



In the cult classic movie, *The Blues Brothers*, Jake and Elwood Blues (played by the late John Belushi and Dan Akroyd) put their old band back together in an effort to save the orphanage where they grew up. Recently released from prison, Jake fears that his brother's methods will get him a return ticket to Joliet. "They'll never catch us," Elwood assures him. "We're on a mission from God."

Jake and Elwood were on a mission to save an orphanage. Take a moment to reflect on your own life. What is your mission? Or what are the major components of your mission?

History is littered with people who claim to be on a mission from God, then use it as an excuse for an un-God-like behavior. The European Crusaders are not the only ones to declare they were doing God's business while denying God's ways. This is just one example of many "crusaders" who claimed to be *on a mission from God* to justify their actions. No wonder so many people have such a low opinion of those who claim to be God's messengers in this world.

But what is God's mission? God should be allowed to speak for himself, shouldn't he! Read the Bible verses below and put God's mission into your own words.

Luke 19:10

Matthew 28:18-20

Matthew 22:37

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Matthew 5:13-16

Proper perspective is vital if we are to understand what God is up to. One common misunderstanding is that Jesus left heaven to get humans *off of earth and into heaven*. The truth is, Jesus came to earth *to get God out of heaven and into the lives of humans*. God's mission was not a rescue but an invasion! So his ultimate goal was to invite humans into a relationship—an eternal relationship with himself—Father, Son and Spirit. In announcing the future birth of Jesus, God's Son, Isaiah used the word "Immanuel," which means "God with us." (Isaiah 7:14)

Listen to what C. Baxter Kruger says about it in his book, *The Great Dance*.

It all boils down to three things: **First**, there is the Trinity and the great dance of life and glory and joy shared by the Father, Son and Spirit; **second** there is the incarnation as the act of the Father, Son and Spirit reaching down, extending the circle, their great dance of life, to us; **third**, there is our humanity, which is the theatre in which the great dance is played out through the Spirit. That is what motherhood and fatherhood are all about. That is what fishing and baseball and playing are all about. They are the very ways the beauty of the Father, Son and Spirit, the great dance of the Triune God, the glory, the fellowship, the life are played out in us. (*The Great Dance*, C. Baxter Kruger, p. 23)

What emotions are stirred by Kruger's statement? Surprise? Comfort? Confusion? Explain.

Reflect on the 3 movements that Baxter identifies above. Rank them in order of importance in your spiritual journey.

___ *The great dance*

___ *The incarnation*

___ *The theatre in which the great dance is played out*

What do you struggle with when ranking these?

Here is another way to describe God's mission: **To invite all humans into the dance of life**. But it is critical that we distinguish between *means* and *ends* at this point: *Ends* are **what** God is trying to achieve, while *means* are **how** God plans to get there. Thinking about God's activity in this world in these terms, **his end is to bring joy to himself and his creation by drawing all humanity into the dance of life**. *Even though I might be included in "all humanity", I am not a part of the ends as much as I am a part of the means or "how" God will get to his ends.*

Look at it this way: God wants to bring all humanity into relationship with himself (the end) and he is doing it by partnering with those who are in the dance of life already (the means). He asks us to **share** the experience with those who aren't dancing yet. Or to state it in *7Journeys* language, to move us from a receiver to a giver.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word missionary?

It has been customary among Christian churches to refer to those who go overseas to share the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection as missionaries. And often a superior sense of spirituality is attributed to "missionaries." But is that a biblical concept?

On the first page of this study you looked at Matthew 28:18-20. Essentially this is Jesus' last words to his followers before he returned to heaven.

Re-read Matthew 28:18-20 and pay close attention. Who is Jesus talking to? Describe his audience.

In the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus labeled all his followers as missionaries and invited them to join God's mission of reaching all humanity. In effect, he is asking us to move from receiver to giver.

Having re-read Matthew 28:19-20, do you agree or disagree with the statement above? Explain your choice.

The Bible defines a follower of Christ as a person on mission with God—a *missionary*. As Christ-followers, if we are to experience the fullness of life that God intends, it is crucial that we understand *that we are God's means to his ends*.

Look again at 2 Corinthians 5:16-21.

How does Paul characterize the opportunity God has given us?

How do you think Paul would respond if you asked him if there was a difference between a follower of Christ and a missionary?

David Bosch, a South African theologian, says this,

“To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.” (*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, p. 390)

Not only does God invite us along on this mission but he also gives us a good clue as to how we are to go about things.

Read Philippians 2:5-11.

How would you describe God’s method for reaching humans?

John 1:14 in *The Message* version of the Bible says this:

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

Jesus came from heaven not in a loud majestic fashion, not with a flash of lighting and a boom of thunder, but in a humble gentle way. Most important, he became like us. He took on human flesh. He moved in next door. He became like us to help us see how God wants to reach the rest of humanity.

Paul says it this way in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23,

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (NIV)

How are Paul's methods and God's methods alike?

Neither God nor Paul stood far off and shouted to those not yet in God's family. They drew near, became like and "moved into the neighborhood."

We've been invited to join God's mission and to use his means to reach those not yet connected to him. As we move from receiving God's grace to sharing it with others, we find our greatest fulfillment in life lived with God.

In fact, when we understand *Journey 1: Earner to Heir* and *Journey 2: Self Hearted to Soft Hearted*, it makes moving from receiver to giver a no-brainer. I don't need a degree, or more knowledge, or more training. I simply am one beggar trying to show another beggar where to find food.

In his book, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*, Michael Frost suggests this "moving into the neighborhood" lifestyle includes four features:

- 1) *Authentic sharing of life* (the skill we discovered in Journey 2)
- 2) *Use of the language and thought forms of those we are sharing Jesus with* (maintaining a culture relevancy rather than moving into Christian groups, using Christian jargon and alienating those who don't believe like us)
- 3) *Willingness to go to where people are* (moving into the neighborhood)
- 4) *Confidence in the gospel being communicated by ordinary means of servanthood and good deeds, as well as proclamation* (understanding that good works create good faith which allows us to share the good news)

Which one of these excites you the most? Scares you the most?

If you had to rank them in order of your ability to live them out, what would that look like?

George Hunter, author of the book *How to Reach Secular People*, suggests that people come to a relationship with Jesus through multiple exposures to the message. Much like anything in our lives, we must experience something numerous times before we believe or adopt it.

Many people today have a negative image of God, Jesus and the Bible. It is not Jesus but Christians and the church that have left a bad taste in their mouths. So not only do we have to

help them move into situations where they can hear and see the message of Jesus multiple times, we have to overcome some negative thoughts and feelings as well.

Let's first take a look at some areas where we can live and act on God's mission, and then figure out how we can help our friends connect with multiple exposures to the message.

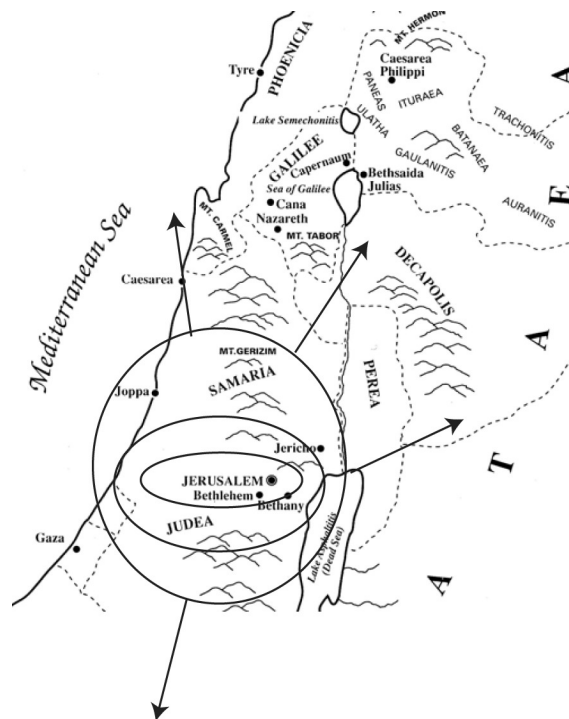
When Jesus spoke to his followers after his resurrection from the dead, he said this:

Acts 1:8

"You will be my witnesses—in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria, and in every part of the world." (NCV – New Century Version)

Jerusalem is a city located in the province of Judea. Samaria is the province next door and obviously the last phrase is abundantly clear.

This is a picture of how we can join God on his mission. You are designed to be relational and it is within those relational connections that God intends to move.



If Jerusalem represents your immediate relationships, here are some questions to help identify what God might be up to in your world.

Who in my immediate relationships do I feel a burden to share the journey I am on with?

Who in my immediate relationships is most open to beginning a journey with Jesus?

Let's break it down into our spheres of influence:

- Relatives
- Neighborhood
- Life stage (same age, children in same classroom, went to school with, etc.)
- Workplace
- Third Space (gym, coffee shops, hobbies, etc.)

Thinking through your spheres of influence, who can you begin to pray for and be aware of God's activity in your relationship with them? List them below.

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

Now that we have identified the potential "Who" in our mission with God, it is time to discuss the "How" or "How do I get my friends and loved ones repeated exposure to this life changing message?"

Shoal Creek has designed many of its large group activities with your relational network in mind.

Sunday Mornings

- Anything but boring!
- Relevant, life-related topics from the Bible
- Creative presentation through the Arts
- Casual atmosphere
- Language that doesn't exclude those who aren't used to going to church

Sundays are designed for repeated exposure to a Biblical message so you can keep the conversation about the spiritual journey alive in your relationships.

If you have ever had a guest attend on Sundays, what was your experience?

What was their experience?

Special Events

- Fireworks Tent
- Eyes on AIDS Run
- Halloween Bash
- KidzMall
- Brown Bag Revolution
- Christmas Eve services

These events are designed for low commitment and high relational activity. They allow you to bring your friends to a safe and pleasant experience with a “church.” They allow you to leverage seasons and culturally relevant issues to attract your friends. Each event is designed to provide a surprising experience that is clearly sponsored by a church. As you invite your friends to these events it will open the door to stimulating discussions and possibly a decision to begin attending Shoal Creek on a regular basis.

If you have ever had a guest attend one of these events, what was your experience?

What was their experience?

Often times in our busy worlds our relational networks have decayed and we need to begin some habits to rebuild our connections. The suggestions below can help do that.

- Eat with non-Christians—especially at work
- Walk, Don't Drive—walking around your neighborhood is a great way to meet neighbors
- Be a Regular—restaurants, cleaners, coffee shops, haircuts, grocery store, etc.
- Hobby—use your interests to connect with people who don't have a relationship with Jesus
- Talk to Your Coworkers
- Volunteer with Non-Profits
- Participate in City Events
- Serve Your Neighbors

Jesus says in John 4:35,

“Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” (NIV)

This reference is to those who are ready to hear that God is pursuing them and he desires to relate to them. So the question remains, “Are you ready to start moving from receiver to giver?” Let's set this question in an eternal perspective.

Christianity is a statement, which if false, is of no importance, and if true of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important. (C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, p. 101)

Do you agree or disagree with the statement above? Explain your thoughts.

If Lewis is right, we either embrace Jesus and his mission with our whole lives or we ignore him. Moderation is not an option. Unfortunately, the history of people who claim to follow Jesus is riddled with moderation. Much like King Solomon,

1 Kings 11:4

As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been.
(NIV, *emphasis added*)

receiver to giver

Journey 3

G. K. Chesterton once commented that “the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.” (Chapter 5, *What's Wrong With the World*, 1910)

When you think of yourself being fully devoted to Jesus and his mission, what excites you? What scares you?

Jesus had a mission in mind when he left his disciples behind (and you and I, if we call ourselves Christians, are included in his band of disciples). He calls us to reach the ends of the earth with a message of hope and restoration. You and I are God’s Plan A. He has no Plan B. God’s mind is made up; the question that remains is, what are we going to do?

Are you willing to join God on His mission?

What is the next step you are going to take?

- Invite a coworker or neighbor to visit Shoal Creek.
- Share with a close friend your new interest in a spiritual journey.
- Offer the opportunity to a friend to serve in one of Shoal Creek’s special events.
- Email the www.meaningfulchurch.com link to friends so they can watch a previous service.
- _____ What?