

Our Mission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 5:14–16; Luke 24:48, 49; John 20:21; Matt. 28:19, 20; Rev. 14:6–12.*

Memory Text: “‘And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come’” (*Matthew 24:14, NKJV*).

Early in Jesus' ministry, He called Peter and Andrew to be His disciples, which meant that they were to lead others to Him: “‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men’” (*Matt. 4:19, NKJV*). Later, the Lord appointed 12 disciples “that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach” (*Mark 3:14, NKJV*). Christ sent out the Twelve Apostles and later 70 disciples to evangelize, as well (*Matt. 10:5–15, Luke 10:1–12*). During the 40 days after His resurrection, Christ appeared several times to His disciples (*1 Cor. 15:3–8*), and He placed the responsibility of preaching the gospel in their hands (*Acts 1:2, 3*). Again and again He entrusted them with the gospel commission. Though none of the gospel writers recorded every word Jesus said, each one set down a few sentences of the Lord's instructions, each account emphasizing a different aspect of the gospel commission and thus providing us with valuable insight into its purpose, methodology, and scope.

This week we'll look at the gospel commission as Jesus Himself presented it.

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

To Be the Light of the World

Read Matthew 5:14–16. What is Jesus saying here to each of us individually and as a church community?

Throughout the Bible, light is intimately associated with God. “The LORD is my light,” sang David (*Ps. 27:1*), and John stated that “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (*1 John 1:5, NKJV*). God is the Source of light. In fact, the first thing He created was light, because light is indispensable for life.

Given the close connection between light and God, Scripture frequently uses light to symbolize truth, knowledge, and godliness. To walk in light means to have a character like God’s (*Eph. 5:8, 1 John 1:7*). Light stands for God; darkness, for Satan. That’s why it is a grievous sin to “put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (*Isa. 5:20*).

Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, is “‘the light of men, . . . the true Light which gives light to every man’ ” (*John 1:4, 9, NKJV*). He alone is the light that can illuminate the darkness of a world enshrouded in sin. Through Him we may have the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (*2 Cor. 4:6*); that is, His character.

When we accept Christ as our Savior, we become “‘sons of light’ ” (*John 12:36, 1 Thess. 5:5, NKJV*). But we have no light in ourselves. Like the moon, all we can do is reflect the light that shines upon us. When we let Jesus shine through us, we will not do good works to parade our own virtue but to lead people to glorify God.

“If Christ is dwelling in the heart, it is impossible to conceal the light of His presence. If those who profess to be followers of Christ . . . have no light to give, it is because they have no connection with the Source of light.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 41.

Wouldn’t it be absurd to light a lamp only to put it “‘under a basket or under a bed’ ” (*Mark 4:21, NKJV*)? Then why is it that sometimes we do so with Christ’s light? A concealed disciple is no more useful than a lamp under a bowl on a dark night. Therefore, “arise, shine; for your light has come! and the glory of the LORD is risen upon you” (*Isa. 60:1, NKJV*).

Light itself is actually invisible. It has to be reflected off of something; otherwise we cannot see it. What spiritual lesson can we draw from this about how, as believers, our light is to be revealed?

To Be Witnesses

Jesus' first encounter with the disciples after His resurrection was very important. They were fearful, distressed, discouraged, and perplexed. They had locked the doors of the room out of fear, but Jesus came and stood in their midst. With a clear and warm voice He said to them: "Peace to you." Startled and terrified as they were, it was difficult for them to believe their eyes and ears. Lovingly, the Lord showed them His hands and His feet and explained to them everything the Scriptures said about Him. That night His presence and His words transformed them dramatically, dispelling their anxiety and unbelief and filling them with the peace and joy that come from the certainty of His resurrection.

Then Christ began to expound their mission, gradually helping them to grasp the significance of their responsibility as witnesses of His death, His resurrection, and His power to forgive sins and to transform lives (*Luke 24:46–48*). They had surely seen Him die, but they had also seen Him alive again. So, they could testify for Him, that He was the Savior of the world.

A witness is someone who has seen an event happen. Anyone can be a witness, provided that he or she has personally watched something. There is no such thing as a secondhand witness. We can testify based only on our own experiences, not on someone else's. As rescued sinners, we have the privilege of telling others what Jesus has done for us.

What is the relationship between receiving the Holy Spirit and witnessing for Christ? See *Luke 24:48, 49; Acts 1:8*. See also *Isa. 43:10, 12; 44:8*.

The book of Acts shows that the believers' testimony could have convincing power only through the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in their hearts. After receiving the Spirit, "with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (*Acts 4:33, NKJV*). That is, they were able to speak, openly and with great power, about what they themselves had witnessed and experienced. In a very real sense, our witness about Christ must always include our own experience with Him.

What has been your own personal experience with the Lord? What has God done in your life that you can witness about firsthand to others? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

So Send I You

John’s Gospel also reports Jesus’ first encounter with the disciples in the upper room but mentions other elements not included in Luke’s Gospel.

According to John, in what way did Jesus define the mission of the believers? See *John 20:21*.

Jesus had already mentioned this concept a few days before, when He prayed: “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (*John 17:18, NKJV*). Sending someone implies that the one who sends has authority over the one who is sent. It also involves a purpose, since one is sent with a mission to fulfill. Jesus was sent by the Father to save the world (*John 3:17*), and we are sent by Jesus to proclaim salvation through Him. Evidently, our commission is a continuation of Christ’s work, which consisted of a complete ministry to all people (*Matt. 9:35*). He expects us not only to continue what He had initiated but also to go further. “He who believes in Me,” said the Lord, “the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do” (*John 14:12, NKJV*).

Jesus provided the Holy Spirit to enable the disciples to carry out their mission. At Creation, God “breathed into” Adam “the breath of life” (*Gen. 2:7*). Now Jesus “breathed on” the disciples “the Holy Spirit” (*John 20:22, NKJV*). As the breath of life transformed lifeless dust into a living being, so the Holy Spirit transformed fearful and discouraged disciples into powerful living witnesses to continue Jesus’ work. The same anointing is indispensable today to fulfill the commission entrusted to us.

Jesus has called you to be a witness. What can you witness about? That is, what have you seen or experienced that you should share with others about Jesus?

To Make Disciples

After His resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples in Galilee, at “the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them” (*Matt. 28:16, NKJV*). Not only the eleven, but also more than five hundred followers gathered there to meet the risen Lord (*1 Cor. 15:6*). The One who had conquered death said to them: “ ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’ ” (*Matt. 28:18, NKJV*). His power and authority are no longer voluntarily limited as they were during His earthly ministry. Rather, as before the Incarnation, His authority includes the whole universe. Based on His unquestionable authority, He entrusts a mission to His followers.

According to Matthew’s account, in giving the Great Commission, Jesus used four verbs: *go*, *make disciples*, *baptize*, and *teach*. Unfortunately, many Bible versions do not reflect on the fact that, in Greek, the only verb that is imperative is *make disciples*, while the other three verbs are participles. This means that the emphasis of the sentence is on *make disciples*, the other three activities being dependent on it.

What is the role of going, baptizing, and teaching in fulfilling the command to make disciples? See *Matt. 28:19, 20*.

Jesus’ mandate indicates three activities involved in making disciples. The three activities do not need to occur in a particularly sequential order; rather, they complement each other. While going to different places, eventually to the entire world, we should be teaching everything Jesus taught, baptizing those who accept Him as Savior and are willing to observe all the things Jesus commanded.

We rejoice when somebody is baptized, but baptism is not the end of the story. It is just part of the process of making someone a disciple. Our task is to invite people to follow Jesus, which means to believe in Him, to obey His teachings, to adopt His way of life, and to invite others to become His disciples too.

The word *all* characterizes this text. Because Jesus has “all authority,” we have to go to “all the nations” teaching them to observe “all things” pertaining to the gospel, with the assurance that Christ is with us “always” (literally, “all the days”) to the end of the age.

Think about your local church. What is done there to help nurture and disciple new believers? What more can be done? Ask yourself, too: What talents do I have that I could use in this important part of fulfilling the gospel commission?

To Preach the Gospel

With its characteristic conciseness and clarity, the Gospel of Mark presents the commission in one short sentence: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (*Mark 16:15, NKJV*). As in Matthew, the verb *go* in Greek is a participle that indicates not the task but the movement needed to fulfill the task. The mission itself is expressed by the Greek verb *Kērusso*, given here in the imperative mood. *Kērusso* means “to proclaim aloud, to announce, to preach.” Mark uses this term 14 times, more than any other Gospel. The church must proclaim the gospel.

During Jesus’ ministry, the Twelve had been sent not to the Gentiles but only “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (*Matt. 10:6*). Now they are sent “into all the world” and “to every creature.” The eleven alone could never announce the gospel to the entire world, much less to every creature living in it. A task of such worldwide dimension requires the participation of the entire church. It is entrusted to all the believers in Jesus in all ages. This includes you and me.

Read Revelation 14:6–12. How do these verses encompass the worldwide mission of the church?

Preaching the gospel to every creature, however, doesn’t automatically mean that everyone will accept it. Only “he who believes and is baptized will be saved” (*Mark 16:16, NKJV*). We should preach eagerly, hoping that every hearer will yield to the gospel invitation. Nevertheless, we have to be aware that many will not accept the Word, as the image of the narrow gate clearly shows (*Matt. 7:13, 14*).

What assurance do we have that this worldwide mission can and will be fulfilled? See *Matt. 24:14*.

There is an encouraging parallelism between Mark 16:15 and Matthew 24:14. Both texts refer to the proclamation of the gospel to all the world. While the first passage presents Jesus’ commission to preach, the second gives Jesus’ promise that the mission will actually be carried out.

Christ “made full provision for the prosecution of the work, and took upon Himself the responsibility for its success. So long as they [His disciples] obeyed His word, and worked in connection with Him, they could not fail.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 822. The question, then, that we each need to ask ourselves is, *How willing are we to be used by Him in this crucial work?*

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Go Teach All Nations,” pp. 818–828, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“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.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

“The Saviour’s commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister. . . . All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ.”—Page 822.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Not everyone is able to travel the world preaching the gospel. What, though, are ways that each one of us can be involved in the task of spreading the gospel to the world in the context of the three angels’ messages?
- 2 In what ways is your local church continuing Jesus’ ministry in your community? How could you help to improve the church’s missionary service?
- 3 Jesus said that the gospel would go to all the world. For the vast majority of human history since He spoke those words, methods of communication had not changed. Two hundred years ago communication wasn’t much faster than it was 2,000 years ago, when Jesus gave us the gospel commission. Of course, all of that has changed, especially in the last 50 years, in which we have developed methods of communication that are amazing. How can we better learn to use the incredible technology we have been given in order to do the work that we have been promised will be done?
- 4 In class, based on the question at the end of Monday’s lesson, let those who are willing share their own personal experience with Jesus. How can we use our own testimony as a witness to others? Why should we use our own experience?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 28:19, 20*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand the church's mission as centered in Christ's gospel commission.

Feel: Crave opportunities to participate in the God-ordained vocation of making disciples.

Do: Pray earnestly that God will open doors, starting this week, for sharing his or her faith.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Jesus' Disciples Light the World.

A Why is Christ's kingdom associated with light?

B Christian witnessing is oftentimes associated with proselytizing, but what does its original meaning signify?

II. Feel: Personal Fulfillment Results From Participation in the Disciple-making Process.

A Runners rejoice whenever they surpass their personal records. Weight lifters likewise feel fulfilled whenever they press greater amounts. How does leading someone to accept Christ make Christians feel? Why?

B Teams are often lifted by one member's extraordinary efforts. How can sharing disciple-making victories inspire others?

C How can believers develop that mind-set that constantly awaits opportunities for sharing their faith?

III. Do: God Provides Opportunities for Sharing Faith for Those Who Humbly Pray for His Guidance.

A Why is prayer so important to the disciple-making enterprise?

B What are the dangers in disciple-making of depending upon secular persuasion techniques rather than upon prayerful dependence?

C How can the church work together more effectively to lead people to Christ?

► **Summary:** The church exists by Spirit-guided mission as fire exists by oxygen-driven burning. Those making genuine disciples are fulfilling God's purpose for His church.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Matthew 28:19, 20*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Unless every member of the church is actively participating in Christ's commission to make disciples, it becomes unfruitful, eventually dying.

Just for Teachers: Fire exists by burning. Churches exist by mission. Christ specifically commissioned His church for disciple-making. Sterile, fireless institutionalism results whenever the church organization forgets this mission. Every institution should periodically evaluate its faithfulness to mission. Church members accomplish many worthwhile things, but are these mission focused? Church administration oversees hundreds of different enterprises, expending voluminous energies. Every activity that misses Christ's mission unnecessarily wastes energies that should be invested in disciple-making.

Activity: Invite class members to disclose their workplaces. Record their responses. If available, use slide projection or marker boards to do so. Query, "What's the primary mission for your company?" Enumerate *supporting* missions, functions, or activities. Note or register their responses alongside their company moniker. Follow this with discussion questions listed below.

Consider This: What happens whenever companies lack clearly defined mission? What happens whenever secondary functions or supporting activities overtake the mission, even becoming more important?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Jesus' explanation of mission is communicated through several metaphors, including lamps, witnesses, and ambassadors. Christ promised His fishermen followers that they would become fishers of people. Their mission includes elements of enlightenment, testimony, representation, and acquisition. Specific locations may utilize these in different proportions as circumstances dictate, but all elements deserve particular attention because they form constituent building blocks of the disciple-making process.

Bible Commentary

I. Enlightened Testimony *(Review Matthew 5:14–16, Ephesians 5:8, Luke 24:46–49, and Acts 1:8 with your class.)*

Light symbolizes God throughout Scripture. Darkness symbolizes His antithesis. Christ admonishes His followers against walking in darkness. Rather, they should be shining lights, dispelling darkness. Metaphorical language aside, Christians should enlighten their world, revealing God’s loving character through teaching and activity.

A look at contemporary light-dispersion technology helps to further illustrate this point. Such light has incredible capabilities, taking natural night light, concentrating and channeling that brightness, and lighting sizable interior spaces without electricity. Christians should likewise become concentrated channels for divine benevolence; dispersing blessing, kindness, encouragement, compassion, cleansing, generosity, gentleness, patience, and truth. Also, concealed discipleship (candles hidden beneath baskets) equals oxymoronic terminology. Christ mingled with humanity, thus brightening and transforming our world.

Wherever individuals have appropriated the title “Christian” for themselves without emitting light and enjoying any personal experience with Christ, those individuals have misrepresented reality. Their falsehoods blacken the authentic witness of genuine believers. Imagine fluorescent lightbulbs without any electricity. Those bulbs may exhibit the correct shape, length, and fixture placement, looking in every way like genuine lights, but until they encounter electricity they are merely bulbs. Churches may overflow with empty “bulb believers” when God requires eyewitness lights worldwide.

Consider This: How should members maintain that personal experience with God that empowers effective witness?

II. God’s Double Agents *(Review John 3:17; 14:12; 17:18; Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20 with your class.)*

A double agent generally connotes duplicity, someone lacking trustworthiness, working surreptitiously. Please allow yourself another understanding for this terminology: “Twofold ministry representatives” are “double agents.” Our “twofold” (double) commissioning emanates from Christ Himself. Jesus commissioned (1) preaching and (2) disciple-making. “Agent” signifies representative or ambassador. Ambassadors are high-ranking diplomatic officials dispatched from one country to another as long-

term representatives. Therefore, Christians are representatives with twofold ministries of preaching and disciple-making.

Receiving countries accept incoming ambassadors based upon the reputations of the sending countries, rather than upon the representative's personal sagacity. Therefore, our reception as ambassadors is not based upon personal characteristics but upon God's status. Discouraged witnesses should remember this whenever rejection happens (*John 17:14–18, Luke 10:5–16*). Rejection is not personal but, rather, is in reality rejecting Him whom we represent. Christians should also recognize the extraordinary commendation implied by serving as Christ's ambassador. Just as Christ was dispatched by His heavenly Father, so believers are dispatched as His personal representatives. What could surpass following in Jesus' footsteps with divine commissioning from Heaven's throne?

Perhaps someone is thinking, *I'm no preacher*. Defining terminology may help. The Greek expression “κηρυχθήσεται,” often translated “will be preached,” is associated with ancient traditions of heralding. Heralds were originally messengers dispatched by monarchs who conveyed announcements or proclamations. Neither eloquence nor oratorical proficiency was required. Three things, however, were necessary: (1) royal commissioning, (2) knowing the message, and (3) willingness to transmit the communication. Every Christian has been royally commissioned. Genuinely converted Christians, by definition, already know the message. The solitary impediment is willingness to make announcements. Without mounting stages, utilizing pulpits, or sound checking microphones, every believer can “preach” the good news. Biblical proclamation is every believer's responsibility, not just that of religious professionals.

Similarly, disciple-making is every believer's responsibility. Completing the primary phases of disciple-making does not require seminary education. First, intermingling; second, winning people's confidence; third, sharing Bible-based eyewitness testimony; and fourth, appealing for spiritual decisions summarize the process. Christianity's finest century, with its most explosive growth, happened before the first Christian seminary was conceived. Carpenters, nannies, gardeners, soldiers, merchants, tentmakers, shopkeepers, and common laborers fueled Christianity's unprecedented expansion. Should not today computer programmers, paramedics, truck drivers, lumberjacks, sanitation engineers, realtors, and telephone solicitors do likewise?

Consider This: What fuels your imagination, stimulating your passion to become involved with Christ's great commission?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Read the following parable aloud and discuss with the class. How can believers avoid mission distractions?

Parable: The Globally Motivated Automobile Corporation (GMAC) was originally commissioned to manufacture intergalactic vehicles by universally renowned inventor Joshua Ben Lovejoy. First-generation vehicles, combining forward-thinking design, innovative engineering, and exorbitant investment, sold exceptionally well. Despite fierce competition from existing manufacturers, legislative interference, and cutthroat maneuvers, Globally Motivated garnered an ever-increasing market share. Demand reached unprecedented levels, and the corporate headquarters authorized expansion and luxurious amenities for the workers. Inconveniences and sacrifices endured by first-generation employees were forgotten.

Gradually capital investment shifted away from product design and marketing as the headquarters began emphasizing employee satisfaction. Initially, declining sales were attributed to tougher competition, seasonal variations, and market vacillation. Extensive reserves acquired from first-generation sales, however, cushioned the impact, and concerned voices were seldom heard. Employees began demanding higher wages, longer breaks, increased profit sharing, more diverse cafeteria menus, and longer vacations. Voices of moderation were silenced. Reserves dwindled, and finances were diverted from capital investment to bankroll employee demands. The design and marketing departments suffered severe cutbacks. Globally Motivated was increasingly marginalized as appeals for intergalactic travel waned. GMAC's own workforce progressively abandoned their products to purchase Land Travelers, a competitor's featured vehicle.

At GMAC's factory, someone accidentally combined two juices in the cafeteria. The fresh flavor became an immediate sensation, and headquarters immediately instructed marketing to redirect their energies into promoting juice. That successful venture absorbed the corporation's energies as intergalactic vehicle manufacture gradually stopped. Massive layoffs followed. Weeds overtook the playground. Land Travelers took over. When Joshua Ben Lovejoy visited, nobody noticed. Joshua wept.

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: *Have you ever seen glow-in-the-dark sticks? When these phosphorescent creations become exposed to light sources, they shine, glowing in darkness. Christians, exposed to Jesus, are likewise empowered to brighten their darkened world.*

Activity: Fashion your weekly schedule, incorporating more opportunities for “Jesus exposure.”