

God's Mission to Us: Part 2



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 20:21, 22; Matt. 28:16–20; Rev. 14:6, 7; Deut. 7:6, 11, 12; Rev. 7:9, 10.*

Memory Text: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (*Matthew 28:19, NKJV*).

The theme, that of God as a God of mission, runs throughout Scripture. It is the connecting thread of human history, and it demonstrates God's purpose for His creation. Furthermore, it consolidates divine revelation with a main focus: the restoration of God's image in His fallen children (*compare with Col. 3:9, 10; 1 John 3:2*).

The mission of God also functions as the background through which we should see and understand God's Word to us. When we read the Bible, we can identify a God who is intentionally reaching out to us. In spite of the separation caused by sin (*Isa. 59:2*), through His mission God continues to restore the broken relationship with humanity until the glorious moment when He will “make all things new” (*Rev. 21:5, NKJV*).

In the meanwhile, God has chosen to manifest Himself to us in such a way that we can understand His nature and purpose, and above all, we can have a real and lasting relationship with Him. In other words, we not only come to know Him but also share, with others, our experience with Him and His saving love.

In the Scriptures, then, God gives us the basic elements of what His mission is all about.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 14.

The Triune God: The Origin of Mission

The mission of God in Scripture has Jesus at the front and center as the only way to salvation. Christ Himself declared: “ ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’ ” (*John 14:6, NKJV*). But Jesus also helps us understand the centrality of the triune God to His mission.

Everything Christ did was either for or from His heavenly Father (*see John 4:34, John 5:30, John 12:45*). However, we must always remember that Jesus’ mission did not begin when He came into the world. He had received it from the Father even before the creation of our world (*compare with Eph. 1:4, 1 Pet. 1:20*).

Therefore, God planned His outreach to humanity even before He laid the foundations of our planet, and He intentionally entered into humanity’s history in order to accomplish this purpose.

The Son created the world (*John 1:3*), and at “the fullness of the time” (*Gal. 4:4, NKJV*), God demonstrated His love by sending the Son here (*John 3:16, 17*). The Son came, died on the cross, and conquered death. Then, sent from the Father, the Spirit came here (*John 14:26, John 16:7*), convicts the world (*John 16:8–11*), and today continues the mission of the Father and the Son by empowering and by sending God’s people out for mission (*John 14:26; John 16:13, 14*).

Read John 20:21, 22. How should the understanding that mission finds its origin in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shape our mission?

Even though the word “trinity” is not found in the Bible, mission-focused evidences involving all Three Persons of the Godhead are numerous. For instance, after His resurrection, Christ appeared to His disciples and promised them: “ ‘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’ ” (*Luke 24:49, NIV; emphasis added*). Here we find the reality of the Godhead’s mission in one sentence: the Father’s promise, the Son’s assurance of the fulfillment of the promise, and the promise itself, the coming of the Holy Spirit (*see also Luke 3:16; Acts 1:4, 5, 8*).

We learn from this that the mission is not ours. It belongs to the triune God. As such, it will not fail.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all involved in the work of saving souls. Why should you find this thought so comforting?

Making Disciples: The Focus of Mission

Read Matthew 28:16–20. What elements of discipleship can you identify in this passage?

Matthew 28:16–20 declares the biblical mandate, commonly identified as the Great Commission (*Matt. 28:18–20*), in which Jesus instructs His followers to move outward and make disciples, teaching them in faith, and initiating them into fellowship (*see also Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:21–23; Acts 1:8*).

The basic components of Matthew 28:16–20 can be seen in four simple aspects: (1) Jesus commands His disciples to go to Galilee to be with Him (*Matt. 28:16, 17*); (2) Jesus comes to them, declaring His authority and sovereignty (*Matt. 28:18*); (3) Jesus then commissions His disciples to a specific task—namely, make disciples—(*Matt. 28:19, 20*); and finally, (4) Jesus promises to be with His disciples until the end (*Matt. 28:20*).

Disciple-making is the primary focus of the Great Commission, and the main task of mission. Literally, in the original Greek language, the beginning of Matthew 28:19 says, “Having gone, therefore, make disciples [. . .]” The “therefore” gives to the commission its foundation on what has just been presented (*Matt. 28:18*): Jesus’ power, authority, and sovereignty—all these coming from the victory attained in His resurrection.

It is important to highlight that the only action verb with imperative force in the Great Commission is “make disciples.” Teaching everyone, baptizing them, and sharing Jesus’ teachings to the whole world are the characteristics of the discipleship process. Here Jesus is clearly directing His disciples toward one purpose: making disciples. This is indeed one of the greatest mission passages in all of Scripture. It ends with Jesus’ promise of continuous presence with His followers.

Obviously, the Great Commission was intended to be for more than just the first disciples gathered in that particular circumstance. They could not go to “all nations” by themselves in order to fulfill the new given mission of making disciples. Therefore, the commission is universal in its scope: every true follower of Jesus Christ should be engaged in disciple-making. Furthermore, the message to be conveyed—the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ—is intended for the whole world, with no geographical, social, or ethnic limitations.

The mission is to “make disciples.” How is this mandate of the Master affecting how you live and minister to others? What can you do to be more involved in what you have been called to do?

The Eternal Gospel: The Message of Mission

Read Revelation 14:6, 7. What aspects of God’s mission can you identify in the “eternal gospel” (*NRSV*) presented by the first angel of the three angels’ messages?

This is the only place in Scripture in which the words “eternal” and “gospel” are connected. The gospel is the good news of grace offered to all through Jesus Christ. He came into our world to show us “grace and truth” (*John 1:14*). He lived a sinless life and died on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice to bear the penalty of our sins (*Isa. 53:4, 5; 1 Pet. 3:18*). He rose to life, returned to heaven, was exalted by the Father, and today intercedes for us in the heavenly sanctuary (*Rev. 1:18, Acts 2:33, Heb. 7:25*). He will soon fulfill His greatest promise—to return in majesty and glory and, ultimately, after the millennium to establish God’s kingdom on earth (*John 14:1–4, Acts 1:11, Rev. 21:1–4*). These are all essential realities of the eternal gospel.

Nevertheless, the fact that this message is eternal is remarkable. There is only one gospel that can save us. It will remain the same until the mission of God is fully accomplished. There will never be another gospel. Deceitful teachings and doctrines come and go (*Eph. 4:14*), but the message of salvation, the eternal gospel, is unchanging, and those who believe and live it in obedience will be rewarded (*see Deut. 5:33, Rom. 2:6*).

The same commission given to the first disciples also is given to us today. We must continue the task of making disciples for Christ everywhere. But what kind of disciples? Good, honest, fully devoted, loving people? These traits are essential, but they are not enough. We must make disciples focused on all biblical elements of discipleship (*Luke 9:23; John 13:34, 35; 2 Cor. 5:17*) with an ultimate purpose: being prepared and preparing others for the second coming of the Master, Jesus Christ.

“The proclamation of the judgment [Rev. 14:6, 7] is an announcement of Christ’s second coming as at hand. And this proclamation is called the everlasting gospel. Thus the preaching of Christ’s second coming, the announcement of its nearness, is shown to be an essential part of the gospel message.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 227, 228.

How is the concept of judgment linked to the “everlasting gospel” in the first angel’s message? Why must the gospel be central to the idea of judgment?

God's People: The Channels of Mission

Throughout history, God has always had those who faithfully represented His character and, in obedience, followed His purposes. God's people are those who have been called and who have accepted His invitation to be partakers of His grace. All of them have been—and continue to be—God's instruments for the fulfillment of His mission.

Read Genesis 12:1–3 and Deuteronomy 7:6, 11, 12. What was God's original purpose for His people in the Old Testament?

God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants had a specific purpose. They were called, created, and commissioned to be agents of God's mission—channels of blessings to the nations (*compare with Deut. 28:10, Isa. 49:6*). However, they were chosen within a covenant relationship with God, based on an implied conditionality of faith and obedience (*Gen. 22:16–18; Exod. 19:5, 6; Deut. 28:1, 2; 2 Chron. 7:14*). This process, that of attracting the surrounding nations to Israel, was God's "mission strategy" in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, God's mission continues. The risen Lord and Savior now launches a renewed "mission strategy" (*see Matt. 28:18–20, Acts 1:8*) in which Christ's disciples—who comprise the church—go out in mission to the whole world instead of, as with ancient Israel, the world coming to it. Mission did not originate with the church. On the contrary, the church exists because God still has a mission to be fulfilled and is using His church to fulfill it.

Yet, a question remains: What is the church's mission? It is the same as that of the One who called the church into existence: " 'For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost' " (*Luke 19:10, NIV*). Though none of us in the church can save anyone, we can and must point others to the only One who *can* save, Jesus Christ.

"The mission of the church of Christ is to save perishing sinners. It is to make known the love of God to men and to win them to Christ by the efficacy of that love."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 381. What a privilege and tremendous responsibility!

Mission is to the church what air is to our lives. Without air, we die. Without mission, the church dies. What can you do, personally, to sustain the life of your church?

The World: The Arena of Mission

Read Revelation 7:9, 10. What does this text suggest about the far-reaching geographical scope of God’s mission?

This week’s lesson has intentionally discussed two crucial mission texts that emphasize the centrality of disciple-making in the Great Commission and the message of the eternal gospel. Interestingly, both texts have at least a common connecting point: the “where” of mission. They read: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (*Matt. 28:19, NKJV*), “those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV; emphasis added*).

In other words, the gospel of Christ is to reach all classes, all nations, all tongues, and all peoples. The influence of the gospel is to unite the saved in one great brotherhood. We have only one model to imitate, and that is Christ. If we accept the truth as it is in Jesus, national prejudices and jealousies will be broken down, and the spirit of truth will blend our hearts into one.

When Jesus said, “You will be my witnesses” (*Acts 1:8, NRSV*), He had three different geographical areas in mind:

Area 1: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem.” At that time, His disciples were very close to Jerusalem. So, Jesus was basically saying, “Begin to share your experience with God with people who are close to you.” Mission begins at home, with family, with neighbors, with friends. This is the initial place of mission.

Area 2: He then continues: “in all Judea and Samaria.” Our mission also involves those who are in some ways close but at the same time distant from us. In this group are people who may speak the same language that we speak—people who have a similar culture but do not live or share the same reality that we do. This is our further place of mission.

Area 3: Beyond this, Christ says: “and to the end of the earth” (*NKJV*). God’s mission calls us to reach individuals from all places, nations, people groups, languages, and ethnicities. This is our ultimate place of mission.

Challenge: Pray every day this week for the community where you live. God has placed you there for a reason.

Challenge Up: Research the demographics of your area (what kind of people live around you)—ethnic and religious background, old, young, poor, wealthy, languages spoken, and so on. Ask God to show you how you may be a channel of His love to them.

Further Thought: For a witness unto all nations. “The Saviour’s words, ‘Ye are the light of the world,’ point to the fact that he has committed to his followers a world-wide mission. As the rays of the sun penetrate to the remotest corners of the globe, so God designs that the light of the gospel shall extend to every soul upon the earth. If the church of Christ were fulfilling the purpose of our Lord, light would be shed upon all that sit in darkness and in the region and shadow of death; instead of congregating together and shunning responsibility and cross-bearing, the members of the church would scatter into all lands, letting the light of Christ shine out from them, working as he did for the salvation of souls, and this ‘gospel of the kingdom’ would speedily be carried to all the world.

“From all countries the Macedonian call is sounding, ‘Come over and help us.’ God has opened fields before us. Heavenly beings have been cooperating with men. Providence is going before us, and divine power is working with human effort. Blind indeed must be the eyes that do not see the working of the Lord, and deaf the ears that do not hear the call of the true Shepherd to his sheep. Some have heard the call of God, and have responded. Let every sanctified heart now respond, by seeking to proclaim the life-giving message. If men and women in humility and faithfulness will take up their God-given, appointed work, divine power will be revealed in the conversion of many to the truth. Wonderful will be the results of their efforts.”
—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 14, 1912.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 The credibility of the church’s influence in the community is determined mainly by the extent that we—the body of Christ—exemplify in our own lives God’s love in the fulfillment of His mission. How do you, personally, respond to this challenge?
- 2 How do you think your church is seen and understood by its non-Adventist neighbors? How do you know? If the perception is positive, what can you do to strengthen it more? If it is negative, what can you do to change it?
- 3 Why is keeping the “eternal gospel” as the center of our mission to the world so important? What ultimate hope can we present to anyone, anywhere, that is not centered on the great hope we have because of the gospel, the good news of what Jesus has done for us at the cross?

Two Boys, Two Prayers: Part 2

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Eight months passed after the miraculous answer to prayer, and Seventh-day Adventist church members visited Father for a second time on a Sabbath in Conakry, Guinea. Fifteen people arrived with Father's sons, Junior and Emilie, who attended an Adventist school on the church compound. "We are here to pray," a church elder said.

Father appreciated the gesture, but he had a question. "Why do all other Christians go to church on Sunday but you worship on Saturday?" he asked.

The elder invited Father to open his Bible to Exodus 20:8-10. Father read, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God" (NKJV). But Father was unconvinced. "The seventh day is Sunday," he said.

The elder asked him to turn to Matthew 28:1. Father read, "Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb." Father saw that the seventh day of the Bible was Saturday. "I understand," he said. "Let's pray."

After the church group left, Father showed the verses to Mother. She was unmoved. "No, we will stay in our church," she said. "I don't care what they said. And even if our children go to their church, I won't leave my church."

Father suggested a time of prayer and fasting. "These questions started when our children began to attend that school," he said. "We sent our children there to be educated. We don't know whether God sent our children to that church to lead us there. If this is the church of Jesus, let Jesus show us."

Father and Mother prayed and fasted for a week. "If this is Your will, let nothing prevent us from going to church next Sabbath," Father prayed.

The next Sabbath, everything unfolded easily. Mother agreed to go to the Adventist church, and church members warmly welcomed them. Father was incredibly happy afterward. He felt like a burden had been lifted. He hadn't been faithful in prayer before, but now he found the energy to pray regularly.

As he prayed, God answered, and his life changed. His work flourished. He began to get along with his parents and siblings. An older brother even named a child after him. He and Mother gave their hearts to Jesus in baptism.



"I have peace," said Father, whose name is Pepe Victorien Soropogui (pictured with his wife, Tido Grace Haba). "Jesus' hand is in this church, and I thank God for bringing me here."

Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering three years ago that helped the Adventist Maranatha School expand into new buildings in Conakry, Guinea, in the West-Central Africa Division (WAD). Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will again help spread the gospel in WAD.

Part I: Overview

In a farewell speech before His ascension to heaven, Jesus commissioned His disciples, saying to them, “ ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age’ ” (*Matt. 28:18–20, ESV*). This directive has come to be known as the Great Commission. With the Great Commission, Jesus set the agenda for the church in all eras and contexts. Apart from clearly spelling out His disciples’ responsibility to spread His teachings to all people groups of the world, Jesus also assured His followers that accomplishing this daunting task was possible because of His omnipotence and omnipresence, which He would exercise on their behalf.

Part II: Commentary

Although at the beginning there were intense disagreements over some aspects of the Great Commission (*Acts 15:1–29, Gal. 2:11–14*), overall, the early church’s understanding of its identity and mission centered on Christ’s command to make disciples of all nations. The fact that each of the four Gospels ends with a version of the Great Commission is a strong witness to its centrality (*Matt. 28:18–20, Mark 16:15–20, Luke 24:45–49, John 20:21–23*). Since then, the Great Commission has been interpreted and applied differently over the centuries.

Components of Discipleship

A review of discipleship literature reveals three essential dimensions, or processes, of every effective approach to discipleship: rational, relational, and missional dimensions.

The rational (learning) dimension of discipleship is the process by which a believer intentionally learns from Jesus. In its original context, “disciple” (*mathetes*) referred to someone who apprenticed with a teacher. That person would attach himself to a teacher for the purpose of acquiring both theoretical and practical knowledge. The rational dimension stresses the need for continuing metamorphosis and growth, even for those who have already become disciples. Because “teaching” in Matthew 28:19 is an ongoing process, the rational dimension of discipleship is a lifelong process of learning and growing. However, the goal of this continual learning is not only to

impart knowledge but also to instill total commitment to Jesus.

The relational (community) dimension of discipleship develops in the context of a supportive community where accountability can take place. The New Testament portrays a very dynamic communal culture in the early Christian church because of the believers' understanding of disciple-making as a relational process. Because of its Old Testament roots, the early church continued to emphasize kinship as one of its core values. What was different about this new community was that kinship was not defined in terms of bloodlines and ethnicity but rather in terms of shared faith and fellowship in Christ. The church became an environment of inclusion and acceptance (*Gal. 3:28*). Membership was open to all on the basis of professing faith in Christ as Savior and the public demonstration, through water baptism, of complete allegiance to Christ (*Acts 2:37, 38*).

The early Christian church expressed its values of corporate solidarity and kinship through the use of motifs, such as the body of Christ and family of God, to describe the interdependence between its members and to convey the close bond that enabled them to treat one another as family members (*Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Eph. 2:19, Ephesians 4, Gal. 6:10, 1 Tim. 3:15, 1 Pet. 4:17*). Such concern fostered the development of a lasting sense of interdependence, corporate solidarity, and accountability among church members. Their interdependence suggested that each member of the body had a unique role to play and yet was dependent upon all other members.

By demonstrating a new way of living, multitudes were attracted to this new community of faith (*Acts 2:46, 47*). In such a setting, being a disciple was not synonymous with simply accepting abstract propositional truths about Jesus. Being disciples of Christ was about learning from Jesus and modeling in life the knowledge of Him. This brand of discipleship was both what the early believers did on behalf of Christ and how they represented Christ in the world. This communal culture of the New Testament, where believers were integrated members of supportive groups, became a fertile ground for the seed of the gospel to be sown and nurtured.

The missional (sharing of one's faith) dimension of discipleship is concerned with understanding the call to "make disciples" (*mathēteusate*), in Matthew 28:19, as essentially a call to engage in mission and duplicate one's self. This injunction is the primary command of the Great Commission, and it must remain the primary responsibility of the church in every context. Believers of the New Testament linked together the notion of belonging to a community with the responsibility of sharing what that community stood for. Mission, in the context of the Great Commission, is more than a call to share the gospel with those who do not know Christ. Mission is both a call to share one's faith and to disciple

interested recipients for the purpose of freeing them from the grasp of Satan so that they may fully and continually devote themselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Hence, the New Testament uses the word “disciple” to indicate a relationship with, and total commitment to, Christ that comes as a result of learning and internalizing His teaching, being changed by continual growth in the knowledge of Jesus Christ (*2 Pet. 3:18*), living a life of total submission to His lordship through the power of the Holy Spirit (*Phil. 3:8*), and helping others begin to experience, trust, and follow Jesus (*2 Tim. 2:2*). From this perspective, discipleship is not to be understood as a church program because it is not an event in time. Discipleship is rather a lifelong process of growing in Christ that transforms believers’ cognitive, affective, and evaluative perspectives on life.

Some Perspectives on the Current State of Discipleship

There is a consensus among Christian discipleship scholars today that, compared to the New Testament, the current practice of discipleship has, to a great extent, lost its primacy of focus among Christians. The making of disciples has largely been watered down to merely moving converts to Christianity into church membership. Current church growth is perceived as largely numerical and statistical growth *without much spiritual depth, unfortunately*. In other words, Christians are, generally speaking, much better at converting people than they are at helping converts become disciples of Christ. Sad to say, this phenomenon implies that one can become a Christian without necessarily having to become a disciple of Christ.

Making Disciples: Every Believer’s Responsibility

Jesus’ command to make disciples of all nations was not addressed only to the original 12 disciples. This requirement is a responsibility incumbent upon every Christian. For Peter, that is the reason for which every believer exists: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (*1 Pet. 2:9, NKJV*). Also, note the following statements from the Spirit of Prophecy:

- “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.
- “God expects personal service from everyone to whom He has

entrusted a knowledge of the truth for this time. Not all can go as missionaries to foreign lands, but all can be home missionaries in their families and neighborhoods.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 30.

- “Not upon the ordained minister only rests the responsibility of going forth to fulfill this commission. Everyone who has received Christ is called to work for the salvation of his fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 110.
- “Wherever a church is established, all the members should engage actively in missionary work. They should visit every family in the neighborhood and know their spiritual condition.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 296.

Taking an active part in the fulfillment of the Great Commission is an ongoing mandatory requirement of being Christ’s disciples.

Part III: Life Application

By virtue of the gospel commission, all Christians are called, in whatever capacity, to share their faith. Below are three ways believers can live up to Christ’s missionary mandate in every area of life, including work:

1. **All Christians need to make a strong work ethic a part of their Christian witness. Scripture enjoins Christians to maintain a God-honoring character in their professional lives as they put forth their best effort in what they do, as if they were working directly for God (*Col. 3:23, 24*). When believers view their jobs as part of God’s calling on their lives, they add new meaning to Christian witness. Maintaining integrity, striving for excellence, being trustworthy and reliable, and treating others with respect in the workplace are qualities that can give Christians a platform to share their faith.**

2. **Through mission-minded mentors, churches can guide younger**

members in how to connect their professional dreams deeply with their faith in Christ and His missionary mandate.

3. With the right approach to discipleship and ongoing support, parents can enhance their children's missionary potentials. Churches should therefore invest in parents' discipling of their children, helping them reframe the responsibility of raising their children into a calling to make disciples of them.

Notes


