



Starting Point

A 10-WEEK JOURNEY TO DISCOVER YOUR ROLE IN THE MISSION OF GOD

Everyone has a starting point. Whether it's playing a sport, reading a book, or pursuing a relationship, we all start somewhere. The same is true in our spiritual lives. We all start somewhere. These points of origin differ for each person, but it's vital that we allow God to take a starting point and begin the hard work of moving us forward into His plan for our lives.

Over the next 10 weeks, you are embarking on a journey that is meant to help you discover God's mission in the world and the unique role you are called to play in that mission. For true transformation to happen, it's important that you process these ideas with other people in your church community as you take steps from your starting point toward God's grand mission.



**The Send Network exists to push back lostness
in North America. That purpose is accomplished
through church planting in areas of greatest need.**

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‘Starting Point’ Overview

“Starting Point” is a 10-week study designed to help individuals or small groups go deeper in the basic elements of missional engagement. The curriculum includes a small group guide, sermon helps and an introductory video to help you share “Starting Point.”

Here are the 10 topics covered:

Imago Dei

All people bear God’s image. Discover the significant implications of this truth for followers of Christ participating in the demonstration and declaration of the gospel.

Spiritual Formation

Discover how God shapes us to be more like Jesus and empowers us to fulfill his mission on earth.

Disciple making

Discover that disciple making is a command from God that Christians should learn to faithfully obey within their own gifting and context.

Bible Fluency

Discover how a thorough understanding of the Bible will help Christians demonstrate and declare the gospel confidently.

Awareness

Discover how knowing and embracing their unique gifting will enable their distinct service in God’s mission.

Relationships

Discover how God uses every relationship to shape them more into his likeness and to further equip them for engagement in God’s mission.

Teamwork

Discover how God has placed others around them to work together for his mission and to complement each other’s giftedness in accomplishing his mission.

Calling

Discover that there may be some specific tasks God has burdened and gifted them to accomplish while on mission with Him.

Missionary Practices

Discover their role as missionaries where they live, work and play and the intentional practices that will help them engage in God’s mission successfully.

Missio Dei

Discover the mission God is working to accomplish and the opportunity they have to join him in his kingdom work.

Starting Point is a free resource available at NAMB.net/Starting-Point.

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IMAGO DEI

“I will praise You because I have been remarkably and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, and I know this very well.”

Ps 139:14

What’s your life’s mission? So much for easy questions to start off a new study, right? No really, why are you on this earth? Your answer to this question—more than any other single factor—will shape the trajectory of your life. If you don’t have a compelling answer to the question, you’ll likely sleepwalk through life, either pursuing things that don’t matter or not really pursuing anything at all. So, try your hand at it. How would you define your life’s mission in one sentence?

Since this is such a big question with so many implications for our lives, it’s important that we ask a more foundational question: *What does God say about my life’s mission?* As the Author of all created things, He has the right to define their purpose and, in His kindness, He has explained our purpose clearly in the pages of Scripture.

You are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14-15). The God who made you—the One who created all that is and will ever be—knit you together in a specific way to showcase His glory. He made you fearfully—taking intricate care to ensure you are designed in just the right way. And, He made you wonderfully—shaping you to be a unique reflection of His creativity and power.

Do you tend to think of yourself as being made fearfully and wonderfully by an all-powerful God? What would change about your life if you really believed this to be true?

Our created design informs everything about our life's mission. Since we are fearfully made, we are to take care to use our lives to their fullest potential, maximizing the abilities, gifts and opportunities God has given us. Because we are wonderfully made, we should seek to leverage our lives to reflect His glory in all things. This is our life's mission.

All the way back at the dawn of creation, God created men and women with this mission. Three times in the span on three verses, we read that God created people in His image and once again we are told that man is created in God's likeness:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." So God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth" (Genesis 1:26–28).

Later, this same theme is repeated in Genesis 5:1: "*These are the family records of the descendants of Adam. On the day that God created man, He made him **in the likeness of God.***" By this time, sin has entered the story of humanity, yet God continues to affirm that men and women are made in His image. Even after God sends the flood to judge human wickedness, He tells Noah that human life matters with these words: "*Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man **in His image***" (Genesis 9:6). God wants to make it clear that the pinnacle of His creation—men and women—are uniquely designed after His image.

Everyone is created in the image of God—regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic standing or any other factor. Many writers and thinkers have attempted to summarize exactly what it means to be created in God's image. Obviously, the *imago Dei* (Latin for *image of God*) doesn't mean that people physically look like God, like a child who has the same physical attributes as a certain parent. This leads some to define the image of God as a certain relational capacity that allows people to know and relate to God in a different way than other aspects of God's creation. Certainly, this is true, but it may not go far enough. In fact, the nature of the *imago Dei* may be more than a certain trait that humans possess—it likely also includes an action to which men and women are called.

As image bearers, we are all meant to reflect God. Not only can we relate to Him in unique ways, but this relationship is meant to allow us to reflect Him in the world. Much like an ancient king who would set up statues of himself in a portion of his kingdom to remind the people of his presence, God sets up representative image-bearers throughout His world to remind the world of the true King. Read the story of King Nebuchadnezzar told in Daniel chapter 3.

Why did he place his image in Babylon? What was the point? As an image bearer, how do you reflect Christ to your different circles of influence?

At first glance, it may seem that bearing God's image is impossible. Human sin means that men and women are incapable of representing God as proper image-bearers. All people are born in a state of sin and, as a result, are broken reflections of the image of God (Romans 4). **Apart from the grace of God, our plight would be to live our lives trapped between the mission we are meant to pursue and our inability to do that very thing.** We'd be forever unable to do what God created us to do.

But, God is gracious. He sent His Son, Jesus, as the perfect reflection of the image of God (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus did more than merely serve as our example of how we might live this image-bearing mission. If that's all He did, we'd still be in a bind—we would still be unable to follow the example He set because of our sinful hearts.

Jesus is an example, but He's also our substitute. He lived the life none of us could live and died the death we all deserved. By grace through faith, His death is credited to the account of His people—they no longer have to fear the eternal wrath of God since it has already been paid for in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-10). And His righteous life is credited to their account as well. When God looks at His children, He sees them as forgiven, pure and holy. God dwells in His people through His Holy Spirit and allows them to do what they were created to do in the first place—be the image of God.

This understanding helps us connect the dots between Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and our life's mission. Try your hand at it. Why does Jesus matter for your ability to be the image of God?

Why does the Holy Spirit matter for your ability to be the image of God?

God's goal, as stated by the prophet Habakkuk, is for "*the knowledge of the Lord's glory, as the waters cover the sea*" (Habakkuk 2:14). The imagery here is clear. Waters cover the sea totally, fully, completely. In fact, there is nothing that can rightly be called the sea that is not filled with water. The same is to be true of our world. God's glory is meant to be known and worshipped among all people, everywhere.

In order for this to happen, God has positioned His people throughout the world to uniquely and strategically be images of Him. There are believers in Turkey and Chicago, urban high-rises and suburban neighborhoods, law firms and inner-city schools, and all points in between. Each is there as a result of the strategic design of God.

Sure, it may appear to us that we are in our neighborhood because we liked a certain house or because it positioned us around a thriving school, but from God's perspective, we are in that home to be His image-bearing representative. We might think we are working day in and day out in a dead-end job merely to pay the bills, but God has more in mind. He has us there to point others to the glory of God. The same is true for every aspect of our lives. Nothing is the result of random chance. God is far more strategic than that. He wants to use every aspect of our lives to fill the earth with His glory as we bear His image.

What evidence do you have that this is true in your life? Can you see examples of how God has positioned you in order to use you to bear His image?

Can you recall a specific example of a time in your life when God has used your life to reflect His glory? How did this happen? What was the result?

The final question is simple and follows naturally from what we've established thus far: **Are you reflecting God effectively?** Or said another way, are you fulfilling God's mission for your life?

In order to answer this question, we've got to establish just what it means to be the image of God. Perhaps the most natural way to answer this question is to assess what our lives **demonstrate** about the glory of God. We'd want to know whether those we encounter on a daily basis notice a discernable difference in our lives by virtue of God's saving work. Does our work ethic demonstrate that we are honoring God through excellent effort? Does our perseverance in the face of suffering demonstrate that we have a greater hope than anything this world can offer? Does our marriage paint an apt picture of Christ's love for His church? We could assess our life's mission using these and a host of other similar questions. In each case, we'd be asking how well we reflect the glory of God and the transformation He has wrought in our lives. Certainly, this is a vital aspect of imaging God through our life's mission. It would be foolish to assume people would be drawn to worship our glorious God if His people did not reflect His glory.

In what areas of life is it most important to demonstrate the glory of God?

The other aspect of our image-bearing nature—and one that we must not minimize—is the role we have in **declaring** the message of Jesus and the glory of God. The reality is that most of those who are far from God may observe someone living a God-honoring life and think that this person is simply being good. They may assume a co-worker, neighbor or friend, is moral or upright, but not understand the connection between this person's actions and the work of God, through Jesus, to transform their heart. Unless we are overt to speak about Jesus and connect the dots between our lives and Jesus' work, then we've neglected a vital component of our image-bearing work.

The person who watches you respond when your spouse is diagnosed with cancer needs to understand that your hope is based on the future promise of the resurrection made possible because of Jesus. The co-worker who watches you refrain from cutting corners and bending the rules needs to know you do this because all your life is worship unto the Lord who has given His very best to redeem you. The friend whose marriage is crumbling needs to know that your marriage is healthy, not because you two are

compatible and have made good life choices—but because you love and serve one another as a response to Jesus’ sacrificial love on your behalf. And, not only do others need to know this connection, but they need to be shown how they can find new life in Christ as well.

What aspects of Jesus life, death and resurrection would you need to communicate in order to effectively declare the good news?

Reflect on your current circles of influence and daily rhythms. What score would you give yourself if you had to score your faithfulness in declaring and demonstrating the gospel with 1 being poor and 10 being excellent?

Demonstrating the Gospel

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Declaring the Gospel

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Which of these comes most naturally to you? Which is the most challenging? Why do you think that is the case?

Demonstrating and declaring the gospel, when combined, provide the proper definition of what it means to bear the image of God. The outworking of these actions is going to look different for everyone. Of course, the gospel message is the same. But you may present it in different ways whether you are talking to a single mom who lives next door or the corporate executive drinking coffee next to you on the morning commute. You are going to demonstrate the transformation brought about by the gospel in

different ways, at different seasons of life, and to different types of people. The president of a tech startup company in the Pacific Northwest will likely demonstrate and declare the gospel in different ways than the stay-at-home mom living in a suburban community in the Southeast.

But, neither is more important than the other. God has been strategic to ensure that His image-bearers are positioned to bring Him glory throughout every aspect of society. What is important, is that all of God's children are leveraging their lives for this mission. It would be a tragedy to have believers positioned by God in strategic locations who squander and neglect their life's mission. That's why this study is so important. North America is filled with professing believers who are doing just that and the implications for our culture are obvious. Every day, scores and scores of men, women and children move throughout their lives without knowledge of the glory of God. Those of us who have been taken captive by that glory are then given the gracious privilege of being an image of that glory to these very people until the day Jesus returns and it can truly be said that God's glory fills the earth forever.

Discuss:

1. What do you think comes to the mind of the average church attender when that person thinks about God's mission in the world? Is it common for people to understand their life's mission in light of the image of God? Why or why not?
2. Use your group as an example. Ask each group member to place their life on a map of your city by locating the place they live, where they work, where they or their kids attend school and at least one of the places they frequent most often. Once every member of the group has placed themselves on the map, consider the implications of God's work to position your group in these areas. Based on these locations, what do you observe about God's work? What unique opportunities has God given your group? How could you strategically work together in God's mission?
3. Allow various group members to share how they scored themselves on the scale regarding declaring and demonstrating the gospel. Are there any common themes for your group members? Why do you think these conclusions are true? What ways could you work together to address weaknesses related to declaring and demonstrating the gospel?
4. Imagine that you are sitting down to talk with someone who just came to faith in Jesus within the last month. They've asked you to help them think through how their salvation should shape their life's mission. What would you tell them? How would you use the concepts presented this week to help them understand their mission? What other passages of Scripture would you want them to read or ideas would you want them to consider?
5. Have you ever sensed God stirring your heart to declare or demonstrate His glory in a new context? This might mean in a new city, a new job, or even just a new gym you'd like to frequent. When is the last time you sensed God calling you to be an image of Him in a new way and you obeying His leading? What happened? What changes might God be calling you to make at this stage in your Christian walk?

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

“Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship.”

Romans 12:1

The objective in any basketball game is clear. One team seeks to win the game by scoring more points than the other team. This mission is unmistakable.

Yet, there are hundreds of actions that are required to accomplish this mission. You can't simply roll a ball out on the court and expect that a team will naturally be able to win without equipping them for the task at hand. They'd need to know the basics—how to dribble, pass and shoot. Then, you would orient them to the rules of the game so they understand the parameters that guide their actions on the court. They would certainly need to learn to play defense to stop the other team from scoring. You would hope the individuals on the team would also learn to work together so each person on the team used their skills in order to uniquely contribute toward the shared mission. You might even work on some offensive plays so the players knew how to score most effectively. No one comes ready-made with all of these abilities. Basketball players, regardless of their natural ability, need to be developed in order to accomplish the mission of winning a basketball game.

The same is true of our mission as disciples of Jesus. **We are created to be the image of God by declaring and demonstrating His glory throughout the world.** We're actually even more ill-equipped to accomplish this mission than the novice basketball player who has undeveloped potential that needs to be harnessed. In our case, sin renders us incapable of accomplishing the mission God has given us. We are born sinners, intent on declaring and demonstrating sinful actions that are a stark contrast to the glory of God.

But God, in His grace, saves us, not by the works we've done but because of His loving-kindness (Ephesians 2:8-9). Even once we've been saved by Jesus work, we still battle with the sin that so easily entangles our lives and hinders our mission (Hebrews 12:1- 2). Like a developing basketball player, we have all sorts of bad habits we have to relinquish in order to be effective. As a response to the salvation we've been given, we enter the life-long process of spiritual formation that allows us to accomplish the mission God created us for in the first place. **If we are going to declare and demonstrate the glory of God, we must offer ourselves to God and allow Him to transform us.**

How is growth and development in the Christian life like learning any skill or hobby?
How is it different? Why are these differences important?

This might not be the typical way you think about spiritual formation. The normative assumption for many is that godly actions are done in an effort to merit God's favor. Think about the person who is caught in a sinful pattern of behavior—the wife confronted in an extramarital affair, the teenage girl battling an eating disorder, or the businessman whose stealing money from work. They may feel shame and guilt and commit to getting their act together. They try to live a good life in an effort to exonerate themselves for their failures or to prove themselves to God. Sadly, many of those who believe this lie end up caving in because they can never consistently do what is right. God's grace is what makes us right with God, not our ability to be good.

Others see spiritual formation as a way to elevate themselves over others. Sure, they'd never say it that way, but often efforts at maturity and growth bolster pride because some are able to look at those around us and think, "Well, at least I'm better than that person over there."

Or, finally, some view spiritual formation as an optional extra for the superstar Christian. The normal, run-of-the-mill church attender doesn't need to concern themselves with spiritual formation. That's the work of pastors or missionaries. The rest of us can rest in the fact that we've been saved and that we're going to heaven when we die. Why bother with the work of spiritual formation anyway?

Each of these three responses results from an inadequate understanding of growth and maturity. **Spiritual formation helps us fulfill God's mission for our lives.** The process of change is as essential as a lay-up drill or a bounce pass for a basketball player. Without the development of Christian character and competencies, we are unable to accomplish the mission.

Notice the link between spiritual formation and God's mission in the following parallel passages. Peter reminds the church in his day that *"you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do what is evil, they will, by observing your good works, glorify God on the day of visitation"* (1 Peter 2:9-12).

He begins with four statements of fact. The people are **chosen, royal, holy** and **His**. This is true, not because they deserve these descriptors, but because God has declared them to be by virtue of Christ's work.

Do you tend to think of yourself using these terms? If not, why?

They are then given a mission to proclaim His excellences and declare His glory, even to those who might speak against them.

How is this mission accomplished? Honorable conduct. Behavior. Holiness. They will need to act like the people God has declared them to be.

How does sin hinder mission?

Peter's language is reminiscent of the words God spoke to Moses before giving the law to the nation of Israel: *"Now if you will listen to Me and carefully keep My covenant, you will be My own possession out of all the peoples, although all the earth is Mine, and you will be My kingdom of priests and My holy nation"* (Exodus 19:5-6). God did not call Israel to be holy to earn His favor, He'd already demonstrated His love for them and redeemed them from slavery. He also wasn't calling them to holiness for their sake alone. His goal was that Israel would be *"a light for the nations, to be My salvation to the ends of the earth"* (Isaiah. 49:6). He had a mission for Israel and their obedience was critical to accomplishing this mission.

This is one of the central purposes of the law. Yes, the law is used by God to point out the depth of human sin and the need for Jesus. But, it was also meant to be a way that God's people were clearly distinct from the pagan nations that surrounded the Promised Land. The other nations were meant to look at Israel and say, "So that's what God's people look like." Their obedience to the law, understood in this way, was a means by which they fulfilled God's mission.

We see the same truth embedded in Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5, Jesus uses the same imagery of light to portray the mission of all of God's people: *"You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:14, 16).

The end goal is the same here as in the passage from 1 Peter earlier—that people who are far from God would see the good works of God's people and glorify God. This means that good works are all about God. They are not meant to point the spotlight on the person in question but redirect the attention to God, whose grace makes such obedience possible in the first place.

It's instructive again to notice what Jesus does in the remainder of chapter 5 of Matthew. There He takes very concrete aspects of obedience to God and conformity to the law and reiterates their purpose. In fact, He takes these commands and goes further, rooting them not in outward actions but in heart disposition. He says that murder isn't the biggest problem, it's anger. It's not adultery, but lust. Not making oaths, but breaking promises. These heart conditions and their corresponding actions are the way someone serves as a light to the nations and points them to the glory of God.

Think about your life currently. What heart conditions or actions hinder you from fulfilling God's mission in your life?

Your answer to the previous question reveals the main hindrance to fulfilling God's mission. We often lack the maturity and obedience required to point people to the glory of God. This is why spiritual formation is critical. Without it, we will also sell out on God's mission and waste our lives.

If spiritual formation is necessary, then what areas should this formation target? Or, asked more concisely, how does God equip me for His mission? It might be helpful to think in terms of three aspects of your being, your imago Dei, that must be formed.

Your Heart

This is the starting point, as we've seen in Jesus challenge from the Sermon on the Mount. Later in Matthew's Gospel Jesus says, *"But what comes out of the mouth comes*

from the heart, and this defiles a man. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:18-19). Every action results from the heart. Godly actions result from a new heart that’s been given by God’s grace. Evil actions result from a heart that continues to reflect its original fallen condition. So, if we want to see lasting change, the place to begin is to do the hard work of addressing our hearts.

Let’s play a little game. In the left column of the chart below are actions that are considered by many to be sinful. Even those who are not Christians would consider many of these actions to be wrong. Beside each action list, is a corresponding heart condition, emotion, or belief that might cause each action. For many of these actions, there will be more than one predictable heart condition that would lead to the behavior. There’s one example provided for you to get you started.

Action	Heart
An employee stealing from his boss	Worry about the future and a lack of trust that God can meet this man’s needs
A teenager rebelling against his parent’s rules	
A single lady who is contemplating an abortion	
A college girl who consistently cuts herself	
A father who is addicted to alcohol	
An action you personally see as sin in your own life	

Your Head

What does this even mean? We have a sense of the power in our hearts. We know what it means to pursue things that we love. We know how our hearts can cause us to do all sorts of things—sometimes really strange things—in order to pursue the objects we desire. The heart is powerful. For it to change, God must act. We can't change our hearts. But, as we've already seen, God is more than capable of doing this profoundly difficult work. He gives us new hearts that pulsate with the new life we've been given in Christ (John 3:1-21).

As a result of this change, we are given the Holy Spirit who brings change to our lives from the inside out. This work begins as the Spirit works to transform our minds—changing them to believe God's truth more than the enemies lies. We are formed as we begin to believe the truth God has declared about us. You might think about using our chart again and adding a third column. Now, beside each heart condition, list a truth about God's character and actions that specifically challenge you to think differently. Ideally, you'll do the work of taking these truths from Scripture so you are clear they are promises of God and not merely something you are creating on your own. Again, one example is provided to get you started.

Action	Heart	Head
An employee stealing from His boss	Worry about the future and a lack of trust that God can meet this man's needs	"This is why I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (Matt 6:25, 33).
A teenager rebelling against His parent's rules		
A single lady who is contemplating an abortion		

A college girl who consistently cuts herself		
A father who is addicted to alcohol		

Your Hands

The last of the three aspects of life in need of formation are our actions. Again, note that this is often the starting point. We try to change our actions and get frustrated when they don't change. But, unless you start with the heart and the head, the hands will never change. Authentic formation will culminate in a change of actions that result in a transformed heart and head that believes God's truth. So, let's add a final column to our chart. Use the same columns to add a corresponding godly action that would replace the sinful action of the first column.

Action	Heart	Head	Hands
An employee stealing from His boss	Worry about the future and a lack of trust that God can meet this man's needs	"This is why I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (Matt 6:25, 33).	The employee would confess his sin before God and his boss, seek to repay what was stolen and commit to prayer that God would meet the needs of his family.
A teenager rebelling against His parent's rules			

A single lady who is contemplating an abortion			
A college girl who consistently cuts herself			
A father who is addicted to alcohol			

Seen in this light, we can clearly connect our actions to our mission. It's impossible for a businessman who is stealing from his boss to live on mission and point his boss or fellow co-workers to the glory of God. It just wouldn't work. But, the godly actions in the final column are ripe with missionary opportunity. The businessman will most likely lose his job, but the motive behind his confession could be a means God uses to point his boss to Jesus. His co-workers could see a demonstration of integrity and someone who seeks to walk faithfully with God. If he loses his job, the man could suffer well and trust God with his future, given an opportunity to testify to the greater hope that he has by virtue of his faith in Christ.

The potential is endless and exciting. Linking spiritual formation and mission, changes our perspective on growth. It's a bit like a kid who is commended to clean his room. This boring task changes when the parent connects it to something the child wants to do. "If you clean your room, then you can go out and play in the tree house with your friends." Now, the action of obedience is tied to the experience of joy and it's likely the kid's motivation changes as well.

In a similar way, think of the joy that those who live in obedience to God experience:

- We can be used by God to point others to saving faith.
- We can invest our lives in a way that matters long after we're gone.
- We experience freedom from shame and guilt that comes from living in known sin.
- We can suffer with hope because we know God is at work in ways we can't see.
- We understand the power of God at work in our lives in fresh and new ways.

We experience joy by obeying God because we're living the lives He created us to live. We're imaging Him to the world. The question then becomes: How do we help others fulfill their purpose in life? How do we walk with others through this process of formation? That will be the topic of our study next week.

Discuss:

1. When's the last time you tried to change something about yourself you knew was displeasing to God? How did you become aware of the sinful action? What did you do to try to change? How did it go?
2. What do you think most of your non-believing friends, neighbors, or co-workers think of when they think of a Christian? How are Christians typically portrayed in the world? How do our actions shape this perception? What might change if people said, "I don't necessarily agree with what they believe but it is clear that they live their lives reflect their beliefs."?
3. Talk through the charts you created this week. Walk someone else through an entire progression of sinful action, heart condition, gospel truth and changed action. Talk about how this process plays out in your own life by using an example from your spiritual formation.
4. Why is it important to connect spiritual formation and mission? What happens if these are separated? What examples do you see in your life for the need for spiritual formation in order to enhance your effectiveness in mission?

DISCIPLE-MAKING

“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 everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20

Imagine you were taking a road trip to the Grand Canyon with your family. You had been planning the trip for over a year, researching all of the best paths in order to experience the beauty and thrill of the destination in its fullest. Upon arrival, you embark on your first day to see the sights and find that one of the prominent pieces of advice you’ve found online is a total bust. It’s crowded, people are angry and the experience leaves much to be desired.

As your leaving, however, you stumble upon an unmarked road and decide that you’ll explore a bit. What’s the worst that can happen, right? Your day is already a bust. Much to your surprise, this road actually leads to a breath-taking view of the canyon. It’s far better than any of the pictures you’ve seen online, even those that were common at the location you sought out in the first place. And, best of all, this path is not crowded at all since it doesn’t appear that anyone else knows about it. Your family spends the rest of the evening capturing a moment you will all remember forever.

The question then becomes what you do with this newfound information. If you’re selfish, you keep the information to yourself and tell no one. After all, no one helped you find this path so why should you help others. Some might choose to post the new information online. They’d jump on the discussion boards and bash the first location and alert everyone else to a far better path to a beautiful view. Most, however, would offer this information to their true friends. They’d want to help those they love to experience the path to beauty and joy as well.

We see this same process play out, on a much greater scale, when people encounter the good news of Jesus. The Bible is filled with examples of people who have tried all sorts of differing roads in search of fulfillment and joy. Consider the woman Jesus met at the well in John 4. Her past defines her identity. She’s a broken sinner and she knows it. Jesus knows it as well but, rather than rejecting her, He points her to the true source of living water—the new life offered by Jesus. What follows is what you’d expect from someone who finds the path to life:

“Then the woman left her water jar, went into town, and told the men, ‘Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could this be the Messiah?’ They left the town and made their way to Him” (John 4:28-30).

This notorious sinner naturally wanted to point others to the path she’d found. Why wouldn’t she? This Christ was unlike any other path she’d ever experienced and she wanted others to experience the joy found in Him.

Think about what it must have been like for those who encountered this woman that day? What do you imagine they were thinking when she told them about her experience?

This is what God’s people do. They meet Jesus, find life in Him and point others to Him. The apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, compares the Christian to a king or authority figure, often in a foreign land. He writes, *“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf, ‘Be reconciled to God’”* (2 Corinthians 5:20).

The two words “appeal” and “implore” demonstrate the significance of this call to be reconciled to God. This isn’t some under-the-breath comment we make to appease our conscience. No, it’s like an ambassador that comes to a foreign army and shouts: “The army is waiting to attack. Now’s your last chance to surrender.”

What’s the last time you made an appeal to someone or implored someone to do something? What was the significance of the call? How is this similar or different to your typical work in pointing others to Jesus?

Our news is far more significant than a secret path on a vacation or even an impending military battle. Men and woman can turn to God in faith and repentance and be spared

the wrath of God that is rightly due their sin. And, in doing so, they can have a relationship with the One True and Living God who loves them and gave Himself up for them (Romans 5:6-11). And, as we saw in week one, this appeal is at the heart of the mission of humanity. As God's image-bearers, we declare the glory of God to the watching world.

There are many different ways to do this:

- Some will declare the gospel by preaching sermons in a church
- Some will declare the gospel by starting a new church in an urban context
- Some will declare the gospel by leading a small group in their apartment
- Some will declare the gospel by talking intentionally to a co-worker, neighbor, friend or family member

The opportunities for speaking the gospel are endless and we all have a role to play in that work.

This appeal is only one facet of the work we're discussing in this week's study—making disciples. This task is the main action commanded by Jesus in His parting words to His first disciples:

*“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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 everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).*

Each of the phrases in the Great Commission is essential and answer a key question about the mission of Jesus' followers:

What: make disciples

Where: of all nations

How: by going, baptizing and teaching

Why: because God has the authority to command us to and He goes with us as we do.

There's one other question whose answer is a bit hidden in the Great Commission. It's the question of “who?” Who is responsible for this commission? Yes, it's given to the first disciples but it extends to all those over whom Jesus has authority and all those in whom He dwells. So, who is this? Well, it's every Christian. God rules over them and goes with them as they work to fulfill this mission to make disciples of all nations.

How do you make disciples? In the space below, share the story of the last disciple you've made? How did it go? What challenges did you face? What victories did you experience?

If you are like most people, the last question was probably hard for you. It's not that most Christians don't know that they are supposed to make disciples. Yet, the majority of those who claim to follow Jesus can't fill in the blanks that followed the last question. Why?

There are two main reasons most don't make disciples. **First, some are just consumed with themselves.** They don't make disciples because it takes work and they've got too much going on to give of themselves to this mission. For some, this means that they actively decide to avoid God's mission. For most, they just get busy—grow consumed with the various facets of their lives—and put disciple-making on the back burner.

Second, some don't know how to make disciples. Since most people can't name a disciple they've made, many reading this study have probably never been discipled themselves. It's a bit like trying to be a godly father and lead your home well when your biological father was an absent alcoholic. You have no model to follow. Often the church compounds this problem. We're taught that disciple-making equals inviting people to church to attend a class where an expert can tell them more about God. Certainly, the church is important to disciple-making, but such an approach can render the average, ordinary church attender passive in the work of disciple-making. They'd rather leave it to the pros who clearly know what they're doing.

What about you? Which of the two reasons above is the main challenge in your mission to make disciples? Most people will likely say that it's a little of both, so try to give yourself a percentage for each. You might say that your work of disciple-making is hindered by selfishness 80% of the time and by a lack of knowledge 20% of the time.

Don't make it a priority: _____ %

Don't know how: _____ %

The answer to the first hindrance is easy, but it's not simple. Selfishness is a sin for which we must repent and beg God to help us love others as He has loved us. If you're not making disciples because it's not a priority, then no study is going to change your heart. You can read all the books you want and you'll never make a disciple until you come to the point where you are willing to die to yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24).

But, let's assume that you're a person who doesn't know how to make a disciple. A good indicator for that might be to consider the following scenario. One day your pastor approaches you and says, "I want to introduce you to someone. This person just trusted Jesus for salvation two weeks ago and I need someone who will help them learn how to walk with Jesus. Would you be willing to do this?" What would you do next? What would be your plan for disciple-making?

If you find you struggle to know how to answer this question, then consider these three key ingredients for effective discipleship.

1. Relationship

The starting point for effective discipleship is a relationship. It's impossible to teach someone to follow Jesus from a distance. The person must be close enough to know your struggles, see your marriage and parenting, and watch you seek to love and follow God yourself. You have to spend time together. At times, this might mean a predetermined meeting each week, but most often it is simply time in the natural rhythms of life—going to the gym, taking kids to the playground, picking up something from the store, going to a ballgame, or anything else that tends to fill your calendar. Your life, and not some book, is the most effective tool you have to use in your disciple-making mission. That's encouraging, right? Disciple-making doesn't have to be something you add to an already busy schedule, rather you can integrate disciple-making into the activities you already do and enjoy.

Consider your life right now. Who are five people who don't know God or who are new Christians who you could spend time discipling? List them in the blanks below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now consider the activities in your life these people are already involved in or could be involved in. List those activities beside the names above. For example, you might write "spend time together at the neighborhood playground" beside the name of a neighbor or "invite over to watch football" beside a friend from the gym.

2. Time

The second component is even more simple than relationships. Disciple-making requires time, often a lot of time. Think about the magnitude of the task, you are taking someone who was once an enemy of God and helping them understand the gospel and apply it to every area of their lives. In a very real sense, this work will never be complete until all of God's people are made perfect in Heaven forever. So, we'd be foolish to think that we can make disciples quickly or perfectly. We have to commit to spending time with the same people for a long time and trust that God will use these relationships to provide a context where we can demonstrate and declare the gospel over and over again.

3. Scripture

The final component for disciple-making is Scripture. God's Word, empowered by God's Spirit, brings transformation (Hebrews 4:12). Effective disciple-makers find ways to infuse Scripture into these relationships in ways ranging from informal to formal. Informally, those who want to make disciples can sprinkle Scripture into the context of these relationships. As opportunities present themselves for conversation, the disciple-maker can bring God's Word to bear on whatever the topic at hand. Whether it's parenting or politics or anything in between, there are always ways to speak God's truth into these areas. In a more formal way, disciple-makers might agree to read a passage of Scripture together each week and discuss it or search Scripture about a specific question and find answers from God's Word. The disciple-maker might begin by reading sections from the Gospel of John or giving the person three or four passages related to marriage to read and discuss.

Refer back to your list above and consider how you might bring God’s truth to bear on these relationships. Since you know the person, even if it’s just a basic friendship, you likely know something about them. You may know that they are a parent or that they’re recently divorced or that they work at a major law firm downtown. Based on this knowledge, what truths from God’s Word might you share. To the parent, you might want to remind them to *“bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4). To the one who was recently divorced you might speak words of hope and remind them that *“Therefore, no condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1). To the lawyer, you might remind them that *“one’s life is not in the abundance of his possessions”* (Luke 12:15). Try your hand at it with the relationships you listed above:

1. _____
Scripture: _____
2. _____
Scripture: _____
3. _____
Scripture: _____
4. _____
Scripture: _____
5. _____
Scripture: _____

There you have it. Disciple-making isn’t easy, but it doesn’t have to be as complex as we often tend to make it. The biggest hurdle, quite honestly, is our sin. Once we commit to the process, we find that disciple-making is a natural outcome of our own spiritual formation. We’ve found the path to life and joy and we want to point others down that road as well.

Discuss:

1. Share your stories of disciple-making. What efforts have you made to fulfill the Great Commission in the past? What have you learned from this experience?
2. What's the greatest obstacle to disciple-making in your life? How are you fighting these hindrances? How can the other people in your group help you fight sin and invest in disciple-making?
3. Use the three factors of disciple-making—relationship, time and Scripture to talk about what you might do in the following scenario: You meet someone on Sunday who found your church online and decided to check it out. After a few minutes of conversation, you learn that this mother of three was recently abandoned by her husband. In the wake of this loss, she says she gave her life to Jesus but she doesn't know what to do now. What would you do next? How might relationship, time and Scripture be used to facilitate disciple-making in this case?
4. This week we discussed intentionality infusing the regular rhythms of your life with disciple-making. Consider the following aspects of your life and put one activity in each blank that could be used to help make disciples. Beside each activity, describe how you might leverage it to make disciples.

Something you love to do: _____

Something you have to do: _____

Something you want to learn how to do: _____

Something you should be doing: _____

Share your ideas with your group and learn from one another about the various ways you can increase your disciple-making intentionality.

BIBLE FLUENCY

“The instruction of the Lord is perfect, renewing one’s life; the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise. The precepts of the Lord are right, making the heart glad; the command of the Lord is radiant, making the eyes light up.”

Psalm 19:7-8

Remember back to last week when we discussed the three key components to disciple-making: relationships, time and Scripture. The last of these three is the one that intimidates many. That’s why we’re going to spend this week discussing Bible fluency and the role it plays in our mission to declare and demonstrate the glory of God throughout the Earth.

You might compare the role of Scripture in disciple-making to a bicycle ride. There are three key components to a successful trip. First, you have to have a bike. Depending on the difficulty of the trip, you might need several styles of bikes. If you’re riding a mountain path, you’ll certainly want a trail bike, while if you’re just riding around the neighborhood it’s likely that any old bike will do. Second, you are going to need a plan. You’ll need to know your destination and the correct way to get to that location. But, a plan and a bike will not make a successful ride unless you supply some power. You have to have someone on the bike pushing the pedals and propelling forward motion. Without the power, the bike will just sit in the driveway.

In the same way, relationships and time are insufficient alone. You have to add power. The power comes as God’s Spirit works in the hearts of others through the truth of His Word. If you take out the Word of God you’re just making friends, you’re not making disciples.

What intimates you when you think about talking about the Bible with others? In what ways do you feel inadequate?

Be encouraged. Everyone feels inadequate when they consider the challenges of understanding God’s Word. No one feels completely competent when they talk about the Bible—particularly when they talk about the Bible to people who are far from God. If Bible fluency scares you then you are in good company.

It is important to once again notice the link between Bible fluency and the overall mission of God. Remember that our mission is to declare and demonstrate the glory of God throughout all the earth. Understanding the Bible and applying it to our lives propels our spiritual formation and increases our effectiveness in this mission. The more we know of God—His character and His ways—the more comfortable we will be in speaking about Him to others.

This goal stands in stark contrast to a desire to understand the Bible merely to flaunt our knowledge and make ourselves feel superior to others. In fact, Paul warns that all of the knowledge in the world is insufficient if it is not accompanied by love (1 Corinthians 13:2). Knowledge is powerful when it is accompanied by a love for others and desire for them to find joy in the good news of Jesus.

So, what do you need to know about Scripture to grow in godliness yourself and disciple others? We will spend the rest of our lives growing in our understanding of God’s Word, and none of us will ever grasp everything, so where do you begin? What’s important that you understand at the outset?

You Need to Know the Main Point

Like any book, the first thing you must know about the Bible is the point. What’s the story about? If you don’t know the main point of any story—whether a book, a movie, or just the silly things your kid did while your spouse was gone for the day—you’ll never be able to relay that story to someone else in a way that makes sense. It’s impossible.

Jesus does us a big favor and tells us what the Bible’s about. Luke records the scene following Jesus’ resurrection as He appeared to two men traveling on the road to Emmaus. They were discussing the strange happenings in Jerusalem and the rumors surrounding Jesus’ resurrection. Luke tells us what Jesus did next: *“Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures”* (Luke 24:27). Moses and the Prophets is a reference to the

Scripture that would have existed at that time. In simple terms, Jesus takes their Bible and shows them how all of it pointed forward to His life, death, burial and resurrection. You can almost hear Him saying: “Come on guys. Don’t you see it? All this that you’re talking about happening in Jerusalem—it’s all right here. All of this is about Me!”

Like the two men on the road, we too are prone to miss the central fact that the entire Bible is about Jesus. He—not anyone else—is the main actor. We are given an authoritative Word from God on who Jesus is, why He came, what He did and how His work changes everything. To live on mission, you need to be able to tell the Bible’s story in such a way that Jesus’ role is clear.

You Need to Know the Big Story

Books have chapters and movies have scenes. The Bible also has a few major transitions that give shape to the overall story. We’ve got to know this progression because the Bible can seem like a quite intimidating book—to us and certainly to those we try to speak to about the gospel. For one thing, the Bible is a big book. It’s also an ancient book, meaning that there are all sorts of people and places we don’t know and words we struggle to pronounce. Finally, the Bible is a diverse book. It’s written by dozens of authors using differing genres throughout. An understanding of the main movements of the Bible helps give order to such a complex book. In simple fashion, you can think of the sections of the Bible like this:

- Creation — God’s plan for the world and His people
- Fall—Man’s rebellion from God’s plan
- Israel—God’s mission to gather a nation and establish their need for Jesus
- Jesus—Jesus’ fulfillment of God’s plan through His life, death and resurrection
- Church—God’s work to save His people and spread the Good News
- Eternity—God’s final work to renew His creation from the effects of sin

These stories are told in a succinct fashion, with Genesis detailing the Creation and Fall, the rest of the Old Testament describing Israel, the Gospels summarizing Jesus’ work, Acts and the Pauline Letters discussing the Church and Revelation speaking of Eternity. There are mentions of various aspects of each section throughout the Bible, but the main sections move in a clear progression, making it easier for you to understand and help someone else see the advancement of God’s plan.

Imagine for a minute that a friend approached you and said, “You know, I’ve never really been able to understand the Bible. Can you tell me what it’s about?” How would you answer this question if you only had five minutes to talk? How might the section divisions above help you explain the main point of the Bible?

You Need to Know Why Jesus Matters

These six sections help you understand why Jesus matters. If Jesus is the main point of the Bible, then we have to be able to see how the portions of the Bible that precede His life point forward to Him and the passages that follow help us understand His work. You might find it helpful to simply ask the “why Jesus?” question about each of the sections listed above. Give it a try. Don’t worry about writing in complete sentences or covering every detail. Just hit the big ideas about why Jesus matters for each?

Why does Jesus matter in Creation?

Why does Jesus matter at the Fall?

Why does Jesus matter for Israel?

Why does His life, death, and resurrection matter?

Why does Jesus matter for the Church?

Why does Jesus matter in eternity?

There are numerous ways you see Jesus in each section but here are a few ideas:

Creation: Jesus is the Word of God who made creation and God's plan for fulfilling His mission to fill the earth with His glory

Fall: Jesus is the answer to the problem of human sin—He is the way God will one day crush Satan, sin and death forever

Israel: Jesus is the fulfillment of the law of God since He perfectly obeyed and of the sacrificial system since He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus: Jesus lived the perfect life no person is capable of living, died the death all people deserved to satisfy God's wrath for sin and rose again to prove that He is God and is able to save sinners

Church: Jesus is the one in whom the church places their faith, He's the foundation of the church and the purpose of its worshipful existence

Eternity: Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, advocates for those who are His children by faith and is worshiped by them forever.

Now we're getting somewhere, right? The Bible isn't impossible to understand. A few key ideas and connections help to give clarity to the beauty of God's revealed Word. There's one final step in seeking to grow in Bible fluency as you live on mission.

You Need to Know Some Key Passages

You might think of Bible fluency as a big tool belt or kitchen cabinet (whichever floats your boat). You are placing all sorts of tools or utensils in your mind that you can use in your daily life. At first, the tool belt or cabinet may only have a few items inside, but over time you add more and more to your repertoire. You'll never have complete mastery over the Bible, but in time, you should improve your knowledge of God's Word and your ability to communicate it to others in a natural conversation.

The first tools to put in your tool belt are a few, key Scripture passages to support the critical concepts in each section of the Bible. These should be important verses that demonstrate God’s plan and Jesus work at each stage. This is important so that you are certain that the ideas and answers you are giving are actually God’s answers and not your own. Also, by pointing others to the Bible, you show them that what you are saying is derived straight from God’s Word. Use the chart below to list 3 or 4 Scripture passages for each section. One has been provided for you in each section to help get you started. If you get stuck, ask a pastor, mentor, or trusted friend for ideas and suggestions.

Section	Scripture
Creation	<i>“For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16).</i>
Fall	<i>“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).</i>
Israel	<i>“I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. You will know that I am Yahweh your God, who delivered you from the forced labor of the Egyptians” (Exodus 6:7).</i>
Jesus	<i>“The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).</i>
Church	<i>“ And He put everything under His feet and appointed Him as head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of the One who fills all things in every way” (Ephesians 1:22–23).</i>
Eternity	<i>“And He put everything under His feet and appointed Him as head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of the One who fills all things in every way” (Revelation 21:3).</i>

These verses aren’t meant to be magic bullets, but tools that you use in conversations when they naturally connect. The more verses you learn, the more you’ll be able to interject them into the flow of conversations at the ball field, playground, or work cubicle.

When we come to the conclusion of a section like this, it’s common to have a number of questions. “But what about this or that?” we might be prone to ask. Let’s quickly consider a few of the common “but what abouts.”

But what if people ask me questions I don't know?

Welcome to the club. There will always be questions we don't know and that's fine. Just admit you don't know and go investigate the answer together.

But what if I get intimidated by people?

Whether it's other people who are smarter than you or just a non-Christian friend, we're all prone to find it intimidating to talk about God's story with others. Remember that your aim in life is to fill the earth with the glory of God and reject anything that hinders this mission, including thoughts about what others think about you. God's perspective on your life is far more important.

But what if I have a bad memory?

You have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). You'll be surprised at God's faithfulness to bring the story and related Scriptures to mind when you need them most.

But what if I hate reading?

What's important isn't that you love to read, but that you can tell a story. There are certainly some people who enjoy reading more than others, but we all have an appreciation for a good story. Capture the story in your mind and combine reading with listening to podcasts, sermons and other tools to help you grow in your knowledge of God's great story.

But what if I get bogged down in details?

Remember that the main aim of Bible fluency isn't a graduate degree in theology, it's a love for God and for your fellow man. Details have their time and place, but begin with a thorough grasp of God's story and allow greater knowledge to enhance your passion to tell this grand story to others.

But what if I feel guilty?

Many people have spent years copping out from engaging the Bible—using various excuses to mask laziness. If this is you, repent of your apathy to God's story and commit anew to the passionate pursuit of loving God with your mind. As you do, you'll find that the Bible is a God-given gift to fuel your life on mission.

What's your most significant "but what about?" What hinders you from actively and passionately engaging in God's story?

Discuss:

1. What intimidates you about the Bible? What steps are you currently taking to battle these fears and pursue a knowledge of God's story?
2. Why is it vital to connect Bible fluency and love? What happens when growth in knowledge does not correspond to a growth in love for others? Imagine that you moved to a new city to help start a church and someone in a local coffee shop saw you with a Bible on the table and asked you what the Bible's about. How might this conversation play out if you were a person with:
 - A. Great love but no knowledge
 - B. Great knowledge but no love
 - C. Simple knowledge and great love
3. Draw a time line on a board or piece of poster paper. Label one end "creation" and place an arrow at the other end and call it "eternity." As a group, suggest the major points on the timeline of God's story in between creation and eternity. Try to focus on the big events, rather than simply listing everything that comes to mind. You might find it helpful to divide your timeline into the six sections outlined in this week's lesson. As you go, try to brainstorm Scripture that would help you describe God's story at each stage.
4. When's the last time you spoke about the Bible with a non-Christian? What prompted this conversation? How did it go? How did you feel? What can you learn from this conversation to make you more effective the next time the Lord gives you an opportunity to speak about Him?
5. Attempt to connect disciple-making (Week three) and Bible fluency (Week four) by thinking about one Christian who may not have a clear grasp of God's story. How could you take the main points of this week's lesson and use them to disciple this person?

AWARENESS

“Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God’s throne.”

Hebrews 12:1-2

In our day, there is no shortage of advice on how to tackle any project. You can find an endless assortment of tutorial videos or blogs in which would-be experts describe the intricate process of building raised flower beds, changing a spark plug, or diagnosing the strange pain in your elbow. These tools are a big help to a novice in any field. Simply follow steps 1, 2, 3 and you’ll arrive at the final project of your dreams.

Or not, right? We’ve all likely been guilty of attempting to follow the pattern only to find that we made a minor mistake back in step one that drastically affects our ability to execute step fifty-seven. Every action isn’t as simple as it should be for one very simple reason: You! Nothing happens in the abstract; Everything flows through a real-life person—a person with weakness, flaws, misunderstandings and all sorts of other challenges that make the execution of the task challenging. Yet, that same person also has a solid assortment of gifts and abilities that he or she brings to the table that enhances the work. Some are more naturally gifted to build a table, while others excel at gardening or quilting. The totality of each person shapes every action in hundreds of ways.

The same is true for our mission to declare and demonstrate the glory of God to the ends of the earth. This is not an abstract task we can follow in a step-by-step fashion. And, ours is not a mission that will look like other Christians we know. We shape the mission—in good ways and bad. This is an undeniable fact. What’s important, and what will serve as the focus of this week’s study, is that we understand ourselves in order to address our weaknesses and leverage our strengths for the mission God has uniquely given us.

How do you, personally, enhance and hinder God’s work in your life?

Your Unique Design

Back in week one, we established the fact that God created people to live on mission to bear his image to the world. This image-bearing task is common to all people, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, background, socio-economic standing, or any other factor. Yet, we all image God in differing ways.

Consider the truth of Psalm 139:13–16:

*“For you formed my **inward** parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in **secret**, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my **unformed** substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them” (ESV).*

Inward. Secret. Unformed. God was at work in these places, long before you were born. There He was working to knit and weave you together to be uniquely you. This includes:

Your Personality

God hard-wired you with certain innate characteristics that shape how you respond to the world around you. These personality factors are unique tools for God’s mission. However, they’ve been affected by sin, causing our personalities to be twisted and distorted in real and powerful ways.

Your Physical Body

God fashioned you with a body. He could have created humans without physical bodies, but He didn’t. He took the dust of the ground and made tangible, physical beings with assorted traits like our gender that again, provide unique inroads for mission.

Your Parents and Place

God gave you to certain parents and a certain time and place. Many of our biological families are broken by pain and dysfunction, but this doesn’t negate the fact that God gave you to them apart from any choice on your part. He also caused you to be born in a certain part of the world with a certain ethnicity and He desires to leverage these factors for His mission as well.

Your Time

Finally, God caused you to be born at a certain time in human history. Think about it. You could have been born at any time—the Dark Ages, the Depression, or in the

future. You had no choice in this. Yet, God sent you to this earth to bear His image at a particular time.

How do you see these four factors shaping your mission? What do you learn about yourself and God from the amount of influence these factors have on your life though they were established long before you were born?

Ask someone who knows you well to reflect on the same question. Ask them to assess how your personality, physical body, parents, place and time are God-given tools that can be used in mission. Write some observations from this conversation below.

Your Unique Sin

The second shaping influence on our mission is a bit less exciting, but critical nonetheless. All people are born dead in sin, yet not all people are born susceptible to the exact same sin pattern. Yes, we are all rebels from God, but this rebellion takes many different forms. Some of these factors are also defined from birth—we may be born into families with certain sinful patterns or have predispositions to addiction from the outset of our lives. Many times, however, we develop patterns of rebellion at an early age that become ingrained in our being and shape our lives. For example, a teenage boy may selfishly hoard resources in an effort to appear more important than his peers. In time, that man may become a businessman whose self-worth is defined by his bank account and who crushes others who get in the way of his success. Another girl might find fulfillment through the love of others, pursuing one failed relationship after another with each leaving her more broken than before. None of these behaviors are original, but their outworking in our lives creates a person with a unique propensity to sin and pain from its implications.

How has your sin shaped your life?

Can you think of a time when your hurts, failures or pain have been a tool God has used to help you share the good news with others? How might your sinful choices be a tool God can use to make you more effective in His mission?

It's important to slow down a bit here and really drill down on the implications of your sin in your life's mission. God can, and does, use our sin to position us for gospel witness, but our sin can also become a great impediment. If we are not careful, we will grow far too accustomed to our sinful flesh. It will become a part of us, shaping our perception of life, ourselves and others in ways we may not even be aware.

There are far too many stories that play out in a similar fashion. You've probably heard the horror stories or experienced them firsthand. The pastor or leader who seems to have it all together falls, and he falls hard. It comes to light that lurking behind the façade of spiritual maturity is another person altogether. Once the hypocrisy is revealed, one wonders, "How in the world can someone who leads others to know the good news live in direct opposition to the good news he proclaimed?" These stories are far too common and reveal the diabolical nature of sin. **Unless you are consciously, actively putting sin to death, you'll find yourself in the same position (Romans 8:13).** Back in week two, we discussed the role of spiritual formation in your mission to declare and demonstrate the glory of God. This formation is a life-long process, not something you ever complete in this life. Much like daily exercise, you must make it a regular part of your life, or you'll begin to atrophy and lose spiritual strength and vitality. Paul says it this way in Ephesians 4:

"You took off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires; you are being renewed in the spirit of your minds; you put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth" (v. 22-24).

This process of putting off and putting on takes work. Thankfully, we are not left to our own in this process. We have a number of God-given aids in this vital work of fleeing sin and pursuing holiness. A few helps are listed below. Beside each is a brief description followed by space for you to reflect on the role each of these plays in your life currently. Be honest with your answers and describe the way you are using each of these resources to fight sin in your life:

God's Word—Reading and mediating on the Scriptures holds a mirror up to our lives, exposing the ways we rebel from God's plan.

True Friends—Pursuing genuine relationships with others serves as a way for others to point out blind spots in our life that we might miss on our own.

The Holy Spirit—Understanding the role of the Spirit and listening to His voice alerts our conscience to ways we have grown accustomed to sin.

The Church—Surrounding ourselves with the community of God's people in the church feeds us with a steady diet of preaching, singing, praying and fellowship designed to anchor our hearts in the good news.

Are there any other resources that you'd add to this list? What has God given you to help you fight sin and pursue holiness? How are you taking advantage of these resources?

Your Unique History

The uniqueness of what makes you, you, gets even more complex when we begin to press play on our lives. The years progress and with them comes a dizzying array of situations, circumstances and choices that define our lives. Remember back in Psalm 139, where the Psalmist writes, *"Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in Your book and planned before a single one of them began"* (Psalm 139:16). God knows every day—the day your father died of cancer, the day you got rejected from the college of your dreams, the day your spouse proposed, the day you

had your first miscarriage, the day you landed the job you'd longed for and every day in between. God knew each of these days and was intentionally at work to use them for your good and His mission.

List the top five most significant days or seasons in your life. These should be the types of defining events that have radically shaped the trajectory of your life. Beside each of these defining moments list at least one way you can see that event being useful in your efforts to declare and demonstrate the glory of God.

Event one: _____

Why does it matter for my mission?

Event two: _____

Why does it matter for my mission?

Event three: _____

Why does it matter for my mission?

Event four: _____

Why does it matter for my mission?

Event five: _____

Why does it matter for my mission?

Not only that, but your unique spiritual journey is a significant tool in your missionary lifestyle. If you know Jesus as Savior, then you have a story of His saving grace in your life. Like the man born blind, you can testify that “though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25). For some, this salvation came at a young age, leaving you without much conscious memory of the process by which you came to know the Lord. Others have a story of God’s grace interrupting a life of blatant rebellion later in life. Regardless of the process, everyone who knows God has a story of God’s miraculous kindness and the transformation He has brought. Even if you can’t remember your life before salvation, you do know the depth of your sin and the extent of God’s saving work.

God will use your unique salvation story to aid you in sharing the gospel with others. There’s nothing new under the sun, so you can rest assured that others have sinned like you have and that God is pursuing others in a manner similar to your story. In addition, He can use your testimony of God’s grace to provoke thoughts in the minds of others of how God is at work in their lives as well.

List a few descriptions of your testimony of God’s saving work in your life. You don’t need to write the full story here, simply list some of the highlights. As you do, consider how these experiences can be useful in your mission. How might God use your story to impact the lives of others?

You’ll often be surprised that God will intentionally place people in your life who have similar life history and in whom God may be working in a similar way as He did in your life. Do you observe this in the relationships you have at this point? How might God be positioning you for gospel opportunities in these people’s lives?

Your Unique Spiritual Gifting

There’s one final tool in your missionary arsenal that you should have awareness of in order to fulfill God’s unique plan for your life—your spiritual gifting. In a number of places, the Bible lists gifts given to believers upon their salvation (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 10:8–10; 1 Peter 4:11). There’s no reason to assume that these are exhaustive lists, instead, they likely reflect a percentage of the vast array

of the gifts Christians experience because of God’s Spirit dwelling within them. Every Christian can be assured that he or she is given a gift from God and it’s important to know your gifting and put those gifts to play in God’s mission. Think about it. If God gives you a gift, then you can rest assured that it’s going to be a really good gift and it will be particularly designed to fulfill the mission He’s entrusted to you. To squander such a gift would be foolish.

There are all sorts of spiritual gifts tests available to Christians today. These tests may be helpful, but it’s often the case that we are well aware of how we’re gifted without ever taking a test. Take a minute to read the three passages listed above. As you do, list the top three ways you think you may be gifted by God for His mission in the world. It might be helpful to consider the following questions as you make this list:

- What do I enjoy doing?
- Where do I see God at work in my life?
- What am I particularly good at?
- What areas do other people tend to point out as strengths in my life?
- Which areas are linked to my personality in meaningful ways (meaning you might notice that you are naturally extroverted and good with people and, as a result, you excel in hospitality)?

Spiritual Gifts List

Now, ask a couple of trusted friends about these three gifts. Tell them why you listed each and what evidence you have for believing that God may have gifted you in these ways and ask for their input. Just as God told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” God says that same to you. He will use out weaknesses as we depend on His power. List some of your weaknesses and ask God to give you grace and power as you use those to declare and demonstrate God’s glory.

It's amazing to consider the complexity and beauty of God's creative work in your life. Everything from your design, your sin struggles, your history, your spiritual gifts, and weaknesses, testifies to the personal care He has taken to make you, you. Awareness allows you to leverage these gifts to declare and demonstrate the glory of God as the unique image bearer you were created to be.

Discuss:

1. What factors make you, you? Imagine that someone who knew you well was asked to list five characteristics that are unique to you. What do you think they'd share? Pair off with someone else in your group and share these characteristics and talk about how each of these factors reflects God's design in your life.
2. What challenges are present when others point out sin in your life or when you point out sin in the lives of others? What makes this process painful? How do people do this poorly and what steps should you take to do it well? In spite of the challenges, why is this work vital for true self-awareness?
3. Share your testimony with someone else in your group. Ask them to point out unique factors in your story that can be useful as you live as a missionary and testify to God's grace.
4. Compile a list of the spiritual gifts and weaknesses of those in your group. Ask those who are comfortable sharing to discuss one way they see spiritual gifts and weaknesses evident in their lives? As each member shares, try to encourage one another with suggestions for how those might be valuable tools for God's mission.

RELATIONSHIPS

“And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

Hebrews 10:24-25

Every mission is better with friends. Think back to your earliest memories of exploring as a kid. Maybe you and your siblings or some kids in the neighborhood invented a game that required you to find a hidden treasure or you attempted to discover secret paths in the woods. Even though the mission was childish—at least through adult eyes—it was a journey you wanted to share with friends. There may have been times you explored on your own, but if you found something exciting you likely wanted someone else to see your discovery. Missions are not fun when you do them alone.

As you grow older, the missions grow but the desire to pursue them with other people does not change. A ride in your first car, a hike in a national forest, a visit to a college campus, or a trip to see your favorite team play—all of these missions are better with other people.

You’ve likely noticed the similar trend in your spiritual journey. Your life’s mission is meant to involve others. Think back over some of the most significant spiritual moments in your life. What role did other people play in those experiences?

There are a number of reasons other people matter in your life’s mission, some of which we’ve alluded to in previous weeks.

Joy

Other people bring joy. Whether it’s watching a football game or going on a short-term mission trip, life is simply more fun when other people are involved. We all have differing bandwidths for relationships—some preferring to have many people around all of the time and some preferring a few deep friendships—yet everyone finds joy in sharing life’s most significant experiences with other people.

Encouragement

Other people can speak words of hope to you when you are down and discouraged. God can speak through them to remind you that you are made in His image and have a specific mission in life. There are times when all of us will lose our way and forget our purpose and we need other people to remind us of our unique identity and calling.

Challenge

Relationships provide a context for people to know us well enough to challenge areas of sin that hinder our spiritual formation and mission. No one likes random strangers pointing out their flaws, but when a trusted friend does so in the context of love, it can be a tool God uses to bring us to repentance and change.

Growth

We grow better and faster when we're with others. That's why people often workout in pairs. Having someone else around you to push you can cause you to find strength you did not know you had. In our spiritual lives, others can propel us to Bible reading, prayer, evangelism, service and all sorts of other practices that are meant to be a natural part of the Christian life.

Support

Life is hard. If you are following God's mission for your life, then you will often find that life only gets harder. You face many adversaries—some you can see and some you can't—who are trying to destroy you. You live in a fallen and broken world, in which pain is a common theme. Relationships are our support system to bolster our hope and perseverance during dark days.

Consider each of these five benefits of relationships in the Christian life. In what way have you seen people play these roles for you? Try to be specific with your answers so you can more readily see God's hand at work. How has another person brought you joy? How has someone been supportive? How have friends pushed you to grow?

Everyone knows the great power of relationships and the connection of those relationships to mission. In fact, one of the worst forms of punishment for a criminal is solitary confinement (no relationship) in prison (no mission). If you take out mission and relationships, life seems to lose its meaning quickly.

Yet, it's also important to consider the types of relationships you need to cultivate in order to fulfill God's mission. You might think of it as if you were dropped out in the woods, Survivor-style, and asked to find your way to a safety. There are a few people, or types of people, that you'd want in your life to help you fulfill this mission.

Someone Who Has Walked the Path Before

Ideally, you would want to take someone with you who has already navigated the complexity of the mission you are forced to undertake. It would be a gift to have a person who walked the path before you, knew the obstacles you would encounter, the choices you would confront and the most effective way to get from point A to point B. If you were the person in our fictitious Survivor scenario, you would be foolish to know someone who had gone before you and not take advantage of their expertise.

When it comes to God's mission in our lives, we are prone to make this foolish decision. The writer of the book of Hebrews reminds us that *"we also have such a large cloud of witnesses" who helps us "run with endurance the race that lies before us"* (Hebrews 12:1). There are older men and women who can teach younger men and women how to love God and others (Titus 2:1-10). There are many, many people who have walked with Jesus faithfully who can guide you in your life's mission as well. They've faced the same temptations, suffered similar losses, found victory in certain ways and learned lessons that are crucial for faithfulness. Sure, no one has it all figured out, God places people who are several steps ahead of us so we can learn from them.

And, we should invite them into our lives and ask for guidance. But, this is hard. It's likely because we're afraid of what they might think if we ask for help. We might assume they are too busy to care about us. Or, we might fall prey to the lie that the mark of maturity is to figure things out on your own. Whatever the reason, most people are reluctant to pursue another spiritually mature person and ask them for help, encouragement, counsel and care in God's mission. What about you? Do you have someone who is spiritually mature with whom you regularly meet and discuss your spiritual formation and faithfulness to God's mission?

If not, why? What holds you back from seeking out this type of relationship?

Can you think of one person who you admire who you might approach about playing such a role in your life? What steps could you take to pursue this person?

Someone Who Will Walk the Path with You

The second type of relationship that is critical for God’s mission is relationship with those who are willing to walk with you as you, together, pursue God’s mission. This is not to suggest that the mature man or woman is not walking with you, but they are walking a path they’ve walked before and showing you the way. This second type of person is someone who is at a relatively similar stage of maturity and is walking the path with you for the first time as well. They’re likely going to stumble at similar places as you do and get discouraged when faced with fears along the way.

The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes reminds us of the value such relationships bring:

“Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). Even though you’re experiencing the same challenges related to God’s mission, it is a help to everyone involved if you are not doing it alone. It’s especially helpful if you also have a relationship in place with someone who has walked the path before you. That way you are not only walking with fellow travelers, but you also have the benefit of experienced guides as well. The cumulative power of many relationships helps you walk—and walk faithfully.

You might think that these relationships would be difficult to form. You are alike in many ways, after all. Yet, something strange happens by the time most people reach adulthood—they stop making new friends, or at least they stop making friends of any depth. Sure, there are people they work out with, talk with at the playground, or watch a ball game. But we often struggle when it comes to spiritual friendships—

friendships that are actually pushing us further into God’s mission. It feels a bit awkward to say, “Hey, can we walk together in God’s mission.” But it doesn’t have to be awkward at all. In fact, you’ll find that most Christians crave these relationships as well. We live in a world with more ways to connect with people than ever before in history, yet it seems that people are lonelier than they’ve ever been. Christians, of all people, know of the deep need they have of others to “promote love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24). We’ve just got to take a risk and seek out such relationships.

Brainstorm some of the best ways you might go about entering into a relationship with someone else with the shared intent of pushing one another toward faithfulness in God’s mission. Where would you look? What would you be looking for? What might you do together in order to help you grow?

Do you have these types of relationships in your life right now? Are you taking advantage of the ways these friendships can help you grow in God’s mission? If not, what steps do you need to take to change that?

Someone You Can Show the Way

The final type of relationships every Christian needs, is one with at least one other person who they are leading down the path of God’s mission. Regardless of where you are in your spiritual formation, if you are a Christian, you are always further down the path than certain people with whom you have relationship.

This is most obvious when we consider our relationships with non-Christians. Clearly, these people have not experienced new life in Christ and do not understand their mission as image-bearers of God’s glory. It’s your chance to invest in these relationships and point these men and women to the hope of the gospel.

Thankfully, God has positioned your life for such a role. You likely live, work and hang-out in places where non-Christians are as well. The key is to find ways to enter into relationships with these people so that you have an opportunity to talk about things that matter. This doesn’t have to be something you add to your schedule, but like disciple-making, it should be a regular component of your natural life-rhythms. As you are going through life, you are looking for in-roads for meaningful relationship with those who are far from God and seeking to speak to them about the hope of

the gospel (2 Corinthians 5:20). You can do this through relationships at a local coffee shop or restaurant, by coaching a team at the local YMCA, or any of a vast array of daily tasks that allow you to come across people who are far from God. Sadly, it is common for Christians to lose intentionality in forming relationships with the lost the longer they are Christians. It is natural for people to seek relationships with those whom they have much in common, yet relationships with those who do not share your faith commitments are the means by which you fulfill God's mission to declare and demonstrate the glory of God in a dark world.

What daily or weekly activities do you do that allow you to meet non-Christians? How can you be more intentional about building relationships with people who are far from God?

Who are three people you know right now who are without saving faith in Jesus? Write their names in the space below and stop and pray that God would save them and that He might use you to point them to the gospel.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

It is not only non-Christians that need someone to show them the way. There are also many young Christians who need someone more mature than them to teach them to understand the gospel, talk to God in prayer, read and understand the Bible, share their faith, battle sin and all of the other aspects of God's mission in our lives.

You can play this role for others. Yes, you can. I know what you're thinking as you read those words: "Not me. I've got so much left to learn. I don't have it all together. I'm still really messed up." Yes, you are. And so is everyone else. If you wait until you are fully ready then you will never invest in caring for others, because you'll never be fully ready this side of heaven. But you have much to offer.

Remember back in week three we discussed three marks of effective disciple-making: relationship, time and Scripture. First, you must be willing to enter into relationship with a younger believer. Again, this doesn't have to be awkward or forced. Simple invitations like, "Hey, would you like to meet up for lunch one day" or "Our family would love to have you over for dinner one night" should be enough to get the relationship started.

From there, it requires time. This may be as simple as a text message of encouragement based on something this person has shared about his or her life. It could be a set time to get together and talk more. It might be an invitation to meet each week and discuss an area of spiritual formation or Bible fluency that you've discussed informally up to that point.

Then, you overlay this relationship and time you spend together with God's Word. If you've read and tried to apply the Bible to your life, then you have insight to offer someone else as to what you are reading in God's Word and how He is changing you. You don't have to be an expert to share these insights with someone else and talk about what God is doing in your life. Before long you'll surprise yourself and find that you are leading someone else down the path of God's mission.

Who is a younger believer with whom you already have a relationship? Or, who is a younger believer that you know casually and could pursue a more intentional friendship?

What steps would you need to take to begin a disciple-making relationship with this person?

The Role of the Church

All this talk about relationships leads to one final, important question. What's the role of the church in all of this?

There are many answers to the question regarding the role of God's church. Obviously, the church is at the heart of God's mission in the world. It's through the Church that the "manifold wisdom" of God is put on display in the world (Ephesians 3:10). One

way this wisdom is seen, is the way in which the church provides a natural context for the relationship you most need to form. Local Churches, made up of real people who know one another, listen to the same sermons, pray and sing together, give generously to the same ends and serve together in mission, are the place where each of the three types of relationships mentioned above should be centered. This is not to suggest that everyone who plays a role in your spiritual formation should be a member of your local church, but it is to suggest that many of them should. The Church should be the first place you look for people you can partner with in order to pursue God's mission together.

This makes sense because it is these people who you should encounter on a regular basis. Of all of the Christians throughout the world, it is those who gather in your local church who you should see most often and with whom you should have the most in common. And, your obedience to love others, should start right there. Be warned: This will be difficult. But all relationships are difficult. It's much easier to love theoretical people who you've never met than it is to love real life people who are different than you, who frustrate you and who may often let you down.

Take a minute to look up the following Scripture passages. How do they describe a Christian's relationship with other people?

- John 13:34 - 35
- Romans 12:10 - 16
- Galatians 5:13 - 15
- Ephesians 4:32
- Colossians 3:9 - 16
- James 5:9 - 16
- 1 Peter 3:8

Take some time to think through the implications of the passages above. Think through times in your life where you have been encourage you to live out these commandments. Try to be specific. For example, you may see in Scripture a passage showing that Christians are to forgive one another. If you've ever been in relationship with anyone, you know that there are ample opportunities to forgive and be forgiven. How can you apply this today? You might say something like: "I felt slighted by a comment Jose made a month ago. I never talked to him about it but it really ticked me off. I've been harboring a grudge ever sense and I need to talk to him about it." Try to brainstorm three concrete examples in the space below, whether they deal with forgiveness, brotherly love, showing compassion, or any of the other marks of a Christian mentioned in the verses above.

Relationships aren't optional for the Christian. They are mandatory for a life on mission. Over time, what you will find is that God forms these relationships in such a way that, together, you can do far more than you ever dreamed possible. You'll not only see yourself grow in God's grace, but you'll also find meaningful ways to live on mission with one another. Who knows, these relationships might even be the basis of a mission team or church planting core group one day?

Discuss:

1. What challenges do adults face when they seek to build new relationships? What makes this difficult? What factors in modern, American culture push against genuine relationships and how should a Christian respond to these challenges?
2. It's quite common for people to move through life without mentors of any sort. They may have people they respect, but few people have an intentional relationship with someone who is more mature and who seeks ways to bring about growth and maturity. Why is mentorship challenging for many? Do you have someone who is leading you down the path of God's mission? If so, how did this relationship form? If not, what steps could you take to seek out such a relationship?
3. Describe the depth of your Christian friendships at this point. Who are you walking with as you seek growth in spiritual formation and faithfulness in God's mission. Discuss the quality of the relationships in the groups you are a part of in your local church. What steps could you take to increase the health and intentionality of these relationships?
4. What are you doing to enter into relationships with people who are far from God? How are these relationships forming and what are you doing to bring the gospel to bear on these relationships? What challenges are you facing and how can your church community help you in this task?

TEAMWORK

“Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different activities, but the same God activates each gift in each person.”

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Have you ever been on a short-term mission trip? It's common for churches through North American to send small groups from their church to partner with other churches and organizations around the world to care for orphans, dig wells, run children's programs, teach pastors, or a host of other projects that aid these organizations in mission.

The work of these teams follows a fairly typical progression. First, the mission is determined. What are they going to do? Then, a leader is selected. Who is going to work to build a team who make sure the mission is accomplished? Finally, the team is formed and roles are distributed so that everyone knows exactly what they are to do as they serve.

Ask those who have been on such a trip and they are likely to see the trip as a significant benefit to their spiritual growth. There's something about living on intentional mission with a group of other people that is formative in our understanding of God's mission and our role within His mission. These trips are often a way that God reorients the priorities of those on the team itself.

Why?

Because **there's something powerful about living on mission with a group of people**. We come away from these trips with a profound understanding that this is how God designed life to function. We were meant to live in community with others on a shared mission.

If you have ever been on a short-term mission trip or even served with a group of Christians for a one-day mission project, what was your experience like? What did you learn about yourself and God's mission through this process?

Unfortunately, it's not easy to translate this pattern to the regular rhythms of life back home. The powerful pull of the mundane details of life works against life on mission. We've got kids to get to practice, work to do, dishes to clean, emails to send. It's hard to live on mission, much less to do it with other people.

This presents us with the key choice in life. Are we going to squander God's mission in pursuit of our desires or are we going to do the hard work of figuring out how to live on mission with others through the lives He's given us? You'll notice that these components have formed the content of this week's study up to this point.

1. Live on mission—Actively seek to declare and demonstrate the glory of God to the ends of the Earth.
2. With others—Form spiritual relationships with others that foster growth in your life and in which you partner together in shared mission.
3. Through our lives—Seek to involve every aspect of your life, both word and deed, in this grand mission of God.
4. That He's given us—Understand that it's His mission and He's graciously invited us to give our lives away for something more important than ourselves.

It's the second component that we want to focus on this week. It's not enough to have relationships with others, though this is vital as we saw last week. It's also vital that we learn to leverage these relationships to enhance our shared mission. We must consider how **we, together**, can declare and demonstrate the glory of God to the ends of the Earth.

What factors hinder you being on mission with others? Do you find it difficult to partner with others in God's mission? If so, why? If not, what steps have you taken to make this easier?

There are at least three natural ways relational circles can facilitate shared mission.

With Your Family

Your family provides the first, and most strategic, community for shared mission. If you are married, this is why you are married. God created a woman for Adam to serve as a

‘helpmate’, implying that the man and woman would partner together to accomplish something—the mission God had already given them (Genesis 2:18). The primary purpose of marriage is not companionship; it is shared mission in a way that pictures God’s great love for His Church (Ephesians 5:22–33).

This reality is extended and enhanced if the couple has children. These young image-bearers are the blessing of God’s plan for the couple to be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth with reflections of God’s glory (Genesis 1:26–28). Parents should seek to raise their children for the purpose of sending them into adulthood on active mission with God. This process begins with intentional investment in shared mission as a family.

If you are not married, this does not mean you shouldn’t seek to take steps to live on mission with your family. Everyone has a biological family of origin and if their family contains some professing believers, then you should work to find meaningful ways to declare and demonstrate God’s glory together. Spending more time with your non-Christian family members could be a good starting point. Also, as we will soon see, there are other relational circles that can allow you to live on mission with others even if you are not currently married.

How are you doing at living on mission with your family? What factors make this challenging?

Take some time to dream a bit. What are some examples of ways that you and your spouse can live on mission together? What relationships do you share, what hobbies do you enjoy, in what ways are you gifted? How can you leverage these for shared mission? If you’re not married, consider how these same questions might relate to a close relationship in your life?

If you have kids, consider the various ways your family could live on mission together. How is your family uniquely designed for mission? In what ways do you see God gifting your children for mission and what steps can you take to help them learn to leverage these gifts and use them in God’s mission?

With Your Neighbors

Another natural relational circle for joint mission is your neighbors. God has strategically placed you in a neighborhood, apartment complex, or dorm room for the sake of mission. You may be in that environment alone, but more than likely there is someone who lives near you who is also a believer. By virtue of the fact that you live in a similar location, you have a ready-made circle of care that you can partner in together.

Let’s say you and a neighbor met together and began by mapping out of your neighborhood or apartment complex—listing the names of your neighbors and any needs you are aware of. At minimum, this gives you a way to pray with someone else for the salvation of your neighbors. You can also join in prayer around areas of pain and suffering that you know of among those you live around.

But it can go further as well. You could seek to find ways to love and bless your neighbors. You might throw a neighborhood block party and invite families to join for a night of food and fun. You could organize a way to welcome new families and individuals into the area when they move. Or, you might plan a day each week when moms are going to meet at the park to let the kids play. This doesn’t have to be a weird bait-and-switch, where you trap your neighbors into an awkward evangelism crusade. It’s simply a way to enter into relationships with those you live around and watch as God opens doors for gospel conversation.

What would this look like where you live? Do you know any neighbors who are believers? If not, what steps could you take to find out who has a relationship with Jesus?

What are two practical ways you could partner with other believers where you live so that you, together, can more effectively live on mission?

With Your Church

There's one final relational context for shared mission—your local church. You can't reasonably live in joint mission with your entire church. Thankfully, most churches have some sort of structure that creates relational connections, be it Sunday school, small groups, or some other environment. These groups provide a meaningful way to join together for mission. You might think of it as your ready-made, short-term mission team. The key here is to begin to think through this using the categories of a short-term trip: a shared mission, a defined leader and a complementary team.

1. A Shared Mission

If you want to live on mission with your church community, you'll need to define a shared mission. It can't be every man or woman for himself. Rather, shared mission happens when a defined group knows and owns a project together. If many of the members of your church community live in the same area, then you might partner together to declare and demonstrate the gospel in a certain neighborhood. If there are key issues of brokenness—such as poverty, homelessness, single-parent families—then you might consider ways your group could meet those needs. What's important is that you define this and that others in your group own the mission.

What groups are built for community within your local church?

What are some examples of shared mission that you might undertake? Are those in your community already engaged in mission in some way? If so, how might you leverage the things they are already doing to join together in mission?

2. A Defined Leader

Every group needs a leader. This doesn't necessarily have to be the person you think of when you imagine a natural leader—someone with charisma, boldness and vision. Leadership at this level simply requires someone who understands God's mission and wants to help others engage in the work He's doing. Most failure in mission doesn't happen because of a bad strategy but simply results from a lack of leadership. No one is willing to step up, take a risk and call others to the mission.

You might be that very leader. In time, this mission may compel some of you to give your lives away as international missionaries, pastors, or church planters. For now, this mission certainly should compel you to seek out ways to lead your family, neighbors and church community to engage.

What would this look like for you? What type of leadership would be necessary for mission in these circles of relationship? What would be required to lead your family in mission?

What would you need to do in order to lead your neighbors in mission?

What would you need to do in order to lead your local church community in mission?

What you will find is that some are more naturally and supernaturally gifted as leaders. These people will have a clear sense of the way to engage others in God's mission and demonstrate the type of character that compels others to follow. If this is you, then you should take note of these gifts and begin to ask questions about how God might leverage them for church planting or mission sending in the future. You may have never

thought about yourself in this light, but you should begin to ask questions about your leadership calling if you see evidences of God's blessing as you attempt to lead.

Others or you may find that you are not gifted in leadership. You are more inclined to teaching, hospitality, or mercy ministries. Great! This doesn't mean you are any less important to God's mission. If you step up and lead for a season, even if it's not the best fit for you personally, then you'll soon find that God does send other capable leaders to the team. This then allows you to invite someone else to step into the role of leader while you shift into a role that is more fitting for your gifts.

What about you? On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being low and 10 being high, how confident do you feel as a leader?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why?

How gifted do you sense yourself to be as a leader?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why?

What should this say about the role you should play in God's mission?

3. A Complementary Team

This discussion of leadership gifts presents a natural segue into the final component of joint mission—a complementary team. God's grace is seen in the wide distribution of gifts

He gives to His people—gifts that are meant to be used in mission with others. Whether it's your family, neighbors, or church, it's important that you develop a strategic plan to use everyone's gifts well. You would never go on an international mission trip and have your best carpenter teach kids for the week or your best musician dig a well. They may be willing to serve in these ways, but it would be far more effective to position your team so that people are doing what they do best for the majority of the time.

The same is true in our lives. We are surrounded by people who excel in hospitality, giving care to those in need, administrating certain projects, or teaching the truths of God's Word. God has been intentional in the giving of these gifts and the community in which He's placed these gifts. You will likely find that your family, neighbors, or church has complementary gifts represented among its members—the types of gifts that can enhance the work of mission if deployed effectively.

What gifts do you see demonstrated by those in your family? How can you leverage those gifts for shared mission?

What gifts do you see demonstrated by those in your neighborhood? How can you leverage those gifts for shared mission?

What gifts do you see demonstrated by those in your church community? How can you leverage those gifts for shared mission?

It is interesting to note how the topics of each week's study complements one another. Your growth in Bible fluency fuels your spiritual formation. Your spiritual formation allows you to be the image of God. And, here, your joint mission with others enhances the very relationships that God has given to you for your personal growth and transformation. To squander these gifts of God would be to do ourselves harm and short-change the mission God has put before us. Every day is a mission trip, meant to be engaged with others.

Discuss:

1. Have you ever been on a short-term mission trip? If so, what factors made this trip meaningful for you personally? What played a role in the effectiveness of the mission you went to accomplish?
2. Why is it challenging to think of your everyday life as a mission trip? What steps could you take to raise your intentionality in God's mission each and every day?
3. Share the ways your family, neighbors and church community are currently engaged in mission together? What are some examples of potential mission options for each of these groups?
4. How can the group you are participating in partner together for mission? What gifts are represented in the group? What shared mission objectives has God put before your group and what steps could you take to enhance your intentionality there?
5. Before you come back together next week, engage in a shared mission with your group. What did you learn about yourself and your group from this experience?

CALLING

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

Romans 10:14-15

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Young kids respond to this question with all sorts of answers that make us smile like astronauts, professional athletes, doctors, teachers, or moms. It’s rare for these young dreams to play out exactly as the child imagines, but it’s a good thing for children to dream about the future. Adults have a tendency to stop asking this question, or at least to stop asking it explicitly. We settle into the flow of life and may fail to consider how God might be calling us to give our lives away for the sake of His mission in the world.

Call to Mission

The first call all Christians have is a call to mission generally. God has commissioned every one of His image-bearers to declare and demonstrate His glory to the ends of the Earth. This reality is made clear when we consider one of Jesus first tasks in His public ministry. Matthew records the scene:

“As He was walking along the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea, since they were fishermen. ‘Follow Me,’ He told them, ‘and I will make you fish for people!’ Immediately they left their nets and followed Him” (Matthew 4:18-20).

First, Jesus called them to Himself (follow Me) and then He sent them on mission (fish for people). This connection should be repeated in every person who comes to saving faith in Jesus. **They are called to salvation and in turn sent on mission.**

This should not be a surprise because we see sending throughout the Scriptures. Even in the Old Testament, God called His people to go. Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of sending in the Old Testament is found in Isaiah 6. In this passage we catch a glimpse of God’s sending nature: *“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,*

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying: ‘Who should I send? Who will go for Us?’” To this Isaiah responds, “Here I am. Send me” (Isaiah 6:8). God’s people go because God is sending them out.

John’s gospel contains the most overt sending language, using the word “sending” or “sent” over fifty times. Most of this sending language is reserved for God’s sending of Jesus who was the embodiment of God’s mission. In turn, Jesus says, *“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you’”* (John 20:21). The Church is sent on active mission into the world and each individual member is a manifestation of this mission. But, this call is general. There’s also a sense in which God calls each of us to a specific mission.

Call to a Specific Mission

You might think that it’s only pastors who experience a call to ministry. This is not true. Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus makes it clear that God gives leaders to His church so that every Christian in the local church can do “the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:11–16). Ministry is a task the entire Church is called to. It’s important for you to begin to identify the way you are specifically called to mission. To do this, you might look at the following realities in your life.

1. Your Gifting

How are you uniquely gifted for mission? What ways do your personality and gifts open opportunities for mission? As you grow in self-awareness through this study you should be able to identify very clear ways in which God has designed you for mission.

2. Your Passions

What gets you out of bed in the morning? The answer to this question can give insight into your life’s calling. If you are particularly passionate to see people understand God’s Word, then you might be called to teach, whereas a particular passion toward the oppressed might mean that orphan care is a mission to which you’ve been called.

3. Your Location

Where you live, work and play provides a natural way to understand your mission. These locations are not haphazard, but are an intentional plan of God. They serve as your circle of responsibility—the areas in which God has given you to make disciples. What impact does your current location have on your calling?

4. Your History

Finally, you might look to your life history for clarity in your calling. You may notice that God seems to bless particular work you've done in the past or that you've found unique joy when engaged in certain forms of mission. You may be a person who is effectively gifted in showing mercy to those in crisis or who enjoys helping under-resourced communities develop sustainable business practices.

How does your life history help you understand your calling?

5. Your Opportunities

All of the above presents you with clear opportunities for gospel witness. You should take note of the ready-made opportunities before you and seek to leverage them for mission. If your city is marked by racial division, then engaging in reconciliation might be a valuable life's calling. If many of your neighbors are divorced, then it might be that God is calling you to provide marriage counseling or care to those experiencing the horror of a broken marriage.

What opportunities are immediately before you? How should you engage in mission based on this reality?

These factors can help us think beyond the typical way church members think about calling. Your mission is more than simply to hand out bulletins on a Sunday morning, make coffee for guests, or serve in a weekly youth ministry. These are needed roles, but your mission is bigger than that and it's important you can clearly articulate your calling to yourself and others.

Try your hand at it. In one sentence, write a statement of your life’s calling as you currently understand it. This sense of calling may change over time, but what do you sense God calling you to at this point in your life? You might begin your statement with “God has uniquely called me to engage in His mission by...”

How would you complete this sentence?

Starting New Churches

There’s one specific way you can play a role within God’s mission. Throughout North America there has been a resurgence of effort to start new churches, particularly in urban centers. New churches need missionary disciples to play various roles in the early stages of the church. We need more and more men and women who are willing to invest in this vital work in one of three ways.

1. Church Planters

Some men may be called to start a new church. They are typically called church planters. They will often be the type of individual who took the challenge of leadership from last week’s session and demonstrated a clear gift in this area. They have multiplication in their DNA and are faithful and fruitful in their disciple-making work through their local church. Some with this track record should consider extending their efforts to start a new church. While it may sound intimidating to think of yourself as a church planter, in reality church planters are those who are simply effective missionaries. God does the real work of starting a church, it’s simply our role to use our gifts in His mission and watch what He will do (Matthew 16:18).

Through the effort of many church planters and leaders, tools have been created to aid in the discernment process for those who think they may be called to start a new church. If this is you, or if you are intrigued but don’t really understand the whole concept of church planting, check out these resources developed by The North American Mission Board at namb.net/SendNetwork.

Have you ever thought about starting a new church? What comes to your mind when you think about that?

2. Church Planting Team Member

Those who do not feel particularly called to start a new church still have a role to play. There is a great need for team members to assist church planters in various team roles. By virtue of the fact that church plants are new, they have an abundance of needs and your gifts will be valuable to the growth and development of the church. Most important, new churches need mature disciples who are willing to invest in the work of disciple-making.

Some may be a part of a church planting team as a pastor or ministry leader, others may simply decide to relocate with a church plant and get a secular job in order to help. We need Christians from all walks of life and all professions who are willing to take a risk to live in a place that lacks healthy churches and invest in a church plant. You may be a part of a church that is sending out church planters on a regular basis. If so, ask your pastor or the church planter what needs there may be for church planting team members. If you could just as easily live and work in a place where there is a great need for more healthy churches, why not take the risk and watch God birth a new church?

What would hinder you from being a church planting team member? What role could you play within a new church?

3. Sender

Those who may not leave to be part of starting a new church can still play a critical role in the health of a new church. The first, and most important, way you can do this is by praying intentionally and regularly for a specific church plant. Again, this might be a church plant sent by your current local church or it could be one you find online. Rest assured that any plant would love to have people interceding on their behalf. List the names of two church plants that you will commit to pray for.

1. _____
2. _____

Now, write three specific ways you could pray for these churches. Think about how you might pray for their evangelism and disciple-making efforts or how you might pray for the church planter and his family. Write three prayer requests below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now that you've selected two plants, find a way to contact the church planter and let them know you are praying. You'll be surprised at the impact a letter or email can have in bringing hope and encouragement to planting efforts.

A second way you can be involved in sending is through partnership in giving and serving. You may feel led to give financially in order to establish a new church. Or you may be able to give time to go on a short-term trip to come alongside a need within the plant. Whatever the means, it's critical to find ways to give of your blessings to aid the work of a church plant.

How else could you serve and invest in starting a new church? If you don't know, ask. Contact a church planter and ask them what their biggest needs are and ask God how you can meet these needs.

One final question may help this discussion of calling. How do you know where and how God is calling you? In the early portion of this week's study, we provided you with five questions to determine your internal sense of calling. But, it is not enough merely to feel like you should do something.

God uses those who know you best to affirm your calling. There are not many people who know you as well as your spouse, fiancé, significant other, or best friend. They have had a front row seat to all the highs and lows of your life, your ministry and the impact you have made in the lives of others. They've seen the great examples of God's work in and through you as well as how you respond when God works in this way. This is why it is extremely important to listen to those who know you best in regards to your calling. Their confirmation and affirmation is crucial.

Now when considering a call to church planting or vocational ministry, the voice of other mature believers is another very important factor. God often uses others to speak words of encouragement, truth and His desires to us. Listening for patterns

in what other believers see in your life can often be vital in learning where God may be leading you. It has the potential to save you many sleepless nights or seasons of drought in the long run.

Take some time to ask the following questions to three people who know you well. Listen to their answers and jot down some observations you may have.

1. How have you seen God at work in my life over the past few years? What are a few things that stand out to you?
2. In what ways could you see God using me in the ministry of the church?

God equips and provides for those He calls on a specific mission. He supplies what is needed to fulfill the mission to which He has called us (Ephesians 2:10). Yes, the road will be hard, but we can take heart God will go with us as we follow Him in obedience.

Discuss:

1. What comes to your mind when you think of someone who is “called” to Christian ministry? How does it change your perspective to consider that all Christians are called?
2. Have various members of the group share the statement of their life’s calling. What do you observe about these calls? What does this tell you about your group?
3. Have you ever considered a role in starting a new church? What new churches or church planters do you know personally? What needs have you seen in these churches? How might you be uniquely designed to meet these needs?
4. How could you and your group partner with church planting work right now? What steps could you take to grow more informed about the work God is doing through church planting and to find strategic and specific ways to serve church plants and planters?

MISSIONARY PRACTICES

“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”

John 17:18

Life is lived in a series of tangible actions. It's one thing to have a theory of the values that will define your existence, but it's a far different and more important matter to put these values into play in practical ways.

For example, it's common to hear a father say that he loves his wife and children. Yet, translating that to practice can be difficult. He might busy himself with vocational pursuits or waste time through mindless hobbies rather than do the hard work to invest in these relationships. If this happens, then there is a gap between his stated belief—"I love my family" and his actual practice which says, "Many things are more important than my family."

The same is true for the Christian. You'll meet few Christians who will not agree that they should be making disciples, yet most struggle to translate this to practice. As a result, many squander their lives in mission-less living. Paul warns against such a life when he writes, "*Making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is*" (Ephesians 5:16-17). We have a responsibility to make the most of our days because they are short and fleeting.

As we near the end of this study, we want to move our attention to practical issues related to missionary living that will help our belief and practice become more congruent. We may have alluded to several of these up to this point, but let's spend some time teasing out the basic life rhythms of a person who is intent on living on mission.

It's important to realize from the outset that nobody is a natural missionary. Even Paul himself needed to pray for boldness. Before we start, you need to give yourself permission to not like missionary living at first. A firefighter doesn't enjoy rescuing someone from a burning building, doing CPR, or using the Jaws of Life to cut somebody out of the flaming wreckage of an automobile, but it needs to be done to save a life. You might not enjoy some of these actions at the outset, and it will most certainly take a good bit of work to adjust your regular rhythms to be in line with God's missionary plan. That's ok.

Rate your willingness to live as a missionary in each area listed below on a scale from 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent). Following each answer, list a few reasons for the score you selected.

I am confident in my ability to share the gospel.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why?

I am confident in my understanding of the gospel message.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why?

I have plenty of relationships with nonbelievers with opportunities to share.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why?

I am passionate about sharing the gospel with non-Christians.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why?

God alone can save a soul, but Paul clearly states that somebody has to be willing to bring the gospel to those who are far from Jesus (Romans 10:14-15). Even if you are intimidated, you should be encouraged by the fact that you are not alone. In fact, the Holy Spirit is known as the Helper (John 16:4-15). He is there to help you when you feel weak, inept, or downright ignorant. He's there to bring courage when you doubt and hope when you wonder if anything good is actually happening.

The apostle Paul discovered that through his weakness, the Lord was strong, and that His grace was sufficient for him (2 Corinthians 12:9). You'll discover the same as you trust God's word to you that He'll be with you as you step out in obedience to His command to "go." As you go, here is a four-fold process you should follow in order to make missionary living a regular part of your daily rhythms.

Build Relationships

Reading the book of Acts, or even the Gospels, it becomes obvious that most of the successful evangelism modeled by Jesus, and the apostles was done through strategic relationships and outside of buildings. There is an art involved in reaching people outside of the church, as much as there is a skill in fishing, golfing, or photography. Building relationships takes work. Here are a few ways to begin:

- 1. Have Fun**—Find ways to embed yourself in a few, strategic recreational activities in your community and participate in those consistently. There are fantasy sports, cross-fit groups and dinner clubs. This is where individuals are provided with opportunity to enter into the rhythms of society and be a part of the conversation people are already having. There are more activities than just sports. People who take their kids to dance, gymnastics and soccer games form a type of community. There are play groups for stay-at-home-moms. There are craft groups, cooking classes and yoga classes. The possibilities are endless. Relationship building is work, but it can be fun. Leverage something you already enjoy doing to be around people who are far from God.
- 2. Learn**—Art classes. Reading groups. Cooking classes. Night school. People are always trying to learn more, feed their minds and stimulate deeper thinking. Public libraries provide opportunities to teach writing workshops, or to speak on an area of expertise. Going to art exhibits with your neighbors and engaging in discussions about an artist's work can provide amazing gospel conversations. Since God's truth is seen throughout every facet of life, these arenas provide easy inroads to gospel conversations.
- 3. Serve**—Unbelievers today are socially aware to the conditions in their world, and socially awakened to do something about it. Nothing speaks so powerfully about grace than a group of people sacrificially serving others. Often, when non-believers witness the love of God in action, they are moved to join in and help. For Christians, this provides a huge opportunity to "pick a fight" with an area of darkness in your city and engage in meaningful mission. There is a saying

that you earn the right to speak to a culture when you serve a culture. Gospel conversations abound and flourish when we serve the less fortunate ones in a community. It could be kids aging out of foster care, making them vulnerable to sexual predators or the sex trade. It could be homelessness. Sex trafficking. Often, people in your community who are disinterested in the gospel initially, come along because they share the desire to see injustices eradicated from their city. Seeing you in action causes them to want to listen to what you believe.

4. **Show Hospitality**—Everybody has to eat. For that reason, inviting somebody over to eat seems like a big ask, but it doesn't necessarily take a huge investment of time if you'd already planned on eating anyways. Instead of half an hour around the table with your family, you might spend two hours in conversation with your neighbors. You could host a block party on Memorial Day, grill hotdogs and rent a bounce house. You can provide coffee for the commuters standing at the bus stop in an urban setting. Mark a day of the week, pick a bus stop bench, and own it. Serve coffee out of a Starbucks traveler until everybody has caught their bus. The more creative you get, the more fun you'll have. And remember, that's part of the power of it.

1. **Be a Regular**—Finally, certain places in your neighborhood are hubs for community. Being a regular in a particular place of business can foster a sense of community. In Britain, it's the local pub. In America, it can be the coffee shop, or a local restaurant. These places are where the people congregate and establish an unspoken relationship and fostered sense of community. It could be a skate park, a secret surfing spot, known only to locals, or a park in an urban setting. Whenever you see these places, consider doing business there. Especially if it's a hub in the community you're trying to reach.

Use these five suggestions to map out a plan for building relationships over the coming month. You may already do some of these things. If so, feel free to include them. Either way, seek to come up with at least one clear action step in each of these areas that would enhance your missionary living.

1. Have fun

2. Learn

3. Serve

4. Show hospitality

5. Be a regular

Bridge to Gospel Conversations

Building relationships should provide a natural context to bridge to gospel conversations. This doesn't have to be a bait-and-switch technique where people feel used so that you can feel good about yourself for having shared your faith. If the person feels this way, then your missionary efforts will often have the opposite effect—people will feel jaded and skeptical of the truth you proclaim. You should genuinely seek to build relationships in an effort to love people well. Then, if people truly feel loved, God will provide the opportunities for you to turn natural conversations into gospel conversations.

There you are. You've invited a family over for a meal. The food is the picture of excellence. The atmosphere is superb. The company splendid. Then, a perfect night becomes ruined by the forced conversation about Jesus. The obligatory gospel conversation is pulled out and dusted off to justify the existence of a good night out.

Have you ever had that experience?

Have you ever scratched your head about how it all went wrong? Did you wish that the person talking had learned to pick a better moment?

Perhaps you've been on the other side of the fence. You've been meeting with a couple or individual for months. Perhaps you've been playing basketball with a team for six months and nobody knows you're a Christian. You don't know how to ever bring it up. You wait. And wait. And wait. After enough time, it's actually embarrassing to share about Jesus because it seems so out of the blue now that so much time has passed.

Here's the reality. Timing is everything. In both situations, a little more faith was required. At the dinner table, faith was needed to allow God to open up the right opportunity. And even though it seemed to be taking a while on the basketball courts, guys sometimes take a lot longer to talk about deep things. Nonetheless, God is always working behind the scenes in our lives. God has perfect timing and as we get to know people, they open up and share things that invite us into their lives on a deeper level.

It could be that after practice, one of the guys tells you about his wife and how she's going to leave him. He'll ask your advice, and that's your time to listen, talk and offer to pray for him. Often, asking somebody if you can pray for them is the easiest way to break the ice. People will often say yes, or tell you politely that they don't believe in God. If they say yes, pray on the spot.

The importance of building relationships naturally is so that you can share the gospel in a natural way when the time comes. Often, we've been taught to share the gospel like a slick salesman, quickly laying out our pitch, then closing the deal on the spot. The problem is that this isn't modeled anywhere in Scripture. When Paul preached at Mars Hill in Athens, the response of the crowd was mixed. There were three responses. Some thought he was a babbler of nonsense and mocked him. Others believed. Others needed to hear more. Read this story in Acts 17. What do you observe there? What does this tell us about the importance of sharing the gospel in a natural way?

Read Paul’s description of gospel work in 1 Corinthians 3:5–9. How should this change the way you view the timing of gospel conversations?

How does understanding evangelism as being a process change the way you depend upon the Holy Spirit to partner with you?

For an excellent gospel conversation tool, visit namb.net/3Circles. Download the free training and mobile app.

Connect to the Church

The third stage—connect them to a local church—is one we often neglect or put in the wrong order. Of course, there’s nothing wrong with inviting a total stranger to your church’s Easter service and there’s also no issues with handing your neighbor an invite card to an upcoming event. More often than not, however, people are going to be drawn to take you up on your invitation if there is a relationship already established. If you’ve hung out with your neighbor and shared a number of meals together, they may be willing to come to a church cookout. If they’ve gone with you to a few ballgames, they might be willing to come over for a small group at your house. Also, if you’ve already shared the gospel with them, then they might be intrigued to hear more about the truth of the gospel when your church gathers.

What’s important, is that you try to find ways to involve non-believers into the rhythms of your church’s life. Why? Because once they are saved, the local church will be the context for growth and community, so why not go ahead and connect them? And, not only that, but the teaching of the church, the stories of other relationships built on love, will often have a compelling affect in drawing your friends to Christ.

This doesn’t mean that your first invitation has to be to your church’s Sunday morning gathering. It could be that you invite them to an outing with some guys from the church, a women’s Bible study, a mission project, or other activities in the life of the church. These smaller settings, in fact, will often allow your friends to feel more comfortable and form better relationships with believers.

Think about your church. What are some ways you could involve non-believers in the life of your church?

Commit to the Process

Missionary practices are not hard, but they do take intentionality. You may grow discouraged. You may not see immediate fruit from your missionary efforts. Some people will reject you. Others will be skeptical but distant. Still others may be genuinely interested, but just not let you know. What's important is that you persevere and continue to live a life on mission.

The purpose of each of these sessions is to create patterns of behavior that will last a lifetime. Yet, we are all forgetful people, and in a few months, or years, we will be prone to drift from the practices we've been reminded of this week.

In order to arrest these tendencies, finish this week by committing to not allowing any aspect of your life to neglect the needs of those around you who are far from God. If you are changed, your community will start to change around you. As we continue to pray the Lord of the harvest to send out workers, we will soon learn that with Jesus, the harvest is plentiful.

As we conclude, it's important to realize that nobody is an expert in evangelism. The Holy Spirit is willing to work with each one of us in a unique way as we boldly step out on the journey to become His instruments of bringing hope and salvation into people's lives. You will grow in your knowledge, boldness and confidence as you continually see God working in new and surprising ways. Each time God meets you on the other side of obedient faith-filled evangelism, your faith will grow and increase. Remember, when it comes to actually saving a soul, God does all the work. He is just looking for a faithful messenger who will deliver the good news of Jesus to all who need it.

Discuss:

1. What hinders you from living on mission? What challenges do you face when you attempt to live as a sent individual each week?
2. Describe a time when you built a new friendship. What did you do? How can the pointers from this week's session help you build relationships with people who are far from God?
3. Brainstorm some ordinary ways you can bridge everyday conversations to gospel conversations. What are some common themes you find in your conversations? How can you take each of these themes and bridge to gospel conversations? For example, you may say it is common for people to discuss hurt or pain their life. If so, it should simple for a Christian to take these stories of suffering and point to the One who is our only hope in times of pain.
4. How could you connect non-believers to your church community, even before they come to trust in Jesus? What challenges might you face? What are some ways that your group can make it more natural for outsiders to enter your group and feel loved and accepted?

MISSIO DEI

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord’s glory, as the waters cover the sea.”

Habakkuk 2:14

We’ve come full circle. Back in week one, we considered God’s creation and the mission of men and women within the world God made. We saw that God created all people to declare and demonstrate His glory to the ends of the earth. This idea links the mission of God (missio Dei) and the imago Dei (image of God). The missio Dei is God’s plan to fill the earth with His glory by saving sinners and fixing the world. This is what He has been doing since Creation and what He will continue to do until the world, as we know it, ends. In order to accomplish this mission, God choose to create image-bearers who would represent and reflect His glory throughout the world. As people fulfill their image-bearing mission, God’s mission is accomplished. This is what we were made for, though far too often we neglect our God-given mission.

We’ve got good news though. God has already made a fantastic promise about the future. John’s vision captures a glimpse of this coming reality:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea no longer existed. I also saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look! God’s dwelling is with humanity, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will no longer exist; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away” (Revelation 21:1-4).

You’ve probably had the experience of watching a movie you’ve seen before or re-watching a ballgame where you already know the outcome. It’s intense the first time you watch the movie or the game. You’re on the edge of your seat, unsure of the outcome. You might pace around the living room or anxiously cover your eyes. This is normal for any event in which the outcome is up in the air. But, it’s totally foolish if you already know the outcome. You’d make fun of a friend who was yelling at the TV when he was watching a ballgame when he already knew his team had won. If the

outcome is determined, then you can just kick back and enjoy the fun of watching it again without any stress.

In a very similar way, the final outcome of our lives and of our world has already been determined by God. For example, read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Why would Paul tell the church to encourage one another with these words? What is encouraging about these words?

Now read Revelation 21:22-22:5. What is encouraging about this passage?

These two passages are merely a sampling of the promises of God related to the future hope for those who are in Christ Jesus. And, here's where the news gets really, really good. These promises come from God! You and I don't make promises like God does. We're prone to break our promises. We say things like, "I'll be there at 7pm" or "I'll grab some bread on the way home from work." Our intentions are good, but we don't always keep our word. We forget. We run out of time. We get selfish. Whatever the cause, the underlying reason is that you and I are frail humans. We're not like God who *"does not lie or change His mind, for He is not man who changes his mind"* (1 Samuel 15:29). God doesn't change His mind and He won't break His promises. He always keeps His word. He will do whatever He has promised to do in the future. He's got a good track record. Throughout the Old Testament, He made promise after promise of the coming Messiah, going all the way back to Genesis chapter 3 where He promised that a son of Eve would crush Satan. Each and every time, God came through on His promises. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are a stunning picture of a God who always does what He says He will do.

How should the promise-keeping nature of God change the way you live your life? In what areas, should God's character give you peace and hope?

We've got one life to live and the outcome is already decided. Sure, we don't know the exact twists and turns our life will take, but we do know how it will all end. Think about how this might apply to a classic passage like Hebrews 12:1 - 2:

“Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God's throne.”

Let us run with endurance. This idea is often applied to concrete aspects of human existence. Run with endurance when you are faced with adversity—when cancer strikes, when a loved one dies, when you lose a job, or when your marriage is on the ropes. Or, we apply it to various spiritual disciplines. Don't give up, continue reading your Bible, praying and fasting even when you might not want to. Press on! There's no doubt that these are valid applications of this passage.

But, there may be one additional way we could look at this text in light of what we've been discussing throughout this study. Run the race of your mission with endurance. Declare and demonstrate the gospel. Don't quit. Throw off sin because it will hinder your mission. Keep your eyes on Jesus because He is the picture of faithful mission. Run. Run hard because He's called you to this race, goes with you as you run and is waiting for you at the finish line.

Mission is hard work. First, it will force you to adjust your priorities. You simply will not be able to continue to live a life that revolves around you. You'll have to give up some things in order to invest your life in others. Second, you'll get hurt along the way. People will say mean things. Relationships might change. People might not listen to what you have to say. Finally, you'll have to focus. You will not drift toward mission. It will take hard work to keep your priorities in line and shape each day around what will position you for maximum effectiveness. As with everything worthwhile in life, you'll have to endure. You'll have to push through hard days. You'll have to work. And, this is probably why so many people give up and settle for an average, mission-less life. What about you? What obstacles stand in the way of you running your missionary race well?

In Hebrews 12, the author points our attention to Jesus, and not simply to the race set before us. He says, “look to Jesus.” Why? Because He’s authored the race, meaning He designed it and He knows its course. And, He’s the perfector, meaning He’s finished the race and done so with excellence. He sets the model of a perfect missionary. This is where we get the language of Mission Dei—the mission of God. It is not simply that God does missionary things, but that He is a God of mission. It’s intrinsic to His character. He lives on mission to seek and save that which is lost (Luke 15). So, when you and I give of ourselves to live on mission we are being like God. Have you ever thought of it that way? We’re prone to think that we’re like God when we’re singing songs, listening to sermons, abstaining from some sin, or doing something else that’s typically thought of as “spiritual”. But, you’re also like God when you have a non-believing neighbor over for dinner, share some laughs, play a game and find creative ways to speak about God’s goodness. You’re like God when you hear of a co-worker going through a difficult time and you call her on the way home from work just to listen to her cry. You’re also like God in thousands upon thousands of little ways that you die to yourself and live for His mission.

How does this idea of everyday mission give encouragement and purpose to your day? Your work? Your neighborhood? Your school?

Because we’re so prone to neglect God’s mission, we really need one another. That’s why it’s great if you’re doing this study with a group of friends from your church. At the end of ten weeks, you should know one another enough to understand how others are wired for mission and the various challenges they may face when they seek to live a life of mission. You are now God’s gift to your fellow brother and sister in order to keep their focus on God’s mission.

Think of some practical ways you might do this. How can you encourage others to live on mission? What are some practical steps you could take to increase the missionary fervor of your church community?

One of the most effective ways you can spur one another on to mission is to celebrate God's faithfulness in and through your missionary efforts. Throughout the Scriptures we find examples of God's people calling to mind His past faithfulness as motivation for continued obedience (see the book of Deuteronomy). These men and women knew that they were prone to forget God's faithfulness, so they made it a habit of calling to mind God's work in the past, both great and small. They told stories and sang songs that recounted the myriad of ways God had acted on their behalf.

You and your group should do the same. Hopefully, you have a few examples of ways God has been faithful over the course of these ten weeks. Start by thinking of your own life. In the space below write one example of a way God has challenged, stretched, or grown you?

Now, think about your family. What is one way God has enhanced the mission of your family? How has He proven faithful there?

Finally, think about your non-Christian friends. Recount one story of how God has proven Himself faithful as you've attempted to declare and demonstrate the gospel to them.

Now, write a prayer asking God for a specific need in each of these areas. It might be that He would continue to bring to mind your missionary tasks throughout the week. You

might ask that God would save your ten-year-old daughter or that He would give you and your wife a chance to share the gospel with your non-believing neighbor. You could pray that God would use your co-workers divorce to prompt gospel conversations or that He would make it possible for you to share your testimony with your local barista. Whatever the need, make sure it is specific and clear.

My prayer for myself:

My prayer for my family:

My prayer for my non-Christian friends:

Discuss:

1. When is a time in your life when you were most passionate about engaging in God's mission? What factors caused this passion? Why does your excitement about missionary living wane?
2. What is the Missio Dei? Why is our obedience derived from the missionary nature of God? How is this an encouragement for you to live on mission?
3. How is Jesus the perfect missionary? In what way is your mission similar and different from His?
4. How has God shown Himself faithful and powerful through this study? Share a story of God's work in your life, in your family and in your missionary activity as a result of these ten weeks.
5. Conclude by praying together for the areas in your life in which you are trusting God for help as you seek to live a missionary life.



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