

Mission OF GOD:

LEADER GUIDE



A Bible Study
from
Mission of
Christ Network

John L. Mehl, Author

MISSION
OF CHRIST
Network

Mission of God: A 7-Week Bible Study

Lesson 1: Sent for Relationship

Key Truths: Mission is God’s sending work for the sake of reuniting His family. God – who sent the prophets, who sent His Son, and who sends the Holy Spirit – is also sending the Church for the sake of restored relationships.

Now What? Spend some time praying for lost siblings, both those you know by name and those you have not yet met. Pray also for God to align your perspective of mission to His.

Lesson 2: Old Testament Sending

Key Truths: From the beginning, God’s purpose for Israel was to call the nations to Himself. As the new Israel, the Church today is also called to be a kingdom of priests and light for the world.

Now What? Pick either the image of “priest” or “light” – whichever one you connected with more today. What is one way that you want to live out this role this week?

Lesson 3: Sending the Unlikely

Key Truths: God uses the most unlikely of people to be His missionaries. The mission is His and the power comes from Him and His Word, so there is no one He can’t use to be an agent of His grace!

Now what? Pray about the things that make you feel like an unlikely choice to be God’s missionary in the world. Ask God to show you how He can work through your uncertainties and insecurities. Consider people in your life you might think of as unlikely to believe the Good News about Jesus. Pray for a heart of love for all people and for greater trust in the power of God’s Word to change any heart.

Lesson 4: New Testament Sending

Key Truths: The New Testament describes a sending Church that is called to go out into the world to serve and proclaim the Gospel. God’s Mission is for all people, and He sends us out as His ambassadors.

Now What? What is a specific way that you can be Christ's ambassador this week? Where do you have the opportunity to appeal for spiritual reconciliation, declare God's praises, or live a good life in a way that brings glory to God?

Lesson 5: God's Kingdom and the Church

Key Truths: God's Kingdom is His reign in the world, His presence, power, and mercy with and for us. As citizens of God's Kingdom, believers are brought into a new and restored relationship with God and a new relationship with the world. The Church is vital for evangelizing and discipling believers as well as sending them out into the world.

Now what? Where do you have a chance to intentionally "gossip" the Gospel this week? Pray for God to open moments in everyday conversation for you to share the Good News with others.

Lesson 6: Blessed to Be a Blessing

Key Truths: God has chosen us and given us His blessing for the purpose of proclaiming His goodness and blessing to the world! The Mission is all in God's control, but He chooses to work through us, His resurrected people, in all of the stations and relationships we have in life.

Now What? What is one truth from this study about your identity, security, or purpose that you want to hold onto this week? What is one relationship in your life that you want to focus on this week as a place to be part of God's Mission? Pray about this individually or with a small group.

Lesson 7: Let God Be God

Key Truths: Only God can give faith and only God can save. We don't know exactly how God will use us, but we know that He will. We walk by faith – working hard and moving out to go where the fish are – but trusting in God to do His mission.

Now What? Think back over all the lessons of this Bible study series. What are 3 key takeaways for you? What are 2 specific action steps that you want to take in response to these takeaways?

Sent for Relationship

Opening Discussion:

How would you answer if someone asked you, “What do Christians mean when they talk about *missions*?” (Consider all the questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why?)

Allow small groups or tables a short discussion time to begin thinking about this topic with no expectation of having a formal answer.

It may be worth pointing out the various definitions from Merriam-Webster and how these have changed over time.

1: a specific task with which a person or a group is charged [including a military mission, space mission, or a company mission]

*2: CALLING, VOCATION
Her mission was to be a teacher.*

3: a body of persons sent to perform a service or carry on an activity

4: a ministry commissioned by a religious organization to propagate its faith or carry on humanitarian work

5 obsolete: the act or an instance of sending

Part 1: Relationship in Creation

Our God is a God of relationship. *In His creation, we see His relationship with His creation.*

Genesis 2:18 – “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’”

He created humans to be in relationship with one another.

Genesis 3:8a – “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”

He created humans to be in relationship with Him. He came and visited with them in Eden and spoke with them face-to-face.

Discuss: What types of relationships do we see in the Garden of Eden? Describe these relationships.

We see God’s relationship with His people which is close and intimate. We see people created for relationships with each other, relationships which are perfect and open - “fit” for each other. Elsewhere in Genesis 2, we also see people’s relationship with creation, a relationship of caretaking, and God’s relationship of perfect caretaking for creation.

Part 2: Sin Breaks Relationships

Genesis 3:8b – “And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

Matthew 15:8-9 (Is. 29:13) – “‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”
Sin continues to break that relationship and the LORD bemoaned this.

Matthew 23:37 – “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

Discuss: How have you seen sin break relationships in your own life or the lives of others? Consider both broken relationships with other people and with God.
Take any answers but encourage participants to be honest and specific. Sin is not just a matter of abstraction or arbitrary rules. It has real, personal consequences in our lives and between us and God.

Part 3: God Wants His Family Back

God wants his family back. The LORD wants the relationship restored, and so He becomes a sending God. He knows that with the relationship that is broken, HE must do the sending. He must come to mankind.

It begins with Adam and Eve. He comes into the garden and seeks them out. He could have very easily pushed the restart button on creation, but He loved Adam and Eve (and us!) so much that He came to them.

Genesis 3:9 – “But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”

Discuss: How is Genesis 3:9 a word of Gospel?
This is pure Gospel. Even before the promise of a Savior, we see that God sends himself to Adam and Eve. “Where are you?”

Then in Genesis 3:15, He promises the Savior who will repair the broken relationship.

Genesis 3:15 – “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring: he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Discuss: Have you ever lost a child momentarily or been estranged from a family member? What was that like?

How does it affect your view of God and missions to think of Him as a Father trying to bring His family back together? How does it affect the way you think about unbelievers if they are our lost siblings?

This is an intensely personal view of God and His Mission. It's not about a jealous God demanding worship but a loving Father longing for and seeking after His children. And if we are God's children, then our longing for mission is a longing to see our lost brothers and sisters brought back into the family! How can we not long to see our family reunited?

Part 4: A Sending God

Throughout the rest of Scripture we see God sending prophets, judges, kings and others.

The sending of Christ: *This is the peak of God's sending work!*

John 1:14 – “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 17:18 – “**As you sent me into the world**, so I have sent them into the world.”

The sending of the Holy Spirit:

John 14:26 – “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

John 15:26 – “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”

The sending of the Church:

John 17:18-23 – “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

John 20:21 – “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’”

Discuss: What difference does it make to see God's sending of the Church into the world in the context of all these other sendings?

Sending is part of the very nature of God. From the time Adam and Eve sinned, God knew He would have to be the one to act to restore the relationship. When we, as the Church, go out as part of God's Mission, this is not our work and not something we do on our own. We're not going anywhere God isn't already at work. We go as one piece of God's

sending work throughout time and creation! We fall within the sweep of His hand.

Part 5: The Word Mission

Our English word “mission” comes from the Latin word “send.”

- *Mittere* is the verb form. We see this in the word “intermittent” as in “not continues sending.”
- *Missio* is the noun form. We see this in our word “mission” as in “the mission to the moon.”

In the English Standard Version of the Bible, the word “mission” is used in its different forms 990 times in all kinds of ways, but often with God sending (and not just sending people).

Jeremiah 9:16 – “I will scatter them among the nations whom neither they nor their fathers have known, and I will **send** the sword after them, until I have consumed them.”

Joel 2:19 – “Behold, I am **sending** to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.”

Amos 8:11 – “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “when I will **send** a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.”

Psalms 111:9 – “He **sent** redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name!”

Conclusion: Mission is God’s sending work for the sake of reuniting His family. God – who sent the prophets, who sent His Son, and who sends the Holy Spirit – is also sending the Church for the sake of restored relationships.

Now what?

- Spend some time praying for lost siblings, both those you know by name and those you have not yet met. Pray also for God to align your perspective of mission to His.

A Luther Quote to Ponder:

“For whatever remains of your life, live as those sent by Christ. It is the office of everyone to instruct his neighbor, etc. And this power is not given clergy alone ... but to all believers. When you have performed this highest work, seek to become Christ’s apostle, to serve all people, so that they may come unto God as you have.” LW 69:336

Old Testament Sending

Opening Discussion:

Where do you remember seeing missions in the Old Testament? Who was engaged in God's Mission and whom was God seeking to reach?

Allow small groups or tables a short discussion time to begin thinking about this topic with no expectation of having a formal answer.

Part 1: Abraham's Blessing

Genesis 22:17-18 – "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your **offspring** as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your **offspring** shall possess the gate of his enemies, and **in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed**, because you have obeyed my voice."

We tend to think of "offspring" as all the physical descendants of Abraham, but the singular offspring in verse 18 who will defeat enemies and bless the nations of the earth points us to The Offspring – Christ (see Gal 3:16, below). This reminds us that God's promise is not just physical but spiritual blessing for the spiritual Israel; in your offspring (in Christ!) will everyone be blessed. The Offspring is for all the nations.

Galatians 3:16 – "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' who is Christ."

Discuss: Who does the action of blessing here and for whom is this blessing given? What do these verses tell us about the purpose of God's relationship with Israel?

All throughout God's Word we see that God uses His people in order to help unbelievers come into relationship with Him. With Abraham we see that God made him a blessing. Note that it is God who does the verbs here. Abraham didn't make himself a blessing.

We don't have a tribal God! Abraham is not just the father of Israel. All who trust in Jesus are part of the spiritual Israel. Abraham's seed is to be a blessing to ALL NATIONS. The purpose of God's choosing Israel for a special relationship with Himself was for the sake of all the nations of the earth and the salvation that would come through Christ.

Part 2: Other People Grafted In

Exodus 12:37-38 – "And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. **A mixed multitude also went up with them**, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds."

In the Exodus from Egypt, many non-Jews were grafted into Israel! These are people of faith. Israel was porous. God used Israel to call other people to Himself.

Part 3: A Nation of Priests

In fact, we see that the LORD calls the Children of Israel His priests who proclaim to the nations.

Exodus 19:4-6 – “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, **for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

This was before the Levitical Priesthood was established.

In the New Testament we read that God still considers his people to be priests.

1 Peter 2:9 – “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Discuss: Do you think that the church and all her members see themselves as priests? What does it look like to be a priest in this sense?

This is a precious identity of closeness with God and a responsibility of service to the church and world. Consider various roles of the priesthood: praying and interceding, speaking God’s Word to the people, offering sacrifices. Discuss practical ways for all believers to fulfill these roles.

Part 4: Foreigners Drawn to Israel

In Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple, he blurred the lines between the children of Israel and the foreigner:

1 Kings 8:41-43 – “Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name.”

The “sojourner” stays & “foreigner/alien” goes home. Solomon sees the temple as not just something for Israel, but a mission tool that helps even the foreigner have a relationship with the LORD. Israel is a witness.

In Micah we see that the LORD described Israel as a place to which the world will come:

Micah 4:1-2 – “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

In Ezekiel the spiritual Israel is described as a cedar where birds of every kind can nest:

Ezekiel 17:22-24 – “Thus says the Lord God: ‘I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.’”

Paul, missionary to the Gentiles, also emphasized that the Old Testament Scriptures said the Messiah was for all people:

Romans 15:8-12 – “For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, ‘Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.’ [2 Sam. 22:50] And again it is said, ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.’ [Deut. 32:43] And again, ‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.’ [Ps. 117:1] And again Isaiah says, ‘The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.’ [Is. 11:10]”

Discuss: We might be tempted to see the Old Testament as all about Israel while the New Testament expands the Gospel to include the nations, but clearly the Old Testament also talks about God's love for and mission to the nations. Why is this important for us to recognize?

Missions to the end of the earth is not a new theme in the New Testament. God has always been concerned with the salvation of all people. The purpose of Israel was to draw the nations to God, even though they often didn't recognize this. Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel who is the true mountain of the house of the Lord to which all people are drawn and the true cedar where all can rest.

Part 5: A Light for the Nations

The Promised Messiah:

Isaiah 49:6 – “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

The Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:14-16 – “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Discuss: Do you think the Church sees itself as a “light for the nations?” What does it look like to be this light?

Once again, push for specific examples of what it looks like to be this light. Point people toward the purpose of the light in both passages - to spread God’s salvation and to bring glory to the Father.

Conclusion:

From the beginning, God’s purpose for Israel was to call the nations to Himself. As the new Israel, the Church today is also called to be a kingdom of priests and light for the world.

Now What?

- Pick either the image of “priest” or “light” – whichever one you connected with more today. What is one way that you want to live out this role this week?

A Luther Quote to Ponder:

“Therefore God gathers a church in the world not only from the one family of the patriarchs but from all nations to which the Word made its way.” LW 6:227

Sending the Unlikely

Opening Discussion:

Who would you say was an “unlikely missionary” in the Bible? Why?

Allow small groups or tables a short discussion time to begin thinking about this topic with no expectation of having a formal answer.

Throughout the Bible we see that God’s love is for ALL people, and He can accomplish His mission through the most interesting people...

Part 1: Unlikely Old Testament Witnesses

Move relatively quickly through part 1 so you are able to focus on Jonah. Reading through each text should give participants the idea of “unlikely witnesses” without a lot of discussion or instruction being required.

The father-in-law of Moses was Jethro, the Priest of Midian, yet we read this:

Exodus 18:10-12 – “Jethro said, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people.’ And Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God.”

Rahab the prostitute is listed in Hebrews 11 as one of the heroes of faith who helped the spies take down Jericho in Joshua 2:

Hebrews 11:31 – “By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.”

Joshua 2:8-9, 11 – “Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, ‘I know that the LORD has given you the land . . . And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.’”

Ruth was a Moabite and this is her confession of faith:

Ruth 1:16-17 – “But Ruth said, ‘Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.’”

Naaman was commander of the Syrian army, and yet he believed:

2 Kings 5:15, 17 – “And he said, ‘Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel . . . please let there be given to your servant two mule loads of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD.’”

Part 2: Jonah, the Reluctant Missionary

God even uses reluctant people to be His “Agents of Blessing.”

Read Jonah 1:1-2:3.

Jonah does exactly the opposite of what God tells him to do. God tells him to “arise” and go (1:2) and yet every action we see him take in chapter 1 is a movement “down.” What references do you see in these verses to Jonah going down?

Goes down to Joppa (vs. 3)

Goes down into the hold of the ship (vs. 5)

Finally goes down into the water

Tries to flee the presence of God (vs. 3) (Where does he think he can flee to? Is this similar to Adam and Eve fleeing God’s presence?)

When we go against God’s call, the result is upheaval! Things get “pitched about.” What references do you see in these verses to things being thrown?

God throws a storm (1:4)

The crew throws cargo over (1:5)

They throw lots (1:7)

The crew throws Jonah overboard (1:15)

God throws Jonah overboard (2:3)

Discuss: Look at Jonah 1:14-16. What is ironic about this passage? Who is the missionary? Who are the believers and unbelievers?

See the disconnect: Jonah, who knows Yahweh and is called to be His missionary, is thrown overboard. Heathen sailors worship, sacrifice and make vows.

Part 3: Jonah, the Power of God’s Word

Read Jonah 3:1-10.

After three days in the tomb of the fish, Jonah is “resurrected” by vomit and starts his missionary call over again. This time he’s successful – but not by the power of his own preaching...

Isaiah 55:10-11 – “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

Discuss: Look again at Jonah 3:1-5. Jonah’s sermon is 5 words long in Hebrew. Would you call it a good sermon? Why or why not? Why do the people repent? Do we trust God’s Word to be so powerful?

This sermon is all Law. It’s not a good sermon. But – God’s Word is efficacious. Because the people repented, so did God. Isaiah reminds us that God’s Word always has this kind of power to accomplish His purposes!

Part 4: Jonah, a Story about God

Read Jonah 4.

Jonah becomes angry because God is too merciful! Jonah is ready to die. It’s at this point we realize Jonah is really a story about God, about God’s grace to Jonah and God’s grace to the people (and even cattle!) of Nineveh.

All the action of chapter 4 is God’s action. God appoints a plant (4:6). God appoints a worm (4:7). God appoints a scorching east wind (4:8). A prophet cannot co-opt God. God isn’t the property of a prophet.

Discuss: In what ways did God use reluctant Jonah to accomplish His Mission? What other “agents of blessing” (even non-human agents) do you see in the story?

As with Abraham, God made Jonah a blessing. Through their encounter with Jonah, the sailors came to worship God. The whole city of Nineveh repented! But none of this was because of Jonah’s merit. It’s all in God’s control.

Perhaps we can even think of the fish and the plant as agents of God’s blessing!

God can use anyone in His Mission - even the reluctant and unlikely.

Part 5: We, the Unlikely

As we talked about in the Old Testament lesson, our Lord appoints us to be His priesthood and to be light to the world. He makes us His “beautiful feet” who help others to have right relationships with Him.

Isaiah 52:7 – “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’”

Romans 10:14-15 – “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”

Discuss: We know that as believers we are called to be “beautiful feet” who bring the good news of God’s salvation to others, and yet many of us feel like unlikely choices for this important work. What things make you feel like an unlikely choice to be God’s missionary? What difference does it make to think of yourself in the context of all the other unlikely missionaries we read about in Scripture?

Conclusion: God uses the most unlikely of people to be His missionaries. The mission is His and the power comes from Him and His Word, so there is no one He can’t use to be an agent of His grace!

Now what?

- Pray about the things you identified above that make you feel like an unlikely choice to be God’s missionary in the world. Ask God to show you how He can work through your uncertainties and insecurities.
- Consider people in your life you might think of as unlikely to believe the Good News about Jesus. Pray for a heart of love for all people and for greater trust in the power of God’s Word to change any heart.

A Luther Quote to Ponder:

“For God has always been accustomed to collect a church for Himself even among the heathen.” LW 8:135

New Testament Sending

Opening Discussion:

When you think of the Church's mission, do you think primarily of people being drawn into the Church or the Church going out? What difference does this make?

Allow small groups or tables a short discussion time to begin thinking about this topic with no expectation of having a formal answer.

In the Old Testament, most of the mission is done in a way that is centripetal...drawing in. Israel is the priesthood and holy nation that the Lord said they would be in Exodus 19. They were to witness to the world of God's goodness. All people were to look to the God of Israel as we read in Micah 4, "and many nations shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.'" God sending Jonah to Nineveh was a different paradigm, and we saw how Jonah felt about this.

In the New Testament, the mission is centrifugal...going out.

Part 1: God's Mission in the Gospels and Acts

The following Bible passages are meant to give an impression of how pervasive this theme of "going out" is throughout the New Testament. Don't feel a need to talk about each verse. The goal is to read through all the passages back to back to see how this theme builds.

Matthew:

Matthew 9:35-38 – "...pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest..."

Matthew 24:14 – "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations..."

Matthew 28:18-20 – "...Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."

Mark:

Mark 16:15-18 – "And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.' "

Luke: *Jesus is the "sent one" and the "sender."*

Luke 4:18-19 – "... he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Luke 24:46-48 – "[He] said to them, 'Thus it is written ... that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations ... You are witnesses of these things.'"

John:

John 1:1, 14 – "In the beginning was the Word...The Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

John 3:16-17 – "... He gave His one and only Son...in order that the world might be saved through him."

John 17:18 – "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

John 20:21 – “... Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

Acts: *We don't go out alone. We go out in the power of the Spirit.*

Acts 1:8 – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 2:17-18 – “‘And in the last days ... I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.’” *Here in Peter's sermon at Pentecost, he quotes the prophet Joel describing how ALL members of the church will be witnesses.*

Think about: Peter, John, Saul/Paul, Barnabas, Titus, Mark... All of them were sent to go out!

Part 2: God's Mission in the Epistles

God's mercy is for all people:

Romans 5:18 – “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.”

2 Corinthians 5:15 – “And he died for all...”

1 Timothy 2:4 – “...who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

2 Peter 3:9 – “... not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

Galatians 3:28 – “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Revelation 7:9 – “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.”

This mercy is not just for our congregation, our church body, or our country. It's not about “staying at home” and taking care of ourselves.

Discuss: “God's mercy is for all people” may seem like an obvious truth, but we often as a Church don't live as if we believe this. In what ways have you seen the Church (and yourself) worry more about taking care of our own than about proclaiming God's mercy for ALL people?

The conversation can address the question on a few levels: 1) the North American Church as a whole 2) your congregation specifically 3) individual hearts and actions. Push toward specific, personal reflection as a church and as individuals as much as group dynamics will allow. This question is not meant to be a bashing of the Church but a gentle probing and reflection upon where we are.

How much of our time, money, energy, programs, etc. are spent on inreach versus outreach? What kinds of outreach activities are attractional in nature (designed to draw people into our church doors to hear the Gospel) and which are missional (designed to send our people out into the community with the Gospel)? How can we be more missional as a Church?

We might not have Jew/Gentile or slave/free divisions, but what other divisions show up in the Church?

What are some ways we categorize “us” and “them”? Is the Church focused on sharpening divisions between denominations, between those inside the church and those outside, or between different groups in society (be it race, economics, educational background, or some other category)? Or are we focused on drawing people of all backgrounds toward Christ?

We are God’s ambassadors:

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 – “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation ... entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

1 Peter 2:9-12 – “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

Discuss: What is an ambassador and what do they do? What does it look like to be Christ’s ambassadors both individually and as a church?

Ambassadors are going people. They are sent to represent and do the work of their government, country, company, etc.

Encourage people in answering this question to think about some of the specific phrases in these Bible passages: “the message of reconciliation,” “making his appeal,” “proclaim the excellencies,” “keep your conduct honorable.” Connect each of these things to our witness in the world.

Closing Discussion:

1. Georg Vicedom says, “We actually have a pleasure-seeking Christendom, which exhausts itself in edification and constructing, but never becomes the living building [Eph. 2]. So long as the ministry of the office is performed only under the aspect of taking care of the church, it can have no influence on the outside world.” *Mission of God*, CPH 1965.
 - a. What do you think he means by “a pleasure-seeking Christendom”?
 - i. *Much has been written comparing Christian churches in the West to hospices that merely keep Christians comfortable until they die and “collect their eternal reward,” leaving Christians free to live their lives for themselves, chasing whatever dreams they may have for this life. Is this the case? Are we just concerned with getting people baptized and into heaven with no concern for how they live their lives?*
 - b. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
 - i. *Take all answers and encourage thoughtful discussion. Consider listing various activities of the church and dividing them into those that “take care of the church” and those that “influence the outside world.” What do you notice from this?*
2. When Jesus sent out the Twelve, he told them to heal, raise the dead, and cast out demons along with their preaching of the Good News (Mt. 10:8). What impact is the Church in North America having in service to our communities? What examples of this outward-focused serving have you seen in your church or community? How is this a blessing both for the good of the community and for the preaching of the Gospel?
 - a. *Talk both about places that this service to the community is lacking and places where you have seen it done well. Encourage people to highlight good examples and praise God for these! When the Church goes out in love and service, there is immediate benefit for our community (something God cares very much about – “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile” Jer. 29:7), and this also opens doors for the Gospel by creating relationships and credibility for speaking the Good News into people’s hearts and lives.)*

Conclusion: The New Testament describes a sending Church that is called to go out into the world to serve and proclaim the Gospel. God's Mission is for all people, and He sends us out as His ambassadors.

Now What?

- What is a specific way that you can be Christ's ambassador this week? Where do you have the opportunity to appeal for spiritual reconciliation, declare God's praises, or live a good life in a way that brings glory to God?

Luther Quote to Ponder:

"Whoever you meet, bring here!" 'Go out!' The apostles did this until the table was full. And this continues still every day, and the servants will continue to do so until the end of the world."

WA 15:714.35ff, Luther on Matthew 22:9-10

God's Kingdom and the Church

Opening Discussion:

In our last lesson, we talked about the New Testament Church being sent into the world. Some people might hear this and conclude that there is no need for gathering. We should shut down church buildings and just go out and be the Church. How would you respond to this?

Allow small groups or tables a short discussion time to begin thinking about this topic with no expectation of having a formal answer. Refrain from giving too much input at this time.

Part 1: The Kingdom of God

Matthew 3:2 – “Repent, for the **kingdom of heaven** is at hand.”

In other words, “the power that conquers sin, death, and the devil is at hand”

Matthew 9:35 – “Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the **gospel of the kingdom** and healing every disease and every affliction.”

Matthew 24:14 – “And this **gospel of the kingdom** will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Discuss: What is the Kingdom of God? How would you explain this phrase?

Let students discuss openly, noting themes from the verses above: repentance, teaching, healing, testimony. Don't expect for them to have a formal definition, just see where they are at and what they're thinking about.

In Lutheran catechetical terms the Kingdom of God is:

- Power (*the power of our omnipotent Creator at work*)
- Grace (*God's grace to the Church universal making us a priesthood of believers and citizens of heaven*)
- Glory (*in the last day, we will see the glory of the Kingdom in eternity with God*)

All of these things are true, but they can lead us to focus only on the future Kingdom rather than seeing the Kingdom of God at work among us now.

We can't subdivide the Kingdom and expect it only on the last day. The Kingdom of God is God active today in and through us – healing the sick, bringing peace now, speaking the forgiveness that we receive and give to one another. In the Gospels, we see Jesus do these things face-to-face with real people. This is not something we're just waiting for later on. The Kingdom of Heaven starts today.

When we hear the word “Kingdom,” we might be tempted to picture a location with boundaries. Another way to talk about the Kingdom is to talk about the Reign of God (see Jeff Gibbs’s commentary on Matthew).

Discuss: What if we think about it in terms of the **Reign** of God? What does it add to your understanding of these verses from Matthew if you read them using the phrase “Gospel of God’s Reign” instead of “Kingdom of Heaven” or “Gospel of the Kingdom”? *“Reign” speaks not just about a location, but rather God’s presence, power, and mercy with us. This Kingdom Reign is relational, rather than territorial. It’s holistic, not just spiritual. Repentance is acknowledging God’s reign rather than our own. The Reign of God is good news of God’s powerful and merciful presence that is for all the world.*

The Kingdom of God = The Reign of God

Note: All of these things are going on today! The Kingdom is living and active, not just cerebral or future.

- God’s reign/kingdom is outside our thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)
- God’s reign/kingdom is a gift. (Ephesians 2:8)
- God’s reign/kingdom is rescue. (Luke 4:18-19)
- God’s reign/kingdom is yesterday, today and tomorrow. (Psalm 145:13, Luke 1:33)
- God’s call to His reign/kingdom includes repentance and justification. (Luke 24:46-47, Mark 1:15)

The reign of God comes crashing into a world where Satan is the prince of this world, breaking through the darkness. This Kingdom is not just spiritual but whole and complete restoration.

Discuss: What does the Kingdom/Reign of God have to do with God sending us out as part of His Mission?

God’s reign comes crashing in through us and through the proclamation of the Gospel. We are both citizens and ambassadors of this Kingdom. Because we have received the gifts of God, we seek to share them with the world through the sharing of Christ. Vocation is not just daily tasks but pointing people to the Savior.

Part 2: Living in God’s Kingdom

Many of God’s gifts come to everyone: *(1st article gifts)*

Matthew 5:45 – “...For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

But living in God’s Kingdom also means new and different gifts:

Philippians 3:20 – “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...”

Matthew 6:25, 32-33 – “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ... For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Romans 5:1-2 – “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

Discuss: What is different about being in the Kingdom of God? What gifts come only to those who are citizens of God’s Kingdom and why are these gifts important?

Being part of the kingdom of a perfect, holy, all-powerful King destroys worry and offers true and lasting peace. It means having a positive relationship with the Creator and being at peace with God. It means a new citizenship with new rights and new allegiances.

Part 3: Kingdom, Church, and Mission

Acts 2:42 – “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Hebrews 10:25 – “...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Matthew 28:20 – “...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Acts 17:11 – “Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”

Discuss: Why do we as established believers need the Church? And why do new believers need the Church?

- *The Church is an instrument used by God to proclaim His Word. The Church is where the Word is rightly proclaimed and the Sacraments administered. (AC 7) In the Church we have proclamation, but also hearing and receiving the Sacraments.*
- *New Christians need to be brought into the Church to be connected and fed regularly.*
- *The Church keeps all believers from “going off the rails.” Heresies are always important because they strain our relationship with God. We need theology that keeps us focused on Christ and on what God has done for us.*

Even as we seek to evangelize the world, the world is evangelizing us. What kind of “evangelism” from the world leads people away from Christ and God’s Word? How can the inward evangelizing and discipleship work of the Church counteract this?

Lots of possible answers. Encourage discussion. What’s important is to recognize that the world is actively looking to draw us into fellowship with itself and it is actively preaching to us a message other than the Gospel of Jesus.

Ephesians 4:11-13 – “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **to equip the saints** for the work of ministry, **for building up the body of Christ**, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...”

Acts 4:20 – “for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

Romans 10:14-17 – “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? **And how are they to preach unless they are sent?** As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ **So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**”

Discuss: What is the role of the Church in God’s Kingdom and His Mission? How is the gathering together of the Church essential to sending out believers into the world?
The Church is present in the world, but not of the world. The Church is where members come to be drawn into fellowship with our Lord through Word and Sacrament and then sent out into the world to share what they’ve received. If the goal of God’s Mission is to make Jesus followers who are also witnesses, then we can’t just go out into the world and proclaim the Gospel. We also need to nurture and disciple believers in the Church and equip them for going out.

The early church “gossiped” the Gospel in marketplaces and at work. How can the Church better equip individual believers for sharing the Gospel in the world?
Each member of the church is sent out into the world. Each believer is called to impart the Word through person to person interactions. This Gospel sharing is not just what we do but who we are! This is a big topic. Push for practical and specific suggestions. This is a great chance to hear from the congregation where they feel they need more equipping!

“God’s Church doesn’t have a Mission; His Mission has a Church.” (Ed Stetzer, *Christianity Today*)

The Church “must pass [the Gospel] on if she wishes to keep it, otherwise it will die.” (Georg F Vicedom, *Mission of God*, p. 96)

Discuss: What do both of these quotes say about a) why the Church is necessary and essential – but also b) why the Church can’t only be concerned with inward-focused care for herself?

First quote: The end goal is not the growth of the Church but the accomplishing of God’s Mission. The Church is essential to this Mission; it’s how God has chosen to grow, strengthen, and equip believers for living as His people.

Second quote: By her very nature, the Church is part of the Body of Christ whose purpose is the salvation of all people. To refuse to participate in Christ’s sending by keeping the Gospel for herself is to cut herself off from Christ and His work. To cut oneself off from Christ is death.

Conclusion: God’s Kingdom is His reign in the world, His presence, power, and mercy with and for us. As citizens of God’s Kingdom, believers are brought into a new and restored relationship with God and a new relationship with the world. The Church is vital for evangelizing and discipling believers as well as sending them out into the world.

Now what?

- Where do you have a chance to intentionally “gossip” the Gospel this week? Pray for God to open moments in everyday conversation for you to share the Good News with others.

A Luther Quote to Ponder:

Luther’s Large Catechism on the Second Petition, Thy kingdom come:

“This we ask, both in order that we who have accepted it may remain faithful and grow daily in it and in order that it may gain recognition and followers among other people and advance with power throughout the world.”

LC 2nd Pet.

Blessed to Be a Blessing

Opening Discussion:

What does the word “bless” really mean? The first definition of the verb “bless” in most dictionaries is “to make holy or consecrate.” What are some times when we do this as a church? A second dictionary definition describes the verb “bless” as conferring prosperity or happiness. How does this fit with the phrase, “I’m blessed” or the use of “#blessed?”

Allow small groups or tables a short discussion time to think about these questions with no expectation of having a formal answer.

Note: We bless as a church when we set something aside for use by the church. The Lutheran Service Book “Agenda” has 70 pages of blessings from “Blessing of a School” to the “Blessing of a Creche” and everything in between.

Part 1: Abraham’s Blessing and Us

Genesis 12:2-3 – God told Abraham, “And...I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

When we receive the Aaronic blessing at the end of a church service we hear, “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:24-26)

Discuss: How do these verses fit with the definitions of blessing we looked at earlier? As we think about Abraham and him being blessed to be a blessing, what are the implications for us as we receive God’s blessing?

The Lord is telling Abraham more than just that he will receive prosperity and happiness. We already read in the OT Sending lesson that God told Abraham, “and through your seed all nations on earth will be blessed” (Gen. 22:18). So Abraham is blessed to be a blessing. We are also God’s people, called and blessed by Him; we have received the blessing that came by Abraham through Christ. But as with Abraham, this blessing from God is not just for ourselves. God blesses and redeems us so we can be a blessing and a part of His work in the world.

Part 2: Identity, Security & Purpose

Robert Kolb talks about how everyone will look for identity, security and purpose in life.

Christians should look for these things in our relationship to God.

Ephesians 2:8-10 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

1 Peter 2:9 – “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Discuss: How do we see identity, security and purpose in each of these two passages?
Be specific.

Ephesians 2:8-10

Identity: We are God’s workmanship.

Security: We are saved by faith. Both salvation and our good works are not by our work but God’s gift.

Purpose: We have been saved for a purpose - for works that God has already prepared.

1 Peter 2:9

Identity: chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, people for his possession (encourage participants to unpack each phrase)

Security: We are chosen and possessed by God

Purpose: To proclaim God’s excellencies!

Part 3: God Working Through Us

God works through those He raised. Bob Newton points out that “God’s doesn’t work through the living: He works through the resurrected dead.”

Colossians 2:13 – “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him.”

God chooses us imperfect human beings, not holy angels, to be His proclaimers. It seems more logical to use perfect, holy messengers from heaven, but – wonder of wonders! – God chooses to use sinners to proclaim His message of salvation!

1 Timothy 1:15 – “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”

2 Corinthians 4:5-7 – “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”

God equips us with His Spirit:

John 15:26-27 – “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

Acts 1:8 – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Acts 13:52 – “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Mission happens where we are not in control:

Hebrews 11:8 – “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.”

We need to be able to go as Abraham went. Abraham could not take a single step without God-given faith.

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 – “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

It is not our job to create faith. Our job is to be proclaimers...to point people to Jesus, to be planting the seed and watering.

God uses us in our stations:

Samuel's instructions to Saul were not very specific after being anointed king.

1 Samuel 10:7 – “Now when these signs meet you, do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you.”

1 Corinthians 7:17, 24 – “Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches ... in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.”

Colossians 3:18-24 – “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,

knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

We fulfill our calling to be in God’s Mission through the relationships he has given us: mother, father, son, friend, student, worker, etc. Through word and deed, we show God’s love.

Discuss: In part three, there are five statements in italics (*in **bold italics** in the leader notes*). How do each of these truths relate to our identity, security, and especially purpose as God’s children?

1. *Our identity is to be those who have died and been raised with Christ. This is also our security - our new life is secure in Christ, the Risen One, and the power to live this life comes from Him.*
2. *Our identity as God’s human creation is unique and God has a special purpose for us. This purpose is to proclaim the Good News.*
3. *We can be secure in knowing that the power for this calling comes all from God’s Spirit.*
4. *It’s also important for us to know what our identity and purpose is NOT. We are not the ones in control or the ones who create faith. This truth gives us great freedom and security in our calling to be part of God’s Mission.*
5. *Our identities are unique as individual Christians. While we share one purpose of proclaiming the Good News, we live this out in many different ways.*

What do each of these statements say about being blessed to be a blessing?

1. *The great blessing of resurrected and eternal life is a blessing we are called to use to bless others.*
2. *God chose us and blessed us sinful people so that we could bless others with the Good News of the Gospel.*
3. *Specifically, God poured out the Holy Spirit on us so that we would have the power and be thoroughly equipped to bless others through proclamation.*
4. *We often don’t know and can’t see how God is using us to be a blessing. We have to trust that the same God who blessed us is working through us for the blessing of others.*
5. *We live out this blessing to others through specific roles and relationships, through the activities of daily life, daily service and love to others. (See Luther quote below)*

Conclusion: God has chosen us and given us His blessing for the purpose of proclaiming His goodness and blessing to the world! The Mission is all in God's control, but He chooses to work through us, His resurrected people, in all of the stations and relationships we have in life.

Now what?

- What is one truth from this study about your identity, security, or purpose that you want to hold onto this week?
- What is one relationship in your life that you want to focus on this week as a place to be part of God's Mission? Pray about this individually or with a small group.

A Luther Quote to Ponder:

"Then the major premise will not fail you because the Holy Spirit testifies both by this example and many others that God's people please God even in the least and most trifling matters. For He will be working all things through you; He will milk the cow through you and perform the most servile duties through you, and all the greatest and least duties alike will be pleasing to Him. " LW 6:10

Let God Be God

Opening Discussion:

When are you tempted to not “let God be God”? What things in your life is it hard to let go of and place fully in God’s hands?

Allow small groups or tables a short discussion time to begin thinking about this topic with no expectation of having a formal answer.

Part 1: Only God...

The following Bible passages are meant to give an impression by emphasizing all the things that only God can know and do. Don’t feel a need to talk about each verse. The goal is to read through all the passages back to back to see how this theme builds.

Only God can see the future and fully knows the past:

Isaiah 55:8-9 – “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Psalms 147:5 – “Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.”

Only God has authority over all:

Psalms 33:9 – “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.”

Matthew 28:18 – Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

Psalms 135:6 – “Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.”

Ephesians 1:20-22 – “He raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.”

Only God works faith:

John 6:29 – “Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’”

Hebrews 12:2 – “Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...”

John 6:44 – “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...”

2 Corinthians 4:6 – “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

John 14:6 – “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Only God saves:

Acts 4:12 – “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Isaiah 43:11 – “I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior.”

Romans 6:23 – “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Let God be God! We have no business pretending that we are responsible for any of the things that God does. We need to let God be God.

Part 2: Aggressive Waiting – Be a Fisherman

Because we live in a “modern” world, we often think that WE can make things happen.

Newton’s 3rd law of motion states that “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” So, we would like to believe that if WE act then we will see a reaction. For example, if we have more parking places, then we will get more people in church. This is NOT the way it works with God. We await His action.

Luke 5:1-11 – “On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’ And Simon answered, ‘Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.’ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; **from now on you will be catching men.**’ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”

Psalms 27:14 – “Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!”

Discuss: What does it mean to be like a fisherman? What things can fishermen do and what things are out of their control? What role does waiting play in fishing?

Fishing requires waiting. Fishing for people requires waiting...we wait for the Lord. He is the man of action.

This does not mean we are lazy and simply wait around for people to come into church or onto our front porch to hear about Jesus. We are like bass fishermen who have great equipment and are skilled at casting, etc., even though they can't cause a fish to bite. We work hard in God's mission while recognizing that He is the ultimate actor.

Psalm 127:1 – “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.”

Discuss: How does this verse both affirm our action in God's Mission and remind us to let God be God?

God is building the house, but He uses us to labor! We work hard in God's mission while recognizing that He is the ultimate actor.

Part 3: As You Go...

Do we plan? Yes, with an awareness that the mission is God's and He is already at work. By the eyes of faith, we look for where He is working and then join Him in that. We fit into God's story.

Matthew 28:19 – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”

1 Peter 3:15 – “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”

Discuss: We are ready and prepared to “go where the fish are” and follow where God leads, but it's hard to change direction if we aren't moving. What kinds of questions could your church ask to learn where the fish are around you, how God is already moving, and how you might best join in His work?

Work to list together some specific questions for understanding your context.

The point here is that we need to do some research and map what assets we have to be participants in what God is already doing. We don't try to do youth ministry in a retirement village, etc. But we need to be moving. Only when we are moving can we see where God is leading. We can't see that from the church basement.

Part 4: Engaging – Explaining vs. Proclaiming

Matthew 10:7-8 – “And **proclaim as you go**, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. **You received without paying; give without pay.**”

John 5:39-40 – “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to **come to me that you may have life.**”

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 – “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Explaining = Telling others about Jesus based on our knowledge and understanding in order to convince them of the truth.

It's important to help people understand God's love and it seems the easiest way to do this is through explaining. We put a lot of emphasis on our own knowledge and understanding and our ability to convince people of the truth.

Proclaiming = Letting God speak His Word through us to declare what He has done for YOU, leaving room for the Spirit to work and strengthen faith.

Proclaiming is difficult, but necessary.

Proclamation...

- *is not talking ABOUT God, but rather God talking in and through us.*
 - *God doesn't come begging "Please believe in me." He confronts with "You have sinned and fallen short!"*
 - *This doesn't mean we are rude, preachy, or self-righteous! It means that we are doing more than explaining. We are telling people that Jesus loves them...that He died for them. This comes from a heart of love and care for our neighbor. Just as God's Word proclaimed to us has changed our hearts and lives, we want to see others changed by the Gospel!*

- *calls for an answer and can't be dismissed as "your opinion"*
 - *If you say, "Jesus is the Son of God," someone may say "that is your opinion." But if you say, "Jesus suffered hell on the cross so you can have a right relationship with God," it is more difficult to say "that's your opinion." They can say, "I don't trust in Him as my Savior" or they can say "tell me more about this," but it is difficult to call this an opinion.*
- *uses the "YOU" word – makes it personal*

Think about the difference between talking about love and proclaiming "I love you!"
Without a personal pronoun, words about love are only a description and not a proclamation of love. "Love is the most powerful force on earth" carries less weight than, "I love you."

Paradox — do you think the following are true?

- Explaining is comfortable, even mentally stimulating, but leads to eternal death.*
- Proclaiming is painfully uncomfortable and leads to eternal life.*

Discuss: What do you think about this distinction between explaining and proclaiming?
In your experience, is explaining easier? Why or why not? Based on the verses above, why is explaining dangerous as a basis for our witness?

Some people may find explaining easier because it's less personal and more intellectual. It focuses on our preparation, our answers, and our knowledge which allows us to feel in control. On the other hand, proclaiming frees us from feeling like we need to have all the answers before we can be part of God's Mission. Proclaiming takes all the pressure off of us as we recognize that saving faith comes only from God!

Explaining can be dangerous...

- *if we use it to make ourselves look smart and all knowing (1 Co. 2)*
- *if we use it to try to convince people to believe. This is God's job!*
- *if we use it to try to prove the Bible is true. The purpose of the Scriptures is to bring people to faith...to rebuild the relationships that were lost at the Fall. Remember, God wants His family back.*
- *if we simply use the Scriptures to teach good behavior. Sanctification is worked by God. We understand that sin strains the relationship with God and we certainly want others to have a good relationship with our Savior, but saving faith comes first and then God's work to sanctify.*
- *if we teach people to put their faith in the Bible instead of Jesus (Jn 5)*
- *if we teach people to trust their own faith instead of trusting in Jesus*

Try to think of specific examples of what it might look like to proclaim rather than explain in a conversation where you are sharing your faith.

Conclusion: Only God can give faith and only God can save. We don't know exactly how God will use us, but we know that He will. We walk by faith – working hard and moving out to go where the fish are – but trusting in God to do His mission.

Now what?

- Think back over all the lessons of this Bible study series. What are 3 key takeaways for you? What are 2 specific action steps that you want to take in response to these takeaways?

A Luther quote to ponder...

“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

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