



MISSION PRECISION

DEFINING TRUTHS EVERY
DISCIPLE NEEDS TO KNOW

DAVID PLATT
WITH DAVID BURNETTE

Copyright © 2018 by David Platt and Radical, Inc.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America

Published by Radical, Inc.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the ESV ® Bible
(*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*), copyright © 2001
by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

8 TRUTHS

EVERY DISCIPLE NEEDS TO KNOW

1	INTRODUCTION
2	GOSPEL
16	EVANGELISM & CONVERSION
32	DISCIPLE
44	DISCIPLE MAKING
54	CHURCH
66	CALLING
76	MISSIONARY & MISSIONARY TEAM
88	UNREACHED PEOPLE & PLACES
97	CONCLUSION
98	NOTES

INTRODUCTION

There was a group in Jesus' day that was willing to go "across sea and land" to make a single convert (Matthew 23:15). They were zealous about their beliefs, and they wanted others to join them. Talk about commitment to the mission! There was, however, a rather significant problem: they had the wrong message, the wrong motives, and the wrong method for spreading their beliefs.

You probably know this group as the Pharisees, and they received a scathing rebuke from Jesus (Matthew 23:1–36). The Pharisees serve as a reminder that it's not enough to be passionate about a cause or a mission (though passion is obviously a good thing). You need to have the right mission, and you need to know how to carry it out. The same holds true when it comes to the church's mission. We need to know precisely what Jesus means when He tells us to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

We need mission precision.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of clarity in the church today concerning our mission, and part of the confusion revolves around the fact that certain key terms are understood in different ways. In the pages ahead, we'll see how Scripture defines the following terms: gospel, conversion, evangelism, disciple, disciple making, church, calling, missionary, missionary team, and unreached. Regardless of how these terms are commonly defined today or how we've used them in the past, the question we should be asking is, "How does God define these terms?"

For the sake of our neighbors and the unreached peoples across the world, as well as the health of our own churches, we cannot afford to settle for less than biblical precision when it comes to the church's mission.

** This resource is adapted from David Platt's message series titled "Mission Precision," which can be accessed for free at radical.net.*

GOSPEL

[gos-puhl]

The gospel is the good news that the only true God, the just and gracious Creator of the universe, has looked upon hopelessly sinful men and women and has sent His Son, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin through His substitutionary death on the cross and to show His power over sin and death in the resurrection from the grave, so that everyone who turns from their sin and themselves and trusts in Jesus alone as Savior and Lord will be reconciled to God forever.

GOSPEL

This first term, *gospel*, is the most important of all the terms we'll look at in the chapters ahead. We don't want to assume this term, for without a right view of the gospel, the church has no mission, no good news to proclaim. And tragically, there are a lot of false gospels being offered today. On the other hand, when we faithfully communicate the biblical gospel, we are sharing the "power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). What a responsibility and a privilege!

Scripture contains rich imagery and varied descriptions of the gospel, so it's difficult to address every aspect of the gospel in one chapter. At the same time, there are certain truths that make up the core of the gospel. In this chapter I want to explore these truths and give you a way to remember them.

Think of the word gospel as an acrostic. Each of these six letters, G-O-S-P-E-L, represents a truth that is foundational to our faith and to the church's mission.¹ Here are the truths we will cover:

G - God's Character

O - Offense of Sin

S - Sufficiency of Christ

P - Personal Response

E - Eternal Urgency

L - Life Transformation

We will look at these core truths through the lens of Ephesians 2:1–10. Here, in the space of ten verses, we see the beauty of the gospel, as well as its implications for our lives, our churches, and our mission to the world:

MISSION PRECISION

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 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. (Ephesians 2:1–10)

Using this concise gospel summary from the apostle Paul, let's begin where the gospel begins and ends—with God.

G – God's Character

The gospel is God-centered. Paul begins by highlighting the sinfulness of man, but the hinge of this passage is verse 4: “But *God*, being rich in mercy . . .” (emphasis added). Notice all the things God has done for us in this passage:

- He saved us because of His great love (5).
- He made us alive together with Christ (5).
- He raised us up with Him (6).
- He seated us with Christ in the heavenly places (6).
- He decided to show the immeasurable riches of His grace in the coming ages (7).

God is clearly the One acting. We, on the other hand, are primarily passive. We didn't save ourselves, but rather we “have been saved” (5, 8). This happened *to* us, from the outside. Yes, this salvation comes “through faith,” but lest we miss the point, Paul puts the

emphasis on God's role: "And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (8).

God saves us, and He does it based upon His character.

Various aspects of God's character—holiness, justice, mercy, wrath, love, etc.—can be seen in Ephesians 2:1–10. But these characteristics seem to be in tension: God's wrath is mentioned in the same breath as His mercy and great love (3–4). While our tendency is to minimize certain characteristics of God, faithfulness to the gospel demands a full-orbed, biblical account of God's character.

We must proclaim God's love *and* His wrath. We must proclaim His justice *and* His mercy. And we can never forget to proclaim His absolute, unadulterated holiness so that people might fear God as they put their faith in Him. If we have a glorious view of God, then we will have a glorious view of the gospel. But if we have a small view of God, then we will have a small view of the gospel.

There's even a danger that we will see God as a means to some other end.

Today there's a (so-called) gospel being sold that prostitutes God as a means to worldly pleasure. "Put your faith in God," we're told, "and you can

get everything you want." This is sometimes called the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel, and it's rampant across the Americas, Africa, and Asia. We must counter this false gospel. Rather than "Come to God and get health and wealth," we should be saying to people, "Come to God . . . and get *God*." *He* is who we want. *He* is who we need—the God who is revealed to us in Scripture.

Once we get a glimpse of God's glorious character, our eyes are also opened to the offense of sin.

“
*If we have a glorious view
of God, then we will have a
glorious view of the gospel.
But if we have a small view
of God, then we will have a
small view of the gospel.*
”

MISSION PRECISION

O – Offense of Sin

In light of the fact that God is holy, just, loving, and gracious, you might expect man to be filled with humility, gratitude, and love. But our response to God is just the opposite—rebellion. Look at the ways Ephesians 2:1–10 describes our condition apart from God’s grace in Christ:

- We were dead in trespasses and sins (1).
- We were following the course of this world (2).
- We were following the prince of the power of the air (i.e., the devil) (2).
- We lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and mind (3).
- We were by nature children of wrath (3).

Needless to say, our sinful condition is dire. Consider that first phrase: “dead in trespasses and sins” (1). We are born with a sinful nature, and this propensity to sin manifests itself in our countless sins and trespasses against God. (A sin is any offense against God, while a trespass refers to a violation of a specific commandment in the law.) And this rejection of God is nothing new.

We are just like Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Even though God says not to eat from the tree, we want to do it anyway. We reject His authority as our Creator. This is the God who beckons storm clouds, and they come; the God who tells the wind to blow and the rain to fall, and they do it immediately; the God who says to the mountains, “You go here,” and to the seas, “You stop there,” and they do it. Everything in all creation responds in obedience to the Creator, until you get to man. You and I have the audacity to look at God in the face and say, “No.”

Those who live this way, which is all of us apart from Christ, are “dead” in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). And if nothing changes, we will be *dead* in our sin forever (Romans 6:23). Man’s problem is not that life is not going right, that he has messed up, that he has done some wrong things, or that he has made some bad decisions. Man’s problem

is that, at the core of his being, he rebels against God, and he is dead without God. Not *kind of* dead, or *sort of* dead, but *dead*.

Francis was once asked, “What would you do if you met a modern man on a train and had just one hour to talk to him about the gospel?” Schaeffer’s answer may surprise you:

... I would spend 45–50 minutes on the negative, to really show him his dilemma—that he is morally dead—then I’d take 10–15 minutes to preach the gospel. I believe that much of our evangelistic and personal work today is not clear simply because we are too anxious to get to the answer without having a man realize the real cause of his sickness, which is true moral guilt (and not just psychological guilt feelings) in the presence of God.²

In our efforts to reach people with the gospel, we cannot gloss over the severity of sin. For most unbelievers in our day, and even for many believers, sin is not that big of a deal. People think, “I’m not that bad,” or “Surely God wouldn’t punish me for that.” But Scripture paints a different picture. Lot’s wife was turned to salt for one act of disobedience (Genesis 19:26); the Lord told Moses that a man was to be executed for gathering sticks on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32–36); Uzzah was struck down simply for touching the ark of God (2 Samuel 6:6–7); both Ananias and Sapphira were put to death (instantly) for telling a lie (Acts 5:1–11). If these examples sound extreme, then we have a man-centered perspective of sin.

The severity of sin is determined by the One who is sinned against. One sin against an infinitely holy God is infinitely serious, causing infinite separation from God. It was one sin that brought condemnation for all men (Romans 5:12)—and we’ve committed *thousands* of them! This is an infinitely

————— “ —————

The severity of sin is determined by the One who is sinned against.

————— ” —————

serious problem for everyone in the world. We are dead in our sin, and we are not sufficient to save ourselves. Gratefully, Someone Else is.

MISSION PRECISION

S – Sufficiency of Christ

Since we cannot save ourselves, we need God to give us life. But that forces us to acknowledge the tension we noted concerning God's character. God is just, and He will punish sinners (Romans 2:12). At the same time, He is merciful and desires to save sinners (1 Timothy 2:3–4). This leads to the ultimate question of the Bible: *How can a just God save rebellious sinners when they rightfully deserve His wrath?*

Now that's not usually identified as the ultimate question of the Bible, or even as an important question at all. Not many people are losing sleep at night because God is being so kind to sinners. Instead, they are pointing the finger at God and asking how He can punish sinners, or how He can be loving and send people to hell. However, if a judge today were to look at a criminal guilty of treason and declare him innocent, we would (rightly) remove that judge from the bench in a heartbeat. Justice demands that the guilty and the innocent be treated accordingly. So how can a just God look at us, guilty in our sin, and declare us innocent? How can He be both just and merciful? The answer is found in Jesus Christ—who He is and what He has done.

Who Jesus Is

Scripture presents Jesus as fully divine (John 1:1–3) and, at the same time, fully human (1 Timothy 2:5). Both His divinity and His humanity are necessary for our salvation.

First, in terms of His divinity, Jesus is rightly called the Son of God (John 11:27; 20:31). He receives worship (Matthew 14:33); He heals diseases (Matthew 4:23–24); He forgives sin (Mark 2:5); He has authority to judge (John 5:22–24); He gives life to the dead (John 11:17–44).

Calling Jesus God's Son is a significant issue today in missions, especially among Muslims. Many people are urging us to avoid referring to Jesus as the Son of God because this truth is offensive to Muslims. However, we do not have the option of diluting the gospel in order to make it more palatable to certain people. Fidelity to the

gospel is our priority. Among Muslims, and all other religions and peoples of the world, we proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God, and we should explain what this means. Jesus is God in the flesh, and He has come to us.

I once sat with two men in Southeast Asia, both from different religions, and they were basically trying to convince me that all religions are fundamentally the same, to which I replied, “It’s almost as if you picture God at the top of a mountain with us at the bottom. You may take this path, I may take that path, but we all end up in the same place.”

“Exactly, you understand,” they said.

“But what if I told you that the God at the top of the mountain didn’t wait for you and me to come up the mountain, but He actually came down to us?”

“That would be great.”

“This is what God has done for us in Jesus,” I said, “and this is what makes Him totally unique.”

We must proclaim Jesus for who He is—God in the flesh (John 1:1–3, 14). But we must also proclaim what He has done.

What Jesus Has Done

God is perfectly holy and just (as we’ve already seen), and this means His commandments must be kept. He cannot simply lower His expectations or sweep sin under the rug. So how can anyone be forgiven of their sins and counted righteous before a God like this? The answer comes by considering three aspects of what Jesus has done for us.

First, the requirements of God’s law have been fulfilled for us by Jesus. Jesus has lived the life we could not live, a life of perfect, sinless obedience to the Father. He was fully tempted by sin, and yet He fully triumphed over sin (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus met the demands of God’s law.

MISSION PRECISION

Second, though He had no sin, Jesus died the death we deserve to die. He died for *our* sin, as our substitute. Jesus died *instead* of us. This is the beauty of the cross. For at the cross, God expressed the fullness of His judgment upon sin. At the same time, through Christ, God endured the fullness of His judgment against sin. And, in the process, God enabled salvation for sinners. That is, He accomplished everything necessary for their redemption. So is God just toward sin? Absolutely, look at the cross. Is God loving toward sinners? Absolutely, look at the cross. At the cross God's justice and love are on full display.

“

*So is God just toward sin?
Absolutely, look at the
cross. Is God loving toward
sinners? Absolutely, look
at the cross.*

”

Third, not only has Jesus lived the life we could not live and died the death we deserve to die, but also He has conquered the enemy we could not conquer. Death could not hold Jesus down, for He was raised on the third day. The grave has been defeated. Jesus is alive!

Now, based on what Jesus has done in His life, death, and resurrection, salvation is found in Him alone. Repeatedly we see the phrases “with Christ” or “in Christ” (or “in Him”) in Ephesians 2:5–7. The gospel is the good news that anyone can be saved *in* and *through* and *with* Christ! In a world full of religions, Jesus Christ stands alone.

The sufficiency of Christ's saving work should lead us to ask another question, namely, *How is this truth applied to our souls for our salvation?* This leads us to the next letter—P—in our GOSPEL acrostic.

P – Personal Response

The gospel requires a personal response on our part, and this response is summed up in Ephesians 2:8: “By grace you have been saved *through faith*” (emphasis added). God's grace is the ground, or underlying reason, for our salvation, and faith is the means by which

we receive it. But have you ever wondered why God chose *faith* as the proper response to His saving grace? Why not love? Or why not humility or joy or wisdom? Why has God designed faith to be the only means of salvation?

Because faith is the anti-work.

Faith is the realization that there is nothing you can do—no amount of love you can show, kindness you can display, joy you can have, or obedience you can accomplish—to earn God’s salvation. You can only trust in what has been done *for* you. Faith is the attitude of the heart that is the exact opposite of depending on yourself. That’s why Paul follows up by saying, “This is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:9). This is a truth my eight-year-old son was wrestling with recently as I tucked him in for bed: “Dad, I don’t get it. It seems too easy. After all that I have done in sin against God, all I have to do is ask Him to forgive me and put my trust in Jesus?”

It’s understandable that he would struggle to get his mind around this biblical concept of grace, for we naturally feel as if we must *do* something to earn God’s favor. But, as I assured him, salvation is a gift we receive, not a prize we earn. And we receive it by faith.

It would be a misunderstanding, however, to think of ourselves as entirely passive in this process of receiving God’s grace. The gospel is not just information; it’s an invitation. It’s an invitation that demands a decision. The gospel is not only a statement detailing what Christ has done; it’s also a summons describing how we are to respond. To communicate the gospel is to call people to faith. This is an especially important point as we think about the church’s mission to our neighbors and the nations.

People cannot personally respond to a message they have never heard. Tragically, there are over four billion people in the world right now who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. And they won’t hear it unless we tell it to them. There is an eternal urgency to this message.

MISSION PRECISION

E – Eternal Urgency

When we proclaim the message of the gospel, eternity is at stake. On the one hand, heaven is a glorious reality for all who trust in Christ. Believers will experience the riches of God’s grace in the “coming ages” (7). On the other hand, hell is a dreadful reality for all who do not trust in Christ. These are individuals who die as “children of wrath” (3). They will face God’s eternal judgment.

Few people today speak of hell as the destination toward which men and women are headed in their sin. This is strange, particularly given how much Jesus spoke of hell. Our Savior spoke of conscious “torment” (Luke 16:22–24), “outer darkness” (Matthew 22:13), and an “unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:44), to name a few examples. Paul likewise spoke of “the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His might” (2 Thessalonians 1:9). These are sobering truths and shocking images.

Some people ask whether the Bible’s language about hell is literal or merely symbolic. Even if the Bible is using symbols, these symbols are telling us about something that is *real*. The biblical writers are not describing a winter retreat or a summer vacation. Burning fire and smoking sulfur are symbols for a terrifying place to be—a place that people will never, ever leave.

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night. (Revelation 14:11)³

Thomas Watson commented on this sobering word “ever”:

Thus it is in Hell; they would die, but they cannot. The wicked shall be always dying but never dead; the smoke of the furnace ascends for ever and ever. Oh! Who can endure thus to be ever upon the rack? This word ‘ever’ breaks the heart.⁴

Watson was right. The reality of hell does, or at least it should, break our hearts. After all, who can grasp what it means for judgment to be everlasting?

When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and

amaze your soul; and you will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all; you will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions and millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance; and then when you have so done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains.⁵

We cannot be ignorant or indifferent to these realities. This is not a game. When we say things like, “That was a hell of a song,” or “We had a hell of a time,” we miss the weight of what we are saying. There is real, eternal wrath awaiting sinners before a holy God. God is going to consume them forever and ever. What more reason for urgency do we need than this? Regardless of how old-fashioned or cruel the concept of hell seems to the world, we must share this gospel:

What is most needed today is a wide proclamation of those truths which are the least acceptable to the flesh. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the character of God—His absolute sovereignty, His ineffable holiness, His inflexible justice, His unchanging veracity. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the condition of the natural man—his total depravity, his spiritual insensibility, his inveterate hostility to God, the fact that he is ‘condemned already’ and that the wrath of a sin-hating God is even now abiding upon him. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the alarming danger in which sinners are—the indescribably awful doom which awaits them, the fact that if they follow only a little further their present course they shall most certainly suffer the due reward of their iniquities. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the nature of that punishment which awaits the lost—the awfulness of it, the hopelessness of it, the unendurableness of it, the endlessness of it.⁶

May God help us to proclaim the gospel, even when it’s not popular.

MISSION PRECISION

L – Life Transformation

Finally, after looking at various aspects of the gospel, the question naturally arises, *What does this gospel produce in those who receive it by faith?* Nothing short of life transformation. And this transformation occurs not only in eternity; it begins even now on earth. “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). The gospel leads to a radically new life.

Scripture describes salvation as crucifixion with Christ (Galatians 2:20), with the result that one becomes an entirely new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Salvation is neither a casual determination nor a superficial declaration. You cannot merely say some words, profess to be a Christian, and then move on with life as it was before. For this reason, we must be careful to communicate a gospel—both here and around the world—that calls people to die to their sin and to themselves and to trust in Christ as Savior and Lord.

The life-transforming nature of the gospel means that our goal is not merely to count decisions; Christ has called us to make disciples (Matthew 28:19). So let us be faithful to our task. And let us allow God to judge the fruit of our ministries. In the meantime, let us believe and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Based on everything we have seen in this chapter, we might summarize this gospel as follows:

The gospel is the good news that the only true God, the just and gracious Creator of the universe, has looked upon hopelessly sinful men and women and has sent His Son, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin through His substitutionary death on the cross and to show His power over sin and death in the resurrection from the grave, so that everyone who turns from their sin and themselves and trusts in Jesus alone as Savior and Lord will be reconciled to God forever.

Now *that* is good news.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

C H A P T E R 1

1

What does it mean to have God as the goal of the gospel?

2

What is missing in our explanation of sin if we simply refer to it as something that disrupts our relationships with others?

3

What biblical tension does the gospel help us understand?

4

What is it about faith (as defined by Scripture) that makes it the proper response to God's grace?

5

How should the realities of heaven and hell affect our approach to evangelism?

EVANGELISM

[ih-van-juh-liz-uhm]

AND

CONVERSION

[kuh n-vur-zhuhn]

Evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit with the aim of persuading people to repent and believe in Christ.

Conversion is the divinely enabled personal response of individuals to the gospel in which they turn from their sin and themselves (repent) and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord (believe).

EVANGELISM & CONVERSION

Years ago I saw a survey that said the majority of Americans identify themselves as Christians. Yet, among these self-proclaimed Christians, less than half of them were involved in church on a weekly basis, less than half of them actually believed the Bible is accurate, and the overwhelming majority of them did not have a biblical view of the world around them. But that's not the worst of it.

Researchers dug deeper in order to identify men and women who are described as “born-again Christians” (as if there is any other kind of Christian). These are people who say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus and who believe they will go to heaven because they have accepted Jesus as their Savior. Almost half of Americans fit in this category. Yet, out of this group of “born-again Christians,” researchers found that their beliefs and lifestyles were virtually indistinguishable from the world around them. For instance, many “born-again Christians” believed their works could earn them a place in heaven; others thought Christians and Muslims worship the same God; some thought Jesus sinned while He was on earth; an ever-increasing number of these “born-again Christians” described themselves as marginally committed to Jesus. What are we to make of these statistics?⁷

Some people have used this data to conclude that Christians are really not that different from the rest of the world. However, I don't think that interpretation of the research is accurate. One thing that is abundantly clear from these statistics is that there are a lot of people in our culture who are deceived. In fact, there are scores of people, both here in the U.S. and around the world, who culturally identify themselves as Christians yet biblically are not followers of Christ.

Is that possible? According to Jesus, it's actually probable:

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

MISSION PRECISION

On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (Matthew 7:21–23)

Jesus said there are “many” people who will be shocked on the last day to find that, though they thought their eternity was secure, they were ultimately deceived. They will stand before Jesus on the last day and hear Him say, “I never knew you.” Therefore, each of us should want to know: How do we lead people to a true knowledge of Christ? That’s *evangelism*. And what does it mean biblically to become a follower of Jesus Christ? That’s *conversion*.

How we understand evangelism affects our approach to unbelievers, who, like us, will either spend an eternity in heaven or an eternity in hell. Likewise, our understanding of conversion has implications for how we go about the task of evangelism and how we assess the spiritual state of those to whom we minister. A biblical view of conversion is also crucial for us to have assurance that we have eternal life. Therefore, when it comes to evangelism and conversion, we cannot afford to rely on what most of our Christian friends think or what seems right or fair to us. We must look to God’s Word to gain a true understanding of these critically important concepts.

Evangelism

We will begin with a definition of evangelism and then unpack this definition using Scripture.

Evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit with the aim of persuading people to repent and believe in Christ.

One of the best places to see this truth illustrated is in Jesus’ final words before He ascended to God’s right hand. He was giving His disciples a concise summary of their mission:

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 1:8)

Based on Christ's words in this passage, we'll consider the concept of evangelism in terms of our role, our message, our power, and our aim.

Our Role

The first key word in a biblical understanding of evangelism is proclamation, and it is based on the fact that Jesus told His disciples that they were going to be "witnesses" (Acts 1:8). Evangelism always involves proclamation, and it always involves communicating the message of the gospel using language the lost can understand. Unfortunately, this is one of those areas where the church, particularly in our culture, has totally misconstrued evangelism.

Some people claim to witness with their life, either by being a good person or by putting a smile on their face each day. I hope that's a given. But Jesus did not tell His disciples that they would be given the power of the Spirit so that they could smile at people. No, Jesus gave the power of His Spirit so we could speak. That's what a witness does.

The concept of witnessing comes from the Greek word *martureo*, from which we get our word 'martyr.' The disciples lost their lives, and it's not because they were nice. It's because they spoke. Christians are still losing their lives around the world today, and it's not because they are smiling and doing good deeds. It's because they

are proclaiming the gospel.

“
Christians are still losing their lives around the world today, and it's not because they are smiling and doing good deeds. It's because they are proclaiming the gospel.
”

As we proclaim the gospel, we must use language the lost can understand. In our own culture, this means we can't rely on Christian clichés, nor can we assume that familiar theological

MISSION PRECISION

terms—sin, salvation, judgment—will be understood rightly. Instead, we must clearly and carefully explain biblical concepts in ways that unbelievers can grasp. As we cross cultures, we will need to proclaim the gospel to those who speak a different language. This is the central reason why many missionaries around the world work so hard on language learning—so that they can communicate the gospel in a way that is understandable to those in a different culture.

Our Message

Proclamation will not do us any good if we don't proclaim the right message. According to our definition, evangelism is proclamation of the *gospel*. As we saw in the previous chapter, the gospel includes the full message of the holiness and love of God, the sinfulness of every human being, the atoning sacrifice and victorious resurrection of Jesus for our sins, and the necessity of repentance and faith. Sadly, much of what passes as evangelism in the contemporary church is gospel-lite, or even gospel-less.

Simply having a conversation about God with someone while failing to mention Jesus or the need to repent and believe in Him is not evangelism. Neither is it necessarily evangelism just because Jesus is a part of the conversation; Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons go door-to-door talking about Jesus, but they are not sharing the good news. They are actually sharing bad news, for they believe we must earn the favor of God. This kind of message is damning. Remember our summary of the gospel at the end of chapter 1:

The good news that the only true God, the just and gracious Creator of the universe, has looked upon hopelessly sinful men and women and has sent His Son, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin through His substitutionary death on the cross and to show His power over sin and death in the resurrection from the grave, so that everyone who turns from their sin and themselves and trusts in Jesus alone as Savior and Lord will be reconciled to God forever.

We may not get to share every aspect of this definition each time we attempt to share the gospel, but that doesn't make the

conversation worthless. We can present various elements of the gospel as the Lord gives us opportunity. Eventually, though, we have to bring these core truths of the gospel together for people who don't know Christ and then invite them to respond.

Our Power

Sharing the gospel may be our responsibility, but it is a supernatural activity. That's why our definition above specifies that evangelism is done "in the power of the Holy Spirit." In Acts 1:8 Jesus told the apostles they would receive power from the Holy Spirit with the result that "you will be my witnesses." In other words, the Holy Spirit is given to us *primarily* for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel.

Of course, the Holy Spirit is given to us for all sorts of reasons—to convict us, to comfort us, to encourage us, to guide us, to lead us, to teach us, to fill us, etc. However, the phrase "filled with the Spirit" appears eight times in the New Testament, and each time this filling leads to verbal proclamation.⁸ For instance, when the apostles were released by the authorities, they returned to their fellow believers and lifted their voices to the Lord:

... and when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31)

The Spirit's empowering of all believers to proclaim the gospel is a privilege Old Testament saints only longed for (Joel 2:28–32).⁹ Amazingly, you and I have the privilege and responsibility of proclaiming the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit every single day! This is why the Holy Spirit lives in us. Natural words from natural man cannot cause a person's life to be supernaturally transformed for all of eternity. This work can only be carried out in the Holy Spirit's power.

Our Aim

We present the gospel message, but only the Holy Spirit can turn a

MISSION PRECISION

person's heart and mind toward Christ. And that, after all, is the aim of evangelism—persuading people to repent and believe in Christ. That's why Peter preached at Pentecost (Acts 2:14–41); that's why Philip engaged an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40); that's why Paul took the time to talk with a Philippian jailer instead of fleeing the prison from which he had just been freed (Acts 16:25–34). These men were not just *informing* people about the gospel; they were *persuading* people with the gospel.

Evangelism necessarily includes a call for the hearer to repent of sin and believe in Christ. Unfortunately, we often leave out this vital part. We're often content to have a conversation about Jesus and what He's done while failing to connect the dots for people by telling them how to respond. After Peter's first sermon at Pentecost, the crowd was "cut to the heart," and they asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter did not leave them guessing:

... "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." (Acts 2:38–40)

That's pleading. And the next verse gives us the result: "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41).

Some people might shy away from the idea of persuading because they think it sounds manipulative. But this is a misunderstanding of biblical persuasion for at least two reasons. First, the Holy Spirit carries out God's saving work, so we're not talking about manipulating anyone in order to elicit some kind of response. We renounce such man-centered means. Second, the urgency of our message demands that we plead with people to respond. Eternity is at stake. Sadly, many Christians seem unsure about this all-important message.

Douglas Murray has written about being struck by the similarities among the various accounts of those who have converted to Islam. According to Murray, these stories go something along these lines: “I had reached X age (often the twenties or early thirties) and I was in a nightclub and I just thought, ‘Life must be about more than this.’” Murray notes, “Almost nothing in our culture says, ‘But of course this is not all.’ Instead the voice of our culture just says, ‘repeat, repeat.’ In the absence of such a voice, they search, and they discover Islam.” Murray then asks why these seekers choose Islam and not something else. Why not, for instance, Christianity? Murray concludes that it’s because most branches of mainstream Christianity have “lost the confidence to proselytize.” We either deny the gospel or sit by silently, but the result is the same: people aren’t persuaded to believe it.¹⁰

May it never be said of us that we have lost confidence in sharing the gospel. Our power comes from the Holy Spirit, and our message (rightly proclaimed) is as reliable as God’s Word. So let us boldly and compassionately seek to persuade people with the greatest news in all the world.

Conversion

The need to persuade people with the gospel helps us connect the two main terms in this chapter. Our *evangelism* should be aimed at *conversion*. That’s why we need to know precisely what is involved in conversion. Here’s a definition:

Conversion is the divinely enabled personal response of individuals to the gospel in which they turn from their sin and themselves (repent) and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord (believe).

Based on that definition, we’ll consider conversion in terms of God’s work and in terms of our responsibility.

MISSION PRECISION

God's Work

The words “divinely enabled” are critical in our understanding of conversion. Conversion is God’s work, a truth that follows naturally from the way Scripture describes unbelievers:

- Slaves to sin (Romans 6:17)
- Unable to understand the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14)
- Unable to obey God or please God (Romans 8:7–8)
- Justly under God’s wrath (Romans 1:18–23)
- Blinded to the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:3–4)
- Running away from God rather than seeking Him (Romans 3:10–18)
- Dead in their sin (Ephesians 2:1)
- Without hope (Ephesians 2:12)

In short, dead people cannot bring themselves to life. We must be *given* life. From beginning to end, conversion is a divinely enabled work. That’s why, when God promised His people salvation through a new covenant, He assured them that *He* would initiate it and accomplish it:

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:24–27, emphasis added).

Only God can transform the heart. It is His Spirit that brings life, not man’s abilities, wisdom, or creativity. So, you may be wondering, where do *we* come into the picture?

Our Responsibility

According to our definition, conversion, while divinely enabled, is also “a personal response of individuals to the gospel in which they

turn from their sin and themselves (repent) and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord (believe).” Those two terms, repent and believe, were part of Christ’s initial invitation in the Gospels—“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; *repent* and *believe* in the gospel” (Mark 1:15, emphasis added)—and they are crucial to our understanding of conversion.

To *repent* is to acknowledge your sin before a holy God and to experience sorrow over that sin in such a way that you turn from it (2 Corinthians 7:9–10). It’s what God called for in Isaiah 45:22: “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” Similarly, Paul says the Thessalonians “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God . . .” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). This is another way of saying they repented.

To *believe* involves knowledge about Christ, but it goes beyond mere intellectual or mental agreement. After all, even the demons believe, in the sense that they acknowledge His identity and authority (James 2:19). The kind of belief that saves includes trust in, or reliance on, Christ and His saving work (see the previous chapter for a full definition of the gospel).

Repentance and faith are not identical in terms of their meaning, but it’s important that we do not separate them in terms of our response to God. In some cases, faith is used to describe conversion (Acts 11:17; 14:23; 16:31), while at other times only repentance is mentioned (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20). Sometimes both terms are mentioned, as when Paul speaks of “repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). The one who repents believes, and the one who truly believes repents of his sin. Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin.

The fact that conversion includes faith *and* repentance means that conversion necessarily involves submission to Christ’s lordship. We cannot receive Christ’s salvation and then continue on the same sinful path of rebellion. That would be faith without repentance. We trust Christ as Savior *and* submit to Him as Lord: “If you confess

MISSION PRECISION

with your mouth that *Jesus is Lord* and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9, emphasis added). To be clear, following Jesus as Lord does not mean we immediately stop sinning—far from it! True Christians continue to confess their sins and repent on a daily basis (1 John 1:8–2:2). However, as Christians we no longer delight in our sin because God’s Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and reminds us that we belong to a new Master. Salvation involves coming to Jesus as the Savior who died for us *and* submitting to Him as the Lord who rules over us.

Some people hear about the need to repent and submit to Christ’s lordship and worry that this undermines God’s role in salvation. After all, didn’t we already establish that conversion is “divinely enabled”? While it’s true that we must respond to God with repentance, even this response is a gift from God. Notice the words in bold added for emphasis below:

I have heard Ephraim grieving, “You have disciplined me, and I was disciplined, like an untrained calf; **bring me back that I may be restored**, for you are the LORD my God.” (Jeremiah 31:18)

Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored!
(Lamentations 5:21)

God exalted [Jesus] at his right hand as Leader and Savior, **to give repentance to Israel** and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:31)

And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also **God has granted repentance that leads to life.**” (Acts 11:18)

God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth . . . (2 Timothy 2:25)

Repentance is clearly a work of God’s grace in us, but what about faith? Is it something we muster up? According to the verses below, faith is also a gift:

And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he **[God] had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.** (Acts 14:27)

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. (Ephesians 2:8–9)

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake . . .
(Philippians 1:29)

When God gives us new life in Christ, He opens our hearts to believe the gospel.

Implications, Clarifications, and Challenges

Now, in light of our definitions of evangelism and conversion, let me offer two implications, three clarifications, and a two-fold challenge.

Implications

First, the gospel must be proclaimed for anyone to be converted. No one can be saved apart from receiving, understanding, and believing the gospel. This makes the task of evangelism critically urgent. God has ordained our mouths and our words (spoken and written) to be the means by which His gospel is communicated (Romans 10:14–17). People are only converted when they hear the gospel.

Second, the content of the message matters. It is absolutely essential that we get the message right, especially in light of distortions of the gospel that are popular in our own context and around the world. Any “gospel” message that denies or dilutes the foundational truths of the gospel (see Chapter 1) is unbiblical and does not lead to biblical conversion. This is why we must communicate the gospel clearly in a language the lost can understand.

Clarifications

You may still have some questions about the nature of conversion, such as: Is it drastic? Will we know if it has occurred? Is it temporary or permanent? A few clarifications should be helpful.

First, conversion is *radical*. The Bible uses extreme language to

describe it. Someone who has been converted has died to everything they used to be and received new life in Christ. They have been “crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20). They have been created anew (2 Corinthians 5:17). They have been born again (John 3:3). Conversion to Christ is neither casual nor superficial.

Second, conversion is *noticeable*. While no believer attains perfection in this life, a converted person is a changed person. This is particularly evident in a Christian’s belief in the gospel, love for God’s people, and growth in holiness. The idea that one can come to Christ and remain the same makes no sense biblically or practically.

So what about those who profess to be Christian, but their lives don’t reflect a relationship with Christ? Are they saved or not? And can anyone have assurance of salvation? This leads to the third clarification.

Third, conversion is *permanent*. God never lets go of or loses anyone who has been truly converted (John 10:30). While it is true that some may profess faith for a time and then fall away, their departure from the faith indicates that they were never truly converted (1 John 2:19). While God alone knows the condition of a person’s heart, it is neither biblical nor safe to assume that anyone who has denied the faith, who shows no evidence of regeneration, or who has voluntarily abandoned the fellowship of the body of Christ, has been converted, regardless of what they have said or done in the past.

Challenges

This discussion of evangelism and conversion should challenge each of us to ask a couple questions.

First, do *you* know Christ? I’m not asking if you have prayed a prayer, walked an aisle, signed a card, or joined a church some time in the past. The question I’m asking is, *Do you know Jesus?* By God’s grace, have you turned from your sin and yourself and trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord of your life? If not, will you do that now?

Second, are you proclaiming Christ? This may sound simple,

MISSION PRECISION

but it seems as if few Christians are actually doing it. Christian, you have the Spirit of God inside of you (Acts 2), so speak the gospel. Tell people the good news. This is how they become disciples of Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

C H A P T E R 2

1

“I try not to offend people. I share the gospel by the way that I live.” What’s wrong with this approach to evangelism?

2

What makes it so tempting to leave out certain aspects of the gospel? What’s the danger of not telling someone all of the major elements of the gospel?

3

What is the Holy Spirit’s role in evangelism and conversion?
What is our role?

4

What’s the difference between merely presenting the gospel and aiming to persuade people to repent and believe? What’s the difference between manipulating and persuading?

5

List three unbelievers with whom you have regular contact. How can you be intentional about sharing the gospel with them? Be specific.

DISCIPLE

[dih-sahy-puhl]

Disciples are followers of Jesus. They have turned from their sin and trusted in Him as their Savior. They have died to themselves and surrendered their lives to Him as Lord.

DISCIPLE

The order of the chapters so far has been intentional. We must define the gospel (Chapter 1) before we learn how to share it. Sharing the gospel, or evangelism, then leads to conversion (Chapter 2). Conversion is ultimately God’s work, and the one who experiences it becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ. That term, *disciple*, is what this chapter is all about.

Perhaps the best illustration of what it means to be a disciple is found in Jesus’ initial call of several of His disciples in Matthew 4:18–22:

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

To put it simply, we might define a disciple as follows:

Disciples are followers of Jesus. They have turned from their sin and trusted in Him as their Savior. They have died to themselves and surrendered their lives to Him as Lord.

Disciples have responded to Jesus’ invitation: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). And, by God’s grace, disciples can say, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

This concept of being “crucified with Christ” and of Christ living in us—sometimes referred to as union with Christ—is key to under-

MISSION PRECISION

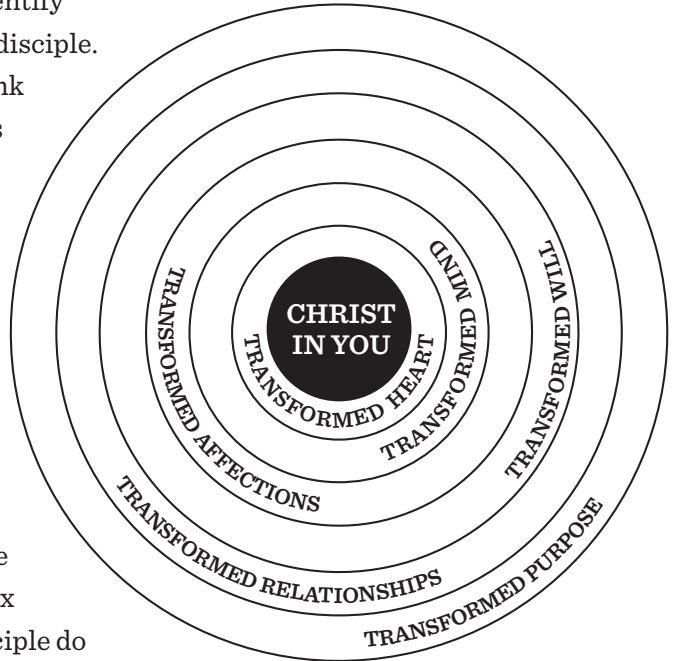
standing what it means to be a disciple. Disciples have experienced a profound change, for Christ now lives in them, transforming everything about them from the inside out. Based on this transforming work of God, we can identify six primary marks of a disciple.

It may be helpful to think of these marks in terms of concentric circles, with Christ's work in us working outward through these various aspects of our transformation.

Before we look at the six primary marks of a disciple, a couple clarifications need to be mentioned. First, the six primary marks of a disciple do not occur simultaneously. The

first mark, a transformed heart, occurs at the point in time when a disciple first places his or her faith in Jesus, i.e., at conversion. But this initial faith at a point in time leads to inevitable growth in faith over time, as the Christian is increasingly conformed into the image of Christ. The other five primary marks of a disciple are found in increasing measure as a Christian grows through faith in Christ.

Second, a disciple's growth over time should occur as a member of a church. As we'll see in the next chapter, the Christian needs the church in order to grow in Christ. For now we simply need to recognize that disciples are not "lone rangers," spiritually speaking. They are fellow members of the body of Christ.



Mark 1: Transformed Heart

Disciples are spiritually regenerate—they have been forgiven of their sin, and they are now indwelt by God’s Spirit.

This first mark is the greatest news in all the world. As disciples of Christ, God doesn’t count any of our sins against us. And as if that was not enough, the Spirit of God lives inside us! By supernatural grace, disciples have put their faith in Christ and thus been acquitted before God the Judge and adopted by God the Father. Let that soak in: not only has God the Judge declared us righteous before Him, but He has also welcomed us into His family as sons and daughters! Unfortunately, I have found that adoption is not always an easy concept for people to understand.

When Caleb, my oldest son, first came home with us from Kazakhstan, we got some interesting reactions. Based on his physical appearance, it was obvious to some people that Caleb had been adopted. We would tell them Caleb’s story, and they would say, “Oh, that’s so nice, now do you also have children of your own?” (By the way, that’s at the top of the list of things *not* to say to an adoptive parent!)

“Come in real close,” I wanted to say, “I have a secret to tell you . . . He’s ours!”

“You know what I mean,” they would say.

I knew what they meant, though they wouldn’t say it quite this way: *Caleb didn’t really count as our child*. Soon after, when my wife got pregnant, some people said, “How great is that—first you had an adopted child, and now you’re going to have one of your own!” We were even asked if we had met Caleb’s *real* mother, as if my wife was merely a fake mom.

Some people wondered whether we would tell Caleb his family and cultural heritage. They were surprised to learn that Caleb knows all about his granddad (my dad), whom he unfortunately never had the opportunity to meet. But he has pictures, stories, and videos. And he knows about his other granddad (Heather’s dad), his two grandmas, his

MISSION PRECISION

cousins and his uncles and his aunts and his great aunts and his great uncles. He's got more family heritage than he knows what to do with!

Caleb is also learning about his cultural heritage. He reads books by Dr. Seuss, and he eats fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, watermelon, and birthday cake. He's even learning his musical heritage: though he probably can't recognize the Kazakh national anthem, he's heard "Sweet Home Alabama" (the place where we first brought him home). And do you know why? Because he's our son. He's not an alien or a stranger in our home. Caleb is a Platt—not partly a Platt, but fully a Platt—with all the heritage of the Platt family. And to think: God has done this with us! He has made you and me a part of *His* family!

If you're a disciple of Jesus Christ, then God is your Father. And the implications of this truth are massive for understanding the Christian life:

What is a Christian? The richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father. If you want to [know] how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.¹¹

This first mark of a disciple, a transformed heart, happens in an instant and then triggers a glorious transformation that occurs in increasing measure over time. Having been brought from death to life (Ephesians 2:4–6), disciples are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17) who now live as servants of the King and heirs of His kingdom (Matthew 25:34). Empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), they grow in holiness (Hebrews 12:14) as God gradually transforms them into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18). Disciples hold fast to the sure hope of full and final future glorification with Christ (Romans 8:30).

The heart transformation that takes place in this first mark infuses every facet of who we are, thereby setting the stage for the rest of the marks that follow.

Mark 2: Transformed Mind

Disciples are biblically grounded—they believe what Jesus says.

Jesus says that His disciples abide in Him, and His Words abide in them (John 15:7). Disciples of Jesus trust the truth of Jesus and view the world around them through the lens of God's Word. As disciples abide in Jesus, which includes reading, hearing, studying, understanding, memorizing, and meditating on God's Word, He molds their minds to become like His. They are continually being renewed in knowledge after the image of their Creator (Colossians 3:10). This continual renewal of the mind is how transformation happens:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

Reading the Word, studying the Word, and being taught the Word are essential to the believer's spiritual life. When the Word abides in us, every thought is "taken captive to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Christ transforms the way we think, and the more we know Him, the more we think as Christ thinks (1 Corinthians 2:14–16).

Mark 3: Transformed Affections

Disciples are deeply satisfied—they desire what Jesus desires.

We have a hard time knowing how to connect our faith with our emotions. On the one hand, our faith can be like an emotional roller-coaster; how we feel determines the level of our faith. On the other hand, we often disconnect our faith from our feelings altogether. This is not a new problem for disciples of Jesus.

During the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards addressed both sides of the spectrum. He observed that some were getting carried away in an emotionalism devoid of truth. Others, however, were clinging to truth, but they were completely devoid of emotion. Edwards

MISSION PRECISION

notes how unthinkable such a lack of affection is when it comes to eternal truths:

In things which concern men's worldly interest, their outward delights, their honor and reputation, and their natural relations, they have their desires eager, their appetites vehement, their love warm and affectionate, their zeal ardent; in these things their hearts are tender and sensible, easily moved, deeply impressed, much concerned, very sensibly affected, and greatly engaged; much depressed with grief at losses, and highly raised with joy at worldly successes and prosperity. But how insensible and unmoved are most men about the great things of another world! . . . How they can sit and hear of the infinite height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus, of His giving His infinitely dear Son, to be offered up a sacrifice for the sins of men, and of the unparalleled love of the innocent, and only, and tender Lamb of God, manifested in His dying agonies, His bloody sweat, His loud and bitter cries, and bleeding heart, and all this for enemies, to redeem them from deserved, eternal burnings, and to bring to unspeakable and everlasting joy and glory—and yet be cold and heavy, insensible and regardless! Where are the exercises of our affections proper, if not here? ¹²

If we know God, then we will be affected by God. It's not possible to separate faith in Christ from feelings for Christ. I'm reminded of the time I spent with believers in underground house churches in Asia, believers who gathered

together at the risk of their lives to study God's Word for twelve hours a day. When they prayed, they wept and cried out, "We love you, Lord." They had faith *and* feelings.

God intends for us not only to know Him, but also to enjoy Him; Christ changes not only the way we think, but also the way we feel.

In other words, disciples are deeply satisfied in Jesus. Their pursuit of peace, joy, and life has led them to Jesus, who has not only saved

“
God intends for us not only to know Him, but also to enjoy Him; Christ changes not only the way we think, but also the way we feel. In other words, disciples are deeply satisfied in Jesus.
”

them from their sin, but also satisfied their souls.

As the “bread of life,” Jesus says, “Whoever comes to me shall not hunger” (John 6:35). To the thirsty He says, “. . . whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again” (John 4:14). Jesus not only saves; He satisfies! Disciples, therefore, participate in spiritual disciplines (prayer, Bible intake, fasting, fellowship, etc.) not out of a sense of duty, but out of a sense of delight: enjoying the exaltation of God in worship, craving communion with God in prayer, hungering for God’s Word more than daily food, confessing sins with grateful contrition, and loving God’s glory more than their own lives.

Is this true in your life? Are spiritual disciplines a part of your daily routine? And would you describe those disciplines as duty or delight? If it seems like more of a duty, that doesn’t necessarily mean you’re not a disciple. Remember, the marks of a disciple are found in increasing measure. God desires for you to grow in these areas. And when you think about it, isn’t this awesome? God desires for you and me to grow in the pleasure that is found in Him alone. That’s when we find ourselves crying out with the psalmist . . .

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no
water. (Psalm 63:1)

Such love for God continually crowds out love for the fleeting pleasures of this world. Our affections, then, are critical for fighting sin in our lives. We sin because we think it will bring us more pleasure or be better for us in some way. Therefore, we fight sin by realizing that it does not satisfy. Christ alone satisfies! Disciples daily crucify the desires of the flesh as they bear the fruit of the Spirit and long for the return of the Son.

MISSION PRECISION

Mark 4: Transformed Will

Disciples are humbly obedient—they do what Jesus commands.

Some people profess to be disciples of Jesus Christ, but their lives give no evidence that they have been made new creatures. They may even claim to have great affection for God, but this so-called affection never seems to affect the way they live. But this is not how Jesus describes His followers:

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love . . . You are my friends if you do what I command you. (John 15:8–10, 14)

Disciples of Jesus do not merely hear the Word and so deceive themselves; they do what it says (James 1:22). Disciples see imperatives in the Scriptures as invitations from the Savior to experience the joy of active submission to Him. The more they walk according to God's Word, the more Jesus conforms them to His will.

By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1 John 2:5b–6)

In increasing measure, disciples of Jesus begin to look more like Jesus in the way they live. Their growth may be slow at times, but their will has been transformed, and so they begin walking in a new direction.

Mark 5: Transformed Relationships

Disciples are sacrificially loving—they serve as Jesus serves.

When Christ lives in us, which is what it means to be a disciple, it affects the way we relate to others. Having been reconciled to God through Christ, disciples continually work toward reconciliation with others in Christ—forgiving one another freely and serving one

another selflessly. Disciples of Jesus join together as members of local churches where they love one another by laying down their lives for each other. Such sacrificial compassion extends beyond the local church as disciples care for their families, the global church, the lost, and the poor. It's the kind of compassion Christ modeled for us:

By this we know love, that he [Jesus] laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:16–18)

Again, falling short in terms of love and care and forgiveness in our relationships doesn't necessarily mean we are not disciples, for we will always have room to grow. But if these things aren't evident in increasing measure, then there are holes in our discipleship. This others-centered impulse leads to the sixth and final mark of being a disciple.

Mark 6: Transformed Purpose

Disciples are missionally engaged—they make disciples who make disciples of all nations.

For disciples of Jesus, their very purpose for living has been turned upside-down. They no longer live for themselves or the stuff and the accolades of this world. Compelled by God's grace, disciples are captivated by the Great Commission. Jesus has not only transformed their way of life; He has revolutionized their reason for living. Disci-

“
*Compelled by God's grace,
disciples are captivated by the
Great Commission. Jesus has not
only transformed their way of
life; He has revolutionized their
reason for living.*

ples live—and die—to share the gospel of Christ, to reproduce the life of Christ, to teach the Word of Christ, and to serve the world for Christ. And disciples carry this out by praying for, giving to, and

MISSION PRECISION

going to people around them and peoples around the world for the sake of God's fame.

Given this transformed purpose of every disciple, we need to take a closer look at what it means to *make* disciples.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

C H A P T E R 3

—————1—————

Respond to the following statement: “I’m a Christian, but I wouldn’t consider myself a disciple.”

—————2—————

Of the six marks of a disciple given in this chapter, why must a transformed heart be the basis of the others?

—————3—————

What would you say to a professing Christian whose life shows no signs of being transformed? What would you say to a professing Christian who gives evidence of being saved but who is discouraged because they still struggle with sin?

—————4—————

Practically speaking, what are some ways you can be intentional in terms of growing as a disciple?

—————5—————

Who are some members of your church that live lives worthy of imitating? What about their lives is worthy of imitating?

DISCIPLE MAKING

[dih-sahy-puhl • mey-king]

*Disciple making is the Christ-commanded,
Spirit-empowered duty of every disciple of Jesus
to evangelize unbelievers, baptize believers, teach
them the Word of Christ, and train them to obey
Christ as members of His church who make
disciples on mission to all nations.*

DISCIPLE MAKING

Now that we have seen what a disciple is, the question becomes, *How do you make a disciple?* Sadly, many people can't answer that question, despite the fact that they've been a Christian for years, or even decades. The concept is foreign to them, which is why we need to begin with a definition of disciple making:

Disciple making is the Christ-commanded, Spirit-empowered duty of every disciple of Jesus to evangelize unbelievers, baptize believers, teach them the Word of Christ, and train them to obey Christ as members of His church who make disciples on mission to all nations.

If this definition sounds familiar, that's because it is based on a passage known as the Great Commission. Disciple making was not originally a church program but rather the primary mission Christ gave to the church before returning to the Father. Here's the account from Matthew's Gospel:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:16–20, emphasis added)

Based on this passage, we'll unpack the definition of disciple making (above) by focusing on three exhortations for every disciple of Christ. We must believe in the authority of Christ, obey the command of Christ, and depend on the presence of Christ.

MISSION PRECISION

Believe in the Authority of Christ

When Jesus gathered His disciples on the mountain, He didn't begin with a command. He began with a claim: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). That's a massively important statement, and it doesn't come out of nowhere. It's the fulfillment of a vision God gave the prophet Daniel centuries earlier:

I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13–14)

Daniel speaks of a "son of man" who has all authority and an everlasting kingdom. According to the Gospel accounts, the Son of Man is none other than Jesus Christ (see Matthew 25:31). Christ's authority is *the* basis for everything else that follows in the Great Commission. Consider what this means.

First, Jesus is not just a personal Lord and Savior over us. Yes, He *is* a personal Lord and He *is* a personal Savior, but Jesus is so much more than that. His disciples were expecting a Jewish Messiah who would save the people of Israel from their sins and deliver them forever. Yet, Jesus makes clear that His authority is not just over one type of people; His authority is over *all* types of people. And His mission is not just about *one* nation; His mission is about all nations.

Jesus is the universal Lord and Savior over all. He has authority over all peoples and tribes and tongues and nations. He didn't die *only* to save you or me; He died to save people from every people

group on the planet. He has universal authority over all things, and He deserves universal praise from all peoples.

Christ's universal authority in The Great Commission should not come as a complete surprise to those who have read up to this point in Matthew's Gospel. For example, we have already learned the following:

- Christ has authority over all nature and all nations. (8:26; 12:15–21)
- Christ has authority over diseases and demons. (11:5; 9:32–33)
- Christ has authority over sin and death. (9:1–8, 18–26; 28:1–10)
- Christ has authority over your life. (8:18–22)
- Christ has authority over every life. (25:31–33)

Disciple making only makes sense if Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. If Jesus is the only true God, the only One who can save people from their sins, the only One who has conquered death and provided salvation for all people, then we must go—to our neighbors and to the nations—and make this good news known.

Jesus is worthy of the worship of every person on the planet. His worth is the fuel of our mission, and His worship is the goal of our mission. We are looking forward to the day when every tribe and tongue and people and nation gather around our God to give Him the global glory that He is due (Revelation 7:9–12). On that day, we will not be talking about disciple making anymore—we will be worshipping.

For many Christians, the thought of making disciples seems intimidating. But the good news is that, just as Jesus' authority compels us to go, so also Jesus' authority gives us confidence *as* we go. His authority ensures that His gospel will save, regardless of where we are. I can have confidence as I share the gospel in the middle of a slum in North India surrounded by images of Hindu gods, and I can also have confidence as I share the gospel over lunch with a co-worker who doesn't know Christ. Regardless of the context, Christ's authority gives us confidence that His mission will succeed.

Obey the Command of Christ

While the Great Commission is based on the authority of Christ, that doesn't mean we don't play a role. We must obey the command of Christ. For many followers of Christ, Christianity consists of coming to a worship service, participating in a church, and maybe even serving regularly in a church, but not making disciples. The church is filled with people who have been Christians for years, and yet they have never led someone outside of their family to become a follower of Christ. Many Christians participate in all kinds of religious activity with little kingdom productivity.

The Great Commission is not a comfortable call for most Christians to come, be baptized, and sit in one location. The Great Commission is a costly command for every Christian to go, baptize, and make disciples of all nations. *Every* Christian. And it has been this way since the beginning. Jesus' introduction in Matthew 4:19 was clear: Every follower of Jesus is a "fisher of men." Likewise, Jesus' conclusion in Matthew 28:19 is also clear: Every disciple is a disci-

“

The Great Commission is not a comfortable call for most Christians to come, be baptized, and sit in one location. The Great Commission is a costly command for every Christian to go, baptize, and make disciples of all nations.

”

ple-maker. Biblically, to *be* a disciple is to *make* disciples.

If you were to ask Christians today what it means to make disciples, you'd probably get jumbled thoughts, ambiguous answers, and likely even some blank stares. This is a problem. If we're going to know

how to do anything as Christians, then we need to know how to make disciples. So, what does this look like practically? Based on Matthew 28:19, here are four ways we participate in making disciples.

Share the Word

As we live *according* to the gospel, we speak *about* the gospel. We tell people how they can be saved from their sins through Christ's death

on the cross, and we proclaim His lordship. Without question, this is the thrust behind the command to go and make disciples.

In the Great Commission, Jesus was not telling His disciples to pair up and disciple each other. No, He was telling them to reach people who had not been reached with the gospel. And Christian, remember, this is why you have the Spirit of God inside of you—to speak the gospel! So who are you speaking the gospel to? Who has God put in your life that you can share the gospel with this week, or even today? What are we waiting for?

Show the Word

Have you ever wondered why Jesus includes instructions on baptizing people in the Great Commission? It is because baptism symbolizes identification with the person of Christ and inclusion in the body of Christ. Disciple making is not simply about sharing the gospel with people and then leaving them to figure out the Christian life on their own. Nor should we limit disciple making to a weekly meeting in a classroom. No, disciple making is what happens when we walk through life together, showing one another day-by-day how to follow Christ. We teach one another how to pray, how to study the Bible, how to grow in Christ, and how to lead others to Christ. And, in the process, this leads to *our* growth in Christ.

Teach the Word

Jesus told us to teach people to observe everything that He commanded. So we don't just receive the Word; we reproduce the Word, or pass it along. Now there's obviously a sense in which some in the church are particularly gifted to teach (Ephesians 4:11–12). However, every disciple of Jesus is intended to saturate his or her words with God's Word (Ephesians 4:15). We teach others what Christ has taught us.

Serve the World

Our concern is not simply with our own family, church, or community, though this is where disciple making starts. We have been

MISSION PRECISION

commanded to make disciples of “all nations” (Matthew 28:19). That phrase “all nations” (*panta ta ethne* in the Greek) does not refer to nations like we think of nations—the two hundred geopolitical entities recognized in the world today. The reference is to tribes and families and clans and peoples, what we now call *people groups*. A people group shares a similar language, heritage, and cultural characteristics. We see such groups throughout Scripture: Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites (Exodus 34:11), for example. Today they include peoples like the Baloch, the Berber, the Hui, and the Han. There are over 11,000 such people groups in the world.

The Great Commission is not just a general command to make disciples among as many people as possible. It is a specific command to make disciples among every people group in the world. And, sadly, there are approximately 6,000 people groups who have still not been reached with the gospel. We will look more closely at what it means to be unreached in a later chapter, but for now we need to understand that obedience to the Great Commission necessarily involves intentionally taking the message of the gospel to unreached people groups.

So what happens when *every* disciple obeys the command to make disciples? What’s the result when every follower of Christ shares the Word, shows the Word, teaches the Word, and serves the world? We get some idea from the book of Acts.

When the church was persecuted in Acts 8:1, “all” the believers scattered “except the apostles.” And what did these scattered believers do? “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). It was the regular church members, not the apostles, who began taking the gospel to Judea and Samaria. And they eventually took this message even farther, to Jews and Greeks in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (Acts 11:19–20). In fact, it was regular church members who started the church at Antioch, which sent Paul out on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–3). Imagine that: the base for Christ’s mission to the nations was started by a bunch of unnamed people!

This is what happens when followers of Christ decide that there are no spectators in the church, when followers of Christ with different callings and vocations realize that we are all involved in a great and global mission. And as we make disciples of all nations, we will multiply churches among all nations, even without exquisite buildings and elaborate programs. (In fact, the more we complicate disciple making, the more we stifle church multiplication.) All that's needed is the people of God, the Word of God, and the Spirit of God.

Depend on the Presence of Christ

Finally, as disciples who believe in the authority of Christ and obey the command of Christ, it's comforting to know that we can depend on the presence of Christ. Jesus' final words in Matthew's Gospel are so encouraging: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). In terms of the success of our efforts, it is Christ's presence with His people that makes the difference. This mission is not based on who we are or what we can do. This mission is based on who *Jesus* is and what *He* is able to do in and through our lives. And He is able to do far more than we could ever ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

Let's put down small dreams and worldly ambitions and instead give Jesus a blank check with our lives. Together, let's experience the power of His presence with us. We don't want our churches filled with programs and practices that we can

manage on our own. No, we should be desperate for the power of Jesus' presence with us. We know this *won't* be easy and that it *will* be costly. However, in light of our ultimate hope, we also know that it *will* be worth it. Together, let's put our hope in the promise of Christ's return for us:

This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)

“
This mission is not based on who we are or what we can do. This mission is based on who Jesus is and what He is able to do in and through our lives.
”

MISSION PRECISION

Jesus is coming back to receive the praise and worship He is due from disciples made all over the world. So let's give our lives—even lose them, if necessary—making disciples of all nations. This is, after all, what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in the first place. And as we'll see in the next chapter, this is not something we do alone.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

C H A P T E R 4

—————1—————

Why do you think many Christians think of disciple making as something that only church leaders do?

—————2—————

How would you encourage a Christian who does not feel as if he or she can make disciples? What biblical truths would you remind them of?

—————3—————

What should motivate our disciple making efforts? What are some signs that we are motivated by the wrong things?

—————4—————

Besides initially sharing the gospel, what else is involved in disciple making?

—————5—————

What does the command to “make disciples” look like for you practically? What new opportunities can you take advantage of? Be specific with your answers.

CHURCH

[church]

*A local body of baptized believers joined together
under biblical leadership to grow in the likeness of
Christ and express the love of Christ to each other
and to the world around them.*

CHURCH

Sadly, many Christians in our day have a low view of the church. They either refuse to commit to a local church, or, in some cases, they see the church as a hindrance to *real* discipleship. However, the church is not an optional part of God’s plan to make disciples of all nations. It *is* His plan. While no single passage of Scripture gives us a comprehensive definition of the church, the following definition captures some of the most important biblical aspects of the church:

A local body of baptized believers joined together under biblical leadership to grow in the likeness of Christ and to express the love of Christ to each other and to the world around them.

In this chapter we will look at Scripture’s teaching on the church from several different angles. First, we’ll look at three pictures of the church. Second, we’ll look at twelve biblical traits of the church. And then, third, based on those twelve traits, we’ll look at three implications for followers of Christ and for churches.

Three Biblical Pictures of the Church

First Corinthians 3 provides us with three pictures of the church, each of which helps us understand a different aspect of the church. Below we’ll see what it means that we are God’s field, God’s building, and God’s temple.

1. The Church is God’s Field

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. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field . . . (1 Corinthians 3:6–9)

MISSION PRECISION

Paul addresses divisions in the church at Corinth by using agrarian imagery. People plant and water the seeds of the gospel, but God gives the growth. He brings people to life, thus Paul tells the church at Corinth, “You are God’s field” (9). Jesus also used this agrarian imagery to point to God as the One who gives growth. Here’s how he described the kingdom: “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how” (Mark 4:26–27).

Although work is required to scatter the seed, how it grows is a mystery. That’s because the Creator God is the one who causes it to grow. As with the growth of the kingdom, so with the church.

2. The Church is God’s Building

You are . . . God’s building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:9–11)

In his work of planting churches, Paul referred to himself as a skilled master builder who laid a foundation in Christ. We must continue to build on Christ as our foundation, for the Day of Judgment will be the true test of our work (13–15). While our salvation is secure, God is going to judge how you and I serve Him as He builds His church. That reality should cause us to tremble. The church is *God’s* building.

3. The Church is God’s Temple

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16–17)

In the Old Testament, God manifested His glory in Israel’s temple. But now there is a new temple, a new dwelling place for God’s Spirit: the church. Yes, there is a sense in which, as an individual

Christian, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). However, in the passage above, Paul identifies the church at Corinth as God's temple in a corporate sense. This corporate focus is important because there were people in Corinth dividing the church over allegiance to specific leaders. Paul wanted these Corinthians to know Who they were messing with. The church is *God's* temple, the place where His Holy Spirit dwells.

Twelve Biblical Traits of the Church

The three pictures of the church we have just looked at should caution us against treating the church casually. The church is where God intends to put His holy character on display, which means we must work only according to His Word. So what does a church built on God's Word look like? To answer that question, we will identify twelve biblical traits of a church. (Some of these traits have been explained in greater depth in previous chapters.)

1. *Evangelism*

There is an inextricable relationship between biblical evangelism and the local church. In fact, the first time Jesus mentions the word *church* in Scripture, He speaks of building the church, which requires evangelism. When Peter rightly identified Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), Jesus offered this promise: "... on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

This is not the place to address all the questions and controversies in the history of the church over what Jesus meant when He said He would build the church "on this rock." (Jesus was speaking to Peter, whose name means "rock," so there's a bit of a play on words.) Jesus was acknowledging some kind of foundation in Peter, but not based on anything inherently great in Peter. By God's grace, Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Based on this confession, Jesus was essentially saying to Peter, "You are my authoritative apostle, sent out from me to proclaim the gos-

MISSION PRECISION

pel—the truth that I am the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Upon you and your proclamation of this gospel, I will build my church.”

We see Christ’s words being fulfilled in the book of Acts as He began building His church in the power of the Spirit through the proclamation of the gospel. Whether it was the thousands saved at Peter’s first sermon (Acts 2:41), the countless conversions and churches started as a result of Paul’s ministry, or the proclamation of the Word by other apostles and ordinary believers, the church grew through the proclamation and sharing of the gospel. And Jesus is still building His church today as the church proclaims and shares the gospel among every people group on the planet.

2. *Discipleship*

As we’ve seen in previous chapters, we don’t do evangelism and then just move on. We baptize people and we teach them to obey everything Christ commanded (Matthew 28:19). We teach them not only to trust *in* Christ (Acts 16:31), but also to walk *with* Christ (Colossians 2:6), which necessitates ongoing training.

At the same time, we must be careful not to overcomplicate discipleship. Discipleship is fundamentally about helping other believers live in accordance with the gospel, coming alongside them and sharing life with them. The beauty of disciple making is how simple it can be. Not easy, but simple. And all this happens in the context of a local church. For example, men disciple other men who are less mature in the faith; older women disciple younger women (Titus 2:3–5); parents disciple their children (Ephesians 6:1–4). Every church member should be looking to help other members grow in their faith.

3. *Membership*

Being a member of a church means more than having your name on a role. A healthy church has *identifiable* membership, that is, members who are committed to one another in concrete, visible ways. And this is not merely a human invention:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the

members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. . . . The body does not consist of one member but of many. (1 Corinthians 12:12–14)

There is a universal body of Christ comprised of all believers, but the Bible also teaches us the importance of *local* church membership. The word for church (*ekklesia*) in the New Testament literally refers to a gathering. In fact, almost every time the word church appears in the New Testament, it is referring to a gathering of Christians in a particular place. For example, we read about the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:22), the church of God in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2), the churches in Galatia (Galatians 1:2), the church of the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:1), and churches that met in houses (Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2). The Bible puts a clear priority on these local gatherings as visible expressions of the universal body of Christ.

4. Leadership

Biblical leadership is critical to the health of the church, regardless of the context. Identifying qualified leaders was a priority in Paul's church planting efforts. He appointed—or asked others to appoint—elders in every congregation (2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:5). An elder is the same role as a pastor or an overseer, as these three terms are interchangeable in the New Testament.

The qualifications of an elder are laid out clearly in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. Like the qualifications for deacons, the qualifications for an elder are primarily based on his character and godliness. However, unlike deacons, elders must be able to teach God's Word faithfully and accurately to God's people. It's also worth noting that Scripture requires elders to be men. While this truth is not popular in some contexts, we cannot allow cultural patterns and practices to take priority over biblical parameters. The Bible's teaching on male leadership is truth for all people in all times in all cultures. Male pastoral leadership is not a Western invention; it is God's invention. He gives leaders as a gift to His church in order to equip His people (Ephesians 4:11–12).

MISSION PRECISION

5. *Teaching and Preaching*

As qualified leaders are recognized in the church, Jesus uses these men to build up His church through faithful teaching and preaching of His Word. This is a central part of the church's weekly gathering. Disciples are, in essence, learners, which means they gather together weekly to be taught by God through His Word.

A church is not built on the *discussion* of God's Word but on *instruction* in God's Word. Biblically qualified leaders should be preaching the point of the biblical text. Such preaching takes into consideration both the immediate context of a given passage as well as the overall message of the Bible. This is a formidable calling, which is why leadership development in the church is so important. Good, rigorous theological training is needed, the kind that fuels healthy disciple making and church multiplication. Pastors should want to learn from saints around the world and saints throughout history (who have themselves studied the Scriptures) in order to fight for truth and defend the church against error and heresy. In turn, every member of the church needs to hear from God's Word as it is taught and preached by qualified leaders in the church's weekly gathering.

6. *Ordinances*

A healthy church practices the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Every disciple of Jesus should identify with Jesus in baptism, for this was part of Christ's commission in Matthew 28:19. We see the importance of baptism throughout the book of Acts (2:42; 16:14–15) and the letters of the New Testament (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27). Likewise, Christ instructed His disciples to take the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Him (Luke 22:14–23). We give thanks as we take this meal, for by faith we have fellowship with Christ and His people as we remember Christ's death and look forward to His return. Paul reminded the Corinthians to partake of this meal in a manner worthy of the Lord who had saved them (1 Corinthians 11:17–34).

7. *Worship*

Healthy churches regularly gather to exalt God in worship—to sing, to share testimonies of God’s grace, to spur one another on toward Christ through His Word, and to send one another out on mission into the world. Paul provides various instructions on our corporate gatherings in his letters (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 11 and 14). These gatherings are not merely historical conventions but rather God’s means of sustaining the faith of his people (Hebrews 10:24–25).

8. *Prayer*

The early church was devoted to prayer (Acts 2:42). Likewise, Scripture speaks of a twin devotion among early church leaders, namely, the ministry of prayer and the Word (Acts 6:4). Every major advance of the gospel in the book of Acts comes in response to the prayers of God’s people. Corporate prayer, then, should be a priority in a healthy church.

9. *Fellowship*

The Greek word for fellowship (*koinonia*) summarizes all the “one anothers” in Scripture. We are told, for example, to love, serve, care, teach, serve, admonish, exhort, build up, and bear with one another (see Colossians 3:12–17). God has designed the church for this kind of fellowship. No one can live the Christian life in isolation. We need brothers and sisters in Christ to spur us on toward Christ and to keep us from wandering away from the truth.

“

*No one can live the
Christian life in isolation.*

”

10. *Accountability and Discipline*

From the very start of the Christian life, accountability to a local church

should be the norm. And, according to Scripture, that accountability should be accompanied by church discipline, a biblical trait of the church we do not often talk about. Discipline includes the positive role a church plays in the spiritual formation of its members. How-

MISSION PRECISION

ever, church discipline also involves addressing sin and those who unrepentantly persist in it.

In His second (and final) use of the word church in Scripture, Jesus laid out the steps for how members of a church should address the unrepentant sins of fellow members:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. (Matthew 18:15–20)

Jesus is talking about a process by which someone who is identified as a member of a church is removed from the church's membership due to unrepentant sin. Paul exhorted the church at Corinth to carry out this aspect of church discipline against a brother who was living in unrepentant sexual immorality: "Let him who has done this be removed from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:2). He describes this aspect of church discipline in sobering terms:

When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. . . . Purge the evil person from among you. (1 Corinthians 5:4–5, 13)

This is not a blank check to carry out our own agendas by removing those with whom we disagree. It is a responsibility we have been given by Christ, not only for the sake of the church's witness, but also for the sake of the individual's soul. Our goal in church discipline is to see those who are living in sin repent and be restored to fellowship with the church.

11. Biblical Giving

Healthy churches give their resources on a regular basis for the ministry of the church (1 Corinthians 16:1–2). Churches should be financially self-sustaining or at least moving toward that goal. Their resources should be used to address needs within the body as well as the church’s mission in the world.

12. Biblical Mission

Healthy churches make it their aim to make disciples locally and globally. This, after all, was the mission given to us by Jesus (Matthew 28:18–20). And, as we’ve already seen, this is the responsibility and privilege of *every* member in the church—to be a disciple maker in the world.

Three Implications

Based on the twelve biblical traits of a church we have just identified, at least three implications can be drawn for individual followers of Christ and for churches.

1. Participate in Healthy Churches

It should be a top priority for every Christian to be a member of a local church. While no church is perfect, each of us needs to be a part of a church where the twelve traits listed above are being pursued. We need these traits, not only for our own souls, but also for the spread of the gospel. The world needs to see what a church looks like.

2. Plant Healthy Churches

As churches carry out Christ’s mission, they should not simply focus on making individual disciples but rather on planting healthy churches. In the process, they should be faithful to God’s design for the church. Patience will be needed as we teach, train, pray, and offer guidance, but we can trust God with the results.

MISSION PRECISION

3. Partner with Healthy Churches

In order to see peoples reached and churches planted among all peoples, particularly among the unreached, churches need to partner with other healthy churches that share the same stated beliefs. We can be more effective as we cooperate in this common mission for the glory of our Savior.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

C H A P T E R 5

—————1—————

Why do you think so many Christians in our culture see the church as unnecessary?

—————2—————

How would you respond to someone who said, “The Bible doesn’t talk about church membership.”

—————3—————

Why is biblical teaching and preaching so critical for the life of the church?

—————4—————

Why must all Christians participate in healthy churches?

—————5—————

Why is the church critical to the Great Commission?

CALLING

[kaw - ling]

The call to salvation is the gracious act of God by which He draws people to become disciples of Jesus and members of His church.

The call to salvation includes a call to mission, for every person who responds to God's call as a disciple of Jesus receives Christ's command to make disciples of Jesus.

Christ calls disciples to specific stations in and through which they exalt Him on mission.

The call to service is the gracious act of God by which He directs disciples to make disciples in a certain way, at a certain time, among a certain people, in a certain location, or through a certain vocation.

CALLING

When we think about God’s *calling*, we normally think of important life and ministry decisions. Those looking to serve cross-culturally, for example, often speak of a “missionary call.” Similarly, Christians who want to make disciples in their own communities often talk of finding God’s *call* on their life. However, before we think about the call to serve in a particular role, job, or location, or even before we consider whether God is calling us to be missionaries, we need to recognize that Scripture speaks of God’s call in much more foundational and important ways.

In this chapter we will examine four different ways Scripture speaks of God’s calling in our lives. We’ll begin with the most foundational aspect of God’s call—the call to salvation.

1. The Call to Salvation

The call to salvation is the gracious act of God by which He draws people to become disciples of Jesus and members of His church.

This is the predominant way the word call or calling is used in Scripture. For example, Paul refers to the Corinthian believers as those who are “*called* to be saints” and “*called* into the fellowship of his [God’s] Son” (1 Corinthians 1:2, 9, emphasis added). This calling distinguishes believers from unbelievers, for it enables sinners to see and embrace Jesus by faith:

But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are *called*, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (23–24, emphasis added)

This saving call is the way God draws people to Himself, and it is found throughout Scripture.¹³ But how does this call happen? The

MISSION PRECISION

call to salvation comes through the proclamation of God's Word in the power of God's Spirit. In other words, this call comes through the church's obedience to Christ's command to make disciples (Matthew 28:19). As we share the gospel, we are the means by which God is calling people to salvation. What a privilege!

As God calls people to salvation, He is also calling them to a new way of life. For example, every follower of Christ is called to "freedom" (Galatians 5:13), to "holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:7), and to "suffer" for Christ (1 Peter 2:20–21). This latter call, the call to suffer, is sobering. It reminds us that following Jesus is costly, both for us and for those with whom we share the gospel. However, we can't lose sight of the big picture. Suffering makes us more like Christ, and it prepares us for our eternal reward (Romans 8:17). The call to salvation forms the unshakeable foundation of a disciple's primary identity now and forever:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are *called* according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also *called*, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:28–30, emphasis added)

Those whom God called, He justified, and those whom God justified, He glorified. Notice that Paul speaks of our glorification in the past tense, as if it's a sure thing, a done deal. Those whom God calls don't just *hope* that He will bring them to glory one day; they know He will. Our identity, then, is not intended to be found in a position we hold, a place we live, or the kind of work we do. For when these things change, we are shaken to the core. Far more important than any job or ministry calling, God has called you to be in Christ.

2. The Call to Mission

The call to salvation includes a call to mission, for every person who responds to God's call as a disciple of Jesus receives Christ's command to make disciples of Jesus.

Every disciple of Christ is called to mission. As we saw in Chapter 4, disciple making is not the job of a few staff members in a church. It is the God-given, Christ-enabled, Spirit-empowered duty of every disciple, regardless of his or her station, location, or vocation. Every disciple plays an integral part in the eternal purpose of God to glorify His name through disciples made in every nation. This is what it means to be called to mission.

Some people talk about how God is working in their lives, giving them a strong desire to lead people to Christ. And churches sometimes view this evangelistic passion as a call to ministry, or maybe even a call to be a missionary. However, if being a disciple of Jesus means making disciples of Jesus, and if the essence of following Christ is fishing for men (Matthew 4:19), then there's no special call needed in order to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, having a desire to lead people to Christ and see disciples made in all nations doesn't make someone a missionary. That makes someone a Christian.

“
... *having a desire to lead people to Christ and see disciples made in all nations doesn't make someone a missionary. That makes someone a Christian.*”

In Chapter 7 we will see what it means for God to call someone to be a missionary, which is not the case for every Christian. However, Christ's mission is not a compartmentalized program in the church for a select few. It is the foundational purpose in the church for which every disciple was created.

Christian, you have the Spirit of Christ in you, and the Spirit of Christ is passionate about the glory of Christ in all nations. So why wouldn't you be passionate about the glory of Christ in all nations?

3. The Call to Station

Christ calls disciples to specific stations in and through which they exalt Him on mission.

A station is simply a role, relationship, or responsibility in life in which God has placed us. One such station is the family, where Christians are called to be faithful sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and mothers and fathers, all for the spread of God's gospel and the display of God's glory. Scripture also speaks of a divine call to singleness for the sake of the gospel, either for a temporary period or for the entirety of one's life (1 Corinthians 7). Christ's call to meaningful membership in a local church is another example of a call to station for every disciple, as is the call to responsible citizenship in one's community (Romans 13:1–7).

So what's the connection between this call to a specific station in life and the other calls we've looked at? When God calls us to salvation, He is also calling us to honor Him in each of these stations. Likewise, God's call to mission means that we should see these various stations as the ways God has chosen to spread His gospel through us. However, we need to think through how to prioritize these various stations.

Some fathers, for example, put more effort into leading in the workplace than they do into leading their own families. But more foundational than a call to a specific job is God's call on men to love and lead their wives and children for the sake of the gospel (Ephesians 5:25–6:4). The call to vocation should not take precedence over one's spouse or children.

Another issue is the lack of priority some Christians give to membership in the local church. They attempt to grow as disciples, and even make disciples, apart from a commitment to a local body of believers. However, growth in Christ and making disciples should be pursued in submission to biblical leadership and within the covenant community of a local church.

Finally, the call to be a responsible citizen does not mean we can ignore our ultimate allegiance to Christ. In the early church, followers of Christ had to wrestle with how to carry out Christ's mission as citizens of the Roman Empire. The Roman emperor was not ultimately supreme, but believers were nevertheless commanded to honor, obey, respect, and submit to civic authority as an extension of their submission to Christ (Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17). Only when the political authorities command us to disobey God or prohibit us from obeying Him should we refuse to submit. In such cases, we are compelled to say with Peter and John, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

4. The Call to Service

The call to service is the gracious act of God by which He directs disciples to make disciples in a certain way, at a certain time, among a certain people, in a certain location, or through a certain vocation.

Of the four calls discussed in this chapter, the call to service is the most specific in terms of how a particular disciple is called to carry out his or her mission. For instance, God may lead a businessman to go overseas to a context where there are few Christians in order to make the gospel known by serving in a local church in that city. It should be noted that calls to service may be fluid. They operate at varying levels, and every follower of Christ should be open to varying assignments from God. What must be constant in a disciple's life, however, is faithfulness to God's call, no matter the cost, until God calls the disciple to a different service. One's call to service is discerned and affirmed not just individually, but as a member of a local church on mission in the world.

We see several examples of a call to service in Scripture. For example, the Spirit told the church at Antioch to set apart Paul and Barnabas for the spread of the gospel (Acts 13:1–4). We also see the

MISSION PRECISION

Spirit using a vision to call Paul and Timothy to take the gospel to Macedonia (Acts 16:6–10; see also Acts 20:22–24). Paul’s call to be the apostle to the Gentiles was also a call to a particular service (Romans 11:13; Galatians 1:15–16). God’s call to service may even involve a certain vocation, for Paul himself used tentmaking as he proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ (Acts 18:1–4).

Unfortunately, it is common for some vocations to be viewed as superior to others. A missionary, for example, is often viewed as more important in God’s kingdom than a man who works in sales or a lady who works in a restaurant as a waitress. However, it is God who graciously calls men and women to various vocations, so there is no room for boasting or for creating our own hierarchy of important occupations. All work is significant when it is done to the glory of God. Here’s how William Tyndale put it:

If we look externally, there is difference between washing dishes and preaching the Word of God, but as touching to please God, there is no difference at all. That’s a biblical view of work, that there’s no difference when done to the honor of the Lord between preaching and washing the dishes.¹⁴

Have you thought of what it would be like if everyone in your community was a pastor? Sure, you would know how to teach the Bible and shepherd the church, but the community wouldn’t know how to do anything else. The same holds true for other vocations; if we were all in sales, then we wouldn’t have any products to sell; if we were all police officers, then we’d be safe, but we would also be hungry.

We need each other. Similar to the way the body of Christ has different parts, all of which are important (1 Corinthians 12:12–31), God has created us to work in a variety of different vocations in the world, and each of us benefits. This view of vocation was an important part of the Protestant Reformation. If, as Luther contended, we are justified by God solely through faith in the finished work of Christ, then there is no work—not even religious work—that can increase our status before God.

It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and for this reason: all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office . . . A cobbler, a smith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops. Further, everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his work or office . . . ¹⁵

Once we affirm that all vocations are significant before the Lord, there is a question that naturally arises: *How do I know what the Lord is leading me to do?* There is no fool-proof method to figuring out your vocation, but when you are surrendered to God, there are some questions that can get you started in the right direction. Consider your desires, gifts, abilities and opportunities:

- **Desires:** Do I have the desire to do this?
- **Gifts:** Is this a good stewardship of the gifts God has given me?
- **Abilities:** Do I have the education, training, and expertise to carry out this job?
- **Opportunities:** Has the Lord opened up the opportunity for me to serve in this role?

Ask trusted members of your church to help you answer these questions. You may still have a sense of uncertainty about a particular vocational decision, but that's no reason to panic. If you are surrendered to the Lord, abiding in His Word, and resting in the gospel as your only hope, then you don't have to be anxious about missing God's will for you. God is a good Father, and His sovereignty is such that He can orchestrate even our wrong decisions for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28). His calls to salvation, mission, station, and service should bring us hope in the midst of trials and trouble, doubt and discouragement, pressure and persecution.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

C H A P T E R 6

1

When most people speak of the “missionary calling,” what are they referring to?

2

Besides God’s call to a particular “station” for making disciples, what other ways does Scripture speak of God’s calling?

3

What’s the danger of thinking of God’s calling primarily as an internal prompting or an inner voice we hear in our hearts?

4

Why is it so crucial that a Christian’s identity is found in his or her calling in Christ, i.e., the call to salvation, and not in a particular role of service?

5

How might a church discern whether God is calling a person to serve as a cross-cultural missionary? How should the church respond to someone they deem to be unqualified who says, “But I know in my heart God is calling me”?

MISSIONARY

[mish-uh-ner-ee]

AND

MISSIONARY TEAM

[mish-uh-ner-ee • team]

A missionary is a disciple of Jesus set apart by the Holy Spirit, sent out from the church to cross geographic, cultural, and/or linguistic barriers as part of a missionary team focused on making disciples and multiplying churches among unreached peoples and places.

A missionary team is an identifiable group of disciples who meet together regularly, care for each other selflessly, and partner with one another intentionally to make disciples and multiply churches among particular unreached peoples and/or places.

MISSIONARY & MISSIONARY TEAM

Despite the fact that so much of the world is in need of a missionary, there seems to be no consensus among evangelicals today about what a missionary is or does. Some claim that every Christian is a missionary. They resonate with the sentiments of Charles Spurgeon:

If Jesus is precious to you, you will not be able to keep your good news to yourself; you will be whispering it into your child's ear; you will be telling it to your husband; you will be earnestly imparting it to your friend; without the charms of eloquence you will be more than eloquent; your heart will speak, and your eyes will flash as you talk of his sweet love. *Every Christian here is either a missionary or an impostor.* Recollect that. You either try to spread abroad the kingdom of Christ, or else you do not love him at all. It cannot be that there is a high appreciation of Jesus and a totally silent tongue about him.¹⁶ (emphasis added)

On the other hand, some Christians claim that one must move to another country to be considered a missionary. But this still leaves us with questions. For example, what about a Christian engineer who takes a job overseas and who wants to live out his faith—does that automatically make him a missionary? Or is there an allotted number of hours per week that one must give to ministry? Or is it the *type* of work that matters? As you can see, there are a variety of grey areas.

Apostles and Missionaries

One reason there's a lot of confusion about how to define the term *missionary* is that Scripture doesn't give us an explicit definition. In fact, if you skim through an English Bible, you won't find the word missionary anywhere. It comes from the Latin word *mittere*, which means "to send." The corresponding word in Greek (the language of the New Testament) is *apostellein*, from which we get our word

MISSION PRECISION

“apostle” (*apostolos*). We need to examine this word further to see how it relates to our idea of a missionary.

The term apostle occurs over 130 times in Scripture, though there is some variation in how it is used. At the most basic level, an apostle is a “sent one.” For example, Jesus set apart and sent out twelve men who would later be called apostles:

And he [Jesus] appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. (Mark 3:14–15)¹⁷

These twelve men sent out by Jesus were clearly the first apostles. However, in the book of Acts, the word apostle is also used to refer to people outside of the original twelve. For example, Matthias was chosen to take the place of Judas because he met the qualifications of an apostle (Acts 1:21–26). Later, Paul and Barnabas are referred to as apostles (Acts 14:4). In fact, this is the term Paul often uses to introduce himself in his letters, for he was “called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God” (Romans 1:1).¹⁸ James, the brother of Jesus (not the James of the original twelve), was also called an apostle (Galatians 1:19). Finally, the term apostle also seems to be given to others who were associated with the apostles and partnered with them in the ministry of the gospel.¹⁹

The variation in Scripture’s use of the term apostle is one reason why there is disagreement among Bible teachers and scholars over the relationship between an apostle and a missionary. Some claim that missionaries sent out today are essentially the equivalent of the apostles we read about in Scripture. Others claim that an apostle was a unique and temporary role given only to certain men at the church’s founding. For example, Paul says the church was “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20). Similarly, in Ephesians 4:11–12 he says that God 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 (Ephesians 4:11–12). Regardless of your view on this issue, the ministries of the

apostles have a lot to teach us about the role of missionaries in taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the peoples of the earth.

Defining Missionary

So to return to our original question—Is every Christian a missionary?—the answer is *yes*, if by missionary we simply mean “sent one.” Every follower of Christ has been sent out by Christ to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). At the same time, there is evidence in Scripture that some Christians were uniquely sent out from the church for a particular purpose. Paul, for instance, describes his calling this way:

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, but as it is written,

“Those who have never been told of him will see,
and those who have never heard will understand.”

This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. (Romans 15:18–24)

Using this passage, as well as other truths from Scripture, let’s define the term missionary as follows:

A missionary is a disciple of Jesus set apart by the Holy Spirit, sent out from the church to cross geographic, cultural, and/or linguistic barriers as part of a missionary team focused on making disciples and multiplying churches among unreached peoples and places.

MISSION PRECISION

Set Apart by the Spirit, Sent Out from the Church

At the most basic level, a missionary is a “sent one” who goes out from the church in the power of the Spirit as a representative of Christ. In this sense, there is some overlap between a missionary and an apostle. We are reminded of the way Paul and Barnabas were sent out from the church at Antioch:

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:2–3)

The church laid hands on these two men and sent them off in a way that they didn’t do for everyone else in the church. So Paul (who is sometimes called Saul) and Barnabas were given a role that was different from other Christians at Antioch. These men are both called “apostles” in Scripture (Acts 14:4), and they were set apart by the Holy Spirit and sent out from the church for a particular task.

Crossing Geographic, Cultural, and/or Linguistic Barriers

Paul and Barnabas traveled from Antioch to different cities and regions to proclaim the gospel. Likewise, in Acts 22:21 Paul recounts Christ’s call on his life, and he describes it in geographic and cultural terms: “Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.” The phrase “far away” implies crossing geographic barriers, while going “to the Gentiles” requires crossing cultural barriers. Similarly, in the passage cited above, Paul says he ministered “from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum” (Romans 15:19). So there is clearly a sense in which a missionary crosses barriers—geographic, cultural, and/or linguistic—for the spread of the gospel. However, that doesn’t mean all of these barriers must be crossed in order for someone to be considered a missionary.

A missionary may cross a geographic barrier without needing to learn another language. When Paul was on his missionary journey, he wasn’t necessarily learning new languages, but he was crossing

geographic and cultural barriers. On the other hand, some missionaries must cross linguistic barriers for the spread of the gospel. They do extensive training in language and culture in order to clearly communicate the gospel to certain peoples. In one way or another, a missionary is crossing barriers for the spread of the gospel.

To Make Disciples and Multiply Churches

The work of a missionary involves evangelism, discipleship, church planting, and leadership training, all aimed at seeing disciples made and churches multiplied. Notice that this is a specific task. Missionaries should not be sent to do all sorts of random ministries around the world. Here's an example of what it looked like in Paul's ministry:

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:21–23)

Paul made disciples (evangelism and discipleship), gathered them into churches (church planting), and then appointed elders in the churches (leadership training). This summarizes the missionary task, and each part is important. The missionary task is not only evangelism, as if our only goal is to lead someone to Jesus and then quickly move on to the next person. Likewise, the missionary task is not only about individual disciples; we want to gather people into healthy churches. And those churches should be led by qualified elders, or pastors, which means we must identify and train church leaders. Given these various priorities, how should a missionary team spend most of its time? In short, *the state of the church determines our strategy for mission.*

If there is no church among a particular people or in a particular place, then making disciples and starting a church is the first priority. Where the church has a presence, missionaries should work

MISSION PRECISION

to strengthen, equip, and mobilize existing churches to join in the mission of spreading the gospel. It's worth noting that various levels of theological training for missionaries will be extremely useful to carry out these tasks in a way that is faithful to Scripture. The level of training needed will depend on a number of factors, including the spiritual maturity, experience, and knowledge of the missionary, and sending churches should speak into this process.

Among Unreached Peoples and Places

We will define the concept of unreached peoples and places in greater depth in the next chapter, but needless to say, this is where the spiritual need is the greatest. Missions efforts in other areas are not necessarily misplaced or unimportant. However, given the massive number of people who have little or no access to the gospel, missionaries and churches ought to have a laser-sharp focus on getting the message of the gospel to those who have not yet been reached. As we saw earlier, preaching Christ where He had not been named was Paul's driving "ambition" (Romans 15:20).

Missionary Team

In order to get to the point where the peoples of the world are reached with the gospel, I am convinced we need more people involved in the task. And that doesn't only mean more missionaries from North American churches. I wholeheartedly believe that God desires to raise up men and women from less reached parts of the world and so turn harvest fields into mission forces. At the same time, I long to see exponentially more missionaries from churches in North America leveraging the opportunities God has opened up around the world. Professionals, students, and retirees, for example, ought to be coming alongside full-time church planters. But in order for that plan to have any chance of working, we've got to have a healthy understanding of a missionary team.

In the New Testament, disciples on mission most often serve on

teams in which different people have different roles and responsibilities. Jesus, for example, sent His disciples out two by two (Luke 10:1), and Paul often traveled with at least one other person in his missionary travels (Acts 13:2; 15:40; 16:3). Then, beyond this biblical precedent, Scripture points to strong personal, practical, and pastoral reasons for disciples on mission not to serve in isolation from others. In fact, no Christian has been called to live in isolation. We need the body of Christ (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Hebrews 10:24–25).

There are also evangelistic reasons for disciples to exalt Christ in the context of Christian community. For example, Jesus says people will know we are Christians “if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). And when Jesus prays for the unity of the church in His high priestly prayer, He says that this unity shows the world His identity as well as God’s love for His people (John 17:23). The Spirit-empowered witness of an individual Christian is a great thing, but the Christian community puts Christ on display in a way that is utterly unique (Acts 2:42–47).

So, given the importance of partnering with other believers in our missionary efforts, what makes a group of missionaries a missionary team? Here’s a definition:

A missionary team is an identifiable group of disciples who meet together regularly, care for each other selflessly, and partner with one another intentionally to make disciples and multiply churches among particular unreached peoples and/or places.

Several aspects of this definition need to be clarified briefly.

An Identifiable Group of People

Calling a missionary team an identifiable group of people means that these missionaries know each other. They know each other’s personalities, strengths, weaknesses, needs, etc.

MISSION PRECISION

Meet Together Regularly

Proximity is important for a missionary team. Every missionary, just like every Christian, needs to meet regularly with other believers face-to-face.

Care for Each Other Selflessly

Missionaries need the care of the body of Christ. This is non-negotiable, particularly given the difficulties of serving among many peoples and places around the world. Selfless, sacrificial care for other team members is critical to their spiritual health as well as the effectiveness of the mission.

Partner with One Another Intentionally

There is a purpose to the community and fellowship of a missionary team, namely, to make disciples and multiply churches among particular unreached peoples and places. It's this purpose that sets the missionary team apart from other groups of believers that meet together. However, it should be noted that a missionary team is not the same thing as a church. (In Chapter 5 we saw the biblical traits of a church, including qualified leaders who preach and teach Scripture, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, identifiable membership, church discipline, etc.)

“
*Missionaries need
the care of the body
of Christ.*
”

Sometimes the question is asked as to who makes up these teams. Missionary teams may be comprised of missionaries, national believers, and/or other Great Commission partners (like-minded individuals who believe the Bible and want to spread the gospel). The first and most important qualification is that they must be followers of Jesus. In addition, they must also be able to meet regularly, care for other members on the team, and partner with them for the spread of the gospel among the unreached. These men and women would work alongside church planters, nationals, or other Great Commission partners.

Various contexts will present different and sometimes complex circumstances. Factors such as training, accountability, and financial support must be considered. Yet, the goal remains the same—to see *more* people become a part of missionary teams that are working together to make disciples and multiply churches among the unreached. This is a glorious calling, and though it comes at a cost, the reward is far greater.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

C H A P T E R 7

—————1—————

Respond to the following statement: “Every Christian is a missionary.”

—————2—————

Given that all Christians should make disciples, how is a missionary’s calling unique?

—————3—————

What role does a church play in identifying who should (or should not) serve as a missionary? What are some of the dangers of ignoring the church in this process?

—————4—————

What are some benefits of sending missionary teams rather than individuals?

—————5—————

List some ways that a Christian who does not serve as a pastor might participate on a missionary team?

UNREACHED PEOPLE AND PLACES

[uhn-reech-t • pee-puhl • plays-ez]

Unreached peoples and places are those among whom Christ is largely unknown and the church is relatively insufficient to make Christ known in its broader population without outside help.

UNREACHED PEOPLE & PLACES

If missionaries should be focused on making disciples and multiplying churches among the unreached, which is what we saw in the previous chapter, then we need to be able to define what it means to be *unreached*. This is not merely a technical matter, for our definition of unreached will affect where churches send missionaries, as well as how churches spend their time, money, and resources. In addition, every church member should want to understand the term unreached so that he or she can participate in the spread of the gospel to the most needy people and places around the world.

One challenge in defining the term unreached is that the actual word is not in the Bible. However, that doesn't mean it's not a biblical concept. In order to think biblically about how we use the term unreached, we need to return to the same passage that helped us define missionary in the last chapter. Here is Paul's summary of his ministry at the end of his third missionary journey:

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written,

“Those who have never been told of him will see,
and those who have never heard will understand.”

(Romans 15:18–21)

Identifying the Unreached

Paul is making a distinction between people and places where Christ has been named and people and places where Christ has *not* been named. Based on this distinction, here's a proposed definition of the

MISSION PRECISION

term unreached:

Unreached peoples and places are those among whom Christ is largely unknown and the church is relatively insufficient to make Christ known in its broader population without outside help.

Based on that definition, there are two main factors used to identify people as unreached.

1. Unreached peoples don't know the name of Christ.

Some who are considered unreached have never even heard of Jesus. Others may have heard the name mentioned, but they don't know who Jesus is or what He did. They are like many Americans today when it comes to someone like Confucius. They may be able to tell you that Confucius taught on philosophy or the meaning of life, or something along those lines, but that's the extent of it.

2. Unreached peoples don't have a church presence around them.

To be unreached means that you don't have contact with a community of followers of Christ. This separation may be due to geography—you are physically separated from Christians—or there may simply be no church among your people group (or both things may be true). Regardless, a people group is considered unreached if there is not a church with sufficient resources to make the name and truth of Christ known among that people group or in that place. Unless someone from the outside comes in and works among that unreached people group or unreached place, then these people will likely be unreached until they die.

These two factors used to identify the unreached should make it clear why the label unreached is different from the labels *unsaved* and *lost*. Some people wonder why an emphasis should be put on the unreached when there are lost people all around us. However, the lost people around you have access to you, as well as to other Christians

and churches. The unreached, on the other hand, have no way of hearing the gospel. So yes, we should always try to reach the lost people around us, but in terms of cross-cultural missions, our top priority should be those who currently have no access to the gospel. Consider the massive spiritual needs in the world right now:

Clarifying Terms and Concepts

In addition to the two factors used to identify the unreached, there are some words and concepts in the definition above that need to be clarified.

Peoples

When we talk about peoples in the definition above, we are talking about *people groups*. These are ethno-linguistic groups of people who



“
... the lost people
around you have
access to you, as
well as to other
Christians and
churches. The
unreached, on the
other hand, have no
way of hearing
the gospel.”

share common language and cultural characteristics, a common ethnicity. Although Scripture also uses the term “nations,” most people think of nations as the approximately 200 recognized nations in the world today.

As we saw in a previous chapter, when Jesus gave His initial command to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), the word used (*ethne*) refers to ethnic groups. Jesus was commanding His followers to make disciples among all ethnic groups, not merely among the Israelites. Jesus was, and is, Lord over all the peoples of the world (Romans 10:12).

MISSION PRECISION

All history is headed toward the day when every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—all the *ethne* of the world—will have been reached with the gospel. These people groups will gather around the throne and give glory to God and to the Lamb:

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, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:9–10, emphasis added)

Based on passages like this, terms like peoples, people groups, ethnolinguistic groups, and even nations, can be used interchangeably. To clarify, we are not ignoring individuals, but for the purpose of the church’s mission, we are thinking of how best to reach people groups (comprised of individuals) who have little or no access to the gospel.

Places

Another concern about our current definition of unreached is that it unnecessarily limits the “unreached” label to a particular people group. However, we must not ignore the reality that when the New Testament records the spread of the gospel through the early church, biblical authors strongly focus on places, not only peoples. For example, in Luke’s account of Paul’s missionary journeys in the book of Acts, he primarily records the spread of the gospel from city to city and region to region, not from people group to people group. In fact, the entire book of Acts records the geographic expansion of the church from Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Likewise, in his letters, Paul expressed his desire to proclaim Christ “from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum” (Romans 15:19), and he spoke of his desire to come to Rome on his way to Spain (Romans 15:24).

Biblical accounts do not neglect the mention (and even impor-

tance) of ethnic and cultural distinctions among Christian converts. However, the earliest missionaries seemed focused on spreading the gospel not only to unreached peoples, but also (and often even *more* so) to unreached places. It is both biblical and helpful, then, to recognize the unreached in terms of both peoples and places, for both realities bear uniquely upon missions strategies.

Labels

You may be wondering how we decide if there are genuine followers of Christ among a people group. After all, there are many people groups in the world that are labeled as Christian, but they don't believe the Bible or the gospel. These "Christians" are actually unreached. We should therefore understand people to be Christian only when they believe the gospel and the Bible. (Such people are sometimes referred to as "evangelicals.") Simply identifying as a Christian doesn't make you a Christian.

Numbers

It's common for unreached peoples to be defined as ethnolinguistic groups in which the number of evangelical Christians is less than 2%. Though this definition is helpful in some ways, it is problematic in others. For example, it arbitrarily identifies a 2% threshold as *the* determinant between reached and unreached. But it's not clear that this is a sufficient number of Christians needed for the spread of the gospel in all contexts. Missionaries, missiologists, and sociologists continue to debate this issue.

Another problem with the 2% threshold is that it does not take into consideration the gospel's recent progress, or lack thereof, in a particular people group. For example, if People Group A is 1.9% evangelical and People Group B is 2.1% evangelical, then you might assume that the church in People Group B is in a slightly stronger position. However, your evaluation might change if you found out that the number of evangelicals in People Group B had *decreased* almost

MISSION PRECISION

3% over the last five years while the number of evangelicals in People Group A had *increased* from 0% to 1.9% during that same time period. The message of the gospel seems to be taking root and spreading in People Group A, while it is being abandoned by many in People Group B. Clearly, then, a 2% threshold (or any other percentage) does not give us the full picture.

In addition to gospel access, our missions strategies should take into consideration the state of the church in a particular people or place. Some relevant questions might include:

- How many churches are there?
- What is the health of these churches?
- Do these churches reflect the biblical characteristics of a healthy church?
- Is the church growing or declining?

Based upon these and other relevant factors, we then decide which missionary teams to deploy, where to deploy them, and what they should do when they arrive. Because every context is unique, we want to be sensitive to what God may already be doing among the unreached, as well as what the most urgent ministry needs are.

Maintaining a Multi-Ethnic Vision

Although we have been talking about reaching particular places and people groups, the goal is not to plant homogeneous churches comprised of single people groups. Such strategies miss the New Testament pattern. Even though Paul had a clear commission to go to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:16), he still proclaimed the gospel to the Jews (1 Corinthians 9:20), which often resulted in much opposition. It would have been easier to keep Jews and Gentiles separate, but that would have undercut the powerful testimony of a multi-ethnic church. The gospel has a unique power to bring Jews and Gentiles together (Ephesians 2:11–22).

Since the gospel beckons (and even requires) Christians to bridge ethnic barriers in the church, we should not plant churches that are

intended to be exclusively and perpetually comprised of one people group. In some contexts, a church made up of one people group may be unavoidable. However, in places where multiple people groups exist, we should plant churches that intentionally bridge ethnic barriers by evangelizing distinct people groups and incorporating them into the church.

One challenge in multi-ethnic church planting, and in missions work in general, is the language barrier. The ability to communicate is critical to carrying out the core functions of the church. As Paul told the Corinthians,

... if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. (1 Corinthians 12:9–11)

Many missionaries must go deep into learning another language in order to evangelize, disciple, plant churches, and train leaders in that language. Add to this the challenge of communicating this new language to multiple people groups within a church, and you can see why disciple making among the unreached demands much patience and wisdom. In some contexts, it may be wise to include other reached people groups in our efforts, as they may be able to more effectively minister to nearby unreached people groups. This is yet another reason for cooperation between churches.

In the end, regardless of where we serve, we are to proclaim the gospel with an intentional focus on reaching different peoples and, to the extent to which it is linguistically possible, gathering them together into churches. In this way, we are playing our part in seeing disciples made and churches multiplied in every place and among every people group in the world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

C H A P T E R 8

1

Why should churches focus on the unreached if there are so many lost people in our own communities? What's the difference between being lost and unreached?

2

Is a people group the same thing as our concept of a nation or country? Explain your answer.

3

The term unreached is often defined as an ethnolinguistic group in which the number of evangelical Christians is less than two percent. What other factors mentioned in this chapter must be considered as we think about a missions strategy?

4

Why is it helpful for our missions strategies to consider the lost in terms of people groups, i.e., their ethnolinguistic distinctions?

5

What are some ways you can be involved in reaching the unreached?

CONCLUSION

Hopefully the previous chapters have caused you to re-examine some of the foundational terms related to the church's mission. You may have known these terms for years, or maybe some of them were brand new to you. Regardless, it should be evident why our understanding of these terms must be grounded in Scripture.

However, the point of making sure that we have the right definitions for these terms is not simply so that we can file them away mentally, satisfied that we have our facts straight. The point is to let these truths shape the way we respond to the mission Christ has given to His church. And this is not a one-time thing. As we seek to obey Christ's command to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), we must return again and again to Scripture as our authority and our guide, not only because we tend to forget these truths, but also because we are constantly tempted to rely on our own wisdom to carry out God's purposes.

The good news is that we can rely on the wisdom of God to carry out the mission of God. And this is not something we do in our own power, for Christ has given us His Spirit. Whether we go next door or to the most remote and resistant people groups on the planet, Christ has assured us, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. . . . I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18, 20). For the eternal good of those with whom we share the gospel, and for the spiritual health of our own churches, let's look to the Word of God as we carry out the mission of God, all to the glory of God.

NOTES

1. My friend and fellow pastor John Meador created this acrostic using some of my past teaching on the truths of the gospel.
2. Francis Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, 70–71. As cited in Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel to the Whole Person by Whole People*, 71.
3. On the eternity of hell, see also Revelation 19:3; 20:10.
4. Thomas Watson, *Farewell Sermons of Some of the Most Eminent of the Nonconformist Preachers*, 220.
5. Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, 11.
6. A.W. Pink, *Eternal Punishment*, Introduction.
7. Barna Group, “Barna Study of Religious Change Since 1991 Shows Significant Changes by Faith Group,” August 4, 2011; Barna Group, “Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist,” April 10, 2009.
8. See Luke 1:13–15, 39–42, 67–69; Acts 2:2–4; 4:8, 32; 9:17–20; 13:8–11.
9. Notice how the result of the Spirit’s filling at Pentecost (Acts 2:17–21) fulfills Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28–32).
10. Douglas Murray, “Is the West’s Loss of Faith Terminal?” *Standpoint* May 2015. Cited in Russell Moore, “Why Islam Grows,” www.russellmoore.com.
11. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 200–201.
12. Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 51–52.
13. Some other examples of this kind of calling include: Isaiah 41:9–10; 43:1–2; Matthew 4:19; 9:13; Mark 2:14; Acts 2:39; Romans 8:28–30; 1 Corinthians 1:26–29; Galatians 1:15; Ephesians 1:18; 4:1–16; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 11–12; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2 Peter 1:3–11; Jude 1–2.
14. William Tyndale, quoted by John MacArthur, “A Theology of Work,” December 12, 2010, www.gty.org.
15. Martin Luther, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation,” in *Three Treatises* (from the American version of Luther’s Works), 12, 15.
16. Charles Spurgeon, “A Sermon and a Reminiscence” from *The Sword and the Trowel*, March, 1873.
17. See also Matthew 10:1–4; Luke 6:12–16.
18. See also 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:1. Paul was “an apostle to the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13), and he took great pains to defend his apostleship in 1 and 2 Corinthians.
19. Other examples of men who may have been apostles include Apollos (1 Corinthians 4:6–9), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), Silas and Timothy (according to 1 Timothy 1:1 and 2:7), and possibly Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7).
20. Statistics taken from peoplegroups.org.

ABOUT DAVID PLATT

David Platt serves as Lead Pastor of McLean Bible Church in Washington, D.C. He is the founder and chairman of Radical, a ministry that exists to equip the church to be on mission. Resources from David Platt and Radical can be found at radical.net.

David Platt is the author of *Radical*, *Radical Together*, *Follow Me*, *Counter Culture*, *Something Needs to Change*, and *Before You Vote*, and he has contributed to several volumes in the Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary series.

David Platt received his Ph.D. from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Along with his wife and children, he lives in the Washington, D.C. metro area.

ABOUT RADICAL

Jesus calls us to make his glory known among all nations by making disciples and multiplying churches. Being on mission is not simply a compartmentalized program in the church, but the calling of our lives as Christians.

However, 3.2 billion people are currently unreached with the gospel, and many of them endure unimaginable suffering. And, only 1% of missions dollars and 3% of missionaries go to the unreached. Something has to change.

Radical exists to equip the church to be on mission.

We do this by providing:

- Biblical resources to help develop mature Christians and healthy churches
- Trusted avenues to financially support work among the unreached
- Sound training to go effectively to the unreached

To learn more or get involved, go to radical.net.

Christ has commanded His church to “make disciples of all nations,” and every disciple of Jesus needs to know how to be faithful to this mission. In this resource, David Platt examines eight truths that are crucial to the church’s mission:

GOSPEL

EVANGELISM AND CONVERSION

DISCIPLE

DISCIPLE MAKING

CHURCH

CALLING

MISSIONARY AND MISSIONARY TEAM

UNREACHED PEOPLE AND PLACES

For the sake of our churches, our communities, and the nations, we must proclaim Christ’s gospel with mission precision.



RADICAL