ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

TEACHERS EDITION

Final Publication Copy

God’s Mission—My Mission

by: Global Mission Center Directors

October, November, December

2023
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Editorial Office:

12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904

Come visit us at our Web site:

http://www.adultbiblestudyguide.org

Principal Contributors:

Petras Bahadur, Richard Elofer, Kleber Gonçalves, Jeff Scoggins, Clifmond Shameerudeen, Doug Venn, Amy Whitsett, Greg Whitsett, and Homer Trecartin as Assisting Contributor

Editor:

Clifford R. Goldstein

Associate Editor:

Soraya Homayouni
Contents: *God’s Mission—My Mission*

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Publication Manager:
Lea Alexander Greve

Editorial Assistant:
Sharon Thomas-Crews

Pacific Press® Coordinator:
Tricia Wegh

Art and Design:
Lars Justinen

The Overview, Commentary, and Life Application, Lessons 1–13:
Dr. Wagner Kuhn, Dr. Boubakar Sanou, and Assistant Professor Andrew Tompkins, Department of World Mission, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, U.S.A.

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Quit Talking and Start Doing Something!

Years ago, one of our Adventist magazines published a parable about a dreadful swamp. As people passed along the path going through it, they were often overcome and fell in. Their dying cries could be heard all through the nearby village. It was terrible.

The people held a village council. In fact, they held many village councils. Various theories and papers were presented analyzing the cause and sometimes even proposing solutions. But nothing was ever done except to continue meeting and talking. Over the years, the discussions continued. People wrote dissertations on the topic. Guest lecturers were brought in. Yard sales were held to raise money so that meals could be provided to those who sacrificed so many hours sitting in these meetings. Eventually, money was raised to build a sound-proof meeting room so that the cries of the lost and dying would not disrupt the ongoing discussions. But nobody did anything to help those who were in trouble. And nobody did anything to try to stop more people from being lost in the swamp. They just talked.

The church as a whole and your Sabbath School class in particular don’t want to be like the people in that village. We love our time together to pray, think, share, and discuss.
But we long to go beyond this and actually do something for and with those around us. We want to make a difference in our communities and around the world. We want the work to be finished, and we want Jesus to return.

This quarter’s Sabbath School Adult Bible Study Guide is designed to focus attention on getting out there and doing something. We will examine many wonderful Bible stories. We will read about exciting experiences and illustrations. We will learn about available resources to assist us in reaching out to our neighbors (especially to those who have no Christian background). But those will just be ways of illustrating and motivating us. The real focus, the real heart of each lesson, is what will be shared on Thursday each week—a challenge to get out and, actually, do something.

We will share theological insights and provide tools and ideas for you to work with. And each Thursday’s portion of the lesson will issue a careful progression of challenges. It will begin easy. And as the quarter goes along, there will be subtle (and not so subtle) increases in the challenge. The goal is for each of us to take the challenge, pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us, and then spend a few minutes in the next week discussing how it went. This isn’t to be a time of boasting, but a time of sharing—both about what went well and what didn’t.
Introduction: God’s Mission—My Mission

As we share, the group will generate ideas. Prayer lists will grow (personal and collective).

In the end, it is our desire that this quarter be remembered not for memorable thoughts, engaging stories, or deep theological concepts. These may be there—lots of them. But it is our desire that we will all look back on this quarter as the time when the Holy Spirit took our humble efforts and worked mission miracles for the honor and glory of His name.

The Global Mission Centers were first established by the General Conference in 1980. They operate under the direction of the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission. There are currently six centers. Their purpose is to help the church more effectively start new groups of believers among the major non-Christian people groups of the world.

At the time of this writing, the directors of these centers (Petras Bahadur, Richard Elofer, Kleber Gonçalves, Clifmond Shameerudeen, Doug Venn, Amy Whitsett, and Greg Whitsett), assisted by Homer Trecartin (Global Mission Centers director) and Jeff Scoggins (Global Mission planning director), collectively authored this Adult Bible Study Guide. For more information, please go to www.GlobalMissionCenters.org.
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 them. 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, page 51. Unfortunately, sin disrupted that face-to-face interaction.

The Fall did not put an end to God’s mission to humanity. The Fall 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 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 the 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 the 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. At its heart also lies a snapshot of God’s saving mission. 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 the 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; it was also 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 humankind for the express purpose of revealing not only God’s love but also His salvific intent for humanity. God did not stay aloof from 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, with prophetic urgency, God’s reign, 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
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 are 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.
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 around 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: the rational, relational, and missional dimensions.

The rational (learning) dimension of discipleship is the process in 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 to impart knowledge only but 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 Church because of their 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 no more defined in terms of blood lines 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 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.
Lesson 2

(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 Church 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 twelve 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 fulfilment 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.
Part I: Overview

In the previous two lessons, we have seen that mission is, first and foremost, rooted in the work of God. God’s mission is the impetus for all other forms of mission if they are to be successful. This week the focus moves from God’s mission to humanity’s call to partner with God in sharing His love with the broader world. While the focus is on the human aspect of mission, all that follows should be read in light of the previous two weeks, which focus on God’s missiological initiative and intent.

Scripture has numerous stories and passages that illuminate God’s active call to human beings as His partners to share in the blessings He desires all humanity to experience. This week, we will explore several such instances. All the examples found in this week’s portion must be read in light of God’s original Creation design found in Genesis 1 and 2, summarized most succinctly in Genesis 1:26-28. Even after the fall, God’s original intentions for humanity remained the same, but His implementation of those intentions changed due to the
relational breakdowns that were a result of Adam and Eve’s choice. Now, in addition to God’s original desire, there was a need for a plan of redemption. This plan starts in the Old Testament; is fulfilled in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection; and is shared, throughout the rest of the New Testament, by the followers of Jesus.

Part II: Commentary

When God created the earth and placed humanity within the newly created world, God shared an original intention with Adam and Eve. They were called to watch over the earth, including all the living creatures, and to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:26-28). Implicit within this injunction, through the constant refrain of “good” during the creation week, is the notion that God placed humanity in a world surrounded by wonderful things. To learn about these things and live within this world would lead to flourishing and abundance. God was intimately involved in the ongoing life of earth; God’s practice was to walk in the Garden of Eden periodically (Gen. 3:8). Humanity was given substantial freedom to live out their God-given functionalities in creative ways. This enterprise was the original mission call from God to humanity.
After the fall of humanity and the entrance of sin into the realities of this earth, things changed. But the changes did not negate the original call of God to humanity. Repeatedly, God reminds those willing to listen that they are to be fruitful and multiply and take care of the earth (Gen. 9:1; Gen. 15:4, 5; Gen. 22:17, 18; Gen. 35:11). The Bible repeats this theme from beginning to end, culminating in a re-created earth found in Revelation 21-22.

Sin, however, ushered in the necessity of a salvific plan that would make it possible for humanity to be able to fully live the life God intended. Redemption was demonstrated to humankind through the ritual of sacrifice. As Adam and Eve shared this plan with succeeding generations, they included the sacrificial act as part of revealing the scope of what God would do to rescue fallen humans. While many probably struggled to grasp how redemption would work, some could see that God had a plan that brought hope. This plan would become part of the call of God for humanity to share with the world. God’s plan would make it possible for humans to live the reality He originally intended for them in Eden.

The Call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3)
This week’s lesson highlights the call of God to Abraham, found in Genesis 12:1-3. The call has several vital elements that need to be understood if we are to fully grasp what the call of God for mission has been, currently is, and will continue to be. First off, the call is rooted in the Genesis 1:26-28 narrative. This connection is most clearly articulated in Isaiah’s reference to the call of Abraham and Sarah to share the joy of Eden with the world (Isa. 51:1-3). When God called Abraham to be a blessing to the nations, the divine call implied that the blessing entailed sharing a way of life, expressed through profound freedom and creativity, intended by God from the beginning. A quick read of Genesis 12:1-3 makes it difficult to fully grasp the blessing, but its meaning becomes clearer when read within the broader corpus of Scripture. Genesis 22 adds additional detail to what Abraham was called to share, namely, the plan of God to provide a substitute for humanity through death and subsequent resurrection. This plan gave humanity hope that the effects of sin and death could be overcome. It also gave hope that the promises of Genesis 1:26-28 could be fully realized again in the future.

Another element of the call to Abraham that is overlooked is found in Genesis 12:1-3. Abraham was called to bless the nations. We are called to do the same. We often fail to note
that the nations would also bless Abraham (Gen. 12:3). God’s call to mission always implies a two-way blessing. Those who follow God must be prepared to receive a blessing from the broader world around them as well. The call to mission is always a call to bless and be blessed. Understanding this dynamic changes the called person’s, or persons’, attitude toward others and changes one’s approach to sharing the good news. We will explore this theme more next week.

When we read Scripture, a noticeable trend flows throughout both Testaments. The trend is that God had to remind humanity periodically of the original call in Genesis. The need for a reminder resulted from two things: (1) often God’s followers forgot what God called them to do, and (2) changing times required reinforcements of their calling. That is, the overall point to God’s call needs to be contextualized, from time to time, but the call itself remains essentially the same.

Space does not allow for a full exploration of all the subsequent reminders of God’s call to mission throughout the Bible, but a few can serve as examples. When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt into the wilderness, God explicitly reminded His people that, as a nation, they were called to serve all other nations as priests (Exod. 19:4-6); in other words, Israel was called to be a blessing to the nations around them
and to receive blessings from them. Solomon repeated the call in his dedicatory prayer for the newly built temple (1 Kings 8:41-43). The prophets of both Israel and Judah repeated this call in various ways, as can be seen in Isaiah 19:23-25 and Micah 4:2-5. After Israel returned from exile, God again reminded them of this call through the prophet Zechariah 8:20-23.

Jesus lived out the call and demonstrated it, ultimately leading to the fulfillment of the plan of salvation through His life, death, and resurrection. After spending a few years with Jesus and witnessing His resurrection, the disciples were called in the same way that Abraham had been called, and then Israel, as we read in Matthew 28:18-20. Paul, the apostle, also recognized that his calling was rooted in the same call as that given to Abraham, as he states explicitly in his letter to the followers of Jesus in Galatia (Gal. 3:8, 9, 14). The last time the call is given in Scripture is found in Revelation 14:6, which is not a new call but rather simply a reiteration of the call that started in Genesis 1:26-28 and was carried forward throughout history. We believe that this final call is for those of us living during this time in the last days of earth’s history.

Thus, the call to live and flourish, as God intended in the Garden of Eden, is our call today. We have hope that living
the calling and flourishing is possible because of what Jesus
did on earth and does for us now in heaven. It is a privilege
to partner with God in this calling and to go out intentionally
into the wider world with a blessing to share, while also
expecting to receive a blessing from those we meet.

Part III: Life Application

Often when people hear or preach on the call to mission, they
reduce that call to sharing the good news as a form of
information. There is no doubt that part of sharing the blessing
first introduced to humanity in the Garden and carried forward
through many conduits in history involves sharing information.

But the call is so much more than that.

When we recognize that the call of God to us, as humans,
is rooted in Genesis 1:26-28, this understanding can lead us,
through our various talents and skills, to draw people toward
the blessing of flourishing that God intends for us. Our witness
to others should be combined with sharing the plan of salvation,
but, ultimately, the life that salvation makes possible will
give meaning to the call God has given us. Therefore, our call
is to live out the blessings of God in such a way that people
see and desire what we have in God. This idea means that your
workplace, your home, and your circle of friends are the primary locations where you live out the call of God. While preaching and handing out literature have their place, the primary fulfillment of the call to Abraham, and you also, includes how you live out your daily life in intentionality with others who have not surrendered to Jesus, or have not had the privilege yet of meeting Him. But remember that the call of God is a two-fold blessing. As you live out the call in your daily life, expect and look for blessings to come back toward you from people from whom you may not even expect them.
Part I: Overview

Last week, the lesson focused on God’s calling to human beings to partner with Him in the work of sharing His love with the world. This mission was rooted in Creation and reiterated throughout Scripture. The focus of this week’s lesson is on sharing God’s mission. It starts with a call, but it does not end there; without the action of sharing, the call would be of little use.

1 John 4:8 describes God as love. Within that same letter from John, it states that those who have been witness to the love of God will share that love with the broader world. If what people share is not a demonstration of love, then it is not part of God’s mission and should not be shared. Below are several examples of sharing God’s love that can serve as guides in what it means to share the love of God today with those around us who have not yet fully experienced His love in its fullness.

Part II: Commentary
The best place to start when studying the sharing of God’s love is in the Gospels. When God incarnated to the earth in the form of Jesus, His Incarnation was a profound example of love. While none of us, obviously, can replicate the incarnation in its exactness, we are called to follow the example set by Jesus, especially in how He related to other people and demonstrated love. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels quickly reveals repeated themes described concerning Jesus. These themes help us evaluate how we share God’s love.

Jesus had compassion, either toward individuals in need or toward whole crowds of people. Sometimes this compassion led Jesus to touch and heal a person (Luke 5:12, 13), sometimes it led Him to feed a crowd creatively (John 6:1-14), and sometimes it resulted in a kind word or story (Matt. 19:14). Compassion and sharing in God’s mission are inseparable. If upon reflection, we don’t find many moments of compassion in our lives or the activities of our churches, we must re-evaluate how, or even if, we are sharing in God’s mission.

Jesus also sought out people who were open to receiving a blessing. When sharing in the mission of God, we should follow His example. It is our privilege to seek out those in our communities who are neglected and creatively share the love of God with them. This service would be following in the footsteps
of Jesus and fulfilling what He desires, as shown in Matthew 25:31-46. Jesus was all about mending broken relationships and spent most of His time on earth restoring ruptured connections. While we all are faulty, those who have experienced the love and forgiveness of Jesus owe it to the rest of the world to demonstrate this love and forgiveness. This demonstration is part of what it means to share in God’s mission.

Scholars have often debated whether or not Jesus’ primary concern was working among the Jews or with the wider world. Some argue that because Jesus spent most of His time with the Jews and told His disciples to do the same, at least while He was with them, the Jews were His central focus (Matt. 15:24). There is some truth to this idea, but there are numerous instances in which Jesus demonstrated that His love was for more than just the Jews. Several times He quoted Old Testament narratives that highlighted the faith of non-Jewish people, such as the stories of the widow of Zarephath, Naaman, and the Queen of Sheba (Luke 4:24-27, Matt. 12:42). Jesus spent time outside of Judea with non-Jews, including a few nights in a Samaritan town (John 4:40) and a visit to the region of Tyre and Sidon (Mark 7:24), not to mention the Decapolis, which Gentiles populated (Mark 7:31-36).
Jesus lived out a mission and love that challenged the narrow thinking of many of His people during His time. By demonstrating this love and living His mission, Jesus set the stage for what would come after He died, rose again, and ascended. Jesus expected that those who had followed Him during His time on earth would experience His love in such a way that they would take that experience to the wider world. Within this context of a loving experience, Jesus made the well-known call of Matthew 28:18-20, charging His disciples to go out into the world. This commission was not simply a call to mission but a call to teach, to make disciples, and to share the love of God, which each disciple had experienced personally. We are not called to share God’s mission until we first have had a chance to know God and experience His love. Only then do we have something worth sharing.

Another significant portion of Scripture that is helpful to read concerning sharing the God of love is the book of Acts. While our Bibles often title this book the Acts of the Apostles, it would be more accurate to title it Acts of the Holy Spirit. The book is full of partnering between the Holy Spirit and human agents. Much as in the Gospels, we find people who have had a wonderful experience with Jesus, who are unwilling to keep that
experience to themselves and are empowered by the Holy Spirit to share this love far and wide.

As mentioned in an earlier lesson, mission is always a two-way street where all those involved can learn something from one another. The book of Acts reminds us that we as humans do not take God’s place. God, through the Spirit, goes everywhere ahead of us. This Bible truth offers a couple of implications that we would be wise to contemplate.

First, if the Spirit has gone out ahead of us, we should expect to see some manifestation of the Spirit once we arrive. Peter experienced this reality in his encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10-11:1-18). As a result, Peter realized that God was not only already there before he arrived but that he also had something to learn from Cornelius about God’s love. In many ways, the story of Peter and Cornelius is about Peter’s ongoing growth in understanding God, just as much as it is about Cornelius and his family. When we go out to share in God’s mission, we should not go presumptuously, as if we have nothing to learn from those who come to us seeking enlightenment. Rather, we go out expecting to see the Spirit at work already in ways with which we can partner.

Second, we have something to share. While the Spirit is out ahead of us, He also partners with us. We each have a unique

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story or testimony concerning our journey with Jesus. Our
stories needs to be shared. In the process, through our stories,
we may spark in someone’s heart a new insight about God or prompt
within him or her a new desire to follow the Savior. This
prompting devolves from our demonstrating the love of God
through words and deeds. Because healthy relationships are at
the core of what God wants for us, He often waits, or limits
His revelation, until a follower of His is present to share the
good news. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to recognize this
privilege, prayerfully attuned to the ones with whom God is
already working, looking to share the story of God with them
at every opportunity.

Part III: Life Application

While church leaders often attempt to motivate people for
mission, it is crucial to recognize that there are a few simple
things we can each do to evaluate ourselves and our local
churches’ ability to share in God’s mission. These simple
things, when done intentionally, can radically transform us
toward inhabiting a stance of humility and toward making changes
in the church that lead us to become more focused on the needs
of the broader world.
Individually, we must periodically take time to self-reflect. This act requires an immense amount of self-honesty, which we all struggle with regularly. We each must ask ourselves, Have I experienced the love of God lately? If I have not, why not? If you have, then ask yourself the following question: Have I shared that love I am experiencing with the wider world? These simple questions, when asked genuinely, can be very revealing.

Corporately, the church can ask the same questions. Is the church a place where the community experiences God? And if God is experienced in the community, is the church sharing that reality with the broader society around them? Once the church takes stock of the situation, they can make follow-up plans to move toward either experiencing God in new ways or actively take what they have experienced and share it with the broader community.

Periodic reminders (through sermons, children’s stories, books, and articles) of the needs of the world are essential. Much as Jesus did with His disciples, God does with us today. God wants us to be global citizens who think outside of our own needs. We should desire for God’s love to be shared with all humanity, and we should be actively pursuing ways of making this possible. For some, this truth means diverting some of their
financial resources toward an intentional mission. For others, this truth means opening themselves up to a call from God that possibly involves moving to a new location, either in their same country or across the globe. Why? Because God has asked each of us to share our story and our talents with people who desperately need to see a demonstration of God's love. No matter what God is calling you to do, remember that you should remain open to being blessed as you share and that God is already there ahead of you.
Part I: Overview

The past several weeks highlighted that mission is rooted in God’s initiative, and that God calls us to mission. This week, the focus is on the reality that some who have experienced God avoid the call to mission and the privilege to share the loving experience they have had.

At some point, all people who have had an experience with God will face the temptation to avoid sharing this experience with others. It is best to humbly admit to this reality rather than assume such a temptation only happens to others. Once we recognize that we are confronted by this temptation at some point, it is easier to take intentional steps out of this zone of avoidance and into the healthier space of sharing God’s love with others.

Ultimately, excuses to avoid mission are temptations of the devil who does not want anyone to hear or experience the goodness of God. Thus, avoiding mission is not simply a dereliction of duty; it is instead a missed opportunity to draw others into a deeper and more meaningful walk with God and toward
a life more abundant. The following commentary section describes two potential ways in which excuses are used to avoid mission. These excuses do not comprise the only ways that avoidance can happen, but they are two of the more prominent ways. The first example is demonstrated through the disciples’ story in the Garden of Gethsemane. The second example will draw critical points from the story of Jonah.

Part II: Commentary

Gethsemane

When Jesus was nearing His last hours of life on earth before his arrest, trial, and death, He took the disciples into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Jesus asked the three disciples who were closest to Him to pray with Him and stay awake while He prayed, because the weight of what was happening to Him was heavy. Jesus desperately needed the comfort of friends at this time (Matt. 26:36-45).

Unfortunately, the disciples, who genuinely loved Jesus and considered Him a dear Friend, could not fulfill the request and fell asleep. This negligence happened twice; the disciples grew complacent and allowed their sleepiness to keep them from sharing the Lord’s burdens. Before they had a chance to make
it right, Jesus was arrested and taken from their midst (Matt. 26:47-56). Thus, it became a missed opportunity for the disciples to serve the One whom they loved so much.

The problem in this situation was not that the disciples had never experienced Jesus' love. By this point, they had plenty of evidence demonstrating His love for them. It wasn’t even that they had drifted far away from Jesus. After all, they were there with Him in the Garden. Nonetheless, a sense of complacency settled in. The disciples could not understand how critical staying awake and praying for Jesus was at that crucial time. The disciples missed the opportunity to share the Father’s love with the One who had taught them so much about love.

Sad to say, we are often guilty of the same complacency and negligence today. We have beautiful experiences with Jesus. And we are openly followers of Jesus. But the reality, when we take a closer look, is that many of us have grown complacent in our faith. This complacency often happens subtly. When we reflect on our lives, we may realize that we do not love others in tangible ways. Much like the disciples, we know Jesus is good and that we want to be with Him, but we slide into a state of spiritual sleepiness, missing multiple opportunities to share the love of God with a desperate world. We need to remind each
other, respectfully, to stay awake and always be ready to share
the love we have experienced with a suffering world.

Jonah

The second excuse we make to avoid mission is embodied in the
form of missed opportunities in the narrative of Jonah. This
form of excuse differs from the negligence and complacency shown
by the disciples in Gethsemane. However, the second excuse, like
the first, is also prevalent. The story of Jonah exemplifies
the second excuse in several instances. While the story is
multifaceted, the book of Jonah, in many ways, is, at its heart,
as we have just asserted, a story of missed opportunities.

Jonah knew God and prophesied on God’s behalf in Israel
before getting the call to go to Nineveh (2 Kings 14:25). But
his prior prophetic work had always been among Israelites and
involved encouraging things on behalf of Israel. Jonah’s work
did not include prophesying among Israel’s enemies. When you
read the whole book of Jonah, you notice that Jonah struggled
a great deal with loving people who came from a non-Jewish
background.

There are two significant missed opportunities found in
the book of Jonah. The first missed opportunity takes place on
the ship that Jonah boarded to run away from God. During the
storm, Jonah was surrounded by sailors who worshipped other deities. Yet, during the storm the sailors begged Jonah to pray to his God in the hope that his intercession would make a difference (Jon. 1:6). Jonah never prayed. Jonah’s solution was to commit assisted suicide (Jon. 1:12). At this stage in the story, Jonah did not know a fish would save his life, and so he asked the sailors to cast him overboard to his death.

The sailors, who had more compassionate hearts than did Jonah, refused, at first, until they had no other options (Jon. 1:13). (Remember the previous lesson about being open to receiving a blessing from those whom you meet.) The storm stopped when Jonah was thrown overboard. As a result, the sailors had a newfound respect for Jonah’s God. The problem was that Jonah missed the opportunity to pray to God rather than proposing a human solution. This opportunity would have given the sailors a more complete and better understanding of who God is.

The second missed opportunity came after Jonah preached in Nineveh. The people accepted Jonah’s message and repented. But Jonah was nowhere to be found. Instead, he climbed a nearby hill, hoping to see the destruction of Nineveh (Jon. 4:5). When that failed to take place, Jonah got angry at God (Jon. 4:1). Jonah reveals the real reason for his excuses to avoid God’s
mission. Jonah says to God that he knew that God was a loving and compassionate Being and, thus, would likely forgive the Ninevites (Jon. 4:2). Recognizing this Bible truth, Jonah didn’t want to go out in mission to people he didn’t like, because he didn’t want them to experience the goodness of God.

The book of Jonah is the only book in the Bible that ends with a question (Jon. 4:11). The question is straightforward. God asks Jonah, “Why can't you love people the way I do?” Because Jonah refused to love his enemies, he was outside the city when he should have been inside, helping the people of Nineveh take the next steps in their relationship with God. Jonah’s refusal turned into a missed opportunity.

The excuses of Jonah were wrapped up in what we today call ethnocentrism, prejudice, and racism. Jonah experienced the love of God in his life and knew God was compassionate. But Jonah couldn’t get past his feelings of national pride. Because he believed that he was better than others, he was unwilling to go in mission the way that God desired. What a sad story. Yet, we can continue to learn from it today.

The question at the end of the book of Jonah is one for us to ask ourselves and our churches. Do we demonstrate a love for the communities around us, especially for its members who look different from us or come from other parts of the world?
All too often, I have heard conversations in church or in Sabbath School that reveal prejudices and harmful ethnocentric attitudes. These attitudes are often accompanied by excuses for why certain groups of people fall outside our mission. Such thinking is no different from the mindset of Jonah.

Jonah failed to grasp that when God shows love and compassion to others, His divine manifestation of mercy should serve as a reminder that God has done the same for us. When you go out in mission and share the love of God and watch as it transforms people’s lives, such an experience can also enhance your journey with God. This experience also can draw you into new human relationships with people who may be very different from you but who share a relationship with Jesus. Jonah could have made new friends on the ship with whom to share his faith. The same goes for Nineveh. Unfortunately, those opportunities were missed because Jonah opted for excuses rooted in his selfish pride and ethnocentrism.

Part III: Life Application

We should all be thankful for the beautiful experiences we have with Jesus. Over time, though, we often become complacent in our journey with God. With this complacency often comes a
tendency to make excuses for not sharing the love of God with others. Complacency can happen subtly, and before we know it, we are asleep when we should be awake. As individuals and as churches, we need to take an honest look at our daily lives and hold ourselves accountable. If we are not actively pursuing relationships with people who are suffering or need help in bearing their burdens, we have grown complacent. Accountability requires getting together with a small group of trusted friends from your local church who are willing to be open about their complacency and are ready to help each other come up with ways to rekindle experiences with God, by creatively sharing Him with the broader world around us.

For others, the reality is grimmer; they have developed excuses to avoid mission to specific groups of people, such as Muslims or Catholics, because they feel that these people are unworthy of God’s love. Such excuses reveal that an attitude of superiority and ethnocentrism is at work among them, in which case, there is a need to ask God to help them love all people. We can achieve this goal by asking ourselves what we think about certain people. If we are afraid of certain groups or think they are not worth saving, then it is a sign something is wrong with us, not the group in question. Honest assessment takes a level of self-scrutiny and truthfulness that is hard to achieve, but
1 a church willing to grapple with these realities is a church
2 the Holy Spirit can influence.
3
Part I: Overview

While motivation is the desire or reason a person has for doing something for someone, preparation involves an action to get ready so that things can be accomplished. Motivation has to do with something that causes or propels us to act. Preparation makes it possible for the plans to happen. While Jesus and what He has done for us provide our motivation for mission (Rom. 5:8), He also has entrusted us with His Spirit, thus enabling us to accomplish His will and mission mandate (Matt. 28:18-20, John 14:15-31, John 20:21, 22).

“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19, NIV) denotes cause and effect, the reason that motivates us to respond and to act. As we respond to God’s love, we do so by proclaiming and living out in words and deeds the good news that Jesus is our Savior and Lord! Our sharing of the truth, as contained is His Word, will fall on receptive ears and will yield much fruit as the Spirit works. At the same time, we must be prepared for the rejection of the Word by many, causing yet others to lose hope.
Part II: Commentary

The Missionary God


The “Bible’s grand metanarrative . . . shows God working on a comprehensive project to restore His Earth and His whole cosmos to its original, perfect state. The narratives of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, describe aspects of God’s cosmic mission project. The overall theme is that the sovereign,
gracious, loving Triune God initiated his mission and He will bring it to full completion.”—Page 22.

Thus, the story of redemption motivates us to both prepare and engage in God’s mission, in God’s story. As a missionary God, our Father cares and wants to bless others through us; therefore He has commanded us to go to all people, languages, tribes, and nations.

So, why does Christ command us to go and preach the Gospel? Why does God need you motivated for, and prepared to join Him in, mission? Some of these reasons can be found in the book *Passport to Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of World Mission, 2009), pp. 28-36. Here is an adapted summary:

*Jesus is the Unique Source of Life and Salvation, and People Need to Know About Him.*

- John 3:36: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life” *(NIV).*
- Acts 4:12: “‘Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved’” *(NIV).*
- 1 John 5:12: “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” *(NKJV).*
Lesson 6

**Jesus is the Divine Son of God.**

1. Jesus does not claim to be only a good teacher (like other religious leaders) or a great leader (like Moses or David) or some kind of half-god or lesser god (as we find in other religions). No other major religion claims divinity for its founder.

2. Jesus claims full divinity—that is, equality with God (John 8:58, 59; John 10:30-33).

3. Jesus’ disciples also proclaimed His divinity fearlessly (Matt. 16:14-16). The proof that they gave for their claims was the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14-20). If God raised Jesus, what Jesus said, therefore, must be true.

**Jesus Offers a Unique Salvation—Salvation by Grace Through Faith.**

4. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9).

5. No other world religion has such a salvation. Other religions indeed may set high standards, promote ethical behavior, tout health laws, extol a lofty philosophy, or produce nice people. But these religions also believe that people can save themselves
Lesson 6

by what they do! The foundation of these non-Christian religions is that salvation comes by works.

Jesus Offers a Universal Salvation—All-inclusive and Exclusive.

● “‘For God so loved the world . . . that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’” (John 3:16).

The offer of salvation includes everyone in the world. The truth is that God wants all people to hear the message—the Good News that God offers a free salvation based on this unique Jesus. In the Great Commission Jesus makes it clear that we can have a part in sharing this Good News with others.

If someone were to ask you why you are a Seventh-day Adventist, and what motivates you for mission, what would you say? How does the uniqueness and singularity of the Seventh-day Adventist message motivate us for mission to the world?

Though most of the individual beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists are shared by some Christians, the full “package” of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs is unique among Christian groups. Here are three convictions that guide what we believe and how we are motivated, prepared, and how we see our mission.

Conviction #1: Jesus is coming back a second time—this coming is visible, literal, and imminent (soon). Before
Adventism got started, most Christians either did not believe
in a literal coming or de-emphasized it. Many of these
Christians were postmillennialists. Postmillennialists
believed that there would be a millennium, or 1,000 years, of
peace and prosperity, and then Jesus would come. What people
looked for and labored for was this millennium, not the Second
Coming. Seventh-day Adventists believe, based on the Bible,
that the real hope of the world is not an earthly millennium
but the “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) of Jesus’ Second Coming.

Below is a summary of our beliefs about the Second Coming:

• Seventh-day Adventists accept and proclaim the promises
  of the Second Coming (John 14:1-3; Rev. 22:7, 12, 20).
• This coming is literal (Acts 1:11).
• The Second Coming is portrayed as visible (Matt. 24:30,
  Rev. 1:7).
• All signs point to a near, soon, imminent coming. Jesus,
  over and over, used the word “soon” (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20;
• God’s people will see Jesus (John 14:3) and will be with
  Him forever (1 Thess. 4:17).
• The dead will be raised (1 Thess. 4:13-16), and believers
  will receive immortality (1 Cor. 15:53).
• Tears, mourning, and death will be abolished (Rev. 21:3, 4).

This message is important for our mission today, as many need to hear the Good News of the blessed hope. The biggest challenge we face, however, is the non-Christian world. Millions, if not billions, of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of traditional religions have never heard of this hope. We must tell them. Jesus wants them to hear about His coming.

Conviction #2: God calls believers to loving obedience and serious discipleship. In light of Jesus’ coming, we need to make serious preparation. Faithful, obedient discipleship is important. Adventists always have believed that Jesus is our Savior. We have always emphasized that true faith is manifested in making Jesus also Lord. People saved by Jesus should gladly make Him Lord and in gratitude follow Him. We believe that both the gospel and God’s law are vital and go together harmoniously like the two oars of a boat. The law leads us to Christ and serves as our standard. Jesus releases us from the law’s condemnation, and His spirit writes the law on our hearts. For this reason, Adventists:

• Support the whole Ten Commandments, including the neglected Sabbath fourth commandment, believing that
Jesus gave it at Creation (Gen. 2:2), Jesus reiterated it in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:8-11), and Jesus reinforced it during His ministry (Mark 2:27).

- Believe the Sabbath is a powerful symbol of God’s creating power (Gen. 2:2, Exod. 20:8-11), saving grace (Exod. 20:2, Deut. 5:12-15), and the final rest of redemption in heaven (Heb. 4:1-11, especially verse 9).

- Accept the Lordship of Christ in all areas of life, including marriage and family, dress, recreation, diet, etc. (Eph. 5:21-6:4; Phil. 4:8, 9; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 1 Tim. 2:8-10).

In a world where disregard for any standards of morality and decency abound, Adventist Christianity should promote a holy life. In a world where hurry and haste lead to high levels of stress, Christians under the lordship of Christ can find joy and rest in the Sabbath. They should demonstrate in their lives both the saving power and the lordship of Jesus.

**Conviction #3:** God restores in believers the wholeness of life in Christ. Christians do not go to heaven as disembodied souls. The Second Coming restores all of life. Believers should prepare for the Second Coming as whole people. God wants to restore us as whole people. Salvation involves every part of life and being. Jesus wants us to live full and complete lives.
In John 10:10, He says, “‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full’” (NIV). Our motivation and preparation for mission is more than ever needed in a world that is sick, addicted, and living in ignorance, a world desperately in need of the message of Jesus who cares for, and ministers to, all parts of our life. A dying world needs the hope of new life lived to its fullness by God’s grace and power.

Part III: Life Application

As the believer awaits Jesus’ Second Coming, he or she does so by studying God’s Word and singing His praises in fellowship with the body of Christ (the church) while preparing for dedicated service to humanity. There should be no idleness, no time to spare, as every moment is used for preparation and engagement in God’s mission. We press forward believing His promises. “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Gal. 6:9, NKJV).

1. How would our lives look if we put into practice the thoughts of the paragraph above? Can we get motivated and
1 prepared by hearing God’s Word? Explain. Does engaging in
2 God’s service prepare us for mission? Discuss.
3 2. Do you really believe that Jesus is the unique Son of God
4 who offers us the blessing of wonderful salvation, which
5 is a gift? If yes, why? Has this message motivated you and
6 made a difference in your life? If so, how? How did this
7 message affect the mission of the original disciples? How
8 has it affected, and how should it affect, your mission?
9 3. Have we as a church always presented our unique message
10 as it relates to Jesus in a way that motivates us to
11 mission? Explain. What more can we do to prepare and
12 improve in this area?
Part I: Overview

Read the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and ponder the following questions:

Luke 10:29: “‘And who is my neighbor?’” (NKJV). Does asking or answering this question from a personal perspective (“who is my neighbor?”) change the focus or the priority from the one who needs help to the one who provides it? Does such a shift in focus pose the risk of changing the message and principle that Jesus wants us to understand and practice?

Luke 10:36: “‘Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’” (NIV). Jesus’ question focuses on the man who was robbed, his wounds, and his needs. Jesus fixes attention on the person who was robbed and mistreated and for whom help was provided. Jesus also contrasts the neighbors that had the opportunity to help but neglected to do so.

Luke 10:37: “The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise’” (NIV). As Jesus shows, answering the question right is not enough. In His instruction to the expert in the law, Jesus emphasizes the
importance of action, of putting the gospel into practice. That is, we must be the hands and feet of the body of Christ.

Part II: Commentary

“Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”

As we become part of God’s community, we will see the problem of each of its members, and we will experience what it means to live with them and to suffer with them as well. We can hope that, as we suffer with the community, we also will provide for their needs. We must be neighbors to those in need. Many in the community are suffering and in need of help. Can we find out who will need our help as a neighbor? Is my church alleviating the suffering of those in need, or are we contributing to the suffering, either intentionally or through ignorance?

It is worth noting that Jesus’ words, in Matthew 23, were severe, weighted with the truth regarding the situation, and content, of Israel’s religiosity. Jesus’ words were also aimed toward the restoration of His people so that His people could be compassionate neighbors. Jesus wanted His people to understand His law in a new way. He wanted Israel to focus on God and on their neighbor as well. Jesus’ intention was that Israel should “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your
soul, and with all your mind”” (Matt. 22:37, NKJV). This precept is the first and greatest commandment. But the second commandment is an extension of the first: “‘love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:39, NKJV). Fairness and justice, love and care, cannot be practiced by individuals only; they also need to be practiced and implemented by the Church, the body of Christ.

Old Testament Prophets as Defenders of the Neighbor

The prophets of the Old Testament were quite outspoken regarding the laws and regulations dealing with one’s neighbor or with those who needed healing and salvation. Such laws and regulations, spoken through the prophets, were God’s way of communicating His will for Israel to witness to its neighbors, to be a light to the nations. The prophets were to serve as heralds of the gospel and to be spokesmen against all injustices and evil.

The prophets urged the people and their leaders to “seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow,” (Isa. 1:17, NIV) and forbade the oppression of “the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor” (Zech. 7:10, NKJV). The prophets also were fierce in their condemnation of all injustice. Elijah rebuked King Ahab for murdering Naboth and stealing his vineyard. Amos fulminated against the rulers of Israel because, in return for bribes, they

The structure and society of Israel “exalted labor, denounced idleness, expected fathers to train their sons to acquire skills with their hands, furthered human reciprocity, and justice, and demonstrated an active concern for one’s neighbors,” and, notably, “it respected the dignity of both men and women, the bearers of the divine image.”—Arthur F. Glasser, Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 88. Moreover, worship and obedience to God are directly related to justice and philanthropy. These sets go hand-in-hand, just as justice and mercy to one’s neighbor are related to walking humbly before God. All instructions and regulations for the well-being and fair treatment of the poor, alien, orphan, widow, and vulnerable have their origins in God, the One who cares for His children and shows compassion and mercy to whomsoever needs Him. In an echo of the biblical message, one writer sums up in this way the gospel directive to care for the poor: “to speak about poverty is to touch the Heart of God.”—William Robert Domeris, Touching the Heart of God: The Social

Oftentimes a question is asked: How can my neighbor, who is often the poor, the homeless, and the unemployed be helped to secure the blessings of God’s providence and to live the life Jesus intended humans to live? Here is a statement from Ellen G. White that provides light on the subject:

“If men would give more heed to the teaching of God’s word, they would find a solution of these problems that perplex them. Much might be learned from the Old Testament in regard to the labor question and the relief of the poor.

“In God’s plan for Israel every family had a home on the land, with sufficient ground for tilling. Thus were provided both the means and the incentive for a useful, industrious, and self-supporting life. And no devising of men has ever improved upon that plan. To the world’s departure from it is owing, to a large degree, the poverty and wretchedness that exist today.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, pp. 183, 184.

The lessons and instructions of the Bible help us to understand the intention of God regarding the needy neighbor. God wants us to be in connection with His word so that we can be His instruments of mercy and love to those who are suffering
and in need of hope. Moreover, “it is God’s purpose that the rich
and the poor shall be closely bound together by the ties of sympathy
and helpfulness.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, 1905,
p. 193. This togetherness will prove to be a blessing to both
groups. It will help both the poor, as well as the rich, in
understanding God’s plan of salvation and will establish the fact
that a life of benevolence will reveal spiritual truths than can
be understood only amid distress and suffering.

Only by our love and service for our neighbor who needs help
can we prove the genuineness of our love for Christ. True mission
service comes from our true love for our Savior, a sentiment that
reinforces the notion that being is oftentimes more important
than giving or just doing good deeds for the needy or the poor.

“The message of the Old Testament is a call to an ethical
lifestyle modeled in what God has done for us in Christ. It has
to do with following God’s principles through living a life of
witnessing to, helping, and loving the neighbor and those in
need as yourself.”—Jiří Moskala, “The Mission of God’s People
in the Old Testament,” Journal of the Adventist Theological

The Life and Mission of Jesus
The ministry of compassion manifested in the life and ministry of Jesus was the best possible example provided for the disciples, apostles, followers, and new believers of the early apostolic church. Jesus (Immanuel) dwelt among men and women to restore and save, to heal and forgive, with a love that was even stronger than death itself. His special attention toward the neighbor, the other—which included the needy, the poor, the sick, the demon-possessed, the foreigner, and many others—caused the Son of God to devote a large portion of His time and energy to healing and caring for them all during His earthly ministry.

Jesus’ teachings were always confirmed by His actions, and His ministry of healing (salvation) affirmed what He preached. His was a ministry of restoration, which made human beings wholesome in body, spirit, and mind. Jesus came to reveal God’s character to the fallen human race, and by doing so, He made possible the restoration of the image of God in His creatures.

When the needs of both church members and non-members are met, when we become neighbors to the poor and attend to their needs, when we see the hungry and thirsty and feed them, when we cloth the naked and visit the imprisoned, then the members of the body of Christ have true fellowship with God and with one another. This fellowship demonstrates that we are no longer
selfish but can share together and live out a life that testifies
to a true and pure religion and life, the life of Christ.

The apostle Paul encouraged mission to the neighbor by urging
church members to do good to all people, especially to those who
belong to the family of believers (Gal. 6:10). But Paul also had
a broader view of this mission of compassion to the neighbor,
who included even our enemies: “‘if your enemy is hungry, feed
him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink’” (Rom. 12:20, NKJV).

Part III: Life Application

How can the whole gospel of Jesus Christ—a gospel that is able
to heal and to save, to protect and to restore—transform our
neighbors into heirs of God’s kingdom? We believe that this
transformation is work, or ministry, that must be done through
the power of God’s Spirit, in order that many persons might receive
the graces of Christ’s gospel and be transformed into His likeness
for the benefit of families, communities, and nations for the
glory of God. What a difference it would make if we would all
be intentionally committed to this ministry.

Most important, who is Jesus Christ for us today? What does
this question mean in practical terms?
“Real charity helps men to help themselves. If one comes
to our door and asks for food, we should not turn him away
hungry; his poverty may be the result of misfortune. But
true beneficence means more than mere gifts. It means a
genuine interest in the welfare of others. We should seek
to understand the needs of the poor and distressed, and to
give them the help that will benefit them most. To give thought
and time and personal effort costs far more than merely to
give money. But it is the truest charity.”—Ellen G. White,
The Ministry of Healing, p. 195.
Part I: Overview

We cannot deny that the Old Testament emphasizes the responsibility of God’s people to help those in need. In fact, the Hebrew Bible has hundreds of references (and regulations or laws) that guarantee and safeguard the rights of widows, orphans, foreigners, the poor, etc.

Deuteronomy 15:4 states: “However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you” (NIV). But a few verses later it says: “There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land” (Deut. 15:11, NIV).

How do we reconcile these two verses (Deut. 15:4 and Deut. 15:11)? What is the problem here? How can we solve this apparent contradiction? In essence, the Bible is telling us that, because God can provide He wants to use us in helping those in need, as Jesus did. The biblical tradition, as a whole, does not regard poverty as a “normal” part of life but as an evil exception to
the divine plan. What is meant to be normal is the concern that moves people to show kindness to those in need. “God imparts His blessing to us that we may impart to others. When we ask Him for our daily bread, He looks into our hearts to see if we will share the same with those more needy than ourselves.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 283.

Part II: Commentary

“ ‘God has Come to Help His [Needy] People’ ” (Luke 7:16, NIV)

In Luke 7, we read about a large crowd that recognizes what Jesus had just done. The crowd not only recognized Jesus as a Prophet, and a great One, but, filled with awe and praising God, they declared that God had come to help them. Jesus was the Prophet of benevolence and compassion, the One who came to proclaim the good news of God. Jesus also came to proclaim liberty to the captives and to announce that the kingdom of God was near (Mark 1:14, 15; see also Luke 4:18, 19). It was on behalf of the neediest and most neglected that Jesus spent most of His time and energy during His earthly ministry. His heart was constantly touched by the misery and suffering of the most poor, destitute, and deprived human beings.
Among the oppressed and destitute were many women, and for them, Jesus had special consideration. The women who were marginalized by society were graciously received by the Savior and cared for; thus, they were relieved from their distresses and maladies. The compassion and merciful acts of Jesus were constantly demonstrated toward these women.

Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well sets the example for all who labor in favor of women, wherever they are and whatever their condition, be they poor, outcasts, sinners, widows, mothers, prostitutes, or otherwise oppressed by the devil. Giving the Samaritan woman the water of life, Jesus relieved her of her oppression and guilt, empowering her to live a better life, as well as enabling her to become one of His witnesses (John 4:1-26). The Samaritan woman was thirsty, she was poor, she had to carry her own water, she was tired and needy, and Jesus met her physical, social, and spiritual needs.

The way Jesus handled the situation of the woman caught in adultery and the situations of many other women indicates His interest in relieving and restoring the dignity of women and demonstrates that His love has no preference toward any class of individuals. Jesus crossed cultural barriers and even went against strong religious traditions in order to heal, save, and develop the gifts and lives of women for His kingdom. Jesus’ love
has no limits, no strings attached, and is bestowed upon all women in need. Look at the following examples of women who were recipients of the Savior’s love: the Canaanite or Syrophoenician woman (Matt. 15:21-28, Mark 7:24-30); Jesus’ mother (John 19:25-27); Martha and Mary whom Jesus encouraged (John 11:17-37); and the widow of Nain whose son Jesus raised from the dead (Luke 7:11-17). Jesus was anointed by a sinful woman and forgave her sins (John 12:1-11, Matt 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50); Jesus healed and dialogued with a sick woman (Luke 8:43-48, Matt 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34); women were cured from evil spirits and diseases by Jesus (Luke 8:1-3); Jesus healed a crippled woman (Luke 13:10-13); Jesus noticed the widow giving her offering (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4); and Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:10-18).

According to the Gospels, Jesus’ healing ministry toward all those who needed His help, relieving their suffering and setting them free from their maladies, indicates that “none who came to Him went away unhelped. From Him flowed a stream of healing power, and in body, and mind and soul men were made whole.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 17. We find Jesus healing the mother-in-law of Simon (Peter) from a high fever (Matt. 8:14, 15; Mark 1:29, 30; Luke 4:38, 39); Jesus cured a man with leprosy by saying “be clean” (Matt. 8:2-4, NIV; Mark 1:40-44; Luke 5:12,
Jesus healed (forgave) a paralytic by saying, “‘Friend, your sins are forgiven’” (Luke 5:20, NIV) and by adding, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home” (Luke 5:24, NIV, also see Matt. 9:2-8, Mark 2:3-12).

Jesus found great faith in a centurion whose servant was sick and about to die, and rewarded the centurion’s faith by healing his servant (Luke 7:1-10, Matt 8:5-13). It was also by such great faith that a woman who was suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years touched Jesus and was healed immediately by His power. Jesus confirmed her faith by saying, “‘Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace’” (Luke 8:48, NIV; see also Matt. 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34).

Jesus not only healed those who came, or were brought, to Him, but He often demonstrated His love when He saw a person in need. For example, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on a Sabbath day where there happened to be a crippled woman who was bent over and could not straighten herself up. Jesus said to her, “‘Woman, you are set free from your infirmity’” (Luke 13:12, NIV). What a relief to be set free after being crippled by an evil spirit for eighteen years! The record says that Jesus put His hand on her, and she was immediately made straight and able to praise God in her newfound freedom.
Jesus’ ministry of healing went far beyond what the Bible tells us, but it must suffice to mention here what the inspired writers of the Gospels recorded to us. Many other sick people with varied illnesses were healed by the great Physician. An official in Capernaum had a son who was sick, and he asked Jesus to heal him. Jesus graciously granted the official’s request by saying, “‘You may go; your son will live’” (John 4:50, NABRE).

The apostle Paul wrote, “though He [Jesus] was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9, NKJV). Christ’s identification with the poor is clearly stated by the apostle. Jesus was rich but gave up His possessions and became poor in order that poor humanity could inherit the riches of temporal, as well as eternal, salvation.

True Fellowship in the Apostolic Church

The early Christian community was characterized by true fellowship. This fellowship was the trademark of the apostles and new believers. They had decided to abide in unity with Christ and with one another, having everything in common (Acts 2:42-44) and being of one heart and mind. The desire of each one of them was to share the possessions they had in order that their goods might be distributed to those in need. It was because of this
practice that “there were no needy persons among them” (Acts 4:34, NIV), thus the act of sharing their possessions was what made it possible for the new believers to meet the needs of those who were in distress (Acts 4:32-47).

James rightly emphasized the integration of listening to the Word and practicing it, of love that manifests itself in words but also in actions. What, then, is true religion? “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27, NIV). It seems that James is somewhat echoing these words of Jesus: “‘For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me’” (Matt. 25:35, 36, NIV). Needy orphans and widows suffer distress that touches the heart of the Father, so the one who lives a religion that is true will “take up the cause of the fatherless” and will “plead the case of the widow” (Isa. 1:17, NIV).

It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). The text reads: “The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift
to the elders by Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29, 30, NIV). To provide help (eis diakonian) in this context can mean to provide resources (money, gifts) to be used for needy individuals living in distress.

Part III: Life Application

The poor and needy have a special place in the ministry of Jesus, because it is to them that the gospel (the good news, the kingdom of God) is preached (Matt. 11:5, Luke 4:18). Other biblical passages confirm that the poor are not only poor in the spiritual sense but also in the material sense (Matt. 5:3, Luke 6:20). The story of the poor widow’s offering illustrates this point well.

As He looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “‘Truly I tell you,’ he said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on’” (Luke 21:3, 4, NIV; see also Mark 12:41-44, and 2 Cor. 8:9, 12).

The story does not tell us that the woman had any relatives to care for her; instead, it mentions that she was a poor widow and gave all she had to live on. Jesus’ reference to this poor
widow is interesting because, again, His attention is focused on the poorest of the poor, not only in a spiritual sense but very much in the material sense: "'she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on'" (Mark 12:44, NIV).

When needy people, such as the poor widow, look at you or your church, in what ways do they see the embodiment of Jesus Christ and the comprehensive healing and help that He imparts through His church?
Part I: Overview

This week’s memory text is part of Jesus’ discourse on the cost of being His disciple. In His teaching on discipleship, Jesus regularly mentioned the need to count the cost of following Him, which could be high. Matthew 16:24-28, Luke 14:25-33 are two of the key texts in understanding Jesus’ teaching on what it means for a person to follow Him (see also Mark 8:34-37, Luke 9:23-25). It is important to note that in His teachings on discipleship, Jesus does not speak about the evilness of money or the damnation of those who are rich. He simply warns us against letting our possessions stand in the way of our pursuit of eternity with Him. None of the things that money can afford us—pleasures, power, renown—will do us any ultimate good if, because of them, we forfeit eternity.

While the Bible does not condemn riches, it does warn about the potential danger. According to Paul, the love of money, not money itself, is evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Rich and powerful people, as well as poor and weak people, are equally welcome into God’s kingdom. As Peter realized in Cornelius’
house, “‘God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him’” (Acts 10:34, 35, NKJV). God is as concerned about the salvation of the rich and the powerful as He is for the poor and the weak.

Part II: Commentary

The Cost of Being a Disciple of Jesus

In Matthew 16:24, Jesus uses extreme language to highlight the non-negotiable nature of the cost of following Him: “‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’” (NIV; see also Luke 14:26, 27). Jesus did not want a followership driven only by desire to benefit from the various miracles He performed. Following Him for the gratification of our desires would amount to an opportunistic relationship with Him. Instead, Jesus wants His followers to die daily to self-interest, selfish desires, and any ambitions that would hinder their relationship with Him. His call to count the cost of following Him was His invitation to His hearers to, first and foremost, understand and consent to the terms of following Him.

Jesus also demands of His followers a devotion that surpasses their instinct to preserve their own lives. Disciples
must prioritize their devotion to Jesus over life itself. As a symbol of an unavoidable and most excruciating death, taking one’s cross to follow Jesus epitomizes a commitment to the highest possible cost of being His disciple. Just as carrying a literal cross was an act of submitting to the Romans, taking one’s cross to follow Jesus refers to Jesus’ call for His disciples’ total submission to Him. Discipleship is not having Jesus at our beck and call. Rather, discipleship is about transferring to Jesus the ownership of everything pertaining to us. Jesus is upfront because He does not want anyone to sign up for discipleship with Him and then later on be surprised by the high cost for doing so. Jesus does not want His disciples to be possessed by anything or any person but Him.

In Luke 14, two absolutes are mentioned in connection with the cost of being Jesus’ disciple. The first absolute is “anyone,” in verse 26, and “whoever,” in verse 27. Rather than pertaining to a select few, the pronouns “anyone” and “whoever” mean that the cost of being Jesus’ disciple applies to every individual desiring to follow Him, no matter their social standing. The second absolute is “renouncing all” that one has (verse 33). Renouncing all for the sake of following Jesus not only means physically giving up something but also letting go emotionally of what has been physically given up so that an
individual is in no way possessed by that thing. Jesus was basically challenging those who contemplated following Him to set aside their own agenda and embrace His agenda. This absolute emphasizes the fact that a disciple must not allow anything to stand in the way of his or her total surrender to Christ. Jesus’ expectation is that every person who desires to follow Him must be absolutely willing, at any time, to give up all relationships, all possessions, and even life itself. Jesus requires from every individual desiring to follow Him a change of attitude, leading to a daily commitment to be His at any cost. This divine expectation is a warning to every person, desiring to be His disciple, to refrain from trying to make Him a means to his or her own ends. Jesus expects His disciples to exchange their will for His will and to fully surrender the control of their destiny to Him.

*God Has a Heart for the Rich and Powerful.*

God is as concerned about the salvation of the rich and the powerful as He is about the weak and the needy. Christ died for all people, regardless of their background, ethnicity, gender, or social status. His blood has sufficient merit for the redemption of every human being from the perdition of their sin. Consequently, every person has access to His free offer of
forgiveness and acceptance with God. Simply stated, the scope of Christ’s atonement is unlimited; it is universally accessible to the poor, just as it is to the rich (John 3:16, 2 Cor. 5:15, 1 Tim. 2:3-6). Although an online search for “God’s heart for the rich and powerful” generates a negligible number of hits compared to a search for “God’s heart for the poor,” it should be emphasized that God has a heart for every single human being on the account of their creation in His image and Christ’s substitutionary death for them. While everyone will not be saved, every person who ever lived, or is now living, had or has access to God, either through general revelation (nature), particular revelation (God’s providential work among the unconverted), or special revelation (Jesus Christ and Scripture). Acts 14:17 says that God has not left Himself without witnesses among humans. In heaven, there will be people who were billionaires in their earthly life, as well as people who lived in utter poverty. Among the redeemed there also will be people who were considered great minds on earth, as well as people who never learned to read or write.

Scripture makes mention of rich and powerful individuals who loved and feared God. Old Testament examples include Abraham, Isaac, Job, and David. New Testament examples include Matthew (Matt. 9:9), Zacchaeus the chief tax collector (Luke
19:1, 2), the apostle Paul (Acts 9), the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), and Cornelius the Roman centurion (Acts 10). What made these individuals distinctive was not so much what they possessed but their committed relationship with God, in spite of their wealth.

Besides the above examples of rich and powerful individuals who did not let wealth and power hinder their relationship with God, there is also the example of those who let their riches keep them from surrendering their lives to Jesus. A well-known example is the rich young man who rejected Jesus’ invitation to follow Him after he inquired about what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Despite the rich young ruler’s rejection of Jesus’ invitation, Mark 10:21 says that Jesus still loved him. Just because Jesus asked him to sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor before following Him does not mean that rich people cannot be His disciples. In this particular case, the problem was that this wealthy young man’s riches were an obstacle to the surrender of his heart to God. The young man’s heart was so captivated by his great wealth that it became the object of his fundamental allegiance.

The Timing of Our Message Matters
After his healing from leprosy, Naaman made two requests that would completely sound out of place today: (1) he requested to take two mule-loads of earth from Israel back to Syria as a sign of his commitment to worship no other god but the living God, the one Israel worshiped \((2 \text{ Kings 5:17})\); and (2) he asked for permission to bow down with his king in Rimmon’s shrine, not as an act of worship but as part of his job description. He was, after all, the king’s right hand man and needed to be at his side wherever he went \((2 \text{ Kings 5:18})\).

If these two requests were not strange enough, Elisha’s response to Naaman’s request will be troubling in many missionary circles today: “Go in peace” \((2 \text{ Kings 5:19})\). Elisha’s astonishing response was not an encouragement for Naaman to continue idolatrous practices. Elisha most probably trusted that God would continue to work in Naaman’s life. By his confession, Naaman had made a huge step forward in his spiritual journey. God Himself had orchestrated his encounter with Elisha. Elisha saluted that progress and probably thought it wise not to proceed too quickly to other faith matters that Naaman was not yet ready to accept.

The same teaching principle is found in John 16:12, where, after three and half years of mentoring His disciples, Jesus tells them that He still has many things to reveal to them but...
that He is not going to do so because they are not yet ready
to grasp them. Jesus knew their capacity for understanding new
truth. He chose to reveal to them only what He thought was
essential for them at the moment, leaving the rest to the
ministry of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Ellen G. White
advises, “While the teacher of truth should be faithful in
presenting the gospel, let him never pour out a mass of matter
which the people cannot comprehend because it is new to them

Part III: Life Application

A significant portion of human existence revolves around money:
earning it, spending it, saving part of our earnings, and giving
some, first and foremost, as tithes and offerings. Money, and
especially how we relate to it, should not be taken lightly.
Rich people are not the only ones faced with the danger of
becoming mesmerized by earthly possessions. Poor people also
can become slaves to the little they have or to the desire to
acquire more to the point where they may be in danger of losing
sight of eternity.

As Christians, it is important that the way we relate to
money and all that it can afford does not hinder our relationship
with God. Here are two things we need to keep in mind in relation to money: (1) the fragility of earthly investments: all the acquisition the world has to offer (pleasure, security, power, etc.) is fleeting; and (2) on the day we appear before God and render an account of our lives, we will be evaluated by the health of our souls rather than by the wealth of our estates. Because God is no respecter of persons, He still longs for rich and powerful people to become Christ’s disciples. What God cares about most is not what is in a person’s hand, but what is in his or her heart. Bible examples of rich and powerful people teach us that this category of people can also be receptive to the gospel. It is the responsibility of committed believers both to pray that God will directly intervene in the witnessing process in order to reach powerful unbelievers and also to avail themselves to the Holy Spirit to become bridges to reach them.
Part I: Overview

In His farewell speech before ascending to heaven, Jesus commissioned His disciples to be His witnesses among people of every nation of the world (Matt. 28:19). “Nations” in Matthew 28:19 refers not to nation states but to “people groups.” A people group refers to a group of individuals that have a common sense of history, language, beliefs, and identity. There is no human society on earth where the gospel of Jesus should not be presented and where disciples should not be made for Him. Frontline mission agencies, such as Global Frontier Missions and the Joshua Project, estimate that there are about 17,446 people groups in the world, with more than 7,400 of them considered to be unreached by the gospel. In other words, 42% of the world’s people groups lack indigenous communities of Christians who are able to evangelize, without an external witness, the rest of the people groups. Ninety-five of the least reached people groups by the gospel are spread across the 10/40 window, an area mostly populated by tribal people, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and the non-religious. Some of these people
groups have little or no access to the gospel. People not yet reached by the gospel also exist in Western nations, due to the widening impact of secularism.

**Part II: Commentary**

**Paul: A Versatile Missionary**

This week’s study introduces us to witnessing to people who have nothing, or very little, in common with Christians in terms of religious beliefs and values. People of diverse ethnic origins and many dissimilar religious commitments live and share public life together. Because of their unique set of worldview assumptions, these people have different spiritual needs and aspirations. It is within this multireligious world that we are called to share our faith and make disciples for Christ. At first sight, this task is daunting. It necessitates venturing out of our religious comfort zones, with their jargons and codes; reevaluating our attitudes (stereotypes and biases) toward people with perspectives other than our own; and learning new evangelistic approaches. As if that were not enough, many non-Christians do not view Christianity favorably. Fortunately, we have in the Bible precedents of missionary endeavors to reach such people.
After his conversion to Christianity, Paul demonstrated untiring commitment to the propagation of the gospel to all nations. However, Paul approached his audiences differently, depending on whether they were Jews or Gentiles. In comparing what he said to the Jews at a synagogue in Antioch (Acts 13:13-43) with his presentation of the gospel to a Gentile audience at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:16-33), we see that Paul showed a great deal of sensitivity to his given situation, as well as to his audience. In Antioch, Paul quotes Scripture to build his case that Old Testament prophecies find their fulfillment in Jesus. In Athens, Paul begins with what his Gentile audience was the most familiar with: the altar to the unknown God and sayings of their own poets, instead of a series of Bible passages. Paul uses what his audience knows to speak to them about “the Lord of heaven and earth” who created everything. Without condoning the Athenians’ beliefs, Paul commends them for being religious. This positive statement about his audience might have been intended to secure their interest in the rest of his speech. Although he was deeply disturbed by the multiplicity of their idols, Paul was restrained in his behavior. Any display of anger and accusations against these people who had no knowledge of God’s special revelation would have deprived him of a precious opportunity
to present the gospel to them. It is important to note that
Paul’s sensitivity to the Athenians’ life situations did not
prevent him from calling them to repentance.

The above point is best illustrated by Mark Allan Powell’s
2004 publication of the results of his research on the impact
of people’s daily realities on their reading and interpretation
of Scripture (see Allan Powell, “The Forgotten Famine: Personal
Responsibility in Luke’s Parable of the ‘Prodigal Son’” in
Literary Encounters with the Reign of God, Sharon H. Ringe and
H. C. Paul Kim, eds. [New York: T & T Clark, 2004]). In the first
phase of this research, Powell surveyed two groups of seminary
students, one in the United States and the other in St.
Petersburg, Russia. The experiment consisted of asking the
students to read the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32,
close their Bibles, and then recount it from memory as
accurately as possible to one another in their respective
groups. Powell discovered two major differences in the oral
recounting of this parable. On one hand, while only six percent
of the American students remembered the famine mentioned in
verse 14, 84 percent of the students in St. Petersburg referred
to it. On the other hand, 100 percent of the American students
emphasized the prodigal son’s squandering of his inheritance,
whereas only 34 percent of the Russian students remembered this
detail. For the American students, the mention of the famine seems to be an extra detail that adds nothing fundamental to the story. Because they had no recent recollection of famine, they all emphasized the squandering of wealth as irresponsible behavior. However, for the Russian students, who lived and interacted with some of the survivors of the 900-day Nazi army siege to the city of St. Petersburg, in 1941, which triggered a famine that killed up to 670,000 people, the mention of the famine was a significant detail that added a lot to the story. This experiment is a good illustration of the need to adapt our message to our audience, both in style and content, just as Paul did with the Athenians.

Need for Innovation in Mission Praxis

Compared to his contemporaries, Paul was unconventional in his approach to ministry, especially in Athens. He could even be described as avant-garde when it came to the need to be versatile and adaptive in mission. His unique missionary qualities are desperately needed today. The modern-day Areopagus exists in different parts and forms in many urban centers. It could be a city square, a park, a street corner, a shopping center, a university amphitheater, or a café. The church needs members with corresponding gifts, talents, personalities, and
creativity, empowered and released for ministry in such
centers. Members who are equipped to enter into nontraditional
spheres, as well as engaged non-Christians, should be entrusted
with the latitude to explore new ways of sharing the gospel,
even if these ways appear at first to be unorthodox.

God’s asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the son through
whom God promised to make him the father of many nations, was
unconventional (Genesis 22). Elisha’s telling Naaman to “Go in
peace” after Naaman made his two strange requests (2 Kings 5)
was very unsettling at best (see last week’s lesson). God’s
telling Isaiah to roam the streets of the city naked for three
years, declaring a message of doom for Judah’s allies, was
really bizarre (Isa. 20:2-4). Think about the embarrassment
Micah might have felt when God asked him not only to walk around
naked, but to howl like a jackal and moan like an owl (Micah
1:8)! In light of these biblical precedents, “When read in its
context, the Bible offers many statements and examples that show
God’s approval for methods of mission that may go against the
grain of our comfortable practices. Broad reading and the clear
texts of the Bible . . . suggest that God is more open and
creative than we are. If that is the case, we should not be quick
to condemn that which is different or uncomfortable.”—Jon
Paulien, “The Unpredictable God: Creative Mission and the
Biblical Testimony,” in A Man of Passionate Reflection, Bruce L. Bauer, ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University, 2011), p. 85. Instead of continuing to plow the mission fields with traditional methods, we need to be flexible, resourceful, and openminded in regard to new, and even unfamiliar, approaches to God’s mission. Mission originated with God and remains His provenance. We therefore need to be dependent on Him. As King Jehoshaphat did, let us always turn to God, saying, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you” (2 Chron. 20:12, NIV). If we are sincere, God will reveal His will to us. Maybe His way will not be conventional to us just as Jehoshaphat was instructed to send his army to war with singing. But one thing is sure: doing mission and ministry God’s way, and with God’s power, will accomplish His salvific purposes of reaching all segments of society.

Part III: Life Application

All humans are influenced, and limited, by the assumptions of their cultures and their worldviews. That important fact should be taken into consideration in our presentation of the gospel. Paul’s ministry offers us a good example of outreach to
non-Christians. Below are a few basic principles meaningful to our mission to those who have not been exposed to the gospel:

1. People’s cultures, with their deep-seated worldview assumptions, are their only frame of reference. People cannot be confronted with things that are beyond their frame of reference and be expected to respond positively to them. It is, therefore, essential to always be sensitive to the daily realities of the people to whom we witness.

2. We need to act with restraint and respect in our attitude toward non-Christians. We can get significant insights about non-Christians by studying their belief systems and talking to them for the sake of finding common ground that could be used as points of contact for presenting the gospel.

3. We should also focus on our audience’s felt needs and aspirations and show them how Christ answers them. We should not allow our own cultural perspectives to get in the way of how God wants to introduce Himself to non-Christians through us. It is important that, in presenting the gospel, we refrain from assuming that our audience knows what we know about God, cares about values we care about, understands the concept of sin as we do, and feels guilty and in need of God’s forgiveness.
4. Finally, we need to guard ourselves against watering down our message in the process of adapting it to our audience. The gospel is meant to challenge aspects of all worldview assumptions that are not in line with Scripture.
Part I: Overview

Although the Gospel according to Matthew was written specifically for a Jewish audience, the presence of Gentiles near Jesus is a recurring theme in its narrative, sometimes in contrast to the devotion of Israelites. For example, while the Magi (Persian astrologers) come a long way to honor Israel’s true king, the chief priests and scribes (Herod’s wisemen) make no effort to do so. A Roman centurion’s faith is praised by Jesus as greater than that of Israelites (Matt. 8:10). The Gentile execution squad is the first to confess Jesus’ divine Sonship after His crucifixion (Matt. 27:54). In this distinctive way, Matthew highlights three things: (1) God’s redemptive plan has always included all the nations on the earth; (2) Gentiles are not insensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit; and (3) laying aside ethnic, cultural, and religious prejudice to love and serve others, as Christ did, is a prerequisite to effective cross-cultural ministry. Thus, apart from being a call to global mission, Matthew’s Gospel is also a message of ethnic reconciliation in Christ.
The other Gospel writers also highlight notable interactions of Jesus with Gentiles: He extended His outreach to the Gentile region of the Gadarenes (Mark 5:1), He healed a Roman centurion’s servant (Luke 7:1-10), and He ministered to a Samaritan city (John 4). Jesus’ interactions with foreigners revealed that the Kingdom of God is for all nations, Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus demonstrated in practical ways that God has always been concerned with extending His love and forgiveness to all nations.

Part II: Commentary

God’s Missionary Heart for the Nations During Old Testament Times

God has always desired a covenant relationship with all human societies. He was concerned, not only with saving Israelites, but, through Abraham, God wanted His redemptive grace to be extended to every nation (Gen. 12:1-3). The calling of Abraham to be a blessing to all nations singularly indicates that the inclusion of these nations in God’s redemptive plan was not an afterthought. Said differently, God’s desire for the Gentiles (the nations of the world) to experience His salvation was not His Plan B. Centuries later, after the call of Abraham, God
extended the same call to Abraham’s biological descendants (Israel) to be a nation of priests to all nations (Exod. 19:6).

On numerous occasions God reminded Israel that they were chosen not because they were the best among the nations (e.g., Deuteronomy 7) but because God loved them. Israel was chosen to be the vehicle through which other nations would come to know and worship God. Israel was to be a light to the rest of the nations. In Jeremiah 2:3, Israel is referred to as the first fruit of God’s harvest, meaning there was a larger harvest outside of Israel. Right from the time that God called Abraham to be His flag bearer, His plan was to bring salvation to both Jews and Gentiles alike. Israel, as a nation, was, therefore, not chosen by God to the exclusion of every other nation. The account of the Old Testament is punctuated with stories of Gentiles who embraced the God of Israel as their God. Examples include Rahab, Ruth, Uriah the Hittite, and the Queen of Sheba.

Although God chose Israel as a nation to be His representative, He did not leave the mediation of His redemptive plan only to them. In many other ways, God unrelentingly revealed Himself to people of other nations. Ellen G. White makes the following important observation: “Outside of the Jewish nation there were men who foretold the appearance of a divine instructor. These men were seeking for truth, and to them
the Spirit of Inspiration was imparted. One after another, like stars in the darkened heavens, such teachers had arisen. Their words of prophecy had kindled hope in the hearts of thousands of the Gentile world.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 33.

Melchizedek, a Canaanite priest-king, is one such non-Israelite to whom God reached out without the intermediary of other humans. Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High (El Elyon). The account of Melchizedek’s encounter with Abraham in Genesis 14:14-24 is very instructive. Abraham identifies his God, Yahweh, with El Elyon in three ways. First, he conjoined the two divine names—Yahweh and El Elyon—in a gesture that suggests they point to the same God (Gen. 14:22). Second, Abraham gave Melchizedek’s description of El Elyon to Yahweh: Maker of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:22). Third, Abraham’s acceptance of Melchizedek’s blessings and his gift of his tithe to the Canaanite priest suggest that Abraham legitimized Melchizedek’s priesthood (Gen. 14:19, 20). God had chosen Melchizedek “to be His representative among the people of that time, although he belonged to the Canaanite Community.”—Jacques B. Doukhan, Genesis, Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary, 2016, page 214.

It is important to note that God’s unrelenting missionary outreach to His creatures in various ways does not make
believers’ involvement in mission irrelevant. Matthew 28:18-20
and 1 Peter 2:9 point out that making disciples for Christ is
our fundamental reason for existence both as a church and as
individual believers. It is a privilege for us to be co-laborers
with God in what He could accomplish perfectly well without our
participation. Also, knowing that God is ahead of us, preparing
the ground for the sowing of the gospel seed, is another
incentive to accept the privilege He graciously extends to us
to be part of His team.

God’s Missionary Heart for the Nations in the New Testament
As noted above, although most of Jesus’ public ministry was
conducted in Jewish territory, the number of His personal
encounters with Gentiles recorded in the Gospels is remarkable.
Jesus goes as far as stating that He has other sheep outside
of the Jewish community (John 10:16). Through the life and
ministry of Jesus and His commissioning of His followers to make
disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8), the early
Christians gradually understood that God’s covenant promise to
welcome not just the descendants of Abraham, but people of all
other nations as His heirs, would be enacted through the witness
of the Church. With the conversion of Cornelius’s household
(Acts 10), something new broke into the life of the nascent
Christian community. That event and the subsequent lengthy deliberation on the meaning of this new thing that God was doing (Acts 15) convinced the early church that the admission of the Gentiles into the commonwealth of believers, as full beneficiaries of God’s redemptive work in Christ, was ordained by God. As such, there was nothing they could do to invalidate this divine decree. Rather, it was now their responsibility not to overlook anybody in the sharing of the gospel.

As the inclusive people of God, called out of every nation to constitute one spiritual entity (1 Pet. 2:9), the Church was called, enabled by the Holy Spirit, and commissioned to execute the missionary task of being the light of the nations, which Israel as a nation had failed to become. 1 Peter 2:9 therefore makes clear that the entire Christian community is God’s particular possession from among all the peoples of the earth. This verse combines the assertion of the identity of believers as God’s elect and holy covenant people with their responsibility of proclaiming the wonderful acts of God to all who have not yet surrendered their lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Convinced of his apostleship to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13, Rom. 15:16, Gal. 2:7) and boosted by the proceedings of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), Paul dedicated the bulk of his
ministry to the Gentiles. His unfailing commitment to this mission propelled the gospel outside the borders of the nation. God’s aim for commissioning Paul to the unreached Gentiles was to show that His offer of salvation is for all people.

Part III: Life Application

Knowing God’s intention for every people group to experience His salvation, we are called to take up His mission. Just as Israel, as a nation, was mandated to be a light to the Gentiles, we as Christians—or spiritual Israel—are also commanded to be God’s ambassadors to people who have not yet accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior (Matt. 28:18-20, 2 Cor. 5:20). Clearly, Christ’s disciples have an obligation to the unreached. The good news is that we do not necessarily have to go to the ends of the earth to find the unreached. There are, in every context of life, people who have not yet responded to the gospel. They may be our next-door neighbors, our colleagues, our classmates, our customers, our patients, or our students. We may encounter them as immigrants, refugees, international students, diplomats, or international businesspeople. Whatever the social, cultural, and religious background of the unreached people we encounter and minister to, we need to acknowledge that we cannot effectively minister to any group of people without
first freeing ourselves from stereotypes, prejudice, and
discrimination toward them. We, therefore, need to pray that
God will liberate us from any such prejudice.
Lesson 12

Part I: Overview

The book of Esther is unique for several reasons. One of those reasons is the lack of an explicit reference to God. Nowhere is God mentioned in the entire narrative’s sequence—not by the Jewish characters, the story's heroes, or by the non-Jewish characters. And yet, despite this oddity, the book contains valuable wisdom for those who follow Jesus and desire to share their experience with God in a world where many are not open to explicit expressions of faith.

Often when people in the church think about, or discuss, mission, they focus on explicit faith-oriented actions, whether evangelistic meetings, distribution of faith-based literature, giving Bible studies, or other forms of outreach. These things require a certain level of freedom and connection to a community to foster any meaningful transformation. But what about places where government doesn’t allow faith-based activities? What about areas where people are entirely uninterested in such activities? Often the church ignores such settings. But places that fit this description make up a substantial portion of the
world’s population. This week, through the lens of Esther and Mordecai, we will see that God desires us to be creative in our witness, even in places and spaces that are not open to overt mission work.

Part II: Commentary

The story of Esther and Mordecai, much like the stories of Daniel and Joseph, is a reminder to the followers of God that they do not need to be pastors or religious leaders to serve the mission of God. These stories are in Scripture to demonstrate that, through public service, government officials, and other government agencies, the people of God can serve and impact society in such a way that they draw people toward the love of God.

In the case of Esther and Mordecai, they were able to save the lives of thousands of people by being faithful to the values and wisdom passed on to them through their Jewish ancestors. Often when we read biblical stories, we gloss over the details, not always recognizing the intensity presented in some of the situations, as in the case of Esther and Mordecai. What Esther and Mordecai faced was an extraordinarily stressful and precarious situation. For them, preaching sermons or involving
themselves in direct missional activity would not have served
the larger mission of God, which was to draw people into loving
relationships. What was needed was the courage to stand for life
in the face of death. They took this stand in a context in which
they were part of a minority group, under-appreciated in the
empire. Yet, through God’s influence and the willingness of
Esther and Mordecai to make wise decisions in connection with
God's overall plan for humanity, the queen and her adoptive
father were able to be a blessing to people and to be part of
a moment in history that was passed down via the pages of the
Bible and the practice of the festival of Purim (Esther

Many, reading this Bible study guide, are living in places
where they have significant religious freedom and do not have
to worry about their lives being threatened if they reveal their
faith. Others around the world do not have this luxury. Numerous
followers of Jesus currently live in situations where an open
adherence to God would land them in prison or endanger their
lives and the lives of their families. Despite this danger, some
of these people actively work in places of influence. God calls
them to live out their faith in ways that may not seem like
mission to many of us. It’s possible that the best way for these
people to serve God is to avoid openly expressing their faith.
Instead, their quiet work in the background impacts how people are treated, helping them to flourish. This work is no less important than the explicit gospel presentations that others make in situations in which they have more freedom. The courage required to stay faithful in situations in which you cannot do so openly is often demonstrably remarkable. Only in the New Earth will we know the impact that such people have had on countless lives worldwide.

There is another missional lesson to be learned from the story of Esther and Mordecai. Neither Esther nor Mordecai were trained theologians or trained pastors. They were regular people who had come to be in positions that were significant within the empire of the day (Esther 2:7). Little did they know how vital their roles would be. What is clear from the story is that both Esther and Mordecai worked and lived with a sense of integrity (Esther 2:19-23; Esther 4:15, 16). Despite the challenges that life threw at them, they remained dedicated workers for God and developed reputations for their diligence and honesty (Esther 6). As a result, when the activities of people around them (specifically Haman and his minions) conspired against them, their reputations became crucial to their survival.
If either Esther or Mordecai had not habitually been responsible people who served those around them with integrity, the story would have been very different. Their integrity gave them the platform from which to ask for favors and speak openly when it was a matter of life and death (Esther 5:8; Esther 7:3, 4). And they were not only heard at that moment, but they were listened to (Esther 8).

Herein lies the lesson for us today. Most followers of Jesus are not employees of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Even fewer occupy positions such as a pastor, teacher, or chaplain. Yet, according to the story of Esther and Mordecai, it is often not the official workers who have the most significant amount of influence in a community. Usually, the average church member, who may work in secular businesses or for a civil service entity, has the greatest missional potential. We must never underestimate the role our relationships with people may have in the long run. The history of the mission of God is full of stories, many untold, that resemble Esther and Mordecai’s. While most followers of Jesus may not be in such high-profile positions as Esther and Mordecai were, they are still in places and spaces to which pastors and other people employed by the church have no access.
In those spaces and places, a person’s reputation for maintaining a high level of integrity and carefulness on the job will draw people to him or her in relationships of respect that create the possibilities for numerous influential opportunities. Sometimes explicit references to God are not what is needed to draw people toward the life that God desires for all humanity. It is essential to remind ourselves of this reality and remind the people around us, as well.

If a person were to tally up all the stories in the Bible about faithful followers of God, they would be surprised at how many of the stories are about everyday people living out their faith in everyday settings. The Bible demonstrates that God’s mission is for all people and that any person can be a participant in that mission. It does not necessarily require that a person leave behind his or her career in a field other than church work. In fact, in most cases, what is needed is for more people to see their existing places of work as their mission field. This understanding does not always require that they explicitly evangelize their co-workers. It often means that they work with honesty and integrity, allowing the relationships that come from such an approach to blossom naturally. There is a high chance that the people who implement such an approach will periodically find themselves in
situations that require courage and decisions that have an impact far beyond themselves. Living in a relationship with God will prepare them for such situations.

Part III: Life Application

The church must pray regularly for those who live in places where an open adherence to their faith is dangerous. The church should pray that God will give those in such places the courage to live out their faith through appropriate expressions in their given settings. The church should regularly intercede at the throne of grace for those who are in situations without freedom, praying that somehow, through their influence, they may get a glimpse of the love of God and the life God wants for all humanity. Setting aside a week each month in the church for more intentional prayer along these lines would be very valuable.

Together we need to creatively encourage all followers of God who are not official church employees. We need to recognize their service through the different avenues of influence they have. The church should also invest in training that focuses on helping church members see how their work can be missional without necessarily requiring explicit witnessing. The General
Conference has resources and personnel who have thought explicitly about, and practiced, “tentmaking” approaches in mission, who may serve as contact persons for such training. Prayerfully considering in more intentional ways how the members, in their regular jobs, can be mission-oriented would drastically change how the gospel would spread around the world.
Part I: Overview

The Second Coming of Jesus, which leads to the re-creation of this earth, is the culmination of the biblical story. Revelation 21 and 22 could be described as the ultimate “happy” ending. And in some sense, this is an accurate interpretation. From this perspective, the Second Coming and the new earth are the end of God's mission. The end is an eternal life of happiness and joy with God. In another sense, this ending is not the “end” but the beginning, or continuation, of what God intended for humanity and for the earth, a beginning in which the redeemed deepen their understanding of God and His character throughout eternity.

It may be helpful to think of God’s revelation of Himself in three phases, with each phase requiring different definitions of “mission.” (1) The first phase comprises the world’s creation and God’s interaction with His created beings in Eden. Even in Eden, God’s mission was to reveal, through loving relationships, who He was. But sin altered this reality, leading to the world we dwell in, a world full of misery, pain, suffering, and death. (2) This great change required God’s
mission to take on new elements, most specifically the need for
the Incarnation, leading to the life, death, and resurrection
of Jesus. The Incarnation makes possible the future reality of
the new earth. (3) The final phase of God’s mission reaches its
climax at the Second Coming.

But the Second Coming is not the end of humanity or God's
story. Eternal life would be meaningless if the Second Coming
heralded only the end of this earth’s history. Instead, eternity
is a new beginning of infinite possibilities.

**Part II: Commentary**

As Seventh-day Adventists, we rightfully emphasize the Second
Coming in our churches and in our evangelism. The world
desperately needs the message of hope that the Second Coming
provides. Equally important is the biblical description of the
new earth, which is not some heavenly realm in the clouds but
rather a re-created earth that in many ways resembles our
current world. The significant difference between the new earth
and this earth is that there are no longer problems from sin
and death.

From the time Adam and Eve chose to follow a path contrary
to the loving way shown by God, humanity and the earth, as a
whole, have faced suffering and death. Such a fate was not what God intended for humanity, but it was a possibility in a world of free will, which is required in order for love to exist. For us in the world today, we currently find ourselves in this phase of God’s mission. God’s mission has included revealing Himself in numerous ways to the people of the earth throughout history, as the Bible attests. The ultimate manifestation took place in the Incarnation of Jesus, the Son of God, on earth (John 1:1-14). A crucial part of God’s mission was completed during the Incarnation, namely the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which make eternal life possible for humanity.

Despite Jesus’ extraordinary act of love and redemption about 2,000 years ago, we still find ourselves mired in the horror of this world. God’s mission to lead us into eternal life in a re-created world is still in the future. The fulfillment of what God did through the Incarnation will find its most profound actualization in the resurrection of the faithful, who will be translated, along with the those who are living in relationship with God, when Jesus comes again (1 Cor. 15:12-34). Even this outcome is not the final fulfillment of God’s redemption. That event occurs when the earth is re-created, as described in Revelation 21-22.
God’s mission is relationally centered, and it is in Revelation 21 and 22 that we, as readers, get a glimpse of God’s relational desire to be with us in a more tangible form for eternity. Revelation 21 and 22 speak about God dwelling with humans face-to-face on earth (Rev. 21:3, Rev. 22:4). This cohabitation of the divine with humanity is the end goal of God’s current mission related to us. It is beyond our imagination to feel and understand what living with God face-to-face will be like, but from the description in the Bible, it is something beautiful that should inspire those who read it to want a relationship with God now.

From this perspective, it could be argued that God’s mission is completed in the new earth. Indeed, the plan of Redemption has played itself out at this stage. And yet, at some level, it seems God’s mission continues beyond what we as humans can even fathom. Is the new earth the end or the beginning? In short, it is both.

As humans, we must keep in mind that we are created beings. As a result, we can never claim to be all-knowing as God is. Such a realization entails that humans will be eternal learners, constantly growing in understanding who God is and who we are in relation to God, one another, and the earth. Therefore, if we define the mission of God as being God’s desire to reveal
His love to humanity and have that love creatively replicated, then God’s mission would have no end, but is, rather, an eternal, ongoing reality.

This understanding fits the biblical description of God more accurately, rather than claiming the new earth to be the end of His mission. Instead, the new earth is a new beginning that builds on what has come before, but eternally changes toward deeper and more meaningful relational love. In this sense, God’s mission is an eternal activity in which we have the privilege of participating. Thus, the end of a particular phase of God’s mission occurs at the Second Coming. But this ending leads into the next phase of God’s mission. So, the new earth is not simply a completion, but rather a continuation.

The new earth phase of God’s mission also is a time of abundance and joy, fulfilling what John 10:10 claims is God’s purpose for humanity. The description of the new earth is one of diversity, with people from all different cultural backgrounds making up the population (Rev. 21:24). Under divine inspiration, John the Revelator describes the redeemed joyfully eating and drinking together, partaking of the fruits of the tree of life and of the living water flowing from God’s throne (Rev. 21:6, Rev. 22:2). The new earth is a place that gives the impression of creativity beyond our wildest imagination. God
will be there among humanity, interacting with us, creating new ideas, and showing love in new ways alongside us. No wonder, then, that John’s reaction was an urgent plea for God to come quickly (Rev. 22:20). The same desire inspires us today to share with others the good news of God’s plans for the redeemed in eternity.

Part III: Life Application

Seventh-day Adventists pride themselves in having the message of the Second Coming front and center in their identity. This message is something for which we should be thankful and share with the broader world around us. There is no doubt that this message is one that the world desperately needs to hear.

But the truth about the Second Coming goes beyond sharing a message. Humanity also needs to see what it means to live in the present with the hope of the Second Coming and of the new earth. Believing in the biblical description should lead to more than evangelistic sermons but to a radically different way of living in the present. Those who read Revelation 21 and 22 and understand the relational beauty it portrays should be drawn into this kind of life now. There are limits due to the impact
of sin and death, but these constraints don’t preclude the possibility of sharing glimpses of the new earth. For those who have experienced the love of God firsthand and believe in the promises of Scripture, eternal life begins now.

When the hope of the Second Coming and the reality of the new earth become part of our way of living, we as believers will experience daily life from a perspective of hope in the midst of a world that can seem hopeless. This perspective can aid the believer in experiencing and sharing joy and peace, which will be manifested in kindness, patience, and gentleness toward others. Such a perspective also can inspire humanity to use their talents and gifts to creatively live out God’s love, as He intended for humanity from the beginning. Living such a life of love now demonstrates recognition on the part of the faithful follower of God that His way is a path toward abundant life. Moreover, this choice indicates that God’s followers would enjoy the experience of the new earth to its fullest.