

God's Mission *to Us*: Part 1



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:9–15; Gen. 28:15; Exod. 29:43, 45; Matt. 1:18–23; John 1:14–18; John 3:16; John 14:1–3.*

Memory Text: “Then the LORD God called Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ ” (*Genesis 3:9, NKJV*).

Mission finds its origin and purpose only in God. This mission did not begin with Abram's call (*Gen. 12:1–4*) or with the Exodus (*Exod. 12:31–42*). It did not begin even with Jesus Christ on the earth (*Matt. 1:18–25*) or with Paul's missionary journeys (*Acts 13:4–14:26*). This mission began with God Himself, when He brought the universe into existence and later created humanity (*Gen. 1:26, 27*).

In the Scriptures, we see a God who intentionally reaches out and desires to be with His children. From the beginning, He establishes a relationship with Adam and Eve. Even after sin enters, He continues His mission, but now it is to reestablish His relationship with humanity. In the end, God's mission will be accomplished (*Revelation 21, 22*), which is why we should be motivated in the work of proclaiming the eternal gospel to the world (*Rev. 14:6, 7*).

The foundation of any mission endeavor, therefore, must be centered on a relationship with the Creator and with the proper understanding of His missionary nature and character. But before we understand the mission of God, it is essential to better understand the God of mission.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 7.

The God Who Reaches Out to Us

God created us in His image and likeness. He gave us a perfect world, and His purpose was that we would live in perfect connection with Him, a relationship centered in His most precious attribute: love. But for love to be real, God also gave us another precious gift: free will—the freedom to choose which way to follow. Of course, God gave clear instructions to Adam and Eve about the danger and deadly consequences of disobedience (*Gen. 2:16, 17*). Satan, in turn, deceptively persuaded Eve that she could eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but without any negative results. On the contrary, he claimed that they would “be like God, knowing good and evil” (*Gen. 3:5, NKJV*). Unfortunately, Eve chose to eat and gave the fruit to Adam, who made the same choice. The perfect creation, then, was stained by sin.

That moment changed God’s original plan and purpose for the newly created planet Earth. The mission of salvation, which had been designed “before the foundation of the world” (*Eph. 1:4*), had now to be implemented.

Read Genesis 3:9–15. What were God’s first words to Adam after he and Eve fell, and why is that statement so significant theologically even today?

Of course, God knew exactly where they were. Dominated by fear, Adam and Eve were the ones who needed to see what was going on. But they also needed to be confronted so they could understand the dreadful consequences of their sin. Satan also needed to be defeated. For that, God then began to present His mission: the plan of redemption (*see Gen. 3:14, 15*)—the only hope of “reconciling the world to Himself” (*2 Cor. 5:19, NKJV*).

We need to pay close attention, however, to the fact that before the confrontation and the promise of reconciliation, God came looking for fallen humanity. In spite of the seemingly hopeless situation, God essentially addresses two issues in His question to Adam: our fallen state and His missionary nature. We are lost and in desperate need of salvation. He is the One who finds us with the determination to save and to be with us.

Throughout history, God continues to ask: “Where are you?” In your personal experience, what does this mean for you, and how have you answered Him?

The God Who Longs to Be With Us

Read Genesis 17:7, Genesis 26:3, and Genesis 28:15. What was the main focus of God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants in these verses?

In the Old Testament narrative, God continues to act according to His missionary nature in order to fulfill His purposes. For instance, after the Flood the people of Babel decided to gather in one place to build a city and a tower that would reach to the heavens. God intervened, confusing their language with the goal to scatter them around the world (*Gen. 11:1–9*). He then enlarged His mission, calling Abram (who later became Abraham) to be a channel of His blessings to the whole world (*Gen. 12:1–3*). God’s promises to Abraham and his descendants were multifold, but one emerges above all. Several times God basically declared to them: “I will be [your] God.” “I will be with you.” “I am with you” (*see Gen. 17:7, 8; Gen. 26:3, NKJV; Gen. 28:15, NKJV*).

As history goes on, Joseph ends up in Egypt, but as an instrument of salvation to God’s people. In every step of Joseph’s experience—even in the most difficult moments of his life—the Bible affirms that “the Lord was with” him (*Gen. 39:2, 21, 23*). Generations later, in the fulfillment of His mission, God then sent Moses to Pharaoh as the deliverer of His people from Egyptian slavery. During Moses’ “commissioning,” God said to him: “I will certainly be with you” (*Exod. 3:12, NKJV*). Time after time, Yahweh confirmed His deep desire to be with His people.

Read Exodus 29:43, 45. What was one of the main purposes of the Old Testament sanctuary? God decided to be with His children in a different way. He confirmed to Moses His longing to dwell among the children of Israel in the building of the tabernacle and the establishment of a very intentional and purposeful system that would point to the ultimate instrument of His mission: Jesus Christ. “The sacrificial offerings, and the priesthood of the Jewish system, were instituted to represent the death and mediatorial work of Christ. All those ceremonies had no meaning, and no virtue, only as they related to Christ.” —Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Herald of the Sabbath*, December 17, 1872.

What are ways that you experience God’s presence in your life?

The God Who Became One With Us

The Old Testament presents how the Creator began to implement a plan through a people who were supposed to represent His nature and purpose to the world. Everything God did was according to His missionary strategy. Through the prophet Isaiah, God said: “ ‘I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, . . . saying, “My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure” ’ ” (*Isa. 46:9, 10, NASB*). In the New Testament, however, God’s desire to be with humanity takes a new dimension. Through Christ’s incarnation, what was only a promise in the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 3:15*) becomes a reality.

Read the narrative of the announcement of Jesus’ birth in Matthew 1:18–23. What essential things does this account tell us about God?

“God with us.” Immanuel. God had dwelt among His people within the sanctuary, and now He dwelt with them in the physical person of Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, with the birth of Jesus, God presented in concrete ways His continuous desire to be with us in nature and mission: the Son of God was fully human and fully divine, and He is the One who affirmed, “ ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’ ” (*John 14:6, NKJV*).

Read John 1:14–18. What can you learn from Christ’s incarnation about God’s mission to us?

God moved forward with His mission and then, through Jesus Christ, was present in the flesh among His children. The “one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (*John 1:14, NIV*), fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and, in accordance with the divine plan, became one with us, God in human flesh. The God of mission was continuing to accomplish His purpose.

Think what it means that God’s love for us is so great that He would come to us in our own humanity. How should we respond to this love, especially in terms of mission to others?

The God Who Continues to Be With Us

Jesus' life and ministry were God's ultimate revelation. In about three years God was able to reveal more about who He was and what His mission was all about than in all He had done through any other method in previous generations. Christ was the perfect "image of the invisible God," the One in whom "all the fullness should dwell, . . . having made peace through the blood of His cross" (*Col. 1:15, 19, 20, NKJV*). In Christ, the missionary nature of God was completely made known. Jesus Himself revealed His mission, saying, "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*).

Read and carefully reflect on **John 3:16**. How do you see God's love and mission interacting here?

Later in His ministry, when Jesus approached His last week of life, humanity's final destiny was at stake. The events that took place during those days connected the expectation from the past with hope for the future. During the Passover celebration—which pointed to freedom from the Egyptian oppression—Jesus Christ, the incarnated God, gave up His life to deliver us from the bondage of sin. The apostle Paul wrote, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (*2 Cor. 5:21, NIV*).

Read **Matthew 28:18–20**. What is the promise we can find in the Great Commission? How does it bring assurance for us as we get involved in God's mission?

Christ's death was part of the reconciliation process, not the end of it. Through His resurrection, Jesus conquered death and received "all authority . . . in heaven and on earth" (*Matt. 28:18, NKJV*). Based on this reality, He then commissioned all of His followers to make disciples around the world, with an awesome promise: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV; emphasis supplied*).

In what ways have you seen Jesus' promise to be "with you always" being fulfilled in your own life as you are engaged in mission?

The God Who Will Come Back for Us

Read John 14:1–3. In what ways is it connected with the end-time message found in the Scriptures?

During His earthly ministry, one of Christ’s most precious promises, the blessed hope, reflects once again the Creator’s desire to be with us for eternity. Jesus affirmed, “ ‘I will come back and take you *to be with me* that you also may be where I am’ ” (*John 14:3, NIV; emphasis added*).

According to the apostle John, the promise will finally become reality. “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God’ ” (*Rev. 21:3, NKJV*).

“The work of redemption will be complete. In the place where sin abounded, God’s grace much more abounds. The earth itself, the very field that Satan claims as his, is to be not only ransomed but exalted. . . . Here, where the Son of God tabernacled in humanity; where the King of glory lived and suffered and died,—here, when He shall make all things new, the tabernacle of God shall be with men. . . . And through endless ages as the redeemed walk in the light of the Lord, they will praise Him for His unspeakable Gift,—Immanuel, ‘God with us.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 26.

Here we find the most beautiful picture of Redemption. The God of mission will finally fulfill His desire to be with His children eternally. What a tremendous privilege to be part of this reality!

Weekly Challenges. Throughout this quarter you will be invited to engage intentionally in God’s mission. This will be an opportunity to see and experience the God of mission at work in your life. Take advantage of this moment for personal reflection and be ready to share what you have learned with your class on a weekly basis. Additionally, the Challenge Up will encourage you to increase your involvement in God’s mission.

Challenge: Pray every day of the coming week for God to open your heart to be part of His mission.

Challenge Up: Learn the name of someone in your life you don’t already know—a neighbor, coworker, shopkeeper, bus driver, janitor, etc. Begin praying for him or her each day.

Further Thought: “The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Romans 16:25, R. V. . . . It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne. From the beginning, God and Christ knew of the apostasy of Satan, and of the fall of man through the deceptive power of the apostate. God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ John 3:16.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

“Christ did not tell His disciples that their work would be easy. . . . But they would not be left to fight alone. He assured them that He would be with them; and that if they would go forth in faith, they should move under the shield of Omnipotence. . . . So long as they obeyed His word, and worked in connection with Him, they could not fail. Go to all nations, He bade them. Go to the farthest part of the habitable globe and be assured that My presence will be with you even there. Labor in faith and confidence; for the time will never come when I will forsake you. I will be with you always, helping you to perform your duty, guiding, comforting, sanctifying, sustaining you, giving you success in speaking words that shall draw the attention of others to heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 29.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think about what it means that God’s first words to fallen humanity were not “What have you done?” Or “Why have you disobeyed Me?” Instead the first words were, “Where are you?” What comfort should this truth give us regarding God’s intention for us and our loved ones?
- 2 Think about what it means that God Himself, in the person of Jesus, came to this world in order to save us. Christ on the cross was the ultimate manifestation of God as a God of mission. What does this tell us about His character?
- 3 The mission belongs to God. Therefore, He will equip and empower people for the task. In light of this reality, when you look at the challenges of worldwide evangelization, how can you deal with feelings and attitudes of inadequacy or fear?

Two Boys, Two Prayers: Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Father was excited when he saw a new sign reading “Adventist Maranatha School” on a street in Conakry, capital of the West African country of Guinea. He wanted his two sons to go to a Christian school, and this might be their chance. He never dreamed that the school would change his life.

Father entered the fenced compound of the newly opened school and found a teacher. “Is this a Christian school?” he asked.

“Yes,” she replied. “This is a Seventh-day Adventist school.”

Father said his sons were studying elsewhere, and he promised to transfer them to this school. “I want them to have a Christian education,” he said.

Soon the two boys, 11-year-old Junior and 8-year-old Emile (pictured), were studying at the Adventist school. Among their subjects was the Bible, and the boys memorized verses that Father, to his surprise, had never heard. He was even more surprised when the boys declared that the teachers worshiped in church on Saturdays. The boys asked if they could go to a Saturday program in a church located on the same compound as the school. Father thought it was an extracurricular program and agreed.

The boys went to church every Sabbath for two years. Sometimes, school-teachers visited Father and invited him to come to church. “Would you like to come to our church on Sabbath?” they asked.

Father always refused. “No, I have to work on Saturday,” he said. “I’m busy.”

One Sabbath, the church pastor, Matthew, told the church members, “Today, we will visit the father of Junior and Emile.”

A group of 15 church members, accompanied by a delighted Junior and Emile, arrived at the house. “Can we pray together?” the pastor asked Father.

When Father agreed, the pastor asked if he had any requests. He did. Months earlier, Father, who led a nongovernmental organization, had applied to a Guinean government ministry for a grant, and he was still waiting for a response. The pastor prayed about the grant.

Three days later, on Tuesday, the ministry responded. The grant was approved. Father immediately went to the school and told the teachers about

the remarkable answer to prayer. He thanked God for the grant. But the answer to prayer did not convince him to go to church on Sabbath.



Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering three years ago that helped the Adventist Maranatha School expand in Conakry, Guinea, in the West-Central Africa Division (WAD). Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will again help spread the gospel in WAD. Read the story's conclusion next week.

Part I: Overview

The God of the Bible is a missionary God. His missionary nature and character is first rooted in His initiative to create humanity in His image and in His desire to be in relationship with humans. God's pre-Fall relationship with Adam and Eve was characterized by daily fellowship in the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 3:8*). Ellen G. White notes, "So long as they [Adam and Eve] remained loyal to the divine law, their capacity to know, to enjoy, and to love would continually increase. They would be constantly gaining new treasures of knowledge, discovering fresh springs of happiness, and obtaining clearer and yet clearer conceptions of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 51. Unfortunately, sin disrupted that face-to-face interaction.

The Fall did not put an end to God's mission—it shifted His mission to a new dimension. After the Fall, God's mission became rooted in His initiative to redeem fallen humanity. Because of His promise of redemption in Genesis 3:15, Scripture, as a whole, is the narrative of the various missionary endeavors undertaken by God to rescue and restore members of sinful humanity to His original design for them. Because mission is an attribute of God (i.e., mission is rooted in His nature and character), God refuses to give up on us.

Part II: Commentary

Mission as an Attribute of God

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible has one unified message: God is determined to reverse the consequences of the Fall. If Scripture, as a whole, is about God's unrelenting outreach to humanity, Genesis 3:9 could be considered the question that drives it. Genesis 3 is the narrative of the tragic attempt made by Adam and Eve, in a spirit of self-assertion and determination, to be independent of God. This chapter is also a reminder of the reality of sin and its consequences. The consequences of Adam and Eve's choice led them to hide themselves from God. God's first response to the plight of humanity came in the form of a question addressed to Adam: "Where are you?" Understanding the purpose of this question is essential to the understanding of the intent of the entire drive of Scripture.

To start with, "Where are you?" is not a theological question. It is a missiological one. This question reveals that, despite their wrong choice, God has not forsaken Adam and Eve. Human rebellion does not subtract

anything from God's desire to intimately relate with humans. God still loves and seeks His wandering children.

The question—"Where are you?"—the first one the Bible attributes to God, speaks more of a condition than a location. Thus, the question was not intended to find out where exactly Adam and Eve were hiding away from God. God never asks questions as a means of gathering information. His omniscience is a source of limitless knowledge, even knowledge of what does not yet exist. Being omniscient, God knew exactly where Adam and Eve's hiding place was, what they had done, and what condition they were in.

Adam's absence at his usual meeting place with God was clear evidence that something was wrong. Therefore, the question God asks Adam, in Genesis 3:9, is not "Where are you?" in reference to Adam's geographical location. The question "Where are you?" was about relationship: "Where are you relationally?" With the first consequences of sin revealed in the previous verses, God's question was primarily intended to make Adam and Eve think about their relationship with God. The question was intended to make them think about the consequence of their disobedience to God. Adam and Eve were being given the opportunity to examine themselves and acknowledge their guilt. God's question is the equivalent of the following line of inquiry: "Why are you not at our usual rendezvous? What has happened to our relationship that you are attempting to keep a distance from Me? What is the meaning of these fig leaves you are covering yourselves with?" Satan's false promise to Adam and Eve was that, through disobedience, they would become like gods. In other words, sin would improve their lives. We know how that turned out. Adam and Eve ended up naked instead of becoming like gods. Their solution to their new plight was to sew fig leaves to hide their nakedness. If this solution had solved their situation, they would not have sought to hide from the presence of God. Rather, they would have confronted God for not wanting their ultimate well-being.

Moreover, "Where are you?" was the earnest cry of a missionary God whose anguished inquiry betrays divine awareness of the gulf that had been created between Him and humans. The question was also His invitation for His lost children to return to a relationship of love and trust with Him. In light of the promise in Genesis 3:15, God's question bears a promise of hope. Although sin cast its shadow over the divine plan for humanity on account of Adam and Eve's disobedience, God's plan has not been defeated. In the midst of judgment, the promise of a Redeemer is made.

Genesis 3 is not only a narrative about the reality of sin and its consequences. But at its heart also lies a snapshot of God's saving mis-

sion. There were at least three options that were available to God when Adam and Eve willfully disobeyed Him. First, God could have simply discarded them; that is, God could have let them die as a result of their sin and then created new human beings. Second, God could have let Adam and Eve languish forever under the consequences of their bad choice. The third option, which God chose, was that of redemption: the relational gulf created by Adam and Eve's willful disobedience will be sacrificially bridged by Him. Though they may suffer the consequences of their sin, they will not live forever in their fallen condition. The redemption of humanity was not only promised in words, but it also was seen in action: "for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (*Gen. 3:21, NKJV*). This clothing is an expression of both God's justice and grace. Although sin, in any degree, is offensive to God, He graciously offers to cleanse us from all filthiness of the flesh and to cover our nakedness with His righteousness.

The Incarnation as Mission

Christ's incarnation was central to the fulfillment of God's mission. While in Genesis 3:21 the coming of the promised Redeemer was embodied by Adam and Eve, clothed in garments made from the skins of sacrificed animals, the promise was materialized in the New Testament in the birth of Jesus. Through the Incarnation, the transcendent Creator God became immanent to reveal Himself in the fullest possible way in human terms. In the person of Jesus, God identified fully with humanity for the express purpose of revealing not only God's love but also His salvific intent for humanity. God did not stay aloof from the members of humanity in His effort to save them. Instead, He bridged the gap by taking human nature and by experiencing human sorrows and temptations. Through the different aspects of His ministry, Christ not only announced God's reign with prophetic urgency, but He also embodied it by giving God's redemptive mission a face, a voice, and hands. By healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, giving sight to the blind, and raising the dead, Christ demonstrated God's power to fully reverse the curse of the Fall. By so doing, Christ reformulated the concept of God's love so that people could understand it, experience it, and be drawn to God. The substitutionary death of Christ was God's ultimate way of seeking to reconcile alienated humanity to Himself (*John 3:16*). Christ's ministry and sacrifice are mission par excellence!

The Second Coming: God's Mission Accomplished

The last words of Jesus in the Bible are " 'Yes, I am coming soon' " (*Rev.*

22:20, *NIV*). The second coming of Jesus will bring to a close God's post-Fall mission and open the new-earth phase of God's mission. Jesus' coming to claim the earth as His kingdom is the concretization of the Redeemer's promise in Genesis 3:15.

The new-earth phase of God's mission marks the complete reversal of the consequences of the Fall: God will be in the midst of His people again, suffering and death will be no more (*Rev. 21:3, 4*), and human beings will have access to the tree of life (*Rev. 22:2*).

Part III: Life Application

God's primal question, "Where are you?", also is addressed to each of us today. The Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (*Rom. 3:23, NKJV*). Instead of trying to run away from God because of the guilt of our sins, as Adam and Eve unsuccessfully did, we need to objectively examine where we are in terms of our relationship with Him and confess to Him whatever sin we have committed. The assurance is ours: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (*1 John 1:9, NKJV*). Without this assurance, we truly would not be able to change course in our spiritual life. Every attempt to cover our own nakedness before God is just as unwise as Adam and Eve's attempt to cover their nakedness with fig leaves. Every humanly designed solution to deal with sin and guilt is utterly inadequate and worthless. The fig leaves of our good works, reputation, and church titles do not suffice as spiritual coverings. Only God can supply us with the adequate spiritual covering. The only lasting solution is the covering He offers to us through Jesus. God does not cover our sin and guilt. He takes them away first and then covers us instead with Christ's righteousness.

Just as God went out seeking Adam and Eve, He also is out seeking us, not to punish us but to offer us reconciliation for the sake of saving us from the judgment our sins deserve.

Notes
