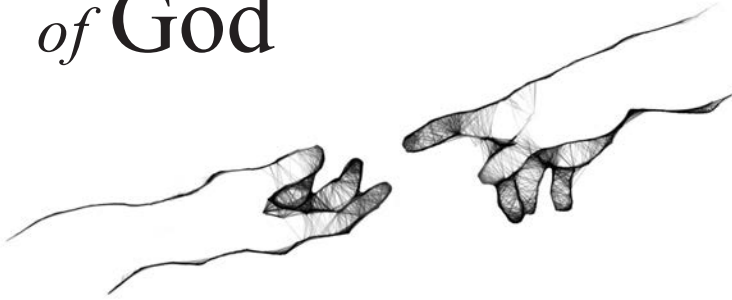


# The Missionary Nature of God



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 1 John 2:16; John 3:14, 15; 2 Cor. 5:21; Matt. 5:13, 14.*

**Memory Text:** “See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples’ ” (*Isaiah 55:4, NIV*).

Our world is a mess, and as humans we are the big reason it is such a mess. And that's because we are sinners, fallen creatures whose nature, at the core, is evil. However much we like to think of ourselves as advancing, as improving, the history of the past century isn't too encouraging. And here we are, not even a quarter of the way into this century, and things don't look that bright from here either. If the past is a precursor to the future, all we can expect, to quote a former British politician, is “blood, toil, tears, and sweat.”

All is not lost though. On the contrary, Jesus Christ has died for our sins, and through His death we have the promise of salvation, of restoration, of all things being made new. “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (*Rev. 21:1, NKJV*).

We have not been left alone, abandoned in the infinite expanse of a cold and apparently uncaring cosmos to fend for ourselves. We could never do it; the forces arrayed against us are so much greater than we are. That's why God had the plan of salvation in order to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 4.

## God Created Man and Woman

One of the perennial questions humans have asked is, Where do I come from? In the first two chapters of the Bible (in fact, all through the Bible), we have been given the answer to what many would consider the most important question a person can ask. After all, only by knowing where we came from are we off to a good start in knowing who we are, why we exist, how we are to live, and where we are ultimately going.

**Skim** through Genesis 1 and 2 but focus especially on Genesis 1:26–28. What great differences appear in the creation of humanity as opposed to everything else seen in the texts? What is it about humans that stands out from other parts of this creation?

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1. Man and woman were created last of all the creatures. They had the whole visible Creation in front of them to study and care for.

2. God’s mode for creating man and woman differed from that of the other creatures. Up to this point, the divine command had been, “Let there be” (light, firmament, water, fish and birds, animals, etc.). Now the command was turned into consultation: “Let us make man . . .” The Three Persons of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—consulted about it. Though these two chapters deal with the creation of the earth and the creatures on it, there’s no question that the main focus is on the creation of humanity itself.

3. Man and woman were created in God’s image and likeness, something not said about anything else that was created at that time. Though the text doesn’t say what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God, it must mean that humans in some way reflect the character of their Creator. Because humans have a moral capacity not seen in other creatures (butterflies might be beautiful, but they don’t struggle with questions of right and wrong), to be made in the likeness and image of God surely means that to some degree humans must reflect His moral character.

4. Man and woman were to have dominion, to represent God on earth, and rule over the rest of Creation. This calling entails responsibility.

**Humans are introduced in the Bible in the first chapter, but not in isolation. We exist, but in relationship to God. What does this tell us about how central God should be to our lives and why we are not really “complete” without Him? See also Acts 17:28.**

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## Free Will

Embedded in the Creation account is the warning God gave about not eating from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (*Gen. 2:9*). So, right from the start, we can see the moral element granted humanity, something not seen in any of the other living creatures. As we said yesterday, the capacity for moral judgment is one way that humans reveal the image and likeness of God.

**What** does Genesis 2:15–17 say about the reality of free will in humanity?

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God could have created humans so that they automatically do His will. That is the way the other created things, such as light, sun, moon, and stars, were made. They obey God without any element of choice. They fulfill the will of God automatically through the natural laws that guide their actions.

But the creation of man and woman was special. God created them for Himself. God wanted them to make their own choices, to choose to worship Him voluntarily without being forced to. Otherwise, they could not love Him, because love, to be true love, must be freely given.

Because of its divine origin, human free will is protected and respected by God. The Creator does not interfere with the deepest, persistent choices of men and women. Wrong choices have consequences, sometimes very terrible ones, too, but it is against the character of our Sovereign Lord to force compliance or obedience.

The principle of human free will has three important implications:

*For religion:* an omnipotent God does not unilaterally direct individual will and choices.

*For ethics:* individuals will be held morally accountable for their actions.

*For science:* the actions of body and brain are not wholly determined by cause and effect. Physical laws are involved in our actions, but free will means that we do have a choice regarding our actions, especially moral ones.

**What are some of the free moral choices you have to make in the next few hours, days, or weeks? How can you be sure you are using this sacred gift in the right way? Think through the consequences of the wrong use of it.**

## The Fall

**“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Gen. 3:6, 7, NIV).**

Eating a little fruit was not a sinful act in itself. However, we have to consider the circumstances in which it was carried out. Adam and Eve were agents with free will, made by God in His image. This included the freedom—but also the duty—to comply with God’s expressed will. They ate the fruit, not out of any stern necessity but rather by choice. It was an act of Adam’s and Eve’s own free will in defiance of God’s clear and specific instructions.

Likewise, we must choose for ourselves whether or not to follow God and whether to cherish or to defy the Word of God. God will not force anyone to believe His Word. He will never force us to obey Him, and He can’t force us to love Him. God allows each of us to choose for ourselves which path we will follow. But, in the end, we must be prepared to live with the consequences of our choices.

By eating the fruit, Adam and Eve, in effect, told God that He was not the perfect ruler. His sovereignty was challenged. They proved disobedient, and as a result, they brought sin and death to the human race.

“So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:23, 24, NIV).

Adam and Eve had to leave Paradise. It was a necessary yet merciful consequence. The Lord would not allow rebellious humanity access to the tree of life. With loving care, He kept Adam and Eve away from the fruit that would make them immortal and thus perpetuate the terrible condition into which sin had brought them. (Imagine what eternal life would be like in a world filled with such pain and suffering and evil as ours is!) Adam and Eve were driven out from the lovely Garden to work the less friendly ground outside (vss. 23, 24).

**In the context of today’s study, read 1 John 2:16. How were the elements that were warned about in this text seen in the Fall? In what ways do we have to deal with these same temptations in our lives, as well?**

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## God’s Initiative to Save Us

The Bible shows that after the Fall of our first parents, it was God who came looking for them, not vice versa. On the contrary, the man and woman tried to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord. What a powerful metaphor for so much of the fallen human race: they flee the One who comes looking for them, the only One who could save them. Adam and Eve did it in Eden, and unless surrendered to the wooing of the Holy Spirit, people are still doing the same thing today.

Fortunately, God did not cast aside our first parents, nor does He cast us aside either. From the time that God first called out, “ ‘Where are you?’ ” to Adam and Eve in Eden (*Gen. 3:9, NKJV*), until today, He is still calling us.

“In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus.”  
—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 68.

Of course, the greatest revelation of God’s missionary activity can be seen in the incarnation and ministry of Jesus. Though Jesus came to this earth to do many things—to destroy Satan, to reveal the true character of the Father, to prove Satan’s accusations wrong, to show that God’s law can be kept—the crucial reason was to die on the cross in the place of humanity, in order to save us from the ultimate result of sin, which is eternal death.

### **What** do each of these texts teach us about the death of Jesus?

*John 3:14, 15* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Isa. 53:4–6* \_\_\_\_\_

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*2 Cor. 5:21* \_\_\_\_\_

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God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us” (*2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV*). That is what it took in order for us to be made “the righteousness of God in Him” (*NKJV*). This idea has been called the “great exchange,” Jesus taking on our sins and suffering as a sinner so that we, though sinners, can be counted as righteous before God as Jesus Himself.

## Metaphors of Mission

Mission is God’s initiative to save lost humanity. God’s saving mission is motivated by His love for each one of us. There is no deeper reason for it. God sent Christ on a mission to bring salvation for the whole world. John’s Gospel alone contains more than forty declarations of the cosmic dimension of Jesus’ mission. (See, for example, *John 3:17, 12:47.*) As Christ was sent by the Father to save the world, He in turn sends His disciples with the words “ ‘as the Father has sent me, I am sending you’ ” (*John 20:21, NIV*).

**Read** Matthew 5:13, 14. What are the two metaphors used for mission in these texts, and what do they stand for?

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The metaphors of salt and light express core functions of Christian influence on humanity. While salt operates internally, joining the mass with which it comes in contact, light operates externally, illuminating all that it reaches. The term “earth” in the salt metaphor refers to men and women with whom Christians are expected to mix, while the phrase “light of the world” refers to a world of people in darkness and in need of illumination.

The children of Israel were encouraged to live up to the moral principles and health rules that God had given them. They were to be a light, illuminating and attracting—you are “a light for the Gentiles” (*Isa. 49:6, NIV*). Their collective existence in a state of health, prosperity, and loyalty to God’s Sabbath and other commandments would proclaim to the surrounding nations God’s mighty acts of Creation and Redemption. The nations, observing their prosperity, would approach them and learn to be taught of the Lord. (That was the idea anyway.)

When Christ came, He also talked about salt, another way to witness. By their influence in the world, Christians are to curb the world’s corruption. Unbelievers are often kept from evil deeds because of a moral consciousness traceable to Christian influence. Christians not only have a good influence on the corrupted world by virtue of their presence in it, they also mingle with people in order to share the Christian message of salvation.

**How good of a witness are you and your church to the surrounding world? Is the light dimming? Is the salt losing its punch? If so, how can you learn that revival and reformation begin with you, personally?**

**Further Study:** We have dealt with some aspects of the missionary nature of God. Mission is an enterprise of the triune God. Mission is predominantly related to Jesus Christ, whose Incarnation is central to Christian faith and mission. By His life and death, Jesus has paved the way for the salvation of all the human race. We, as His followers, His missionaries, have to let people know the good news of just what Jesus has done for them.

“The church of Christ on earth was organized for missionary purposes, and the Lord desires to see the entire church devising ways and means whereby high and low, rich and poor, may hear the message of truth. Not all are called to personal labor in foreign fields, but all can do something by their prayers and their gifts to aid the missionary work.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 29.

### Discussion Questions:

**1** Think more about the question of origins. Why do origins matter? How does a proper understanding of our origins help us to better understand who we are and what the purpose of our existence really is?

**2** How does the following quote help us to understand the existence of free will, love, and evil in our world? “Thus, if God wants to create loving creatures (in imitation of his perfect love), God has to create free beings who can cause suffering and evil in the world by their choices. The dynamics of love and freedom require that God allow us the latitude to grow in love through our human freedom. God’s only alternative to allowing free beings to choose unloving acts is to completely refrain from creating loving creatures.” —Robert J. Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy*, Kindle Edition (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), p. 233.

**3** The death of Jesus was a single act that occurred in a small nation amid the vast Roman Empire almost two thousand years ago. Yet, this act is of eternal significance for every human being. What responsibility rests on us, who know about this act and what it means, to tell those who don’t know about it? How else will they learn of it if those who know about it don’t tell them?

# The Gun Would Not Fire: Part 1

by MAX DE LOS REYES, THE PHILIPPINES

Fernando Lopez grew up in a town 60 miles south of Manila. Like many in the Philippines, Fernando's family didn't have much money. And like many young boys, Fernando quit school to help his parents by selling small items and running errands.

Fernando was active in his church, which helped to ease the boredom he often felt. More than anything, Fernando longed for an education so he could serve God better, but he knew that, humanly speaking, this wasn't possible.

Then one day, Fernando heard about the 1000 Missionary Movement, a program to train volunteer missionaries who serve God for one year in the Philippines or in one of several countries. Excited, Fernando asked his parents' permission to join. With their blessing, he applied and was accepted.

The training Fernando received helped to fill his desire for education and prepared him to serve God somewhere in the Philippines. When the training phase ended, he eagerly awaited his assignment to a territory but had mixed emotions when he learned that he was assigned to work in an area some four hundred miles from his home.

Fernando arrived in his new field and began seeking out those who were interested in learning more about God. Soon he was giving several Bible studies a week. Some of the people taking Bible studies lived in a small settlement in the mountains, a four-hour ride by bicycle from where he stayed.

Despite the hardships, Fernando became so involved in his work that he often spent most of his small monthly stipend to buy materials to build a Seventh-day Adventist church, leaving him without money to buy food. This tested his faith and prepared him for even greater tests that would come. But throughout his experience, his faith in God did not waver.

One of Fernando's converts was Julie Taguinod. She and her sister, Essie, had studied the Bible with Fernando and then attended his evangelistic meetings. Julie and her sister had been baptized recently in spite of the objections of Julie's husband, Lem.

Fernando knew of Lem's objections to his wife's interest in religion. Lem had forbidden Julie to attend church and had threatened to harm her if she continued going. But Julie had stood firm and continued to attend church. Fernando appreciated her sincere desire to honor Christ. And Lem began to ignore Julie's church attendance. Perhaps he realized that his objections would not stop his wife from following Christ.

*To be continued in next week's Inside Story.*



## *The Lesson in Brief*

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▶ **Key Text:** *John 17:18*

▶ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize that God’s mission to restore fallen humanity flows from His very nature; the all-powerful, all-loving Creator God of the universe is the God of mission.

**Feel:** Respond with a deep sense of gratitude to God’s relentless pursuit of His created beings.

**Do:** Undertake to place his or her talents and gifts at the service of the God of mission so that men and women everywhere will acknowledge and worship their Creator.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

### I. Know: Our God Is Extroverted.

**A** We teach our children that “God is love.” How does our understanding of God’s nature deepen to also remember that “God is missional”?

**B** The Father sent His Son into the world on a redemptive mission, and He also sent the Holy Spirit to continue Christ’s work. How does this insight into the “sending dynamic,” within the very triune Godhead, help us to appreciate Christ’s prayer, “ ‘As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world’ ” (*John 17:18, NKJV*)?

### II. Feel: Our Mission DNA

**A** How does your sense of responsibility for outreach increase when you consider how central mission is to understanding the God we serve?

**B** At the same time, how do you feel when you reflect on the fact that mission belongs to God—that even though He invites us to share in mission, the outcome of our efforts ultimately rests in His hands?

### III. Do: We Have Been Sent.

**A** How have we sometimes tended to define mission narrowly, thus missing opportunities for involvement?

**B** Be willing to pray, “Here am I, send me.”

▶ **Summary:** God’s nature draws Him to seek us, to reveal Himself to us, and to draw us into a relationship with Him. Down through the ages, He has invited men and women to become His agents in this grand mission drama. How will we respond to His invitation today?

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *John 20:21*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The grand narrative of God’s interaction with humanity is *mission*. Our God is a God of outreach. Through millennia, He has relentlessly pursued a relationship with His created beings. Just as God sent Jesus into the world as His ultimate “mission Agent,” so Christ gave His followers a critical mission assignment—to make God’s glory known through words and actions. How have we answered God’s call to mission?

**Just for Teachers:** When we think of the attributes of God—holiness, omnipotence, justice, compassion—we sometimes forget another essential characteristic: “missionary”—that is, God wants to be known and is actively working to reveal Himself to humanity. He is “extroverted” by nature. Today, explore this aspect of God’s personality with your class, prompting each member to ask, *How can the mission impulse that flows from God’s nature find practical expression within my church and in my everyday life?*

**Opening Discussion:** We naturally assume that today’s Internet culture is rapidly shrinking our globe. It seems self-evident that as we travel the vast online information superhighway we’ll bump up against people from many different cultures and backgrounds, and our worldview will expand.

But does this theory match reality? Some studies suggest that the way many of us use the Internet actually serves to maintain an insular worldview. We choose what’s comfortable rather than what’s thought-provoking. In short, we build a standardized online network that reinforces, rather than challenges, our existing worldview.

God intends His church to be the ultimate worldview expander. Through Scripture, He’s given us a big-picture view of the great controversy between good and evil and His redemptive plan for the world. Yet, the culture within our church can serve to either focus us outward on God’s mission or to focus our attention inward on our own interests and needs.

When we acknowledge God’s essential missionary nature, we embrace a mission-focused worldview. We won’t be content with a church that’s merely a social club for saints. We’ll want it to be a launching pad for mission.

How does a mission-focused worldview shape:

- Our relationship with other members of our church family?
- Our perception of the church’s activities and programs?
- Our relationship with members of our broader community?

## ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Take the opportunity this week to explore the full biblical picture of God’s missionary nature. Often we concentrate on the New Testament, where God’s mission is clearly portrayed in the life of Jesus and in the early church. But the roots of God’s mission run deep into the Old Testament, and there are riches to be unearthed in God’s plan revealed as far back as Abraham, Moses, and the later prophets.

### Bible Commentary

#### I. A Missionary God (Review Matthew 5:13, 14 with your class.)

It has always been God’s desire to bring salvation to all His children. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible depicts Him as a seeking, searching, redeeming God. Throughout the Bible—from the Israelite nation to the early church—we see God’s efforts to enlist His followers in the same mission, to be salt and light to the people around them.

In Deuteronomy 10:19, the Israelites are instructed to love those who are aliens. Later, the psalmist proclaims to God, “All the nations belong to you!” (*Ps. 82:8, NRSV*). And Micah paints a beautiful vision of what Israel’s influence on its surrounding nations should be: “Many nations will come and say,

‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths.’  
The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (*Mic. 4:2, NIV*).

In the book of Isaiah, God’s missionary call to all the nations is clear: “ ‘Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other’ ” (*Isa. 45:22, NIV*). In chapter 56, Isaiah pictures God’s temple becoming a “house of prayer for all nations” (*vs. 7*). And God says, “ ‘And my blessings are for Gentiles, too, when they commit themselves to the LORD. Do not let them think that I consider them second-class citizens’ ” (*Isa. 56:3, NLT*).

God’s mission vision was larger than His people’s—which perhaps extended to the hope of reconciliation between Judah and Israel. But that was only a small part of God’s plan for His people: “ ‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept,’ ” He says (*Isa. 49:6, NIV*). The larger plan was this:

“ ‘I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth’ ” (*vs. 6, NIV*).

Isaiah further prophesied that one day there would be “an altar to the LORD in the heart of Egypt”—idolatrous, immoral, superstitious Egypt (*Isa. 19:19, NIV*). But if that weren’t enough, Isaiah also prophesied that the brutal Assyrians would join Egypt in forsaking their gods:

“The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth” (*vss. 23, 24, NIV*).

Sadly, too often Israel indulged in syncretism with, rather than mission to, the surrounding neighbors. Again and again, the prophets called them from immorality, self-indulgence, and disregard for the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the aliens in their midst.

The Hebrew verb “to send” (*shelach*) is found nearly eight hundred times in Scripture. While its usage is most often found in a variety of nontheological phrases, it is used more than two hundred times with God as the subject of the verb. In other words, it is God who commissions His people, and it is God who sends.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ To what extent do we resemble Israel in being so preoccupied with our own needs that we overlook mission?
- ❷ Israel’s understanding of its mission role ultimately fell short of what God intended. In what ways could our vision for mission today be less ambitious or less expansive than God intends?
- ❸ The Seventh-day Adventist Church has long identified itself as a “mission movement.” What attributes does this imply? What characteristics would not be consistent with a mission movement?

## ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Do we treat mission as just one activity among many other equally important church activities? Or are we clear that mission is “what it’s all about”? Challenge your class to take a fresh look at the values and priorities that drive your congregation.

**Life Application:** Reflect on the following statement by Adventist missiologist Jon Dybdahl: “Jesus did not create a church and then give it mission as one of its tasks. The divine sending plan comes prior to the church. Mission gives birth to the church and is its mother. . . . If the church ceases to be missionary, it has not simply failed in its task, but has actually ceased being the church.”—*Adventist Mission in the 21st Century* (Hagerstown Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1999), pp. 17, 18.

**Application Questions:**

- ① How do you react to the following idea? “It’s misleading for us to speak of the ‘church’s mission.’ We don’t own mission; God invites us to participate in *His* mission.”
- ② What practical difference does it make that God’s mission preceded the church? What does it mean for how we set our priorities and use our resources? Does this change the way we think and feel about the outcome of mission? Does it change the way we understand God’s purpose for us? For our local congregation?

**Activity:** Draw two columns on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper. Ask the class, “Would a visitor attending Sabbath services at your church know immediately that this is a mission-minded church?” In one column write a list of those practices already in place that clearly reveal the mission orientation of your church. In the other column draw up a list of specific changes your church could make to better reflect the missionary nature of God.

**►STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** When we talk about mission, we sometimes focus on the technicalities. We talk about “unentered territories” and “contextualization,” and we focus on demographics and statistics. While these practicalities are important, how could they cause us to sometimes lose sight of the “why” of mission? Conclude your class today by focusing on the ultimate purpose of our witness: to reveal the awesome majesty and praiseworthiness of God.

**Activity:** Ask three class members to read aloud Psalm 67:1–5, Jude 1:24, 25, and Revelation 15:2–4. Give the class a minute or two to reflect silently on the image of God these passages present. Then ask, “How do you personally respond to these passages? What feelings do they evoke?”

Ask the class to divide into groups of two or three to pray for the Holy Spirit to help us:

1. Catch a clearer vision of God’s endlessly loving and pursuing nature.
2. Find ways to engage in mission, personally and corporately, that will more effectively glorify our Creator and lead others to worship Him.