

lesson one

JUNE 27–JULY 3

The Missionary Nature of **God**

“See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples’ ” (Isa. 55:4, NIV).



Luke 2:10, 11

Introduction

Did You Hear the News?

He dialed the number with excitement and could hardly wait for his mother to pick up the phone. His wife was next to him so they could begin singing “Happy Birthday” at the faintest sound of “Hello.” Thousands of miles away, Mom was happy to be greeted with such fanfare, but her heart really erupted with joy when the couple said, “Mom, we have the greatest birthday present for you. You are going to be a grandma!”

The world rejoiced. People cried. There was great relief.

Some news cannot be kept a secret. By the time Jesus was born in Bethlehem, all heaven exploded, singing in the dark sky of Judea. For us, living in this remote corner of the universe, the news could not be better. The angels sang that the arrival of this Child would bring peace to earth. This is something we all intensely desire, but it seems impossible to achieve at all levels, from the global to the individual. The Child would also bring life, something that we relentlessly try to extend through improvements in health and medicine. But above all, the Child would bring God Himself in flesh and blood to live among us and to disclose to us who He really is.

On October 13, 2010, the rescue of 33 men trapped in an underground mine in Chile drew worldwide attention. Seventeen days after the accident, a note from the miners, brought back by an exploratory drill, triggered an international rescue operation without parallel. Every effort was made to rescue the men buried 700 meters (2,300 feet) underground. On the sixty-ninth day of the ordeal, the world tuned in to watch on live television as the miners emerged from the depths.* The world rejoiced. People cried. There was great relief.

The human ordeal is not very different. The choices Adam and Eve made in the beginning led to the hopeless condition of the human race. We are trapped in the depths of human sin, unable to see the light or breathe the breath of life. But God is on a mission to rescue us—a mission to bring peace to the human heart and to restore hope and life. Jesus, the Son of God made Son of man, set the record straight about who God is and what He expects from us. Jesus embodies God’s love. This is truly great news, news that God desires to make known to everyone. Let us find out God’s plans to break the news to every human being alive.

* “Chile Mining Accident (2010),” *New York Times*, accessed June 2, 2014, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/c/chile_mining_accident_2010/index.html.

Logos | Ps. 19:1–6;
His Word, Your Witness | Rom. 1:20

God Is a Missionary (Ps. 19:1–6; Rom. 1:20)

Skeptics often criticize Christians for being missionary minded. Many people find it confusing, and even offensive, that the followers of Jesus believe they must tell others about their faith. This brings us to an important question: If God loves everyone and if He is all-powerful, why does He ask us to teach others about Him?

Can't God communicate with people Himself? The answer is Yes. Bible scholars use the phrase *general revelation* when they are talking about how He does this. Psalm 19:1–6 says that the heavens declare the glory of God and His works. Sir Isaac Newton expressed this by saying, "This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being."* The apostle Paul picks up on this in Romans 1:20 when he states that "since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse (NIV). He even goes on to say that these qualities are so clearly evident by creation that none of us can ever say that we cannot know about God. Titus 2:11 states that God's grace has appeared and offers salvation to all people. For some people, general revelation will be all they ever hear about God, and some people will be saved because of its powerful testimony about Him.

**We all have unique stories to tell about
how we met Jesus and accepted His salvation.**

God whispers to the heart of everyone. He speaks clearly through historical events and divine providence in the life of everyone. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has put eternity in the heart of every person. So then, why were we given the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19? Because God doesn't seem to want to settle simply for the testimony of general revelation.

The Need for Clarity (Gen. 3:9; Ezek. 28:12; Rom. 1:25; 1 John 2:16)

The shooting guard on the basketball team caught a pass at the top of the three-point line, jumped, and shot the ball. As the ball left his hand, he began to turn around and celebrate as if he had made the shot before the ball even went in the basket. To his horror and embarrassment, he turned around at the last second to see the ball bounce off the rim. He had missed.

Has overconfidence ever led you to believe something that wasn't true? This is exactly what happened when sin began with Lucifer in heaven. Ezekiel 28:17 says that his thinking became corrupted because of his pride. His mind was closed off because of his selfishness. All of us are born into a sin-

ful world, so we all have a propensity to worship the creations and thoughts of our own minds rather than God's truth (Rom. 1:25). We are easily confused. This confusion often makes us doubt and misunderstand the character of God. This is exactly why Adam and Eve hid themselves from God after they sinned. He had never given them a reason to fear Him, yet they ran. Confusion due to selfishness has made a mess of our relationship with God. This is why He doesn't settle only for general revelation. Even though its messages are clear, our minds can easily confuse them. God wants to give us every opportunity to understand Him as clearly as possible.

When God Makes It Plain (John 3:16–21; Heb. 1:1, 2)

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe" (Heb. 1:1, 2, NIV).

God uses many ways to speak to humankind. A specific form of communication is called *special revelation*. This includes miracles, Scripture, messages from prophets, and, best of all, Jesus Himself. God explained Himself clearly in the life of His Son. Jesus came so that every person may know God without a doubt and without confusion. Jesus' special mission is the basis of His words to Nicodemus in John 3:16–21. Special revelation many times removes doubt because it is God's way of being clear and specific. Ultimately, special revelation makes it easier for people to choose to love God.

So where do we fit in to all of this?

The Lord's Army (Isa. 55:4; John 1:9–14; Acts 1:8)

Jesus says, "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8, NIV). A witness is someone who has seen and experienced the power of "the light" of Jesus. Accepting this special revelation truly changes someone's life. God is a very personal God. He convinces us and nurtures us all differently. Because of this, we all have unique stories to tell about how we met Jesus and accepted His salvation. Our stories reveal the truth about God, and this truth removes confusion about Him.

Sharing what Jesus has done for you can make it easier for someone else to choose to be saved. This is what being a part of God's army is all about. We don't conquer people. Instead, we renounce darkness and invite others to do the same. The church is to invite people to love the Savior who has made God so accessible, so understandable, so real. Witnessing is indeed a privilege. We get to tell people what God is really like, because we know Him personally.

REACT

1. What part of your story reveals the truth about who God is?
2. How has special revelation removed confusion about God from your mind?

* Goodreads, accessed October 22, 2014, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/232391-this-most-beautiful-system-of-the-sun-planets-and-comets>.

Testimony *His Mission*

Pss. 1:1-3; 119:97

“The divine Author of salvation left nothing incomplete in the plan; every phase of it is perfect. The sin of the whole world was laid upon Jesus, and divinity gave its highest value to the suffering of humanity in Jesus, that the whole world might be pardoned through faith in the Substitute. The most guilty need have no fear but that God will pardon, for because of the efficacy of the divine sacrifice the penalty of the law will be remitted. Through Christ the sinner may return to allegiance to God. How wonderful is the plan of redemption in its simplicity and fullness. It not only provides for the full pardon of the sinner, but also for the restoration of the transgressor, making a way whereby he may be accepted as a son of God.”¹

“Through the plan of salvation we are united with the agencies of heaven.”

“We should meditate upon the Scriptures, thinking soberly and candidly upon the things that pertain to our eternal salvation. The infinite mercy and love of Jesus, the sacrifice made in our behalf, call for most serious and solemn reflection. We should dwell upon the character of our dear Redeemer and Intercessor. We should seek to comprehend the meaning of the plan of salvation. We should meditate upon the mission of Him who came to save His people from their sins.”²

“There is a connection between earth and heaven through Christ, the mystic ladder that Jacob saw in his vision at Bethel. When we were separated from God, Christ came to reconcile us to the Father. In pitying love He placed His human arm about the fallen race, and with His divine arm He grasped the throne of the Infinite, thus connecting finite man with the infinite God; through the plan of salvation we are united with the agencies of heaven. Through the merits of a crucified and risen Redeemer, we may look up and see the glory of God shining from heaven to earth. We should be grateful to God for the plan of salvation. We have been blessed with many blessings, and in return we should give to God our undivided hearts.”³

REACT

1. Describe what the understanding of the plan of salvation means to you personally.
2. What can we remember when we feel separated from God?

1. Ellen G. White, “Perils of Neglecting Salvation,” *Review and Herald*, March 10, 1891.
2. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 34.
3. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 239.

John 3:17

Evidence *The Emissary*

Nicodemus's meeting with Jesus is one of the highlights of John's Gospel. There we find a wealthy and influential member of the Jewish ruling council engaged in a candid conversation with someone who he thought was a remarkable new preacher. During their conversation, Jesus revealed some of the most profound truths about God and Himself.

He was ultimately crucified.

The greatest aspiration of any Jewish person in the days of Nicodemus was to witness the advent of the Messiah, the Anointed One, who would proclaim freedom and the release of prisoners, start a new era of God's favor, and, above all, bring the vengeance of the Lord upon the Gentiles and all other enemies of His chosen people (Isa. 61:1, 2). God, however, had very different plans. In the conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus declared that love was God's motivation for sending His Son. His purpose was to offer not only the Jews but anyone a new chance at immortality (John 3:16). And then He added, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (verse 17, NIV). This was a far cry from the deeply rooted notion about a vengeful Messiah.

Throughout His life, Jesus exposed and corrected common misconceptions about God. Whereas the Jews expected joy in heaven for the birth of a son of Abraham, Jesus pointed out that there is greater joy in heaven for a sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people (Luke 15:7). When they desired condemnation for the rebellious son, Jesus revealed that the Father desired to celebrate the return of the lost son (verses 31, 32). While the Pharisees were ready to accuse and stone the woman caught in adultery, Jesus was ready to forgive and deliver her (John 8:1–11). Jesus—the Messiah—did not fit the mold.

It is quite telling that when Jesus read the passage of Isaiah 61:1, 2, He left out the statement about the vengeance of the Lord. The ire of the people and particularly of the leaders was a result of the great dissonance between their expectations of the Messiah and the person of Jesus. They failed to understand and accept that God sent Him not to condemn the world but to save the world through Him. He was ultimately crucified.

REACT

1. How do you react when you discover that a perception you have about God is truly a misconception?
2. Jesus' role when He came to earth was to be an emissary to the world for salvation. How can you fill that role to others?

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How-to *To Be or Not to Be*

Matt. 5:13–16;
2 Cor. 5:16–21

When we study the life of Christ, we cannot help but marvel at the endless giving of Himself for others. He always put Himself last. He was always ready to help and to give everything for our salvation. He did not seem to be affected by the various stressors of everyday life that so often cause us to stumble. Yet He was tempted in all things as we are (Heb. 4:15). The Lord declared in Exodus 3:14, “I am who I am” (NIV). The assurance we find in following Christ is that He is always the same. His actions may vary, but who Christ is remains unchanged. And His desire to reach us, to save us, and to bring us into His kingdom is not something He simply does. It is an integral part of who He is, and He ultimately proved that in His sacrifice on Calvary.

He didn't just act like the Son of God. He was and is the Son of God.

The traditional view of a missionary is someone who goes forth and tries to reach people for the kingdom. Christ repeatedly showed us in His time on earth how important His identity as the Son of God was to Him. Everything He said and did stemmed from this identity. He didn't just act like the Son of God. He was and is the Son of God. His missionary nature is just that. It's who He is.

From the life of Christ, we learn that a true missionary spirit is about being connected to God, and as a result, being able to witness to others. For in truth, a true missionary spirit cannot be separate from a true conversion and daily walk with the Lord. This concept is expressed throughout Scripture.

The Bible teaches us about God's character and His missionary nature:

1. It calls us to strive for a similar nature, and He does not leave us alone to do so. We are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13, 14). He became sin for us, that we might become righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). He will make us fishers of men (Matt. 4:19).

2. The goal is not to put good actions by the wayside but to be sure that our actions stream from the fact that we are God's children and therefore His missionaries.

REACT

Explore the Bible for examples of how Christ expressed His missionary nature during His time on earth. What do you learn about Christ's character from these situations?

Matt. 5:13–16

Opinion

I'm Looking for a Missionary

Imagine that a person named Jack asks you to help him find a missionary. You agree to do so. The two of you embark on an intense search in local churches. As you walk and talk, you discover that Jack is searching for someone to help him share with his community what he is learning from the Bible. Jack believes a missionary seems like the ideal person to help him. Eager to assist him in his search, you both are disappointed that you found no missionaries in the local area. Disheartened, you prepare to bid your new friend farewell but are surprised when Jack turns to you and asks, “Would *you* be willing to be the missionary instead?” How do you respond?

Are you ready to take that step from being just a member to being a disciple?

It may seem like a simple question with an obvious answer, but all too often we struggle with saying Yes to a question like the one above. It often requires that we step outside of our comfort zones. Many times we think of missionaries as individuals who travel overseas to share God's Word with an unreached people group, when in reality the Bible says we are all expected to be missionaries. Whether we are speaking with a classmate or chatting with a neighbor, we are representing God. In the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16–20), Christ placed no constraints on His command. It is an unmistakable command to all who call themselves His followers.

However, the role of a missionary is not just sharing the Word of God. It also involves helping to meet the needs of one's community. To meet these needs, God gives each of us certain talents and abilities. It is far too common to find a church where ministries are struggling for volunteers, even when the pews are full of members. Some pastors have begun programs to prepare their members to move from membership to discipleship. This is how one becomes a fully committed disciple of Christ.

Are you ready to take that step from being just a member to being a disciple? It may seem frightening. Stepping out of one's comfort zone often is, but you don't have to do it alone. Christ assures us, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (verse 20, NKJV).

REACT

1. What can you do beside giving a Bible study to share Christ with your community?
2. What skills or talents do you have that may be useful in your local church?

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Exploration

I Don't Deserve This!

Ps. 1:1–3;
Isa. 55:4;
2 Cor. 5:16–21

CONCLUDE

A war veteran complained to his nurse in the recovery room, “I don’t deserve the kind treatment you’re giving me.” His nurse responded, “Neither you nor I deserve the kind treatment we receive; that’s why we need a Savior!” As pitiful humans, neither you nor I need to be afraid of our past, present, or future. The awesome news is that everyone has a Savior! God uses the natural world and the Holy Scriptures to reveal this good news about Himself directly to us. However, God is particularly happy to delegate His missionary work to people already benefiting from His role as their Savior.

CONSIDER

- Taking a hike in nature. Find a quiet place to sit. Prayerfully observe and listen for God to reveal Himself to you.
- Researching Christian people who have faced problems similar to what you or someone you know is currently struggling with.
- Contacting someone who recently has been in your thoughts. Share with that person in some way the good news that he or she does not have to be afraid of the past, present, or future, and why.
- Listening to Casting Crowns’ song “The Voice of Truth” on YouTube. Ask God to reveal the places in your life where you need to believe the Voice of truth.
- Inviting a friend to go with you on an expedition. What examples of the good news do you find? Share what you saw on a social media bulletin board.
- Going to a quiet place to be alone with God and His Word. Also bring a journal. Spend some time confessing your sins and inviting Him to talk to you about anything He wants to discuss. Read the Bible, and journal your conversation with Him.
- Baking some cookies or loaves of bread. Wrap them with paper that has Bible verses written on it, and deliver the baked goods to people who will benefit either from the physical food and/or the scriptural verses that come with it. Prior to making the delivery, pray over the gifts.

CONNECT

Deuteronomy 4:9, 10; 6:6, 7; 7:17–21; Matthew 10:5–15.

Sarah Young, “Jesus Calling,” Joy Each Day’s Facebook page, June 20, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/joyeachday/posts/562680360441737>.

Beth Moore, *Praying God’s Word*.