

God's Mission—My Mission
"Good Word" Study Guide
October to December, 2023

Guests for the taping of this series of Good Word discussions are Brant Berglin and Dave Thomas, both friends and colleagues in the School of Theology at Walla Walla University. My name is Paul Dybdahl, and I will be the moderator of our recorded discussions and author of this study guide. Please note that free audio recordings of our discussions each week are available through the Walla Walla University School of Theology website. You may access these recordings and this printed guide at <https://goodword.wallawalla.edu/>

Introduction and Aim

Before using this discussion guide, the reader should be aware of several assumptions made by the author. First, I assume this study guide will be used in close connection with the *Adult Sabbath School Study Guide* prepared and copyrighted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This quarter, the primary contributors to the adult Sabbath School lessons were the directors of the SDA Global Mission Centers. There are currently six centers, each of them organized to direct the Adventist work among the major non-Christian people groups that exist in our world today. At the time when the lesson was written, the directors were Petras Bahadur, Richard Elofer, Kleber Gonçalves, Clifmond Shameerudeen, Doug Venn, Amy Whitsett, and Greg Whitsett. Assisting them in the writing of the *Adult Sabbath School Study Guide* were Gary Krause, Homer Trecartin, and Jeff Scoggins. For more information on the Adventist Global Study Centers please go to www.GlobalMissionCenters.org.

Sabbath School teachers should take note of the *Adult Sabbath School Study Guide* because it provides background information and fleshes out what is missing in this "Good Word" guide. I have borrowed freely (and will also quote) from this resource—particularly the discussion questions. Readers of this discussion guide will notice those parallels. At the same time, I will not merely reformat and rehash what is available in the Lesson Quarterly. Careful readers will note these distinct differences.

Finally, I assume that those using this guide will carefully read the applicable biblical material. Questions posed in this study guide may not make sense unless one has already grappled with the biblical passages being discussed. Hopefully, readers will also have access to one or two Bible commentaries dealing with the relevant biblical material.

My Aim

In writing a study guide such as this, I will attempt to emulate the teaching style of Jesus of Mark 8. In this crucial passage in Mark, Jesus does very little explaining. Instead, he asks questions. In fact, in Mark 8:17-29 (NIV), Jesus asks nine consecutive questions.

Because of this, readers will quickly see that this study guide is primarily a collection of questions. Some may seem simplistic, some tangential, and some even dangerous. As best you can, however, look carefully at the biblical material and reflect on the questions provided. Then, ask your own questions. Be wary of pat answers that come too easily and seem too obvious. At the same time, avoid thinking that nothing is certain. Ultimately, I hope that honest, prayerful questions will lead us to insight, to truth, and to a renewed sense of our calling to carry the good news to every kindred, nation, tongue and people. May God guide us in this sacred task.

GOOD WORD 2023.4

God's Mission to Us: Part 1

Lesson #1 – Study for October 7

Prepared by Paul Dybdahl, School of Theology, WWU

Leading Question: In Genesis 2:8, we read that Adam and Eve “heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.” What does God sound like when he walks, and why is he walking in the garden?

Scripture Focus: Genesis 1-3; Matthew 1:18-23, 28:18-20; John 1:14-18, 3:16, 14:1-3

The Big Idea: Before we talk about our mission to others, it's important to realize that our God wants to be with *us*!

Discussion Questions:

1. Before we begin a whole quarter talking about mission, perhaps it's important to provide a general definition of some key words. What do each of these words mean?
 - a. Mission
 - b. Gospel
 - c. Evangelism
 - d. Salvation
2. How would you respond to someone who said, “God in the Old Testament seems interested in reaching Abraham's descendants, but he doesn't seem very interested in ‘mission’ to other peoples of the world!”
3. When we are introduced to God in the opening chapters of Genesis, what actions of God most clearly indicate his desire for connection and relationship with humans?
4. Why do you think God wants to be with humans? Doesn't it seem like a bit of a mismatch that the Creator of the universe longs to be with humans?
5. In John 1:14, we read that “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” In Matthew 1:18-23, an angel tells Joseph that Jesus would be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about the birth of Immanuel, which means “God with us.”
 - a. Why was it so important for God to come to us, in human form?
 - b. Couldn't God have revealed his character and his love in some other way? Wouldn't miracles, visions, dreams, the words of inspired prophets have been enough?
6. In John 14:1-3, Jesus promises an eternity with him in the Father's house. How literally should we take these words? Will we really be sharing a residence with God? If so, imagine some of the household traditions you would expect to develop? What would be the largest room in the Father's house?
7. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus promises to be with us always. How has this promise been fulfilled in your life?
8. What message is most needed today: the message that God is powerful, exalted, and worthy of our worship, or that God is present, accessible, and desires a relationship with us?

Leading Question: Is a “Christian commune” a good thing, or is it an oxymoron?

Scripture Focus: Genesis 12:1-3; John 20:21-22; Matthew 28:16-20; Revelation 14:6-7

The Big Idea: God's blessing is to be shared with the world. A disciple is called to make disciples.

Discussion Questions:

1. In Genesis 12:1-3, God calls Abram and describes his plan to bless Abram and his descendants. The reason for this blessing is clearly stated. God blesses Abram's family so that “all the families of the earth will be blessed through you.” In what ways does understanding God's purpose both guide our mission efforts and also protect us from becoming conceited as “God's chosen people”?
2. In John 20:21-22, Jesus tells his disciples that he is sending them out into the world as the Father had sent him. Then, Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The Adult Sabbath School lesson points out that mission “is not ours. It belongs to the triune God. As such, it will not fail.” Do you agree with this statement? Is there such a thing as “failure” in mission?
3. Matthew 28:16-20 (often called the “Great Commission”) is probably the best known “mission” passage in the New Testament. Reading this passage carefully will allow you to better answer the following questions.
 - a. Why do you think some of the disciples doubted when they saw Jesus, even after all the miracles they had witnessed? Is it possible to worship and doubt at the same time? How much faith must someone have—how settled and knowledgeable must they be—before they can go into the world and make disciples? Does doubt disqualify us as missionaries?
 - b. Jesus says that the basis of his sending rests on the fact that all power and authority has been given to him. How does this change our attitude as we go out into the world?
 - c. The Great Commission begins with the call to “go”. Does this apply to all followers of Jesus, or to a select group who are specifically chosen for mission? Does “go” mean to leave for a foreign country?
 - d. The Sabbath School lesson points out that “the only action verb with imperative force in the Great Commission is ‘make disciples’.” How do making disciples, teaching, and baptizing fit together? Are these sequential?
 - e. Jesus says “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” What is the difference between teaching people so they will *know* and teaching people to *obey*? Jesus says we are to teach people to obey “everything I have commanded you.” What commands did Jesus give his disciples? How would our missionary message change if we limited ourselves to sharing the commands of Jesus?
 - f. Jesus ends with a promise, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Many people want to feel the presence of Jesus. Is it possible that we are most likely to sense his presence when we are obeying his commission?

Leading Question: What will God do if we refuse his commission to go to the world and spread the gospel?

Scripture Focus: Genesis 11:1-9, 12:1-3, 10-13:1; Acts 1:1-4, 8

The Big Idea: God cares so much for the world that he is willing to move us out of our comfort zone in order to reach others who don't know of him.

Discussion Questions:

1. Missiologist Ralph D. Winter suggests that ideally, God's people would respond to his commission and go out to the world voluntarily. A second possibility, however, is that when his people fail to share the gospel with the world, God "forces" connections between his people and the nations. This can come through persecution and resulting dispersion, overthrow and captivity in other nations, or the unwanted conquest and settlement of foreigners in one's own land. In his 2009 article, "The Kingdom Strikes Back" (in *Foundations of the World Christian Movement: Course Reader*, rev. ed., edited by Ralph D. Winter and Beth Snodderly. Pasadena: Institute of International Studies, 7-24), he reflects on the harrowing experiences of Christians in Europe when faced with the attacks of the Vikings and others from the north. He writes:
No wonder the Anglican prayer book contains the prayer, "From the fury of the Northmen, O Lord, deliver us." Once more, when Christians did not reach out to them, pagan peoples came after what the Christians possessed. And once more, the phenomenal power of Christianity manifested itself: the conquerors became conquered by the faith of their captives. Usually it was the monks sold as slaves or Christian girls forced to be their wives and mistresses who eventually won these savages of the north. In God's providence their redemption became more important than the harrowing tragedy of this new invasion of barbarian violence and evil which fell upon God's own people whom He loved. After all, He spared not His own Son in order to redeem us! Thus, again, what Satan intended for evil, God used for good (Winter, 17).
 - a. Are you comfortable with the idea that God uses persecution and military expansion for missionary purposes? Is spreading the gospel of Jesus so important that it's worth sacrificing innocent life for?
 - b. What are some biblical examples of voluntary and involuntary outreach?
 - c. Can you think of times in your own life when God "forced" you into a situation you didn't desire, but in retrospect, you can see that it was for a greater, salvific purpose?
2. In Acts 1:1-4, Jesus tells his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they are "baptized with the Holy Spirit." Jesus continues by explaining that the "will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
 - a. What does it mean to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit"?
 - b. Previously, we noted that Jesus commissions disciples who doubt, and throughout the Bible, we see that God uses and sends faulty human missionaries. So, how can we know

whether we should “wait in Jerusalem for power” or whether we should simply witness as we are, with all our failures and doubts?

- c. Which is easier—to witness to families or to foreigners? Which is most needed today?

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Sharing God's Mission

Lesson #4 – Study for October 28

Prepared by Paul Dybdahl, School of Theology, WWU

Leading Question: If God came to your house for lunch, what would you feed him?

Scripture Focus: Genesis 18:1-19:29; James 5:16; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25

The Big Idea: Despite his faults, Abraham models the three missional qualities of hospitality, love, and intercessory prayer.

Discussion Questions:

1. Previously, God had told Abraham that he was to be channel through which God would bless all peoples. In Gen 18, we see Abraham taking the initiative to provide hospitality to three strangers. He brings food, washes their feet, and offers shelter for them to rest, never suspecting that the strangers are the Lord and two angels!
 - a. By these simple acts, was Abraham fulfilling his mission as a channel through whom God could bless the world? Really? Is caring for the physical needs of others enough, or does missionary work require the missionary speak overtly about God?
 - b. It may seem like a small thing, but Abraham provides a calf, curds, milk, and bread for the Lord and the two angels. According to Gen 18:8, God ate the food! What lessons might we learn from all this? Is God a vegetarian? How should we respond to the various types of food that are set before us when we are engaged in reaching out to others?
 - c. Is it possible to reach the hearts of other people if we never eat with them? How important is food in mission?
2. When the Lord finally reveals his mission to judge Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham responds by pleading for the people of Sodom. Clearly, he cares about them and loves them despite their wickedness.
 - a. How does Abraham's pleading for mercy for Sodom differ from our reactions to vile and violent people today? Have we ever asked God to destroy the wicked?
 - b. We should notice that Abraham didn't just want the righteous to be spared, he desired that all of the city be shown mercy. Again, how does his attitude differ from ours?
 - c. If we truly love those who are different from us, will we ever want them to be destroyed?
3. The Sabbath School Lesson presents the conversation between God and Abraham as an example of intercessory prayer.
 - a. What do we learn about intercessory prayer from this story, and did Abraham's intercession for the people of the city work? Did Abraham's prayer change God?
 - b. When faced with violent and vile people today, isn't it important to stand up to them and work for reform and for justice? Is intercessory prayer, asking for God to spare them, the best approach?
 - c. What role does intercessory prayer play in mission today? If prayer for others is so effective, why do we also need to physically go out to the world?

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Excuses to Avoid Mission

Lesson #5 – Study for November 4

Prepared by Paul Dybdahl, School of Theology, WWU

Leading Question: What are the most common excuses we use to avoid doing what God has called us to do?

Scripture Focus: Jonah 1-4; Isaiah 6:1-8

The Big Idea: God sends us to those we hate . . . and extends undeserved compassion to them.

Discussion Questions:

Before discussing these questions, it would be helpful to read through the book of Jonah!

1. God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh, a principal city in Assyria, a feared and hated enemy of Israel at this time. The Assyrians were noted in the ancient world for their cruelty, and Nahum later lists Nineveh's sins as plotting evil, gratuitous cruelty in war (they led prisoners with hooks and impaled their victims, for example), sexual immorality, witchcraft, and commercial injustice and exploitation.
 - a. Adventists have often focused on withdrawing from places of vice and encouraged simple, rural living. Today, more than 50% of the world lives in urban areas. How should the call to reach people where they are be balanced with the idea of withdrawing from wicked cities?
 - b. Which do you suppose was the greater hurdle for Jonah—the fact that he was afraid of going to Nineveh, or that he hated Nineveh and wanted it to be destroyed?
 - c. What is the greater hurdle for us today—fear of the “other” or hatred of the “other”?
2. The book of Jonah draws a contrast between the apparent “heathens” and the prophet of the Lord. In each case the “heathens” (the praying sailors and the fasting people of Nineveh) seem more devout and spiritually open than the prophet. Even the great fish and the growing vine did God's bidding—it was only Jonah who resisted God direction!
 - a. What lessons should we learn from this? Are Christians closer to God than people of other faiths?
 - b. What are some stories in the Bible that show that “God's people” have things to learn from “heathens”?
3. Jonah preached that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days. It wasn't. Was Jonah a false prophet? What is the purpose of a prophecy of the future?
4. At the end of the book, Jonah expresses his frustration at God's graciousness and compassion. He admits that this was the reason why he didn't want to come to Nineveh to begin with. He knew that God was “a God who relents from sending calamity” (Jonah 4:2).
 - a. Is God too compassionate? Should a long history of cruelty, witchcraft, prostitution, violence and injustice simply be forgiven after a few days of fasting?
 - b. Can you think of someone you don't want God to have compassion on—someone you want God to punish?
 - c. Who changed most in this story—Jonah, or the people of Nineveh?
5. As we reflect on the violence, sexuality immorality, spiritualism, and injustice in our world today, what are the main lessons we should draw from the book of Jonah?

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Motivation and Preparation for Mission

Lesson #6 – Study for November 11

Prepared by Paul Dybdahl, School of Theology, WWU

Leading Question: How much do our motives matter in mission? Can I have lousy motives and still do good work for Jesus?

Scripture Focus: Luke 24:1-12, 36-49; Acts 1:12-26, 2:1-41

The Big Idea: It's difficult to produce a list of "appropriate motives" for mission. Perhaps God can use us for good, even when our motives are mixed.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some examples of less-than-ideal motives for sharing our faith?
2. What are some of the best motives for sharing our faith with others?
3. In Philippians, the apostle Paul admits that Christ was sometimes preached out of envy, rivalry, selfish ambition and even a desire to "stir up trouble" for Paul while he was in prison. But rather than lament this, Paul continues, "But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice" (Philippians 1:15-18).
 - a. If this is the case, then do our motives for mission even matter?
 - b. Does this passage suggest that we shouldn't try to stop someone from sharing Christ, even if we know their motives are not pure?
4. In the passages in Luke and Acts, Jesus tells his disciples to wait before they go out into the world.
 - a. What do they do while they wait? What should we learn from this?
 - b. What are they waiting for?
 - c. What is the greater danger for us—that we wait for too long before we go to the world, or that we rush out to witness before we are spiritually prepared?
 - d. What sort of spiritual preparation is necessary for witnessing? Do we need to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? And what does that mean? Have you ever been through the kind of Holy Spirit "filling"/being "clothed with power from on high" that is described in Luke and Acts? If so, describe the experience. If not, why not?
5. What is the most important preparation for mission? (It might be wise to review Luke 24 and Acts 1-2 in order to answer this question.)
6. Who were the first witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus? In what ways is this significant?
7. What single event was the primary *motivation* for apostolic witness as well as the primary *subject* of apostolic witness? How should this inform our witness today?
8. The Adult Sabbath School lesson says, "Of course, we need a personal experience with God before we can share it with others. . . . In the end, we can't share what we ourselves don't have, can we?" Do you agree with this statement? Please explain.

Lesson #7 – Study for November 18

Prepared by Paul Dybdahl, School of Theology, WWU

Leading Question: What does a person need to do or believe in order to receive eternal life?

Scripture Focus: Luke 10:25-37; James 2:17-22; Matthew 22:37-40; Galatians 5:14; Micah 6:6-8

The Big Idea: According to the apostle Paul, the entire law is summed up in the single command to love our neighbor. And our neighbor is anyone who is in need. So, we must love those who are not like us and thus who we don't like.

Discussion Questions:

1. In Luke 10, a lawyer asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life.
 - a. Is the answer Jesus gives the same answer you would give?
 - b. Is Jesus advocating for "salvation by works" when he refers to the law? If not, why is there such an emphasis on behavior in Jesus' answer? Is doing the right things more important to God than believing the right things?
 - c. Later in Luke 18:18-25, Jesus is asked the exact same question, but there, he gives a different answer. Why? Do different people need to do or believe different things in order to receive eternal life?
 - d. We already noted that Jesus gives two different answers to the same question (see Luke 10 and Luke 18). Upon reflection, how were the two answers similar?
2. Later in Luke 10, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan in order to demonstrate what it means to love one's neighbor.
 - a. What parts of this parable seem especially significant to you?
 - b. When the parable was told, it would have been quite difficult for Jesus' Jewish audience to bear because of their animosity toward Samaritans. We should perhaps remember that Jesus' disciples had previously offered to call down fire from heaven to destroy an entire Samaritan village that didn't offer them hospitality. What about today? Who are the equivalent of "Samaritans" for us today?
 - c. Samaritans were religiously, ethnically, and culturally different from Jews. Yet Jesus uses a Samaritan as an example of how to live. So, is it possible that we should emulate certain characteristics of people who are not of our faith? Can we learn from people that don't believe as we do? If we say "Yes," are there any dangers we should be aware of as we emulate aspects of behavior of those who are not Christians?
3. If we struggle with animosity or prejudice toward some group of people, how do we overcome it? What is the best way to grow in our love for others?
4. Is it possible to love someone (in the sense Jesus is speaking of in Matthew 22:37-40) and hate them at the same time? Be careful . . . this might be a trick question!

Lesson #8 – Study for November 25

Prepared by Paul Dybdahl, School of Theology, WWU

Leading Question: Is it possible to hurt the needy while trying to help? And who are the needy?

Scripture Focus: Deuteronomy 10:19; Leviticus 23:22; Matthew 25:34-40; Luke 4:17-19, 5:17-26

The Big Idea: Followers of Jesus should actually follow Jesus. He ministered to people's need—whatever that need was. We should do our best to do the same.

Discussion Questions:

1. Few of us would argue with the idea that followers of Jesus should “help” the needy. But this belief can actually lead to some problems.
 - a. Who are the needy?
 - b. Should a Christian take a triage approach to the needs of the world and focus on the most serious needs? If so, what are the greatest needs of the world—are they physical, emotional, social, financial, spiritual?
 - c. What are some of the dangers of “helping” the needy?
2. In Luke 4:17-19, Jesus begins his public ministry by reading a passage from Isaiah which describes his mission as focused on people who are poor, imprisoned, blind and oppressed.
 - a. Should this also be our focus today? Is this a “social gospel”—and is this what the SDA church should be known for?
 - b. People often say that physical needs should be tended to before we try to share the gospel with someone. People need physical “bread” before they can receive the “Bread of Life.” Do you agree?
3. When Jesus talks about his coming in Matthew 25, he tells a parable about sheep and goats. In his parable, the righteous sheep are those nations who cared for the hungry, the naked, the sick, and those in prison.
 - a. Is our humanitarian response to others the central issue in the judgment, or is this parable of Jesus making a different point?
 - b. In the parable, the judgment is between nations, not individuals. So, what responsibility do we have to work for a society that cares for the needy? Is social activism and working to mobilize political responses to poverty a work we should be involved in?
4. Deuteronomy 10:19 and Leviticus 23:22 both mention love and care for foreigners or refugees.
 - a. What work does your local church do on behalf of refugees and foreigners?
 - b. Are Adventists better known for welcoming refugees and immigrants, or working to keep them away?
 - c. If you want to learn about foreigners in your own country, visit JoshuaProject.net
5. Ellen White's quote about Christ's method of reaching people is well-known in Adventism. She says this method alone will give “true success in reaching the people.” The five steps are to mingle with people as one who desires their good, show sympathy for them, minister to their needs, win their confidence, and then bid them to follow Jesus (MH 145).
 - a. Is there anything surprising about these five steps?
 - b. How much mingling is safe? Would mingling include attending wedding celebrations, coming of age rituals, worship services, or funeral rites that may not be Christian?

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Mission to the Powerful

Lesson #9 – Study for December 2

Prepared by Paul Dybdahl, School of Theology, WWU

Leading Question: Are rich and powerful people less likely to respond to the Gospel?

Scripture Focus: 2 Kings 5:1-19; Daniel 4; Matthew 19:16-22; John 3:1-12, 19:38-42

The Big idea: God is interested in the salvation of all people, including those who seem to be secure and successful.

Discussion Questions:

1. Last week, the Adult Sabbath School Lesson focused on mission to the needy. This week the focus is on mission to the rich and powerful.
 - a. Is it helpful to label people as “needy” or “powerful”? Aren’t all people the same in terms of their need for Jesus?
 - b. Are there fundamental spiritual differences between rich and poor, powerful and powerless? If so, what are those differences?
 - c. In most settings today, Christianity seems to be spread most easily among those who are less educated and less affluent. Why do you suppose that is the case?
2. In Daniel 4 and in 2 Kings 5, we find the stories of Nebuchadnezzar and Naaman. Both men were not descendants of Abraham, yet they came to believe in the God of Israel.
 - a. In both cases, their conversion was directly connected to a supernatural event. In other words, they came to believe in God because of a miracle (a vision for Nebuchadnezzar and a healing for Naaman). What can we learn from this? Are acts of divine power especially important for people of power?
 - b. What role did humans play in their acceptance of the God of Israel?
 - c. Research suggests that today, approximately 80% of Muslims who come to faith in Jesus as their Savior say that a miracle was a key part of the process. Do you know of anyone who has come to faith in Jesus because of a vision, a dream, an exorcism or a dream?
3. In the Old Testament, it was possible to come to believe in God as Sovereign over all and still not become a Jew. What are the implications of this?
4. In several of the scripture passages for this week, the one coming to faith does not seem to fully and openly “change religions” as a result of their conversion. After his healing, Naaman clearly accepts the God of Israel as the true God, yet he asks for permission to continue to lead his master into the temple of the pagan god Rimmon and bow there with him (2 Kings 5:18-19). In the New Testament, Joseph of Arimathea is called a disciple of Jesus, “but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders” (John 19:38).
 - a. Joseph was a secret disciple out of fear. How should we understand this? Should fear keep us from openly confessing Jesus as Lord?
 - b. Should those in positions of influence be allowed to “cut corners” in terms of their practice in order to maintain their positions of influence? Could a devout SDA become president of the United States, or would that position require too many compromises?
 - c. Naaman’s bowing to Rimmon seems to contrast with the three Hebrews who refused to bow to the gold image set up by Nebuchadnezzar. Whose example should we follow?
5. In your opinion, what is the best way to reach powerful people with the message of Jesus?

Lesson #10 – Study for December 9

Prepared by Paul Dybdahl, School of Theology, WWU

Leading Question: What are the most popularly worshipped idols today?

Scripture Focus: Acts 17; Romans 1:18-25; 1 Corinthians 2:2

The Big Idea: The content and manner of our communicating the gospel must be sensitive to the context we are addressing. We must listen well before we can speak well.

Discussion Questions:

1. This lesson is titled, “Mission to the Unreached.”
 - a. In the context of Christian mission, what does it mean to be unreached? Is a non-Adventist Christian unreached?
 - b. Approximately what percentage of the world is unreached? (Roughly 25% of the world has never heard a credible presentation of the gospel, and only about 4% of missionaries work among these unreached.)
 - c. If we take Romans 1:20 seriously, is *anyone* actually unreached?
2. In Acts 17, we read of Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. Does Paul use the same strategy in each of these locations? Why or why not?
3. In Athens, Paul encounters philosophers and idols.
 - a. Which is more dangerous to the cause of Christ—people who rely on their own reasoning and intellect, or people who rely on false gods?
 - b. What are the most popularly worshiped idols/gods in our world today?
4. Let’s look more closely at how Paul speaks to the Stoic and Epicurean philosopher in the pagan city of Athens.
 - a. We should notice that Paul is invited to speak at the Areopagus. In areas where Christ is not known, should we follow Paul’s example and wait to speak until asked, or should we go ahead and begin to preach regardless of whether or not we are invited?
 - b. Paul begins by complimenting the Athenians. What are some of the things you can genuinely appreciate about the non-Christians around you?
 - c. Paul demonstrates that he knows their beliefs. For example, he has not hidden away from the idols in the city, but has been walking around and “looking carefully” at them (Acts 17:23). Furthermore, he quotes from their sacred writings, including quoting from a Hymn to Zeus (Acts 17:28)!
 - i. Should we study false systems of belief? Should we study other religions?
 - ii. Would you be supportive of an SDA evangelist quoting from another religion’s sacred writings in order to make a positive point about God?
 - iii. How about an evangelist quoting from a secular movie or song that may have objectionable elements?
 - d. Paul’s message culminated by declaring a coming judgment by a resurrected Jesus. Nowhere does he refer to the cross of Jesus. Why would he emphasize resurrection rather than crucifixion?
5. Acts 17:34 says that “a few men became followers of Paul and believed . . . also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.” So, would you say Paul’s efforts were successful?

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Mission to the Unreached: Part 2

Lesson #11 – Study for December 16

Prepared by Paul Dybdahl, School of Theology, WWU

Leading Question: Which is the greater danger—that we isolate ourselves from ungodly people and leave them unreached, or that we mingle too closely with them and are ourselves led astray?

Scripture Focus: 1 Kings 11:1-6; Matthew 4:23-2, 8:10, 13; 15:22-28; Mark 7:24-30; Acts 10:34-35

The Big Idea: Faith is found in unexpected people and in unexpected places, so don't be afraid of the city or the people who live there.

Discussion Questions:

1. The Adult Sabbath School lesson presents the need to reach out to people of other cultures and religions. Yet, in 1 Kings 11, we see a potential danger. King Solomon marries hundreds of women, and many of them are from different countries and religions. As a result, “his wives turned his heart after other gods” (vs 4).
 - a. How do we navigate the tension between reaching out to people of different faiths while at the same time protecting ourselves from being negatively influenced by their false gods?
 - b. Is it always wrong to marry someone of a different religion, or are there times when such a marriage is actually evangelistic in nature?
 - c. In most marriages, which is the greater likelihood: that the believing spouse will win the unbelieving spouse, or that the unbelieving spouse will lead the believing spouse astray? Why?
2. As noted previously in these discussion guides, a majority of world lives in an urban setting. Those of us who grew up in the SDA church may remember Ellen White's warnings about living in the city. Interestingly, her few statements about the dangers of the city have been widely republished in a variety of compilations, giving the impression that true believers will nearly shun the city. However, a review of all her writings will show that Ellen White actually has much more of an emphasis on the need to work on behalf of the many people in the cities!
 - a. Why do you suppose SDA compliers have chosen to focus on the dangers of the city rather than the need of the cities and the opportunities for witness there?
 - b. What are the dangers of working in the city? What are the dangers of living in the country?
3. In Matthew 15 and Mark 7 there is a record of a fascinating interaction between Jesus and a “Canaanite”/“Syrophenician” woman who has a daughter that is demon possessed.
 - a. What are the key lessons we learn from this interaction?
 - b. Does someone need to believe Jesus is the divine messiah in order for him to heal them?
 - c. In the first couple of centuries after the resurrection of Jesus, exorcism was an expected part of preparing someone for baptism. Was this a misplaced emphasis? How significant of an issue is demonic harassment in the world today? Why do we seem to ignore it in much of our evangelism, at least in the western world?
 - d. Jesus describes the woman as having “great faith” (Matthew 15:28). This would have challenged Jewish views. They would not have expected that a Gentile would be

commended for great faith. So, what about us? Have you ever encountered “great faith” in an unexpected person—perhaps someone from a different culture or faith tradition?

4. The Adult Sabbath School Lesson says, “The Holy Spirit can help us to overcome our prejudice and bias in order to complete our mission to the cities.” But how? Is it just a miracle, or are there things we can do to overcome the prejudice we may have for others?
5. In Acts 10:34-35, Peter declares that God doesn’t show favoritism in his acceptance of others, even if they come from another “nation” or people.
 - a. Does this mean that everyone has equal access to salvation?
 - b. If so, why do we need missionaries?
 - c. The lesson includes this quote from Ellen White: “God has jewels in all the churches, and it is not for us to make sweeping denunciation of the professed religious world . . .” (*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Jan 17, 1893). Have we heeded this advice?

GOOD WORD 2023.4

Esther and Mordecai

Lesson #12 – Study for December 23

Prepared by Paul Dybdahl, School of Theology, WWU

Leading Question: When faith is out of favor, is it best to keep it quiet, or to openly stand for truth and let the chips fall where they may?

Scripture Focus: Esther 2:1-10, 3:1-15, 4:1-14, 9:1-12; Daniel 1:1-12, 6:1-9

The Big Idea: God is always at work and can accomplish his purposes even through the messiness of our lives.

Discussion Questions:

1. Both Daniel and Esther find themselves in a foreign land that is not particularly receptive to their Jewish faith. Daniel makes his faith (and its behavioral expectations) clear. Esther, on the other hand, does not. In fact, nowhere in the book is God or even prayer mentioned.
 - a. What should we make of this stark difference? Is one method better than the other? Who should we emulate—Daniel, or Esther?
 - b. What are some of the challenges you face as you attempt to live out your faith in your own culture?
 - c. Is your own culture supportive or antagonistic to people of faith?
2. Esther not only keeps her identity secret, she doesn't seem to protest taking part in an immoral competition to become the queen. After a year of preparation, she spends a night with the king and manages to please the king more than any of the other young virgins in the competition.
 - a. Is Esther a good example for us?
 - b. In the Septuagint (the early Greek translation of the Old Testament), the book of Esther is considerably longer than the original Hebrew version. The added material includes lengthy prayers, mentions of God, and Esther's dislike for having to sleep with the uncircumcised king. Why do you think Jewish "translators" added this religious material? Have we done the same thing when we tell the story to our children?
 - c. Do you think Esther really was religious, and it was just left out of the book?
3. In some parts of the world, open faith in Jesus can lead to imprisonment, torture, and death.
 - a. Are these times when it is best to hide our faith, or are these precisely the times when we need to openly confess Jesus and trust that God's will will be done?
 - b. On the plain of Dura, Daniel's three friends didn't hide their commitment to the Lord, and God brought about a great deliverance. What if Esther had done the same?
4. Central to the story of Esther is the conflict between Mordecai, a Benjamite, and Haman, and Agagite.
 - a. After a bit of sleuthing, can you see why these two men, given their family history, would have been so bitterly opposed to each other?
 - b. How much of our dissatisfaction in life stems from our inability to forgive and forget the injustices of the past?
5. Despite the messiness of Esther's story, we can clearly see that God was at work, even though he is nowhere mentioned in the book.
 - a. What qualities did Esther have that we can emulate?
 - b. What do we learn about how God works from the story of Esther?

GOOD WORD 2023.4

The End of God's Mission

Lesson #13 – Study for December 30

Prepared by Paul Dybdahl, School of Theology, WWU

Leading Question: What will heaven be like for God? Will he finally be able to relax? Will his work for us be done?

Scripture Focus: Luke 11:23; 1 Timothy 2:4; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:1-7, 14:6-12, 21:1-4

The Big Idea: God's mission to bring restoration will one day be complete. This is good, good news.

Discussion Questions:

1. This lesson is entitled, "The End of God's Mission."
 - a. Does God's mission end when the second coming?
 - b. When will our mission end?
2. According to 1 Timothy 2:4, God wants all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.
 - a. How successful will God be in his mission?
 - b. In the end, will we be surprised at how many are saved, or how few are saved?
3. Both 1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6 refer to the saved as priests.
 - a. Why do you think this metaphor is used? In other words, what is it about "priests" that corresponds so well with the followers of Jesus?
 - b. In the Old Testament, only men were priests. According to the New Testament all who are in Christ are priests. What are the implications of this?
4. Revelation 14 contains the Three Angel's Messages, a section of scripture that is especially significant for Seventh-day Adventists.
 - a. The message is summarized as the "everlasting gospel." What is the gospel presented by these three messages?
 - b. Adventists have understood this message to be a summary of the basic message they are to present to the world. Do you feel that the church has done a good job of this?
 - c. What part of this "everlasting gospel" message do you find especially meaningful?
5. In Revelation 21:1-4, we get a picture of the renewal of all things. This restoration is what God has been working for all along. Our mission is to invite people to so align themselves with God that they too can experience this final restoration.
 - a. The description of God's renewal is phrased primarily in negative terms—in other words, by telling us what won't be there (no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain). What are some of the top things you are glad will not be in heaven?
 - b. There is also a positive description. In other words, the passage also notes what will be there—God. He will be with his people! What are some of the other things you are most looking forward to in heaven?
 - c. This passage says God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Place yourself into that scene. What will this be like for you? What will you be thinking when God does this for you?
6. Let us end this quarter by praising a good God who loves us and is always working for our restoration. Let us also commit to join God in his work of blessing and restoring all the families of the earth so that one day, we will all be able to join in a great chorus of worship before his throne.