made possible through His strength (Isa. 42:1).

Sadly, though God remained faithful and led the Israelites to the Promised Land, they did not remain faithful to Him. Because of their disobedience, Israel was overcome by various countries. In 2 Kings 15:29, we see that the Assyrians ravaged the Israelites. However, God did not leave them without hope. He sent His Son on a mission to save us and to show us His Father’s love (Matt. 1:22, 23; John 17:1–5).

**REACT**

1. How are we similar to the Israelites when God gave His prophecy of the Messiah?
2. John 8:12 summarizes Jesus’ mission to be a light unto the world. Think of ways we can be a light to those around us who are walking in darkness.

__Amanda Gomez, Ooltewah, Tennessee, U.S.A.‖
I grew up dreaming of a life of excitement. I daydreamed endlessly, concocting thrilling tales of daring and adventure. However, my everyday life—including my walk with God—seemed dull in comparison, until I started praying for God to use me to share His love. Suddenly, a world of exciting (and sometimes scary) opportunities opened up to me. I discovered that God is serious about His command to preach the gospel everywhere. I realized that Jesus’ promise of power to witness in Jerusalem, Judea, and the ends of the world didn’t just apply to the first disciples. The promise applied to me also and to each of Jesus’ present-day disciples. Just as the disciples were called to preach the gospel everywhere, so we, too, are called to go to our immediate sphere, our larger community, and to our world.

Do you see a need somewhere that you could fill?

In our immediate sphere. We all know people who are uniquely equipped to share Christ. We can share our personal experiences with God, a smile, a note of encouragement, a prayer, or a Bible study with our families and friends. God can use the trusting relationships we already have with them to draw them to Him.

In our larger community. Sometimes God calls us to get out of our comfort zones a little more and to interact with strangers in our neighborhood or city. Do you see a need somewhere that you could fill? Can you work together with your church or a local civic organization to reach out to those whom you might never otherwise meet?

In our world. When I asked God to give me some concrete opportunities to share Him with others, one of the things He did was send me to Southeast Asia as a student missionary. Perhaps God is also calling you to dedicate some time to serving Him abroad. Or perhaps He is asking you to financially support someone else to go. What could you do to reach the thousands of people groups who have never heard about Christ?

Sometimes God’s call to go preach the gospel to everyone can seem overwhelming and even frightening. But He promises to go with us (Matt. 28:20). There is nothing more rewarding than knowing that He has used you to touch another person for Him.

Will you accept His call to partner with Him in mission?

REACT

What makes you most nervous about witnessing to others, and how can you overcome your fears?

Lynette Allcock, Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.
As the saying goes, “It’s all about who you know.” Many people acknowledge the fact that they got to where they are today due to some connection they made with another person. Building relationships is a highly recommended practice.

It’s the same with spreading the gospel. Jesus came to this earth to reestablish the relationship between God and His bride. Christ spent 30 years living on earth and building relationships with people before He even started His ministry. He hung out with the riff-raff, the accused, the broken, the proud, and the uncertain. He got on their level, and they drank in His truth. I’d say He had quite a successful evangelistic campaign.

But Jesus’ ministry seems exhausting to some believers. They see His relentlessness, His fearlessness, and His unwavering persistence, and they are daunted by His calling. Many Christians will excuse themselves from reaching out because Jesus seems more capable than they believe themselves to be. But Jesus was bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. His ability to reach others and draw them in had nothing to do with His capability. It had to do with who He knew. He spent early mornings and late nights with Him. He emptied Himself so He could be filled with God’s passion for others. If there is any hope of fulfilling the task that the Lord gave His followers, we must follow His example.

The church needs to start focusing on fostering individual relationships with God, not just encouraging attendance and developing internal community. The power of spiritually fed believers will ignite a church’s outreach, as opposed to spiritually starved members coming once a week to be fed. When people are starving, they are not likely to share their food.

Christians also need to fully invest in their relationships with others. Each believer has the ability to reach out to the community and pull in their friends, in addition to the riff-raff, the accused, the broken, the proud, and the uncertain. We should not be reluctant to share the “food.” It is abundant. And there will be no need to fear being exposed to worldly sinners. Jesus overcame the world, and the Overcomer is always there for us (Matt. 28:20; John 16:33).

When believers truly start to follow Jesus’ example, needy souls will start to take notice. And when they ask themselves what makes followers of Christ different, what makes believers blessed, they’ll be able to tell that it’s about who Christians know.
CONCLUDE

Christ's decision to intervene in humanity's dilemma defies understanding. He gave up His divinity and lived on earth as an example to us. Plus, His death saves us. Our response should be to dedicate our lives to fulfilling the gospel commission (Matt. 28:18–20). We do this through the positive relationships we form with other people. As we witness, we may well find ourselves put in roles of greater spiritual responsibility. Do not fear. Remember that the Lord doesn't always call those who are most able, but He always enables those who are called.

CONSIDER

• Articulating your personal testimony. Tell the story of why you decided to follow Christ. Avoid making it too long. Tailor a definite beginning and end. Practice it until you have committed it to memory. Then, when placed in a situation where your testimony can bless someone else, you will be ready.

• Creating a visual timeline of Jesus' miracles from one of the Gospels. Begin with Christ becoming a human. End with His ascension to heaven. When you have finished, incorporate miracles from some of the other Gospels and even some of the other books in the Bible.

• Preparing a special meal for someone who you know will not expect it. Be deliberate and strategic, and use this meal to create a bond with someone who needs it.

• Putting together a PowerPoint presentation of photos that remind you of the gift of salvation. Use your favorite Christian music and view it on Friday evenings as the sun sets.

• Using a map of the Holy Land to trace the steps of Christ as He moved from region to region. Access photos of these regions on the Internet to further connect yourself with the region and His ministry.

• Choosing an artistic medium (paint, sculpture, pastels, etc.) to create an art project that expresses your response to Christ's gift of salvation.

CONNECT

Cross-Cultural Missions

“‘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’” (Matt. 12:18, NKJV).
Recently, I had an experience at my university that reminded me of how different cultural norms can be. I attended a meeting with a group of student activists, and we began by introducing ourselves. As well as saying our names, we also had to state which pronoun we preferred: he, she, or they—to include anyone wanting to be identified as gender neutral.

**Jesus . . . willingly crossed such cultural boundaries.**

I compared this meeting to one that might occur in a church context, one that would probably begin quite differently—with prayer. The experience was a reminder of how dissimilar groups of people do things and how behaviors considered normal in one cultural setting may be considered strange in another.

While Jesus was on Earth, He spent some of His time with Gentiles, and many of His miracles benefited these outsiders. Jesus mixed with all kinds of people, for example, tax collectors, prostitutes, and lepers. The Jews certainly thought His behavior was strange—even blasphemous—and they ultimately refused to accept Him as their Savior.

Now let’s imagine that Jesus had come first during our time. Would He have spent more time with non-Christians than Christians? Would He have mixed with people we marginalize and look down on? Would Jesus be found spending time with people at a gay and lesbian festival, at a Sabbath potluck lunch eating haystacks, or both?

In John 4:7, when Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink from the well, she was surprised because He was a Jew, and Jews didn’t associate with Samaritans. However, Jesus frequently and willingly crossed such cultural boundaries. This led to numerous conflicts with the religious leaders. It also led to opportunities for witnessing.

People from other cultures have much they can teach us. When Jesus healed the servant of a Roman centurion, He turned to the crowd and said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel” (Luke 7:9, NIV). By associating with different cultures, He exposed more people, like the centurion, to God’s love and His plan of salvation.

Jesus’ last words in Matthew 28:19, 20 are a command to His followers—that’s us—to spread the news of salvation and to encourage others to follow Jesus. That means mixing with people we wouldn’t normally mix with.

God calls each of us to make a difference. I remember a poster that used to hang outside my brother’s room: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words.” Consider this week how you can interact with others in ways that glorify God and that show people who Jesus is.

*Josh Dye, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia*
It's no secret that Jesus reached out to the Gentiles as often as He ministered to His own people. We tend to think of Him as going against the grain of Judaism by doing so. Yet Judaism taught the people of Israel that they were to be a “light to the Gentiles.”* They knew in their hearts that as God's chosen nation, they had a duty to share His love. However, eventually their hearts became hardened. By the time Jesus appeared on the scene, they had cloistered themselves away, thinking that they were holier than all other nations. Thus, they separated themselves from people groups that could supposedly make them “unclean.”

He didn’t turn away, despite the stigma.

When Jesus healed the centurion’s servant and declared, “‘I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!’ ” (Matt. 8:10, NKJV), the crowd was naturally astonished. Roman beliefs were pagan. Surely their God would not extend His healing to Romans! However, through these actions, Christ showed that His love for humankind is not determined by our human boundaries. His love, His salvation, is a gift for all.

It wasn’t just cross-cultural barriers that Jesus spanned. He obliterated subcultural boundaries as well. When the ten lepers begged Him for mercy (Luke 17:11–19), He didn’t turn away, despite the stigma that was attached to people with leprosy and the potential for becoming “unclean.” Upon discovering that they had been healed, only the Samaritan went back to Jesus to thank Him. To a Jew, a Samaritan was someone from the wrong side of the tracks, an individual deemed unworthy by the masses. But to this Samaritan, Jesus nevertheless said, “‘Your faith has made you well’” (verse 19, NKJV).

Today, it seems that we shouldn't have a problem relating to people of other cultures. Our cities are filled with a mixture of languages and accents, and international travel has made the other side of the world accessible to us within a matter of hours. Yet the cultural and subcultural divides still remain; as Christ’s followers, we are called to cross them. It can be as simple as finding the untouchables, the “lepers” of today’s world, and reaching out to them in love. Perhaps, like the Jewish leaders of old, our problem isn't in knowing what we're supposed to do but in actually doing it.

**REACT**

What are some of the “unclean” subcultures in your society, and how can you break down the walls to show Christ’s love to them?

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Sara Thompson, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia
Mission, in a Christian context, is the task of connecting people with Jesus. Notice the important part of that statement: connecting people with Jesus, period! There is no need for distinction of race, age, or other such identifiers except the word human! Jesus’ instructions to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19 NIV; italics added) is clear and without restriction. Yet if we struggle with talking to our friends about Jesus, how can we be expected to go to another country or people group and teach them about Jesus? Thankfully these concerns are not ours. Jesus has already provided confirmation that He will provide for our needs. After all, one of the reasons we can look to His life for comfort is that He, too, experienced the same concerns and troubles that we have.

We are called to be like Paul.

Jesus Himself demonstrated to us what mission looks like, particularly in a cross-cultural context—a context in which you find yourself in unfamiliar surroundings, perhaps even with an unfamiliar language.

Jesus Connected With Other People Groups (Matt. 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10; John 4:4–30; 5:1–14)

Jesus was a Jew—but a Jew who was not afraid to challenge the status quo. Because He was Jewish, He had access to the special blessings that God bestowed upon the nation of Israel throughout its history. Yet He was not selfish with these blessings. He readily extended them to other people groups, including Romans (Matt. 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10), Samaritans (John 4:4–30), lepers, and women!

If the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ time had had their way, the people would not even have known who Jesus was. Yet, through His example of ministering to the least in society—the outcasts and the undesirables—the Christian church exploded.

Jesus often did not have anywhere to live, so He stayed in the homes of friends and ministered to people in the most unlikely places—from mountainsides to boats, public wells, and even public pools (Matt. 5:1, 2; Luke 8:22–25; John 4:4–30; 5:1–14).

People Connected Other People With Jesus (Acts 9:1–22; 1 Cor. 9:19–23)

One of the greatest examples of a missionary in the Bible is a man
named Paul. Paul had an amazing experience on the road to Damascus. This experience turned his life around so that he went from killing Christians to making Christians. Paul went on to plant churches, write letters to churches, and visit churches around the known world in order to bring other people to Jesus. How amazing! Paul even visited the churches in Rome, Ephesus, Galatia, and Philippi.

This was no easy task. Paul had to become a chameleon in order to connect so many people to Jesus: “To the Jews I become 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. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:20, 22–23, NIV).

We are called to be like Paul; each of us can be something to someone and introduce that person to Jesus. We can all participate at this level of cross-cultural mission, be it an overseas mission trip or simply relating to a group others cannot: high school students, disadvantaged teens, single parents, or the family from another country who just moved in next door.

**God Connected People With Heaven (1 Cor. 15:21, 22)**

Perhaps the best example of cross-cultural mission is that of Jesus’ ministry itself. Jesus, the Son of God, left His heavenly home in order to come to this foreign land known as earth so that He could connect with humanity, which was lost through the sin of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:1–7). Prior to sin, humans had a direct connection with God. Adam and Eve walked with God daily in Eden. It must have broken God’s heart that His creation was so selfish and untrusting. Yet even while we were in our broken state, He had a plan to stay connected to us. So He sent His Son, Jesus, to be the best Example of a cross-cultural missionary and to reconnect His people—you and me—with Himself for eternity.

The truth is summed up in a familiar Bible verse: “‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ ” (John 3:16, NIV). How awesome! God sent Jesus so that whoever believes can have eternal life.

If you have received this gift of salvation, God is calling you to share it with others (Matt. 28:19, 20). Are you willing to partner with Him by sharing Jesus with others?

**REACT**

1. Honestly examine your life. Are you concerned enough about people’s salvation that you would consider engaging in cross-cultural mission? Why, or why not?
2. How can you get involved in cross-cultural mission?
3. Can you, like Paul, be a “chameleon” for mission without compromising who you are?
“Oh, how much good might be accomplished if all who have the truth, the Word of life, would labor for the enlightenment of those who have it not. When the Samaritans came to Christ at the call of the Samaritan woman, Christ spoke of them to His disciples as a field of grain ready for harvesting. ‘Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest?’ He said, ‘Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest’ (John 4:35). Christ abode with the Samaritans for two days; for they were hungry to hear the truth. And what busy days they were! As a result of those days of labor, ‘many more believed because of His own word’ (John 4:41).”

“Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary.”

“As soon as she had found the Savior the Samaritan woman brought others to Him. She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples. The disciples saw nothing in Samaria to indicate that it was an encouraging field. Their thoughts were fixed upon a great work to be done in the future. They did not see that right around them was a harvest to be gathered. But through the woman whom they despised, a whole cityful were brought to hear the Savior. She carried the light at once to her countrymen.”

“This woman represents the working of a practical faith in Christ. Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life.”

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

**REACT**

1. Are you living out your destiny as a disciple born into God’s kingdom as a missionary? If not, why not?
2. With whom do you feel called to share God’s gift of grace?
3. What fears do you have about becoming a missionary?

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3. Ibid.

Kriselle Dawson, Lae, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea
At first glance, cross-cultural mission work may seem daunting and impractical. The tower of Babel is a good example of how different cultures, or even just language barriers, can create a less-than-ideal working environment. Despite the perceived difficulties of attaining cultural fusion, our loving God desires to have people of every nation saved for eternity. Thus, we should strive to connect with those outside our own culture. Here are some concepts that may help us do just that.

**We must realize that Jesus loves every culture.**

*Love.* First, we must make sure we have the same love for everyone, whatever a person's culture. We need a genuine fondness for people in general in order to take part in honest mission work. Jesus never held back His love or salvation from anyone, thus often defying the typical cultural exclusivity of His time. We must realize that Jesus loves every culture and yearns for everyone's salvation.

*Recognize.* Identify the various cultures you might be excluding from your typical mission efforts. Sometimes we don't stop to think about the wide variety of cultures around us that are not reached by traditional mission work. It's natural to be drawn to people of our own culture, so we should always be ready to make the effort to extend our boundaries.

*Think.* A culture's uniqueness stands out, be it the language, food, dress, music, or traditions. Different cultures also usually have unique ways of thinking, feeling, and learning. To successfully connect with a culture that differs from your own, you'll need to understand the culture with which you're trying to connect. Take some time to learn about the customs of that culture. The best way to do this may be by talking with the people, asking them questions, and genuinely befriending them. In doing so, you can learn how your cultures differ, how they are similar, and how best to relate meaningfully.

*Find resources.* There may well be resources specifically available to the culture you're trying to reach. Search the Internet, or contact a church office in the homeland of the culture in which you are interested to discover what resources exist for your own mission work.

**REACT**

1. With what cultures do you have the opportunity to share Jesus?
2. If someone from a culture different than your own had the gospel of Jesus and you had no such understanding, what do you imagine that person would have to do to communicate the gospel to you in an understandable way?
If an expert public relations team were to analyze the way Jesus lived out His mission on earth, their report might include phrases such as *haphazard at best, too brief, too personal, took too many risks, or gave it all away.* Yes, Jesus’ life mission was entirely different from any other mission drawn up by human hearts and minds. He was not about gaining popularity or power. He was personal. He took the time to meet enemies, answer hard questions, connect with those despised by the crowds, and submit to His Father’s will.

**Jesus was reaching out to her soul.**

One of His more awkward habits was to spend time with people outside His Jewish culture. The conversation He shared with the woman at the well broke all protocols. He was talking to a Samaritan female, who had been married five times and was living with a man who was not her husband. Furthermore, He asked to borrow her drinking vessel! These actions were serious departures from custom and would surely cause a major setback in the “campaign” for Him to be recognized as “King of the Jews.” The disciples were so dumbfounded at His behavior that not one of them could find words to state the obvious or ask questions.

In terms of tone and choice of words, the actual conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well is not exactly a comfortable read. He wasn’t gentle, but He was thoroughly honest in a way only He could be. Beyond the obvious cultural barrier, the moral chasm, and the gender difference, Jesus was reaching out to her soul. He knew His connection to her would invite controversy and that her past would always complicate her future, but His message was clear. He did not come to punish but to offer His life in place of hers. And once she got it, she ran to tell everyone.

What a marvelous story of a divine-human connection amid a life seen as a failure. God’s mission through Jesus’ life crossed all cultural barriers and alternate lifestyles. Time with the Creator, Savior, Healer, and Teacher brought about a heart change, which naturally flowed out to others. Public relations professionals would have declared Jesus a failure, but they could not deny the universal impact of His life. His gospel mission, through personal testimonies, continues to journey across continents and time, reaching people of all races and generations.

**REACT**

Why was Jesus’ discussion of water and His offer of living water so relevant to the Samaritan woman?

*Georgina Hobson, Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia*
CONCLUDE
True missionaries for Christ naturally operate by a system of values that will defy exclusivity, pride, and divisiveness. Jesus repeatedly modeled the importance of these values during His earthly ministry. He often crossed culturally accepted boundaries and rebuked and provoked all those who struggled with selfishness, pride, control, and arrogance in their own lives. Nevertheless, the very essence of the gospel demands that we all connect with the Father in such a way that, like Jesus, we will minister to anyone, regardless of the circumstances or situation of those who need it.

CONSIDER
• Researching the demographics of a group unlike your own. This might include people from another country or people whose language, lifestyle habits, and ages are different from your own.
• Creating a poem or song lyrics that address issues involved in a particular cultural setting when it comes to awareness.
• Finding a place where AIDS patients or other typically excluded individuals can go for assistance. Pray for opportunities to touch them, in all aspects of the word, in order to show them the same compassion Jesus showed others while He was on earth.
• Celebrating various cultures in your church or small group through music, clothing, and food from those cultures.
• Praying that God will reveal to you any particular groups that you struggle to accept. Ask Him to show you why you find it difficult to relate to these groups and to help you overcome your prejudices.
• Observing group dynamics, noting any exclusive or divisive behaviors. Make a collage or poster demonstrating your observations, and share the design with your church or small group.
• Visiting a farm when new animals are being introduced into an established herd or group. Interview the farmer about the issues surrounding new animals joining a group and/or mixing various species of animals.

CONNECT
Isaiah 65:1; Romans 10:19; 16:17; Galatians 2:12–16.
Robert Chambers, Rural Development: Putting the Last First.
Robert C. Linthicum, Empowering the Poor, chap. 12, “The Church and Community Organization.”

Lisa Poole, Elbert, Colorado, U.S.A.
Peter and the Gentiles

“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).
In an uncertain world, it’s important to have things upon which we can rely: our family and friends, our daily routines, our special places to visit, and most importantly, God’s love. The Bible describes His love as *eternal*, that is, “valid for all time; essentially unchanging.”* Isaiah tells us that we can “trust in the Lord forever, / for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal” (Isa. 26:3, 5, NIV).

We tend to rely on church traditions the same way. We sing the same hymns every week. We hear the same message from the pastor. There are the same interpretations of God’s Word. Stability makes us comfortable. It also brings unity to the church, because it means there are no challenges or disagreements. As David observed, “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1, NRSV).

Yet, in reality, only God is eternal. Everything else changes whether we like it or not. Family members move away. New friendships take the place of old ones. Our interests change. We know from the Bible that the church also changes. This week we are studying a momentous change in the early Christian church, when following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter accepted the Gentile Cornelius into the church as an equal member. The church would never be the same again.

Many people were horrified by what Peter did. Acts 11:2, 3 tells us that “when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, ‘You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them’ ” (NIV). Change can be very challenging. However, the story of Peter and Cornelius tells us that there are times when we are to accept this challenge, even if it makes us uncomfortable. Like Peter, we should pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to give us the courage to accept changes in order to transform the church in His image.

As you study this week’s lesson, consider how you would answer the following questions: (1) Should the church always stay the same, or is there room for change? (2) What challenges regarding change does the church face today? (3) How can we be sure which of these challenges are from God?

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The Great Commission (Matt. 28:16–20)

In principle, the Great Commission from Jesus to His disciples was simple: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19, NIV). At Pentecost, the role of the Holy Spirit was to fill the disciples with the power to preach the gospel to the world, so that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21, NIV). For the disciples at this time, the Great Commission stopped short of building a church where people from every race and religion would be equal.

Peter was not afraid to take risks.

A New Vision (Acts 10:1–18)

God has promised us that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth (John 16:13), and it is clear that at this time the church badly needed the Spirit’s help to develop a vision for the Great Commission. The story of Peter and Cornelius tells how this came about.

Cornelius was a centurion in the Roman army. He was also a devout and God-fearing person (Acts 10:2). He worshiped the Jewish God, attended the synagogue, prayed at the designated times, and gave to the poor (verse 30). Nevertheless, as a Gentile, he could never be accepted as a full member of the synagogue.

However, an angel appeared to Cornelius, telling him to send for the apostle Peter. The Jews believed that angels would not associate with Gentiles, so the fact that the angel spoke directly to Cornelius was already significant.

Meanwhile, Peter had his own vision of a large sheet containing all kinds of unclean animals that he was told to kill and eat. When he refused, God admonished him, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (verse 15, NIV).

When Cornelius’s messengers arrived for Peter, he understood the meaning of the vision, and as he saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Cornelius and his household, he accepted them into the church, saying, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (verses 34, 35, NRSV). This new vision would transform Christianity from an obscure offshoot of Judaism to a truly universal church.

Today we, too, need the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to guide us through our sometimes complex cross-cultural missionary ventures. Reaching out to people is a risk, but the example of Peter shows that it is a risk
worth taking. Perhaps we need to see the church less as a city set on a hill, a “fortress defended against the world,” and more as a community center where everyone is welcome, and where the gospel is the salt of the earth.

Walking on Water (Matt. 14:25–33)

Finally, we can learn from Peter what personal qualities it takes to transform the church’s mission and go where no one else has gone before.

First of all, Peter was not afraid to take risks. When the disciples saw Jesus walking over the water of the lake, it was Peter who had the courage to step out of the boat to meet Him (Matt. 14:22–34). This experience also taught Peter to trust God. “But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ ” (verse 30, NIV).

Jesus responded by challenging him with a question: “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (verse 31, NRSV). Thus, He demonstrated in a most dramatic way the importance of trusting in God.

Courageous as he was, however, Peter later showed that he was no longer a hothead. His response to the vision of the animals in the blanket was thoughtful and reflective. He is described as “wondering” and “thinking about” its meaning, trying to understand what God was endeavoring to tell him (Acts 10:17, 19, NIV).

Peter also showed himself to be open-minded. Although he was initially shocked by the command to kill and eat the unclean animals in the sheet (verse 13, 14), he did not reject God’s message outright. He was prepared to change his mind when the Holy Spirit helped him to see things differently.

Indeed, Peter was politically astute. He was careful to have people witness his actions in Caesarea. And when he faced criticism on his return to Jerusalem, he argued his case so patiently and convincingly that he won over his accusers. “When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, ‘So then, even to the Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life’ ” (Acts 11:18, NIV).

REACT

1. Which should we emphasize, (a) going out to find people to bring into the church, (b) letting them find us, or (c) both? Be able to explain your answer.

2. What risks have you taken recently to venture out of your comfort zone in order to befriend or help someone?

3. Paradoxically, the teachings of Jesus often make church leaders uncomfortable. Why is this? Is there a difference between being religious and spiritual? If yes, how would you explain that difference?

4. Think of a time when God asked you to go somewhere that you weren’t sure about. What was your response, and how did your response affect your life?

1. Andrews Study Bible, p. 1435.

Roy King, Bracknell, United Kingdom
“How carefully the Lord worked to overcome the prejudice against the Gentiles, which had been so firmly fixed in Peter’s mind by his Jewish training! . . .

“When the brethren in Judea heard that Peter had gone to the house of a Gentile, and preached there, they were surprised and offended. They feared that such a course, which looked to them presumptuous, would tend to contradict his own teachings. When they next saw Peter, they met him with severe censure, saying, ‘Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.’

“Peter laid the whole matter before them. He related his experience in regard to the vision, and pleaded that it admonished him no longer to observe the ceremonial distinction of circumcision and uncircumcision, nor to look upon the Gentiles as unclean. He told them of the command given him to go to the Gentiles, of the coming of the messengers, of his journey to Caesarea, and of the meeting with Cornelius. He recounted the substance of his interview with the centurion, in which the latter had told him of the vision by which he had been directed to send for Peter.

“As I began to speak,’ he said, in relating his experience, ‘the Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit. If then God gave unto them the like gift as he did also unto us, when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I, that I could withstand God?’

‘On hearing this account, the brethren were silenced. Convinced that Peter’s course was in direct fulfilment of the plan of God, and that their prejudice and exclusiveness were to be utterly destroyed by the gospel, they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life.’

“Thus, without controversy, prejudice was broken down, and the way was opened for the work to be carried on among the Gentiles.”*

**REACT**

1. Are you open to having your personal prejudices utterly destroyed by the gospel?
2. Suggest how prejudices within your church community could be broken down without causing controversy.

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Erica Hole, Binfield, United Kingdom

Luke also uses a popular Greek literary device by repeating in Acts 11 the story that he tells in Acts 10, as Peter defends his actions to his Jewish critics. In Hellenistic “novels,” a favorite device to make an important point was to include a trial scene in which a main character presents his defense.

Luke’s story in Acts 10 emphasizes Cornelius’s readiness to follow Christ ahead of Peter’s guidance. We don’t know how Cornelius was introduced to God, but he is described as being a “devout man, and one that feared God” (verse 2). “The conversion of Cornelius marks a new stage of expansion in the growth of the church. . . . Even so, in Jewish eyes he was a Gentile, for he was uncircumcised.” Luke tells us that an angel instructed Cornelius to contact Peter. Note that God made the first move in this missionary activity. Peter simply followed instructions from the Holy Spirit in response to Cornelius’s invitation.

Peter understood how important the gates in Israel were. They served as watchtowers (2 Sam. 18:24; 2 Kings 9:17) and as places of business (2 Kings 7:1). Public hearings were held at gates (1 Kings 22:10) as were legal transactions (Ruth 4:1–11). Gates provided protection from danger as people gathered in the open spaces around them for public meetings. They considered gates to be meeting places, and gates symbolized power and even new directions. Luke makes a point of recording that the Gentile messengers stopped at the gate of the house where Peter was staying. There they stated their business, and Peter and his companions were met by Cornelius outside his house. The decision to break with Jewish convention and exchange hospitality was a momentous step across the threshold between exclusive and inclusive belief and religious practice. The “gates of light” opened to reveal a whole new vision shaping the people of God. Let us pray, “Open to me the gates of righteousness” (Ps. 118:19, NKJV).

**REACT**
Strict Jews did not socialize with Gentiles. Who are your modern “Gentiles”?

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1. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 246.
2. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, s.v. “gate.”

Margaret Arbuckle Paterson, Bracknell, United Kingdom
Throughout all the cultures of the world, we can certainly find plenty of differences in language, diet, dress, and social behavior. We can call these questions of style.

But some things are the same wherever we go. After all, we are all children of God, created in His image, with the same moral sense. As Paul pointed out, even people who have never heard of the church still know right from wrong: “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law themselves” (Rom. 2:14, NKJV). Showing respect for life and for each other are what we can call questions of substance.

To be effective missionaries, we need to be able to distinguish between the two and make sure that our message focuses on questions of substance, such as the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1–17) or the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23), rather than questions of style that reflect Adventist traditions or European or North American culture and lifestyle choices. So, for example, the message to love our enemies would be more important than not wearing jewelry or having tattoos. The following five points are designed to help make sure that our mission focuses on the important questions that have the power to truly transform people’s lives.

1. Distinguish between what’s important and what’s not in your own belief and practice.
2. Recognize the fruit of the Spirit at work in other people’s lives—love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness.
3. Look for role models wherever they can be found and whatever doctrines they hold. Examples might be Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani schoolgirl shot by the Taliban for supporting education for girls, who has been nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize, or Nelson Mandela, the South African peacemaker who set an example of forgiveness that many believe prevented civil war in his country.
4. Demonstrate your beliefs through your attitudes and behaviors before you preach about lifestyle.
5. Be prepared to find God and learn something new about Him from unexpected places.

Rob Waller, Reading, England
A striking aspect of Peter’s mission to the Gentiles was the way he was to find God in unexpected places. Simon the Tanner’s house? Cornelius’s household? Surely not. For Old Testament Jews, God lived in the ark of the covenant. On the journey to the Holy Land, God communicated to Moses “from between the two cherubim” (Exod. 25:22) on its cover. When the temple was built, God dwelled in the Holy of Holies with the ark. On one occasion, following King Solomon’s prayers, fire came from heaven and “the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord’s house” (2 Chron. 7:2). That is why when Jacob fled to Bethel to escape his brother Esau and encountered God in a dream, he exclaimed in surprise, “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not” (Gen. 28:16). Similarly, when Jonah wanted to escape God’s commission to preach to Nineveh, he set off to Tarshish to escape “from the presence of the Lord” (Jon. 1:3), only to find that God was there too.

We need to be prepared to find God.

Other churches have their holy places too. In Europe, Christian churches were often built where a miracle had occurred or where a holy person was buried. For Muslims, Mecca is their holy city, while Hindus have a number of holy sites along the river Ganges. But as the story of Cornelius makes it clear, God does not live only in one part of the world. As the Creator of all the different animals in the sheet in Peter’s vision and all the different nations in the world, God is everywhere. If our mission is to be effective, we need to be prepared to find God in some unexpected places.

“The conversion of Cornelius marks a new stage of expansion in the growth of the church. Cornelius was a Roman officer, but he was not completely a heathen. He was ‘devout’ and ‘feared God,’ and gave alms to the people. . . . Even so, in Jewish eyes he was a Gentile, for he was uncircumcised. Consequently his admission into the church marks a new stage in the expansion of Christianity. . . . The striking, supernatural features of Cornelius’ conversion must have been an important factor in leading the apostles to accept the fact that an uncircumcised Gentile might become a Christian.”

**REACT**

1. Why do you think churches dedicate sacred spaces?
2. Are some countries or cultures closer to God than others? Explain.

* The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 246.
CONCLUDE

We serve a living God whom we cannot ever hope to fully comprehend. His Spirit teaches, instructs, and enlightens, thus enabling us to grow in our understanding of Him. These new insights, called present truth, grow constantly as we come to know God in an ever deeper and more intimate way. Present truth is exciting stuff, but without an unshakable faith and trust in God, it can also appear frightening. As God reveals His mysteries to us, we must, like Peter, trust Him completely and be willing to leave our incomplete understandings behind and embrace new revelations.

CONSIDER

- Listing new insights God gave in the Bible and in our own Seventh-day Adventist history. How was each new truth revealed and received?
- Role-playing the scene in Acts 10. Afterward, reverse roles so that each person has a chance to experience the different viewpoints presented in the scene. Discuss whether the position you portrayed had anything to do with whether or not you believed that Gentiles could be saved.
- Brainstorming ways to reach out to people you may have personal prejudices about or who fall out of your comfort zone. Before you act on your ideas, pray that God will give you a spirit of love and acceptance for others despite how they may receive you.
- Compiling a list of Bible verses in which God invites all people to respond to His call. Make a poster with your list and find some place to hang it in your church as a reminder that God excludes no one.
- Reaching out to people who may be different from you, whether by their social status or the way they portray themselves to the world. Make an effort to be a friend to these people without trying to change them.
- Collecting various items on a nature walk that are similar but different. Reflect on how God created each of us to be unique and how our diversity can be used in His great commission to reach everyone with the gospel message.

CONNECT

Matthew 7:1–5; 1 Thessalonians 5:20–22; 2 Timothy 2:7; 1 John 4:1.
Ellen G. White, A Call to Stand Apart, chap. 5, “When Doing Everything Right Isn’t Enough.”

Céleste Perrino-Walker, Rutland, Vermont, U.S.A.
Philip as Missionary

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ ”

(Acts 1:8, NIV).
Who would think that baking bread in a disbanded anthill would be part of a missionary journey? But that's what Millie Howard did to help women in the Congo learn how to prepare healthy meals. She also taught them other practical skills such as the rudiments of sewing. It's all part of spreading the gospel. Millie and her husband, John, followed God's command and became “a light for the Gentiles” (Acts 13:47). They went to the mission field and communicated Christ's redeeming love and His sacrifice on Calvary.

“We are going to the Congo!”

In a casual exchange one Sabbath at a church I was visiting, I said to an older gentleman, “You look as though you have a story to tell.” He said, “Yes, I do. I was a missionary in Africa.” Over lunch, John Howard told me fascinating stories of his travels and work in the Congo. He told of a telephone call inviting him to become a missionary and of a dream that he was preaching in French—a language he did not know—then waking up to tell his wife, Millie, that they were going to Haiti as missionaries. Haiti was the closest French-speaking country he thought that needed to know about God.

Later, John read an article about women in the Congo walking several miles to learn about the Bible. He told his wife, “We are going to the Congo!” When the official invitation letter came, the Congo was their destination.

Stories of David Livingstone made John want to be a missionary. Similarly, the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch should encourage and inspire us to spread God's Word to those we meet casually and to those to whom we are sent. Upon meeting the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip inquired whether he understood what he was reading. When the Ethiopian said No and requested a teacher, Philip gladly explained and then responded to his request for baptism. We also should encourage others to learn, believe, repent, and be baptized.

Philip’s plan, as well as the plan of the other disciples, was to stay in Jerusalem. However, persecution scattered them, and they obeyed God's great commission to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19, 20, NIV).

Missionary zeal seems to be most evident where there is the possibility of unfair treatment because of our or another's religious beliefs. But should we wait for persecution to come before becoming missionaries to those near and far? Or should we use every opportunity to tell someone about Christ?

* Conversation with John Howard, former Adventist Development and Relief Agency Canada director and missionary to the Congo from 1970 to 1977.

Beverly Henry, Mandeville, Manchester, Jamaica, West Indies
The gospel commission in Matthew 28:18–20 compelled Philip to witness to others. The Bible gives several other such examples: the Hebrew maid and her master Naaman (2 Kings 5:1–4); Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20–39); Joseph (Genesis 39); and Daniel (Daniel 6) all fit the description of good missionaries and evangelists as described by the Greek word euaggelistès.¹

There is another window through which we need to witness.

It was customary for Daniel to pray by an open window three times daily (Dan. 6:10, 13). This served as a testimony to all those around him. However, King Darius was tricked into signing a decree intended to get rid of Daniel by throwing him into the lions' den because of his beliefs and witnessing. This had a sobering effect on Darius, who went to the mouth of the lions' den and called to Daniel saying, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?” (verse 20, NIV). After hearing Daniel's response, the king issued a decree that everyone in the kingdom should fear and reverence the living God (verses 25–27). Thus, by visibly praying, Daniel had unwittingly carried out the commission which had yet to be recorded in Matthew 28:19, 20.

There is another window through which we need to witness—the 10/40 Window.² The Ethiopian eunuch to whom Philip witnessed came from this region. Even today, countries in this part of the world suffer from severe poverty and are populated predominantly by people who have the “least access to the Christian message and resources on the planet.”³

When people have access to the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will interpret God's message to them or will send an interpreter to them. We are to follow Christ's example of providing people with spiritual knowledge as well as satisfying their physical needs. “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matt. 9:38, NIV).

REACT

1. How does your commitment to witnessing reflect God's commission to preach the gospel to the farthest parts of the world?
2. Formulate a plan to help evangelize various groups within your sphere of influence.

¹ The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, s.v. “evangelist.”
³ Ibid.
Divine Mission and Mandate (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8)

During the 40 days Jesus spent with His disciples after His resurrection, His main focus was the divine mandate to take to the whole world the good news of the salvation that He provides through His perfect life and vicarious death. His commands in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15 and His assertion in Luke 24:47 make it abundantly clear that His disciples were to share the gospel message with all of humankind. “‘Beginning at Jerusalem’” (Luke 24:47, NIV), this message was to be preached “‘in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 1:8, NIV).

Divine Empowerment (Acts 1:4)

Jesus was emphatic that this mission could succeed only through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, He commanded the apostles, “‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about’” (Acts 1:4, NIV). He also assured them that they would “‘be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (verse 5) and “‘receive power when the Holy Spirit’” came upon them (verse 8).

This need to be empowered by the Spirit before embarking on a mission is also found in Luke 24:49, where Jesus said, “‘I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high’” (NIV). Immediately after commissioning His disciples with the words “‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you,’ . . . he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:21, 22, NIV). Once again, this shows that for Jesus, the empowerment of the Spirit is the essential ingredient of successful missionary endeavors.

Spirit Filled and Spirit Led (Acts 6:1–6; 8:29, 30)

Philip’s preparation for missionary endeavors fulfills Jesus’ prescription with a high level of precision. With respect to the need of the Holy Spirit, it is worth noting that Philip was one of seven men selected for positions (which we now refer to as deacons) for which one criterion was being “full of the Spirit” (Acts 6:3, NIV; see also verse 5).

Further evidence of Philip’s connection with the Holy Spirit is seen in the Spirit’s involvement in his evangelistic endeavors. When the Holy Spirit instructed him to approach the Ethiopian eunuch and engage in a study of
the Scriptures with him, he responded without hesitation. The subsequent Bible study, in which Philip shared with the Ethiopian “the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35, NIV), led to the Ethiopian's baptism (verse 38). When Philip’s mission was accomplished, the same Spirit who had guided him to join the eunuch transported him away (verse 39).

**Philip’s Missionary Activities (Acts 1:8; 6:2–5; 8:5)**

The commands of Christ regarding the mission outreach He commissioned His followers to do had a distinct geographical pattern. It was to begin in Jerusalem, spread to Judea and Samaria, and eventually to the whole world (Acts 1:8). The missionary activities of Philip followed this prescribed geographical progression to a great degree. He began his ministry in Jerusalem as a member of the seven-man team that attended to the material needs of the believers, leaving the apostles free to concentrate on preaching the gospel (Acts 6:2–5).

After the stoning of Stephen and the subsequent persecution in Jerusalem, many of the believers fled to the regions of Judea and Samaria, preaching the Word wherever they went (Acts 8:1, 4). Philip was a part of that spreading of the gospel: “Philip went down to a city in Samaria and preached the Christ there” (verse 5). The people responded positively and joyfully to what he said, because he not only proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ but, empowered by the Holy Spirit, he performed many miracles, healing the sick and casting out demons (verses 6–8). As a result, many men and women were baptized (verse 12). Instructed by an angel, he continued moving farther in the field, going south towards Gaza, when he met the Ethiopian on his way (verses 26, 27). He was then transported by the Spirit to Azotus “and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea” (verses 39, 40, NIV).

**A Model for Us**

There are many valuable lessons we can learn from the evangelistic endeavors of Philip: (1) he was filled with the Holy Spirit; (2) when necessary, he was willing to play a supporting role so that others could focus on preaching the gospel; (3) he was responsive to the leading of the Spirit as he shared his faith; (4) he was willing to go wherever the Spirit led him; (5) he was empowered by the Spirit to perform miracles as part of his ministry; (6) he preached the gospel wherever he went; and (7) he focused on preaching Christ.

**REACT**

1. Jesus mandated that we should receive the Holy Spirit before proclaiming the gospel. Does this mean that we should wait for the infilling of the Spirit before carrying out the mission of the church? Explain your answer.

2. What may be some of the reasons why our preaching of the Advent message is not accompanied by the performing of miracles as in the experience of Philip and others during the apostolic era?

Orlando Moncrieffe, Teaneck, New Jersey, U.S.A.
When Christ commissioned His disciples to preach to the Gentiles, He intended that they should leave Jerusalem and spread the gospel everywhere. However, it seemed that the disciples did not want to leave their comfort zone. There was danger that the disciples would linger... unmindful of the Saviour’s commission to go to all the world. . . . God permitted persecution to come upon them. Driven from Jerusalem, the believers ‘went everywhere preaching the word.’

“Evil angels were waiting for their opportunity.”

“When they were scattered by persecution they went forth filled with missionary zeal... 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.”

“In the experience of Philip and the Ethiopian is presented the work to which the Lord calls his people. The Ethiopian represents a large class who need missionaries like Philip,—missionaries who will hear the voice of God, and go where he sends them. There are many who are reading the Scriptures, but who can not understand their import... Prayers and tears and inquiries go up from souls longing for light, for grace, for the Holy Spirit. Many are on the verge of the kingdom, waiting only to be gathered in.”

“This Ethiopian was a man of good standing and of wide influence. God saw that when converted he would give others the light he had received and would exert a strong influence in favor of the gospel... By the ministration of the Holy Spirit the Lord brought him into touch with one who could lead him to the light.”

“Had Philip left the eunuch with his case hanging in the balance, he might never have accepted the Saviour. Evil angels were waiting for their opportunity when they could... divert the newly awakened mind from seeking after truth. The Lord’s agencies must be wholly consecrated to His service, that they may be quick to understand their work. As wise stewards they must take advantage of every circumstance to teach the grace of God and draw people to Christ.”

2. Ibid., p. 106.
5. White, Christ Triumphant, p. 308.
How can we be missionaries once we ourselves have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior?

*We should be prepared.* After Adam and Eve sinned, God emptied heaven of His most precious possession, Jesus, who came to earth so that we could learn about the plan of salvation and be saved by accepting the free gift of His salvation. God prepares us to accept this gift through the outpouring of His Holy Spirit. A firm knowledge of salvation truth and God's amazing power is vital for success (Isa. 55:10, 11; Matt. 5:14–16). Proclamation of the gospel throughout the world will result in the second coming of Christ (Matt. 24:14).

Our responsibility is to witness wherever we are.

*We are to witness everywhere.* Mission is the work of every church member. We are to witness in our own backyard, across the sea, wherever God calls us to go. He desires that we use our talents and skills with caring attitudes to better humanity. And don't forget your neighbor, whose house is beside, behind, or in front of yours. Often we think of evangelizing only to people in “heathen lands,” at the expense of forgetting the simple yet important acts we can perform for even casual acquaintances. Remember that Paul planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase (see 1 Cor. 3:6). Our responsibility is to witness wherever we are, not only in our home, but as we walk by the way (Deut. 6:7–9).

*Be kind.* Of millennials in the United States, it is said that kindness “is becoming the nation's [the United States'] newest currency.” If millennials generally believe that doing the right thing is mandatory, shouldn't Christians advocate kindness as one of the elements of their missionary work? What revolution would occur if Christians were to be kind to everyone they met?

*Be a positive example.* A Welsh proverb states, “He that would be a leader must also be a bridge.” When you lead by example, undoubtedly you will have followers replicating your teachings. That’s a good thing. Don't be afraid to engage in the use of the Internet and positive social and other electronic media to build constructive relationships and to share what Christ has done for you. Sometimes opportunities come in unexpected places and unheard of ways.

**REACT**

What intentional act can you do to witness to your community and peers?

Philip the missionary was the first named person to preach the gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles. Prior to this time, the gospel was preached to the Jews (Matt. 10:5, 6). Two prophetic events provided Philip with the historic opportunity to be an effective missionary to the Gentile community. The first was the stoning death of Stephen in A.D. 34, signaling the rejection of the gospel by the Jews as a nation and the beginning of the work to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16). The second occurred as Saul led a ruthless crusade to persecute the Christian church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1; 1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:12–14). These events scattered the members of the early church to neighboring regions, and as they established their new homes, they systematically preached the gospel to all (Acts 8:4, 5).

In this transition, Philip relocated to Samaria (verse 5). The Bible illustrates how his dynamic preaching converted many who listened to him and they witnessed the miracles he performed. Many sick and paralyzed people were cured, while demons were neutralized by the power of his preaching (verses 6–8).

Philip was an influential and persuasive missionary. He was an honest man. He had a good reputation as a deacon, and he was known by his church members and the community at large. He constantly walked and talked with the Lord. He lived his life as an open book, and as such, he was identified as a man full of the Holy Ghost.

Philip was wise, yet humble—two prerequisites for being a deacon. He began his ministry as a waiter. He later moved to Samaria in a neighborhood in which there lived a group of people who were half Jew and half Gentile. History shows that the Jews had little contact with these people, yet Philip chose to demonstrate true Christian love by reaching out to them. Philip was diligent regarding his work in Samaria, and his preaching met with much success (Acts 8:5–8). God also elected Philip to minister to a high-ranking government official in the court of Candice, the queen of Ethiopia. Can you imagine getting a chance to witness to such a person? When we accept God’s call, we must be prepared for adventures!

**REACT**
How might you be positioned to witness to a government official?

*Tresco Wilson, Sandys, Bermuda*
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 24:45–49; John 20:21; and Acts 1:5–8. Together, these statements 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 it is a command that continues to resonate with Christians today.

CONSIDER

- Purchasing a map of the town in which you live and highlighting areas that need special attention of some kind. Together with your Sabbath School class or your church’s Community Services director, choose one of those areas and determine how to go about meeting that need.
- Teaching someone who has immigrated to your city from another country how to speak the local language and navigate your country’s or town’s culture. Your local library or city government might have information on how to go about doing this.
- Learning about the how, what, why, where, and when of Seventh-day Adventist missions by going to the Adventist Mission Web site at http://www.adventistmission.org/.
- Writing your reaction to one of this week’s daily lessons that affected you more than the others.
- Singing hymn no. 363, “Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service,” in the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal. What talents and abilities do you have that you could use in humble service for Him?

CONNECT

Leviticus 25:35; Psalm 82:3, 4; James 2:1–19.
Paul: Background and Call

“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).
Even as a young child, he showed great promise. Schooled by the top rabbi of his day, Saul of Tarsus knew the Jewish laws by heart. He grew up to become a religious leader in the Jewish community, a Pharisee, advanced in his knowledge of Judaism beyond his peers. No doubt he would have been appalled by an emerging group who called themselves Christians—followers of Jesus Christ, a man whom the Jews had condemned to death for claiming to be God. Zealous about his faith, Saul relentlessly persecuted these Christians, sending them to prison and sometimes even to their deaths.

One day, Saul was on his way to Damascus with plans to bring some of the Christians back to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished. It was then that Jesus Himself appeared to Saul in a blaze of shining light. He needed no further convincing: Jesus Christ was the Son of God, the Messiah, and from now on it would be his duty to bring this truth to others.

The apostle Paul, as he later became known, would spend the rest of his life sharing the Christian message and helping to grow the Christian church around the known world. He traveled extensively and wrote prolifically, speaking about and sharing the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. He took on disciples who shared in his vision and fervor.

“It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known,” Paul declared (Rom. 15:20, NIV), and preach he did, even on pain of death and imprisonment. Facing the very same persecution he used to inflict on others, Paul continued to encourage the church and spread the Word of God.

He was lashed by the Jews, beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, and in constant danger from both people and the elements. Despite it all, his heart continued to bleed for the early church (2 Cor. 11:23–28).

But Paul isn’t simply responsible for growing the early Christian church. As the author of 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament, Paul also has a profound impact on the Christian church today, thanks to his God-inspired writings on theology, worship, pastoral life, and Christian living.

All this from a man who was at first convinced that Jesus Christ was a mere heretical criminal.

Daniel Bell, Wahroonga, New South Wales, Australia
His Extraordinary Beginning (Acts 7:58; 8:1, 2; 23:6)

Nothing much can be revealed about Paul from the Bible regarding his past. From the little information that the Bible does provide, we see that he was committed to exterminating the heretical movement begun by someone named Jesus. In Paul’s first three appearances in the book of Acts, Saul (Paul’s name before his conversion) was directly involved with the persecution of Christians. During the stoning of Stephen, Saul was there. He was even the one who gave the approval for this event.

In Jesus, Paul found true strength and joy.

Saul then led the systematic arrest of Christians by going from door to door, looking for any believers he could find. His journey to apostleship was different from that of the other apostles. He was neither a fisherman nor a Galilean. He never knew how it felt to sit at Jesus’ feet, listening to His words. He never saw Jesus walk on water, heal the lepers, or raise the dead. He had never met Jesus. As a Pharisee, he was known to disagree with many of Jesus’ teachings. There is not even a slight hint in the beginning of his story that indicates Saul would one day be a great apostle.

His Extraordinary Calling (Acts 9:1–17)

It is interesting to note that God chose to call Saul while he was on his way to arrest Christians in Damascus. He was struck by light from heaven and heard the voice of Jesus. After this incident, Saul was unable to see anything. Rather than leading Saul to find healing from his blindness, God called Ananias to find him and cure him. This approach was necessary for a spiritual change to occur in Saul’s life. Because of his temporary blindness, Christians had the advantage over him. Either they could run away and he would not be able to capture them or, worse, they could harm him. However, it was this very helplessness that finally caused him to experience God’s grace. Jesus, whose people he went to persecute, was sent to heal him. This experience changed him forever. Immediately he gave himself to be baptized.


Paul’s ministry was far from simple and straightforward. It was filled
with adventure and miraculous stories, from confronting a sorcerer in Paphos to being worshiped as a demigod in Lystra, from being imprisoned and miraculously released to surviving a storm and a venomous snakebite.

However, the most important part of the story was the role Paul played in spreading the gospel through the whole of Asia Minor. Paul reached out to both Jews and Gentiles. As a result, he was able to win many souls for Jesus. As his ministry expanded, Paul was rejected and persecuted. He was almost killed more than once. But God used these troubles to help him reach people he otherwise might not have reached.

Due to his Roman citizenship, Paul was able to appeal his legal case, and in the process, he was given the opportunity to preach to the Roman governor and regional kings. He even went as far away as Rome.

**His Extraordinary Love for Christ (1 Cor. 2:2; 11:22–33; 2 Cor. 12:1–10)**

In the letter that he sent to the church in Corinth, Paul elaborated upon the trials that he had to go through for the sake of the gospel. The amount of persecution he endured is hard to imagine. However, in Paul's estimation, it was all worth it, because he was doing it for the Savior he loved.

In Jesus, Paul found true strength and joy. In Jesus, he discovered his calling and the true meaning of existence—“Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2, NIV). That is why Paul could write, “I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10, NIV). The love of Christ that Paul experienced helped him to respond with love to his Savior and to others.

**REACT**

1. If God can use a person such as Paul to spread the gospel, consider how He will be able to use you. How can you use your unique gifts and circumstances to minister to a specific group of people?
2. What does “Christ and him crucified” mean to you personally?

Bayu Kaumpungan, Singapore
“Prominent among the Jewish leaders who became thoroughly aroused by the success attending the proclamation of the gospel, was Saul of Tarsus. A Roman citizen by birth, Saul was nevertheless a Jew by descent and had been educated in Jerusalem by the most eminent of the rabbis. ‘Of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin,’ Saul was ‘a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.’ Philippians 3:5, 6. He was regarded by the rabbis as a young man of great promise, and high hopes were cherished concerning him as an able and zealous defender of the ancient faith. His elevation to membership in the Sanhedrin council placed him in a position of power.”

Saul’s “activity in causing holy men and women to be dragged before tribunals, where some were condemned to imprisonment and some even to death, solely because of their faith in Jesus, brought sadness and gloom to the newly organized church, and caused many to seek safety in flight.” Saul, however, was proud of who he was. He was proud of his own beliefs, proud of his job, and even proud of his commitment to kill people who believed that Christ was the Messiah. Many such people escaped to Damascus. Saul, however, followed them, with the endorsement of Jewish authorities. When he was on his way to Damascus, a light from heaven blinded him, and he fell to the ground. He heard Jesus say, “‘Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?’” (Acts 9:4). Then, the “prophetic records of Holy Writ were opened to his understanding.” And from that point on, everything changed.

“Saul now saw that in persecuting the followers of Jesus he had in reality been doing the work of Satan. He saw that his convictions of right and of his own duty had been based largely on his implicit confidence in the priests and rulers. . . . Now that Jesus Himself stood revealed, Saul was convinced of the truthfulness of the claims made by the disciples.” He became the true follower of Christ, and God used him mightily for His cause.

You may not encounter Jesus Christ the way Paul did, but that doesn’t matter. What does matter is that you do encounter Jesus Christ in some way. We can’t be transformed unless we personally meet the Transformer. And in order to meet the Transformer, we need to seek and find Him. What steps can you take to do so?

2. Ibid., p. 113.
3. Ibid., p. 115.
4. Ibid.

Benjamin Kipzanang, Singapore
Saul of Tarsus, as he was known before he became a follower of Christ, was from a rather interesting background. Born in Tarsus, he grew up in a city that was a focal point of the Roman Empire. Tarsus was in what it is now modern-day Turkey, where even today it is a bustling commercial center. The Tarsus of the past was even more of a metropolis, a grand city with many of what were then considered to be modern facilities, such as baths, marketplaces, and stadiums. It is no coincidence then that Paul came out of this city and went forth to be a missionary to the Gentiles far and near.

Paul’s missionary journeys brought him to several towns, including Antioch, Galatia, Cyprus, and Corinth. As a result, many men and women became Christians, and Paul sent letters of encouragement and advice to them. Finally, his journey ended in Rome, where he is believed to have been beheaded during the reign of Nero.\(^1\)

Paul’s conversion to Paul on the road to Damascus resulted in his changing from one of Christianity’s greatest persecutors to one of Jesus’ greatest apostles. Where he was once traveling around the region to persecute and kill Christians, Paul’s letters now travel around the world to encourage Christians to grow in their walk with Christ.

In Acts 22, Paul confirms that he was born in the city of Tarsus and that he was trained by Gamaliel, who was a well-known Hebrew scholar and “a leader of the liberal school of thought among the Jews.”\(^2\) Gamaliel was one of the most noted rabbis in history.

Not only was Paul a Roman citizen by birth, he was also well qualified and highly respected due to his education and upbringing. However, Paul was willing to throw all of this away for Jesus Christ. His wealth, influence, and education meant nothing to him once he had accepted Jesus as his personal Savior.

Have you accepted Jesus as your personal Savior? If you have truly done so, then like Paul, you, too, can give up everything for Him, without any hesitation or regret.

**REACT**

1. What was different about Paul’s life before he accepted Jesus?
2. What have you done for Jesus, if you have already accepted Him as your personal Savior?

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2. Ibid., s.v. “Gamaliel,” p. 402.
Paul was perhaps Christianity’s most important early convert and the first major missionary to preach the gospel to non-Jewish people. Like Paul, many Christians want to share their faith with others, but they hold back because they worry about negative reactions from their families, friends, and even strangers.

**God, however, does not need us to put someone else down in order to lift Him up.**

While there isn’t a specific right way to tell others about our relationship with Jesus and our convictions, there are three principles that can help us share our faith in ways that are respectful and that would make it easier for others to listen.

*Understand your own beliefs and convictions.* It is easier to explain concepts that we understand, and it’s also more convincing. If you simply parrot what you’ve heard, it will not withstand deeper questioning. It will also make your faith seem superficial and irrelevant. Furthermore, understanding why you believe what you believe goes a long way in countering any fears you may have about sharing the gospel, and it will boost your own relationship with God.

*Don’t judge other beliefs and religions.* Some Christians think that the only way to prove that their beliefs are true is by disproving everyone else’s faith and religion. God, however, does not need us to put someone else down in order to lift Him up. He is big enough to stand on the merits of His truth. We do not need to place a three-year-old’s stick figure drawing next to a Van Gogh to prove how much better Van Gogh’s artwork is. In fact, when we do this, we end up offending the people who love the child. We alienate them instead of endearing them to us. Instead, focus on showing (not just telling) what your faith does for you—how it makes you a kinder, more compassionate, wiser, and emotionally healthy person.

*Know why you’re sharing the gospel.* Often Christians witness because they sometimes have an internal counter of how many people they “convert.” Others enjoy the argumentative discussions and think that they can “debate” someone in to accepting Christ. Still others are driven to see whether the seeds they plant will bear fruit. If your motivations are not coming from a place of love and patience, you could end up relying on manipulation to get a result. Try to know why you are sharing the gospel, and don’t feel pressured to get a decision. Just plant a seed.

**REACT**

What part of today’s lesson resonates with you, and why?

*Faith Toh, Singapore*
Two thousand years ago, the apostle Paul's extensive missionary journeys helped establish the early Christian church. His tireless efforts in sharing the great news of hope in Jesus Christ resulted in the phenomenal growth of Christianity. When Paul brought God's truth to the Gentiles, he gave them a message of hope by preaching salvation by grace. He also separated Jewish religious rituals, traditions, and customs from the core message of the Bible—that God sent His Son to die for humanity's sins and that the way to eternal life is to accept and believe in Jesus' sacrifice.

Christianity's lasting influence and mainstream existence in the world today are legacies of Paul's missionary zeal. His message of universal acceptance, authenticity, love, and care for others won over the world. Yet currently, Christians only make up 32 percent of the world's population.¹

We understand God’s grace is given to all, but do we extend grace to all?

Why is the world receiving a completely different message today? Could it be because we are looking so far into the distance that we fail to recognize how we are behaving and who we are reflecting in our lives? Some research shows that young Christians are dropping out of church because they find it to be overprotective, shallow, antiscience, repressive, and exclusive.²

While we typically think of overseas travel when it comes to missionary trips, how we behave right in our very own communities is equally important to sharing God's message of hope. Today, we can travel to faraway places easier and faster. But do we consider how we share the message of hope with the people we meet? We understand God's grace is given to all, but do we extend grace to all?

**REACT**

1. How has Christianity lost Paul's message of hope? Why do people think Christians are judgmental, hypocritical, and insensitive to others?
2. What can we do to change the negative perception of Christianity?
3. How can you be a missionary in your own community?

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CONCLUDE

Paul’s story begins with his dramatic conversion, which was not mere happenstance. God showed him grace by sending someone to heal him, someone he would normally persecute. At the mercy of Ananias, Paul found that his confidence in his own education, success, and wealth was in vain. He was willing to throw away all the earthly security he had earned to find true confidence, unmatched faith, and salvation in Jesus. His complicated, far-reaching, and adventurous ministry began soon after his conversion and continues today through the letters he wrote that are now an integral part of the Bible.

CONSIDER

- Mapping the journeys of Paul and comparing the locations he visited to current maps.
- Writing some of your favorite verses from the book of Romans in your own words.
- Leather-crafting to visualize how Paul spent some of his time. As you do so, imagine him telling stories and sharing his faith while sitting with a group of friends as they stitched tents together.
- Interviewing a longtime member of your church to record his or her conversion story.
- Journaling your conversion story and submitting it to the religion section of your local newspaper or a Christian magazine.
- Playing the song “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)” by Chris Tomlin at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jbe7OruLk8I.

CONNECT


Paul: Mission and Message

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12–14, NIV).
Have you ever been commissioned to do an important task; one that is pivotal to someone's safety, deliverance, or success? If so, you were an ambassador, one appointed, authorized, and empowered for an important assignment. When you received your directions, what did you do? What was your reaction? Did you analyze your position? How did you plan to adjust it?

Compare your reaction to Paul's. He examined his challenge, reviewed his mission, considered his message, and accepted the means God provided to help him. Then, looking back, he realized that it was not the best and decided to start anew. Thus he exclaimed, “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14, NIV). He knew without a doubt that his mission and message were commissioned by God even before his birth (Jer. 1:5). Paul understood that he was appointed, delegated, and commissioned to go, teach, and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Better still, he knew he was empowered when he was given this commission.

Like Paul, you also have both a mission and a message. And because you, too, are commissioned, help will come from everywhere so that people can know there is a God who honors the pure, simple faith of salvation history that is centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. When you make Him real in your life, He backs up His promises with miracles, and He opens closed doors. Cooperate with Him to see His royal conversion masterpiece! He will then crown your efforts with the success that He promises to the commissioned and empowered.

Paul willingly fulfilled his mission, as he kept in mind that God sent His Son to die in our place and to reconcile us to Him. Loud and clear, he sounded his message that what Jesus has done for us He will continue to do until eternity. Lastly, he reminds us that God's means will always be available, for He promises to be with us even unto the end of the world. This Great Commission is not for Paul alone but for every believer in Christ (Matt. 28:19, 20).

So how do you rate yourself? Remember, like Paul, you, too, are on a divine appointment, delegated from birth to be God's ambassador. Go! Do His bidding and be blessed.

**REACT**

Are you using your own personal style with all of your abilities to deliver God's message?

_Cecily A. Daly, Huntsville, Alabama, U.S.A._
We see in Acts 7:54–58, after the stoning of Stephen, that the Jews laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul (later known as Paul). In Acts 8:1, we read that Paul approved of Stephen’s murder. His goal at that time was to be a highly regarded Pharisee, and he was passionate about his mission. It was at the height of the Christian persecution, and Paul was in the thick of it.

Paul the Pharisee, passionate and purposeful, was misdirected in his focus. He thought that obtaining the necessary documents from the high priest to destroy the people of the “Way” in order to maintain a pure Jewish religion would please God. But Jesus had already ordained him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. As he made his way to Damascus with a murderous intent, Christ laid hold of him and redirected his focus.

What then became Paul’s mission, and what was his new focus? His mission changed from trying to murder God’s people to being willing to die for Christ. No longer was he willing to stamp out and stifle the good news. Instead, his new mission was to fervently spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. He states, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom. 1:16, NKJV).

Why would Christ choose so vile a man to do such a great work? God had already equipped Paul to go between the Jews and the Gentiles. He was an extraordinary person. He was an intellectual educated at the school of Gamaliel. This means that he was able to go before kings and expound on the crucified Christ. Although Paul was not one of Jesus’ twelve disciples, once having met Jesus, he was never the same. Like Peter and the other followers, Paul was invested in the Great Commission: “ ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you’ ” (Matt. 28:19, 20, NKJV).

**REACT**

1. What is your mission?
2. Is your current focus geared toward fulfilling the mission?
The apostle Paul was on a mission—a mission to share with the world what Jesus had done for him. And time was of the essence. He didn’t belabor the legalities of the Hebrew world, but by teaching metaphorically, he made the gospel relevant and meaningful to those who heard him. Our lesson this week addresses the significant groups to whom Paul extended the plan of salvation—the Greeks first and then the Gentiles.

Having been himself exposed to both Greek and Jewish cultures, Paul sought to simplify and globalize the concept of salvation to unbelievers. By following Jesus’ practice of teaching in parables, Paul’s testimony and mission were best expressed through metaphoric analogies that touched on practical topics. He assured the Romans that he was no respecter of persons. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).


In Acts 13:16–26, we read about Paul’s appeal to the Jews, reminding them of the sovereignty of God. He recalled how God had chosen them to be His people and how He made them a nation after He delivered them from Egyptian bondage. He sought to inspire and encourage them by reminding them of their spiritual journey, beginning with the wilderness years, right up to the reign of David. In doing so, Paul immortalized the symbolic heritage found in the Judean lineage of Jesus Christ, the Savior.

**The Greek Resistance (Acts 14:4, 5)**

Unfortunately, Paul’s quest for convincing the Greeks of the gospel was thwarted because of the strong, yet negative Jewish influence that won their allegiance. Soon the people of Iconium were divided. Some supported the Jews, while others stood with the apostles. The Jews and Greeks who opposed the apostles finally persuaded the city officials to arrest Paul and Barnabas. Nevertheless, the mission ordained by Christ Himself continued to grow.
Armored Soldiers (Eph. 6:10–18)

In Ephesians 6:10–18, Paul compares the weapons of a soldier to the weapons we use in the fight for righteousness. He assures us that these weapons are not the types of weapons the world uses. And he is confident that these mighty weapons come from God, against whom nothing can stand.

It is important to know that Paul informs us that the battle with the enemy is “not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12).

Furthermore, he is explicit in preparing us for spiritual combat by directing us to the true spiritual armor and encouraging us to put on every piece of it, because the Lord Himself has given it to us so that we might win against the enemy.

Gold Medalists (1 Cor. 9:24–27)

Paul metaphorically compares the running of the gospel race with that of an athlete's race. He basically says, “You know that everyone who runs in the race gives it everything they have, but only one person wins the laurel wreath. However, in the gospel race, everyone who finishes wins. The athletes do it to win that laurel wreath, which will soon fade and die, while the prize we receive is the crown of eternal life, which never fades.” That's how we should run the gospel race, giving it everything we've got. Paul's message here is “go for the gold”—the gold, of course, being our heavenly golden crown. Paul's message of determination and tenacity is the foundation of his mission.

Paul and the Law (Rom. 2:21–24)

Paul points out to the Romans that the law cannot justify anyone, that only Jesus can do so, because it is He who paid the price of our sins on Calvary's cross, thereby satisfying the demands of the law. The apostle is determined for us to understand two great truths: (1) in our own strength, we are helpless against Satan's attacks, and (2) our strength is secured through the armor of God, as He gives every believer all that is needed to receive victory over Satan's attacks.

Paul's relentless passion for the gospel made him a mission-minded messenger from God. The apostle's message for us today is to forsake the obstacles of life. We are to not only run the race but to keep our eyes on the heavenly prize of an eternity with One who endured the cost of Calvary for our salvation.

REACT

1. Why did Paul use metaphors to describe Christian spirituality?
2. What does the armor of God symbolize?
3. What element of Paul's life impresses you the most? Why?

Sonia E. Paul, Huntsville, Alabama, U.S.A.
“The apostle Paul had been caught up to the third heaven and had seen and heard things that could not be uttered, and yet his unassuming statement is: ‘Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after.’ Philippians 3:12. Let the angels of heaven write of Paul’s victories in fighting the good fight of faith. Let heaven rejoice in his steadfast tread heavenward, and that, keeping the prize in view, he counts every other consideration dross. Angels rejoice to tell his triumphs, but Paul makes no boast of his attainments. The attitude of Paul is the attitude that every follower of Christ should take as he urges his way onward in the strife for the immortal crown.

Paul was educated by the best scholars. Yet he counted it all as lost.

“Let those who feel inclined to make a high profession of holiness look into the mirror of God’s law. As they see its far-reaching claims, and understand its work as a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, they will not boast of sinlessness.”

Paul was educated by the best scholars. Yet he counted it all as lost and gaining Christ as the greatest victory. Should not this be the mission of every one who claims to be a disciple of Christ? Did He not give up His riches in glory to live in a body of flesh for us? Did He not die a ruthless death so that we might have the life that is His? Paul’s admonition is for us to do the same so that we also can gain Christ and the eternal life He has prepared for those who will “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). Indeed, Paul had a prideless nature. It is the same nature we must have in order to love God and each other, in order to gain heaven, and in order so that we can fulfill the mission given to all of Christ’s disciples.

As disciples of Christ, we, too, must give up our right to sin as Paul did. Only through faith can we do so. “Through faith, every deficiency of character may be supplied, every defilement cleansed, every fault corrected, every excellence developed.” This was Paul’s goal. Thus, he was able to say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). Will you be able to have this as your final signature?

**REACT**

How can a young person achieve victories over self as Paul did?

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2. Ibid., p. 564.

Florence Marchand, Huntsville, Alabama, U.S.A.
In this day of 30-second commercials and high-tech toys, the image of the biblical Paul seems so yesterday.

A century ago, the mission field was a faraway place breached only by the eccentric and the adventurous. Now, however, with the preponderance of disasters, the affluence of nations, shifting mission statements, and the increasing number of empty bellies, there are hundreds of mission opportunities. Also, many people now see that service for others can present lifelong lessons not learned anywhere else. You can participate for just a day or week and still gain language skills, spiritual uplift, cultural wisdom, experiential travel, and fabulous photographs. Missionary experience can truly be a blessing to the giver and the recipient. You may face some harrowing events, but just chalk them up to experience. Remember, “If our motive is love to God, no ingratitude can hinder us from serving our fellow men.”*

By now, you have a general idea about some of the ingredients it takes to be a missionary. So check out the following recipe and ask yourself if you qualify:
2 pounds of love for God; 1 pair of feet; 2 cups of enthusiasm; 1 prompting of an inner calling; 2 cups of flexibility; 2 cups of open-mindedness; 2 cups of generosity; 2 heaps of team spirit; 2 shakes of resilience; 2 piles of the unexpected; handfuls of anticipation; loads of friends and family supporters; 1 dose of cultural taboos; 1 camera; 1 round of vaccinations; 1 suitcase of clothes; and several weeks of language immersion.

Combine all ingredients in the bowl of life. With an ample supply of love for God and others, grease a pan of opportunity. Place the pan in the mission oven, and bake anywhere from one day to two years as needed. Frost with shakes of resilience. The missionaries will be well done when they are poked hard several times midtrip yet would gladly repeat the experience! Serve as an appetizer, main course, or dessert for Christian, motivational, and philanthropic events.

**REACT**

1. Reflect on two positive effects you think would occur as a result of participating in a mission experience.
2. Plan on participating in a mission experience or trip by looking for a need that has to be filled. Challenge yourself by saying Yes!

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Hilary Daly, Beltsville, Maryland, U.S.A.
Paul, one of Christianity’s earliest missionaries, definitely focused on his goal of bringing the message of salvation to the people of his day. Where is your focus? Is it on your goals? Today, more than ever, you hear the question “What do you want to do with the rest of your life?” This is usually followed by “Have you set any goals?” These questions and many more come from well-intentioned parents, siblings, friends, and professors. Before you walked through those hallowed halls of life and education, as far back as you can remember, someone most likely said to you, “You need to set some goals, or you’re not going to go anywhere!” Because Paul set his goals as directed by God, we read about his success even today.

Setting goals involves much more than merely listing them in your journal.

So you’ve heard comments like these before, and you have read different studies. Once in a while you even try one or two suggestions, but you just can’t find any that work for you. You realize that setting goals involves much more than merely listing them in your journal. Goal-setting requires action, changing your mindset, perseverance, and, most of all, depending upon Christ. These are the behaviors Paul engaged in, and you can engage in them also.

It is easy to lose sight of a goal when it is viewed as the purpose toward which an endeavor is directed and Christ is not a part of that endeavor. Paul had a rather humble opinion of his own advancement in the Christian life. He wrote, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Phil. 3:12, NIV). “He speaks of himself as the ‘chief of sinners’ [see 1 Tim. 1:15]. Yet Paul had been highly honored of the Lord.” The highest goal any person can strive for is to make Christ the center of his or her life. After quoting Philippians 3:12–15, Ellen White states, “In this Scripture is the promise that we shall not be left to grope our way along in doubt and perplexity.”

**REACT**

Read Philippians 3:12–14. What are your goals? Who’s navigating them?

CONCLUDE

Paul is an excellent example of how the transformative power of Jesus Christ can help His people spread the Word of God. He also is an example of how we can employ the gifts we have once He has transformed us. At first, Paul used his power and zeal to torture and kill God’s people. But after he met Christ on the road to Damascus, he employed this power and zeal to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with anyone he could. He preached “fearlessly in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27, NIV). If he were alive today, Paul would be considered a Christian activist for Jesus Christ. I can imagine him using a multitude of tools to spread the gospel, even such means as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. I challenge you to do the same.

CONSIDER

• Hosting a viewing of The Bible Series: Paul, Part I. You can find it on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAsDVatburA. Afterward, compare how Saul/Paul used the same gifts in different ways.
• Spending seven days ministering for Jesus Christ as Paul did. Journal your experiences and share them with an accountability group.
• Developing an advertisement using iMovie or other video-editing software that will encourage others to use Paul’s example to introduce people to the Word of God. Here are two links on how to use iMovie: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTZukz_kkcw; http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Video-Using-iMovie.
• Hosting a special prayer service for those people who would like to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in their communities.
• Rereading the story of the life of Paul and publishing a book of poetry entitled “Paul’s Life in Poetry” or “The Poetic Musings of Paul.”
• Tweeting to your friends a different text from Acts each day for the next seven days.
• Following Paul’s example of active Christianity by developing a Facebook page titled “Christianity in Action.” Encourage your friends to post on this page how they are spreading the gospel in practical ways.

CONNECT

Job 36:2, 3; Psalms 9:11; 66:16; Isaiah 12:4; 2 Corinthians 3:2, 3.


Calvin Smith, Keys to Personal Witnessing, General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department, distributed by AdventSource.

Ramona L. Hyman, Huntsville, Alabama, U.S.A.
Must the Whole World Hear?

“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” (Rom. 16:25–27, NIV).
Have you ever made something that didn't quite turn out the way you wanted it to—maybe a recipe or an art project? Is there an undesirable flaw in a friend or relative that you wish you could change? If so, at some point or another, you probably wished for an undo button to push in order to fix what you didn't like.

Settling for imperfections when you have the power to demand perfection would be hard to imagine. Amazingly and thankfully, our God is not like that! He delights in love, and that required Him to create us with free will. Despite all that He wants done on earth, He will not use His power to force the will of any one of us. Instead, He deliberately chooses to limit His limitless authority. You see, He's all powerful but not controlling.

Interestingly enough, sinful humanity regularly does the exact opposite with power. As a result, many people grow up in fearful, brutal conditions as did Yeonmi Park. While she was a little girl living in North Korea, Yeonmi was brainwashed around the clock by government propaganda. In spite of deplorable living conditions that existed all around, she did as she was taught and worshiped her “supreme leader” who was the only god she ever knew. She writes, “I had to be careful of my thoughts because I believed Kim Jong Il [the country’s dictator] could read my mind. Every couple of days someone would disappear.” Eventually, with the help of South Korean missionaries, she and her family were able to settle in Mongolia.

God has no shortage of power to save anyone, anywhere, at any time. However, many people wonder about the salvation of millions of helpless souls, like Yeonmi, who don't know that Jesus died to save them. While this thought may be perplexing to many probing minds, it should not overshadow this important question: What can we do to reach people like Yeonmi?

True Christians don’t merely feel sorry for people who have no knowledge of God. Instead, according to Acts 1:8, they position themselves to receive divine power from God so that they can share the gospel in every part of the world. The best part is, we won’t do these things out of compulsion or duty but in response to the greatest force in the universe. “Christ’s love compels us” (2 Cor. 5:14, NIV).


2. Ibid.
Everything Right but Your Direction (Ps. 87:4–6; Acts 4:11)

The cornerstone is the first stone laid in a wall or building. Where and how it is laid is supremely important, because by definition the rest of the structure takes its orientation from that stone. Every structure has a cornerstone. The only question is whether or not it is laid in such a way as to correctly align the structure with reference to the landscape, the prevailing winds, and so on.

In the same way, individuals, organizations, nations, and business enterprises have something analogous—a thing, idea, mission, or person that determines the orientation toward life, the world, and the future. We may not lay that foundation in the same intentional way in which one must lay the first stone in a wall or building, but every step we take, every decision we make, is based on that which we have decided to make most central to our existence.

For the priests and leaders who addressed Peter and John in Acts 4, the cornerstone metaphor was perhaps more literal than it would have been for most people or institutions. Central to their purpose and identity was an actual physical structure—the temple of Jerusalem. With that came a beautiful and spiritual edifice constructed around the temple and its ceremonies and their reading of the laws of Moses.

They had a cornerstone, but it was not the Cornerstone. Everything was right except for their whole orientation. In the same way, everything can be right for us. We can have the right mission, the right methods, and the right attitudes. We can even be successful in persuading people to adopt our ideas, beliefs, and doctrines. But if we are not oriented by our relationship with the Cornerstone, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, we are pointed in the wrong direction.

“By What Name?”

In the dialogue leading up to Peter’s statement in Acts 4:12, the priests and leaders ask, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” (Acts 4:7, NIV). First, they probably knew who Peter and Jesus were. So they also probably knew what the answer to their question would be. But then healers, holy men, would-be messiahs, and wonder workers were neither new nor unique to this time and place. Josephus, our main surviving source of historical information about first-century Judea and the surrounding areas, mentions several. One is even found in Acts 13:6–12.

One thing we know to be true about these individuals is that they healed and performed “miracles” using a variety of names and words of power—the
more, the better. An effective healer or miracle worker was one who had the most names to work with. The names of gods from any and all pantheons, heroes, other dead miracle workers, anything would do. Needless to say, they were only committed to these names as long as they seemed to work. Loyalty, or even comprehension, were not concerns.

So when Peter and John were asked, “By what power or by what name” they acted, the underlying assumption was that they were essentially opportunistic hucksters, hedging their bets by latching on to the magic name of the week. In response, they emphasized that there was only one name—Jesus Christ—that was necessary and sufficient for anyone who trusted in Him.

As twenty-first-century Christians, we also are tempted to hedge our bets, to trust in things that are at best incidental. However, there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved.

Not What You Know, but Who You Know (Rom. 2:12–16)

When we say, as Peter does in Acts 4:12, that there is no other name (than Jesus) by which we can be saved, does this mean that a person cannot be saved without knowing His name? In Romans 2:12–16, Paul makes it clear that it is not factual knowledge of the details that “proves” one’s worthiness for salvation. Rather, it is what any given person does with the knowledge he or she has that demonstrates whether that person is moving toward or away from God. Someone who instinctively does what the law of God requires without knowing the specifics, is really in a much better position than someone who knows the law but only pays lip service to it.

To the person with little knowledge but much faith, the little that person knows is a blessing not only to that person but to everyone that he or she knows. Inversely, for the person who knows everything and disregards or ignores it, that knowledge is a curse.

Beyond Self-Improvement (Rom. 3:23)

How can we become worthy to be saved? While we are capable of doing good things, we are not good people. As Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3, it is thoroughly possible for someone to perform all manner of good works and even supernatural wonders yet be spiritually dead.

What hope do we have then, if even our best efforts are just a pathetic pantomime? None. Fortunately, however, it is not dependent on us at all. Only Jesus can save us. Only He can give us clean hearts.

REACT

1. What or who is your “cornerstone”? How does it or that person determine the course of your life?
2. Do you think you consistently reflect Jesus?
3. Have you ever known someone who instinctively seemed to be on the right path, even with little knowledge of the details of the plan of salvation?
4. If there is nothing we can do for our own salvation, where do we derive our motivation to do good things?

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Alan Hecht, Takoma Park, Maryland, U.S.A.
“‘Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’” (Matt. 28:19, NIV). Many souls may never learn of God’s precious gift. Among these are people held in slavery. Knowing that there is no salvation without Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12), one must ask, What judgment is to be delivered upon those held in bondage?

“I saw the pious slave rise in victory.”

“All heaven beholds with indignation human beings, the workmanship of God, reduced by their fellow men to the lowest depths of degradation and placed on a level with the brute creation.”

Though slavery is illegal throughout the world, it still exists in forms such as debt bondage, indentured servitude, and child soldiers. The Global Slave Index 2013 estimates 29.8 million people still live as slaves. Many of the men, women, and children held against their will may never learn of Jesus Christ.

The “slave master will have to answer for the soul of his slave whom he has kept in ignorance; and the sins of the slave will be visited upon the master.”

While God brings down a heavy hand of judgment on slave owners, He embraces the bonded souls with a thoughtful compassion that may be difficult for some to comprehend. “God cannot take to heaven the slave who has been kept in ignorance and degradation, knowing nothing of God or the Bible, fearing nothing but his master’s lash, and holding a lower position than the brutes. But He does the best thing for him that a compassionate God can do. He permits him to be as if he had not been, while the master must endure the seven last plagues and then come up in the second resurrection and suffer the second, most awful death.”

Mrs. White further makes a distinction between those held in ignorance and those who had knowledge of God’s salvation: “I saw the pious slave rise in victory and triumph, and shake off the chains that bound him.”

How sad that there are those who still suffer in slavery. Many die each day not knowing that “‘God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life’” (John 3:16, NIV).

1. Ellen G. White, Early Writings, p. 275.
3. White, Early Writings, p. 276.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 286.

Patricia Hudson-Henry, Bowie, Maryland, U.S.A.
Satan has been deceiving people ever since he told Eve that she would not die if she ate the forbidden fruit. Yet the truth remains that we can only have eternal life through Jesus, who died for our sins long before any of us came to know Him. Having paid the ultimate price, He offers us salvation for free. There is nothing we can do to earn it. This is a powerful counterpunch to Satan’s deceitful encounter with Adam and Eve. It reveals that God loves us, that He does want to spend eternity with us, and that there is nothing we can do to earn eternal life. All we can do is accept His offer of salvation.

Knowing that the gospel truth will lead many to a love relationship with God, Satan continues to spread falsehoods about His love and the way to salvation. For example, in addition to the popular trend of evolutionary thinking, there are several movements today that question the existence of heaven and hell. Consider the following quote: “Heaven and hell seem out of proportion to me: the actions of men do not deserve so much.”*

On the surface it may appear that one’s view on this topic is not essential to salvation. However, the acceptance of any lie spread by Satan is the foundation for further deceit and ultimately creates a mind that is more receptive to all lies rather than to any truth. This naturally leads a person to question one’s need for salvation.

God loves us and will judge us independently according to our relationship with Him (Matt. 16:27; Eph. 6:8; Rev. 22:12). Because salvation is a gift, Satan’s main objective is to deceive the world into rejecting this gift.

Thus, the basis of our mission is to share the gospel with the world—the truth that God loves us so much that He sent His Son to save us so we can live with Him and the Father forever. Accepting this truth protects us from believing the same lies Adam and Eve believed. God entrusts this holy mission to human agents. How honored we should be, and how diligent we must be, as we come to understand that souls are at stake. Let us move forward in faithful obedience to God’s mission call.

**REACT**

1. Will God hold us personally accountable for missed opportunities to communicate the gospel? Explain.

2. Can knowledge of the truth lead a person into a false sense of safety from Satan’s deceitful ways? If so, then what is the benefit of knowing the truth?

“Calling all sheep. Come in, sheep. Do you copy? Over.” Wouldn’t it be great if the whole world were connected by two-way radios? We could get the message out to everyone at once, right? Alas, it is not that simple, but it is even more possible today than under the conditions of Bible times. Today, we have e-mail, cell phones, TV, and Internet social media. Still you hear people say, “I didn't know about that!” So how can we possibly hope to reach souls in the jungles of Borneo if we can't even get them to pay attention in our own town?

**Do what you can.** The scope of the task is no excuse for inaction. Use what means of communication you have. Go on a mission trip. It’s as rewarding for the people on the trip as it is for the people they serve. If you can't go yourself, sponsor someone who can. Collect clothing and supplies for the missions already out there. Your actions speak louder than words. Make the message attractive.

**Don’t judge.** Just because someone heard the name of Jesus or saw a poster for an evangelistic series does not mean that it has caught their attention. The devil is working hard to keep them from discovering the Savior. We all know people who seem to have the love of Christ in them, yet they are not professed Christians. How is this possible? Christ has made us in His image whether we have discovered it yet or not. We all have consciences that let us know the best way to go.

**Don’t assume.** Jesus has other sheep not of this flock (see John 10:16). There's a joke that's been going around the Adventist community for years. It seems there was a tour group of souls recently admitted to heaven. Their guide pointed out the lovely sights of the sea of glass and the tree of life. Next they entered the neighborhood of mansions. Many were distinctly Catholic or Southern Baptist or Lutheran. There was even a neighborhood for those who never expected to make it to heaven. Then the group came to another area where the tour guide asked all present to be very quiet as they passed. “The Adventists live there,” he explained. “They think they are the only ones here.”

**REACT**
1. What areas does your personal mission field cover?
2. How might you actually be thwarting the workings of the Holy Spirit on behalf of others?
3. Do you know anyone who is not a Christian, whom you consider to be saved? On what do you base your opinion?

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*Kathy Hecht, Takoma Park, Maryland, U.S.A.*
What is the best method to hear a message that would lead to salvation or to more knowledge of God and how He reveals Himself to us? For some, it is in a specific building on a specific day. For others, it is from the dog-eared and marked pages of their treasured Bibles. While going to church and studying the Bible have been effective means of spreading the gospel, for some the most powerful revelations of God have occurred in the most unlikely places. It is these moments more than any sermon or Bible study that leave the most indelible mark on their Christian experience.

God’s greatest revelations to many people have come through nature. As a teenager, before I ever appreciated the gospel message, God revealed to me the immenseness of His being, the depth of His love, and the peace that comes from intimacy with Him while I was sitting in a tree, looking at the ocean. As I watched the waters, I considered how deep and wide they were yet how still and constant. I marveled that despite the ocean’s immense size, the waves that reached the beach were soft and soothing. They rippled over small rough rocks on the beach, making them smooth and shiny over time. In the same way, God washes over us and polishes us so others can see His reflection in us. At that moment, I considered how immense and powerful God is, and how insignificant I felt hidden in that tree. Yet He loved me! He was gently washing over me and covering me.

At that point, my need for God was evident, tangible, and overpowering. Six years later, I was baptized, and to many people, that is the day I became a Christian. But for me, my salvation came that day on the beach, and the “missionaries” who witnessed to me were the ocean and the Holy Spirit.

While doing mission work, we become so focused on going here, going there, teaching, reading, and talking that our eyes and ears become shut to the revelation of God in the natural world. Maybe sometimes we need to stop talking, shut the Book, close the church, and step outside. Instead of reading Psalm 19:1, 2, experience it. “Reading about nature is fine, but if a person walks in the woods and listens carefully, he can learn more than what is in books, for they speak with the voice of God.”


Serrah Thomas, Bowie, Maryland, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

This week we have been looking at some difficult questions, many of which may never be answered until Jesus returns. But there is one thing we can be sure of: we’ve all been given marching orders to share what we know with the world. It’s easy to become discouraged when our efforts don’t bring immediate results. It may be years before some of the people we have prayed for or studied with give their lives to Jesus. And some may never make that choice. However, we can take courage in knowing that God is using us to proclaim the gospel and to bring souls into His everlasting kingdom.

CONSIDER

• Designing an illustration that explains how faith and works function in our lives.
• Contrasting the life of a person who lives by faith with the life of someone who depends on his or her own good works to be saved.
• Refuting the quote in Tuesday’s lesson: “Heaven and hell seem out of proportion to me: the actions of men do not deserve so much.”
• Singing all the verses of “Seeking the Lost,” hymn no. 373 in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal. Create a new melody for the song or write an additional verse.
• Spending an hour passing out literature at a park, rest stop, beach, or mall. Or go door-to-door in your own neighborhood. (In some cases, you might need to first get permission to do so.)
• Interviewing people who have been on a mission trip. Ask how the experience changed their lives and how they were able to help others learn more about Jesus.
• Writing out your personal testimony, and describing your own spiritual journey. Share it with someone in the next few days.
• Taking a walk in nature. What does it tell you about God?

CONNECT

Gary Gibbs, Winsome Witnessing.
If you have not yet received a copy of CQ for fourth quarter 2015, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

**Lesson 1 The Prophetic Calling of Jeremiah**

**Logos:** Isa. 1:19; Jer. 1:1–19; 7:5–7; Ezek. 18:23; Matt. 3:7–11.

**Memory Text:** “‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations’” (Jer. 1:5, NKJV).

**Key Thought:** We know more about the life of Jeremiah than we do about any other Old Testament prophet. Jeremiah had such an effect on history that, even at the time of Jesus, literature workshops and schools for disciples were based on the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah. However, despite years of warning and pleadings, the people generally did not listen to the messages he gave them that were from the Lord. Nevertheless, Jeremiah could not be bought or sold. He stood as “‘a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall’” (Jer. 1:18, NIV), not in his own strength but in the Lord’s. His calling as a prophet brought him much suffering. So much of this suffering came from the very people he wanted to help. Thus, in his own way, Jeremiah faced what Jesus would face hundreds of years later in the same land.

**Lesson 2 The Crisis Within and Without**


**Memory Text:** “‘Israel was holiness to the Lord, the firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; disaster will come upon them,’ says the Lord” (Jer. 2:3, NKJV).

**Key Thought:** Throughout the Bible, we read about one crisis or another. The situation during the time of Jeremiah and his ministry was no different. God’s people faced many crises, both from within and from
without. Unfortunately, in many ways, their greatest crisis came from within. Both their leaders and priests were often corrupt. But the people’s hearts were so hardened and damaged by sin and apostasy that they refused to heed God’s warnings—warnings that could have spared them from disaster. Sin is bad enough, but refusing to turn away from it is indeed a crisis.