

CONNECTING TO GOD THROUGH HIS MISSION

It's easy to get petty about little words like "the" and "a". We often talk about missions as though they are an activity of the church. Missions is not an activity of the church; it's what the church and believers are all about. In fact, it's not a mission, it's "the mission", or better yet, it is 'God's mission.' For the next eight weeks we will be looking at God's mission and how He invites us to be on His mission with Him. For the past year we have looked at:

- Connecting to God Through His Church
- Connecting to God Through Spiritual Habits
- Connecting to God Through Ministry

This brings us to the last of this series, Connecting to God Through His Mission. I hope you are already connecting to God through His mission. If not, perhaps He will speak to you during this time and you will make a new connection. Let's all be praying during this time that we will all be more connected to His mission.

WEEK 1 UNDERSTANDING GOD'S MISSION-----Dennis Watson

What is God's mission? That is a great question. It appears that the overall mission of God is that all people would know Him, worship Him, and bring glory to Him. To bring glory to God is to lift up and magnify His name and who He is. I believe that is the mission of God. Of course this reaches its pinnacle in the person of Jesus Christ who was God in the flesh and Who will come again, and before Him *"every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

DAY 1 THE GOD MISSION

READ REVELATION 21:22-26

Key Idea: God is on mission that all people would know Him and give glory to Him.

Unfortunately I often find myself in search of a celebration. There is always something to celebrate. I want to celebrate a winning team, a successful event, the birth of a new grandbaby, and on I could go. It seems that many people move from one sports season to another looking for a team to glory in. Some look for a new star to celebrate, thus leading to the success of America's Got Talent and American Idol. People like to brag and boast of something or someone. Could it be that this is how we are wired? Could it be that this is exactly God's mission? People want to be associated with a winner. They want to celebrate, applaud, and give high fives. Listen to the words of the Psalmist:

"I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. ² My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear of it and be glad. ³ Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together." Psalm 34:1-3 (NKJV)

I propose to you at the very outset of this devotional guide that God is on mission that all people will know His glory, experience His glory, and give all glory to Him. Again, look at the words of the Psalmist:

"Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. ⁴ Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, And govern the nations on earth. Selah ⁵ Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You." Psalm 67:3-5 (NKJV)

Let's begin with the end in mind. The next to the last chapter in your Bible reveals the final outcome in eternity, the culmination of God's Mission. Here we see Eternity unveiled, and what a glorious picture it is.

"But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. ²⁴ And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. ²⁵ Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). ²⁶ And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it." **Revelation 21:22-26 (NKJV)**

Okay, there is it. God's mission is that all people will glory in Him. When it is all said and done and as believers, we are living in eternity in the New Heaven and the New Earth, we will not be cheering at a ball game or a concert. We will see the beauty and splendor of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. We will celebrate forever and never grow weary of it. We will live forever in awe and wonder of His greatness and glory, and "When we've been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing His praise than when we first begun!"

It is God's mission to make Himself known so that all people will know Him and worship Him. The great barrier is sin and He has removed that barrier by sending Jesus to open the door to forgiveness and to becoming His child. I pray you know Him and have as your mission to love Jesus and lead others to love Him, too.

DAY 2 GOD HAS ESTABLISHED A SPECIFIC PEOPLE FOR HIMSELF

READ DEUTERONOMY 7:1-8; 1 PETER 2:9

Key Idea: God has established a special people for Himself, to know Him, worship Him, and reveal Him to the world.

When I was in college I had an Old Testament professor who would regularly say, "How odd of God to choose the Jews." It was a cute saying but I never really gave it much thought. But now I have to ask if God had not chosen the Jews, who might He have chosen? The passage for today makes it clear that it was not due to any merit on the part of the Jews, it was entirely God's choice.

God was coming into the world. He first promised the Savior/Messiah after Adam and Eve sinned. God cursed the serpent with words that we now understand are applicable to Jesus:

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." **Genesis 3:15 (NKJV)**

Later God specified that the Messiah would come from the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph. God spoke to Abram (Abraham) regarding His plan and said:

"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." **Genesis 12:2-3 (NKJV)**

Then in 2 Samuel 7:12 we see the narrowing of the line of the coming Messiah in the Jewish nation. God speaking to King David through the prophet Nathan says:

"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom." **2 Samuel 7:12 (NKJV)**

Throughout their history the Jewish people were reminded of their special status. This truth appears in nearly every book of the Old Testament. In Solomon's prayer of dedication of the Temple he says:

"For You separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be Your inheritance, as You spoke by Your servant Moses, when You brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord GOD." **1 Kings 8:53 (NKJV)**

What an incredible privilege and responsibility! God entrusted to the Jews the law, the prophets, and the line of Jesus Christ the Savior of the world.

So it was not so odd for God to choose the Jews. God, as the Bible reveals, has been on mission to save people from the power of sin. That mission is rooted deeply in the life and history of the Jewish people.

The fact that God has an eternal future for Israel is evident in that five-sixths of the Bible bears directly or indirectly upon them—Jesus being the central figure who brought the Jews and Gentiles together (Ephesians 2:14).

So read and seek to grasp your entire Bible, not just the New Testament. God is the One who authored the whole thing, and the Jewish people are an inseparable part of the Biblical historical account.

Give thanks to God for your heritage. It goes all the way back to His chosen people, the nation of Israel.

DAY 3 AVOID MEANINGLESSNESS

READ ECCLESIASTES 1:12-14

Key Idea: Life without God is characterized by meaninglessness. At all cost avoid meaninglessness.

King Solomon, in all his wealth and wisdom, set out to see if he could find what life was all about. He tried many things but came to the conclusion that all of it was meaningless. He called all of it vanity, and said that there was nothing under the sun that would satisfy his longing. J. Vernon McGee puts it this way:

Solomon tried wisdom and philosophy; he tried pleasure and materialism; he experimented with fatalism; he tried living life for self. He turned to religion and found ritual but no reality. Then he tried to find the answer in wealth. Finally Solomon tried the good life, the life of the moralist, which he found to be an insipid sort of existence. I think that is why the young people today rebel against it.¹

Over and over he concluded it was “vanity of vanities.” Then after his experiment he came to this conclusion:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all.” **Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NKJV)**

His conclusion was not an “under the sun” discovery. He came to the conclusion that life was above the sun. Life is found in worshipping, knowing, and glorifying God. Everything else is meaningless.

A God-shaped void. I am not sure if it can really be determined where this concept came from because it has been repeated and used by so many through the years. The idea is biblical and says that man is longing for something and tries to fill that longing with many things. Dr. Charles Stanley says that sin is seeking to satisfy God-given needs in an ungodly way. That is the case here, man has a longing for God, but he seeks to fill it without God. Solomon sought to find out how to fill this void. He tried many things but found them to be futile, routine, boring, like chasing the wind. His conclusion was that life was found in relating to God. Jesus told us this many years later:

¹Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6 (NKJV)

Even when our team is winning, when everything is going great, the awareness is "this will not last." Winners in this world will lose and good times will turn bad. The young will become old and the healthy will get sick. Work, family, and daily routine can seemingly become meaningless. God is faithful and good, He does not change. He is the proven winner and He will never lose. The only way to avoid meaninglessness is to connect to the One who is life.

DAY 4 GOD IS A JEALOUS GOD

READ NAHUM 1:2

Key Idea: God is a jealous God, and He demands exclusive devotion.

Our definition of jealous does not enable us to grasp the full meaning of the fact that God is a jealous God. For instance, one definition makes it a feeling: "feeling or showing an unhappy or angry desire to have what someone else has." For our purposes the best way to define God's jealousy is "exacting exclusive devotion." For some people the thought of God being jealous is hard to swallow. But just think about it. There is no other God. To turn to anything or anyone else other than God is giving themselves to vanity or futility that leads to nothing and no one. It is void. God loves you. It does not matter who you are or what you have done. He loves you, and His love is a pursuing love. His loves pursues you. When He sees you getting into a place where you cannot experience His love, He is jealous. Not because what you are doing is hurting His feelings, but because He knows what you are doing is hurting you and will hurt you even more if you continue.

Having a hard time swallowing this? Do you think God is being a little closed minded? When Sheila and I got married on November 16, 1974, I basically said to her, "You shall have no other husband but me; you shall not love another man but me; you shall not give yourself to another, for I am a jealous husband." Do you think that is hard for Sheila to swallow? Not hardly. That is a reality for both of us that keeps our relationship intact. God demands from us loyalty because there is no other way. God knows that anyone else or any other way is a dead end. He loves us for us, and so He demands this loyalty from us, knowing that without it we will experience futility. He alone can rescue, He alone can save.

When you give yourself to sin, God is jealous. He wants you, and He is jealous when you give yourself, your time, and your resources to other things.

God very frankly says, "I'm a jealous God. I want you. I don't want to share you with the sin of the world or with the devil's crowd or with idolatry. I don't want to share you -- I want you to belong to Me." There is nothing wrong with God's saying that He is jealous, and Nahum says, "God is jealous." I'm glad that He is.²

God's love and concern for us is purer than we can ever grasp. His love wants us and wants the best for us. He wants us to experience His best which includes His blessings and His benefits. His jealousy is there because He knows that to whomever or whatever you turn, you are missing His best.

Turn to Him more each day.

DAY 5 JESUS GLORIFIED THE FATHER

READ JOHN 12:20-33

Key Idea: The entirety of Jesus' life on the earth was about bringing glory to His Father. The completion of that was His death on the cross and His resurrection.

Jesus was in the temple when some Greeks wanted to see Him. Apparently they came into the court of the Gentiles and approached Philip saying they wanted to see Jesus. Philip relayed the message to Andrew who in turn told Jesus. Jesus spoke to them and others who were listening in. Did you notice that Jesus did not say, "The hour has come that the Son of man should be crucified?" Strangely enough Jesus came to do His Father's will, He came to glorify His Father. He began to speak about "the hour." He was speaking about His upcoming death, and He made it clear that His death was for His Father's glory. He told them that a grain of wheat falls onto the earth and dies, and in doing so produces much more grain. He was teaching them that death is the way to life.

Jesus then prayed to His Father so those around Him could hear. He said in His prayer that He had come for this event—this hour, which was His death. He raised a question, "Should I say, Father save me from this hour?" He then answered the question, "*For this purpose I come to this hour, Father, glorify your name.*" Jesus was surrendered to His Father's will which included His death on the cross for and because of sin.

God then spoke to Jesus from heaven and said, "*I have glorified it and I will glorify it again.*"

²Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Now if you jump over to John 17 where we find what truly is the Lord's Prayer, Jesus prays this:

*I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵ And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. **John 17:4-5 (NKJV)***

The work that He had come to finish was to bring glory to His Father and that primarily came about through His death on the cross. If you look to **John 17:3**, you see that Jesus tells what eternal life is, "*And this is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ who you have sent.*"

In Jesus, God is glorified through His death and resurrection. One last passage for today:

*And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. **Colossians 1:18 (NKJV)***

Jesus was the "*firstborn from the dead.*" Jesus established a whole new race of people—"*children of God*" (**John 1:12 NKJV**). He was the firstborn from the dead indicating that there would be others. These are those who have eternal life which is "*to know the true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.*" We too, like Jesus, are for His glory. Jesus passed it on to us—He passed on eternal life.

Jesus finished the work of the Father, and we have the same work—to glorify the Father. We too need to be about finishing the work we have to do—giving glory to Him.

WEEK 2 YOU WERE MADE TO BE ON THE MISSION-Chris Watson

When Jesus was born the angels announced to shepherds in the fields, *"Glory to God in the highest!"* On the occasion of the advent of Jesus, glory was proclaimed from heaven by an angelic host. As we saw last week Jesus came for God's glory. The Father glorified His only Son, and yet He has brought many to glory. God has brought many into the world, all with the express purpose of bringing glory to Himself. Every conception is intended for the purpose of bringing glory to God.

DAY 1 ALL ARE WANTED, ALL ARE PURPOSED

READ PSALM 139

Key Idea: God knows, plans, and purposes each conception of a baby. His plan is that each one know Him and bring Him glory.

Has there ever been a baby conceived who was not wanted? I think not! The mother, father, or other family members may not want the child at the time, but rest assured that someone does, and God definitely does. Consider the encouraging words of God:

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." **Jeremiah 1:5 (NKJV)**

God knew Jeremiah before He formed him, He knew all about him! In knowing him, He formed him. The same is true for you and me. We were not an afterthought, mistake, waste, or mess up. God created us. Scripture reminds us that God is the giver of life, and He gave life to both you and me. Look again at Psalm 139:

"My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them. Psalm 139:15-16 (NKJV)

God has set us each aside for His purpose, to glorify and honor Him. We may do that in similar or totally different ways. With just over seven billion people in the world, no one is like me and no one is like you; we are each unique. Not only that, but God knows everything about us. How? He is God and Creator, He gave us life.

Heather Gemmen was a married mom who was taken advantage of by an intruder in her home as she slept. As you can imagine she felt horrible,

violated, mad, angry, and at times she experienced guilt. She found out she was pregnant and gave birth to the child. She later adopted another child. Of course what the man did to her was nothing short of immoral, ungodly, and plain-out sin. In fact, he was arrested and jailed for it. Heather, however, realized that this was God's child, and though wrong and difficult circumstances surrounded her birth, she would continue on. You can check out the full story on youtube, by searching for Heather Gemmen.

Every life matters to God, from the very youngest to the oldest and everyone in between. Every child (and adult) is a special gift and part of God's plan. Warren Wiersbe says, "What we are is God's gift to us. What we do with it is our gift to God." God created you, loves you, and knows you.

Do you know Him? Are you walking in that love? Are you reminded that you are loved and wanted by God? If you are still not sure, reread Psalm 139 again.

DAY 2 GOD'S DIRECTING AND PATIENT HAND

READ HEBREWS 11:23-29

Key Idea: God was patiently directing Moses' life even when Moses did not know it. The same is true of all people. God is patiently guiding and directing your life. Acknowledge and join Him in what He is doing.

How long does it take to get on track with God? For some it takes longer than for others. Take Moses for example. He was hidden for a time in the Nile River in a waterproof basket made by his mother. He was watched over by his sister, rescued by the Pharaoh's daughter, and nursed by his own mother. He grew up as Pharaoh's son in Pharaoh's palace. He had all the advantages of the son of a king. As he grew up he became concerned about his own people and turned away from his advantage as the king's son. He turned to his own people and suffered as they did. Then after forty years he had to flee Egypt after killing an Egyptian. For forty years he lived in Midian with his wife and father-in-law Jethro, living as a shepherd. He then surrendered to God's call to go to Egypt to deliver God's people out of Egyptian slavery. For the next forty years he led the people and prepared them to be a great nation to enter into the Land of Promise.

Moses was planned and purposed by God. It took him eighty years to recognize and accept God's plan and purpose though he eventually did. All of Moses' life God was directing and guiding him, even if Moses didn't know it. God is deeply involved in our lives, both in the big details and the small ones. It took some time, but Moses surrendered to God's plan after being stubborn and sometimes going his own way or taking things into his own hands. I can relate, can you?

God desires that we surrender solely to Him without reservation. The quicker we recognize what He is up to and surrender to His plan, the quicker that we enjoy being in the middle of God's will. Getting in on what God is up to and being in His will can save much heartache and regret. You may have heard the saying, "When you can't see His hand, trust His heart." Sometimes we are not sure what is going on, not sure how things will turn out, or we try to take issues into our own hands. God wants surrender, solely and fully. It should be us saying to the Lord, "*Thy kingdom come and Thy will be done,*" trusting He knows what is best and what He is doing.

When we fully surrender to the Lord, it doesn't mean that all will go the way we want it to, but it does mean we will be in the middle of God's will. Often when we are in the middle of His will, there are great benefits and blessings, both in this life and in the one to come. Are you surrendered to the Lord fully? Is there an area of your life that you are holding back from the Lord? Surrender it all to Him and remember, of all the places you and I can be, there is no better place than in the Lord's will.

DAY 3 THE PRESERVING HAND OF GOD

READ 2 KINGS 11:1-12

Key Idea: God preserves His servants to accomplish His plan.

This is a great account of intrigue as was often the case in political wrangling in those days. The only thing different today is that at least assassination is usually not involved.

When Joash was one year old, his grandmother Athaliah decided to slaughter all her descendants in a desperate bid for power. Joash, the only survivor, was rescued and hidden by his aunt and uncle, Jehosheba and Jehoiada. Jehoiada's work as a priest made it possible to keep Joash hidden in the Temple for six years. At that point, Jehoiada arranged for the overthrow of Athaliah and the crowning of Joash. For many years following, Jehoiada made most of the kingdom's decisions for Joash.³

God preserved Joash through his aunt Jehosheba when Athaliah set out to kill all of the royal heirs. God had promised a king on the throne. Had she not preserved Joash there would have been no heir. God provided a savior so to speak. Then when Joash became king, the high priest Jehoiada guided his choices and decisions. When Jehoiada died, King Joash followed ungodly people leading the people back into idolatry.

God will preserve His servants and carry out His plan even if we are not aware of it or able to recognize what is going on. The account of Joash

³Life Application Study Bible.

demonstrates this principle. Another account that demonstrates this principle is that of Moses. God preserved Moses and had him to lead his people, and remember God did this by putting him in a basket when he was a baby.

So many times God is at work in our lives or around us, but we may be unaware. In fact, I think often we are more unaware than we are aware. At least I am. God will always carry out His plan and purpose and preserve His servants to accomplish His will. Can you think of others in Scripture? What about Joshua, Abraham, and Noah to name a few? How have you seen God work in your life to preserve you for His plans? Would you be willing to admit that there may have been times we were not aware, and God was still at work?

Joash did fine under direction of the high priest Jehoiada, but when Jehoiada died, things changed. However, God preserved the kingly line of David. God preserved Joash, but then Joash went his own way. God will always use us: either we will enjoy the fellowship and “ride,” or He will use us in spite of our disobedience. Remember how God used Pharaoh? I want for God to use me as an obedient vessel of His and follow Him. What about you? Are you an obedient vessel? Are you following Him?

DAY 4 TROPHIES OF GRACE

READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10

Key Idea: God has worked in believers to save us and seal us in order that we might give Him glory.

Trophies are not always given out today because of a great accomplishment. Often today, trophies are presented simply because a young person participated in a sport. Paul said that rewards like those presented for winning in athletics will not last. However, there are trophies that will last; those trophies are God’s.

If you back up into Ephesians 1, you see that God has done things for believers so that we might be the praise of His glory.

Verse 3 He has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

Verse 4 “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”

Verse 5 He “predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

Verse 6 He has “accepted in the Beloved.”

These are just a few of the blessings from God so that we can be the praise of His glory.

Now in chapter 2 Paul makes it clear that we are His shining trophies for His glory. I believe God is proud of His children because of what He has accomplished in us, not because of what we have accomplished. We are His accomplishment:

He made us alive when we were dead

He made us alive with Christ

He seated us in the heavenly places

He did all of this so that *“in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”* Clearly we are His trophies. Like plaques and trophies that we display and boast in, He wants to display us so that others will see what He has done! You as a believer are an accomplishment of God.

Then He calls us His “workmanship.” He uses a great word here which is ‘poiema.’ This is the word from which we get the word poem. We are God’s poem to the world. God is proud of you. That is what got Satan’s attention regarding Job. God was boasting to Satan about Job in Job 1:8 and 2:3. Then Satan made an all-out attack on one of God’s trophies, but God sustained His trophy and Job shined even brighter.

Just think about it, you are a trophy of God. He has done all the work to make you His prize possession. Remember it is not what we have done, but what God is doing in and through us. It’s all about Him!

DAY 5 BE SET APART TO GOD

READ 1 PETER 1:13-16

Key Idea: Believers are holy, set aside for God’s purposes.

First, let's look at God's holiness. What does it mean that God is holy? Passages like 1 Samuel 2:2 and Isaiah 6:3 are just two of many examples of passages about God’s holiness. Another way to say it is absolute perfection. God is unlike any other (see Hosea 11:9), and His holiness is the essence of that “otherness.” His very being is completely absent of even a trace of sin (James 1:13; Hebrews 6:18). He is high above any other, and no one can compare to Him (Psalm 40:5). God’s holiness pervades His entire being and shapes all His attributes. His love is a holy love, His mercy is holy mercy, and even His anger and wrath are holy anger and holy wrath. These concepts are difficult for humans to grasp, just as God is difficult for us to understand in His entirety.

Next, what does it mean for us to be holy? When God told Israel to be holy in Leviticus 11 and 19, He was instructing them to be distinct from the other nations by giving them specific regulations to govern their lives. Israel is God's chosen nation and God has set them apart from all other people groups. They are His special people, and consequently they were given standards that God wanted them to live by so the world would know they belonged to Him. When Peter repeats the Lord's words in 1 Peter 1:16, he is talking specifically to believers. As believers, we need to be "set apart" from the world unto the Lord. We need to be living by God's standards, not the world's. God isn't calling us to be perfect, but to be distinct from the world. 1 Peter 2:9 describes believers as "a holy nation." It is a fact! We are separated from the world; we need to live out that reality in our day-to-day lives, which Peter tells us how to do in 1 Peter 1:13-16.

Finally, how can we become holy? Holiness only results from a right relationship with God by believing in Jesus Christ as Savior (accepting His gift of eternal life). If we have not placed our faith in God's Son alone to save us from our sins, then our pursuit of holiness is in vain. So, we must first make sure we are born-again believers (see John 3). If we truly are believers, then we recognize that our position in Christ automatically sets us apart from the world (1 Peter 2:9). After all, we have a relationship with the living God! Then we must daily live a set-apart life, not trying to "blend in" with the world, but instead living according to God's Word as we study the Bible and grow in it.⁴

Our holiness comes completely from God; He is our holiness. In fact, it has been said the more we get to know and walk with Him, the more we realize how unholy we are and how holy He is. We have no holiness on our own; it is all His. Do you see God working in your life? Do you see Him making you more like Him? Do you see Him doing a work only He can do? If so, thank Him! If not, spend time with Him, and ask Him to work in you and make you holy as He is holy.

⁴<https://www.gotquestions.org/holiness-Bible.html>

WEEK 3 YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES-----Dennis Watson

Acts 1:8 is that familiar missions verse of scripture where Jesus tells His followers that they are to be His witness in their hometown and beyond, all the way to the whole world. This week we look at what it means to be a witness.

DAY 1 COMMAND OR A STATEMENT OF FACT?

READ ACTS 1:1-11

Key Idea: Acts 1:8 is both a command and a statement given by Jesus. As a statement it is the result of believers being witnesses. As a command it is Jesus' instruction that His followers be His witnesses.

In Acts 1, there is an account of a question raised by Jesus' disciples after His resurrection and before His ascension back into heaven. They asked Him if this was the time He would restore the kingdom of Israel. He answered by telling them that it was not for them to know those kinds of things. It seems that He was saying that was not what was important at the time. He then proceeded to tell them what was important for them, and that continues to be important for us now. This is a very personal instruction or statement.

Now the question: Was this a command to be followed, or a future result? Here is the statement broken down:

- The Holy Spirit will come
- You will receive power
- You will be My witnesses

The wording here could be a command—"be My witnesses" or it could be a statement of the outcome of the Holy Spirit coming and power being given. If it is a statement, then this is how I would express it, "after the Holy Spirit comes and you receive His power, the result will be you will be My witnesses." Which is it? Both! I believe in keeping with the Great Commission given in Matthew 28:19-20, this is a command. However, it is also a statement of result. It is not a corporate statement and command; it is a personal statement and command—you go be witnesses and you will become witnesses.

With all that said, it is very important to understand what a witness is. A witness is someone who gives testimony to a fact or an event. In this case, a witness is someone who tells about the Gospel message of Jesus and the impact on their life. As a command, we and all believers are to go be witnesses in our world and beyond. As a statement of future outcome, Jesus is saying you will become something—a witness when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

The outcome of the Spirit's coming was a new and empowered people becoming witnesses. As I write this, I am reminded of a really fun time I had yesterday talking with six-year-old Parker Dooley. His mom wanted him to tell me that he had invited Jesus to come live in his heart. While I waited for him I watched him with great enthusiasm tell everyone he saw that he had invited Jesus to live in his heart. As he and I talked, he told me what it meant, and then he told me that he had told both first grade classes at school. He also told me that he would tell everyone until he died because then he would not have to tell because everyone in heaven would have done the same thing. He was a witness! Yes, he was giving witness, but he was something he had not been before—a witness.

I want to be like Parker and let everyone know that I have invited Jesus to live in my heart.

DAY 2 WHAT WE HAVE EXPERIENCED

READ 1 JOHN 1:1-4

Key Idea: The early followers of Jesus wrote and told people what they experienced regarding Jesus and the gospel. In the New Testament the authors wrote what the Holy Spirit instructed them to write, based on what they had experienced.

When He was about thirty years old, John became acquainted with Him. John and his brother James met Him in Jerusalem. Later they were with their father, mending nets, when Jesus came by and called them to follow Him. They left their father (probably a well-to-do fisherman) with the hired men and followed Jesus. Now John says, I want to tell you about Him, and he asserts the reality of the total personality of Jesus: (1) "We have heard" (through the ear-gate); (2) "we have seen" (through the eye-gate); (3) "we have looked upon" (lit., gazed intently upon); and (4) "our hands have handled." John, of course, is speaking of the incarnation of Jesus and of his own association with Him when He was here upon this earth.⁵

The writers of the New Testament were writing largely about what they had heard, seen, and experienced. They were giving witness to what they had seen and heard. They were also writing about what others had seen and heard.

It is worth saying over and over what a witness is. A witness is someone who gives testimony to a fact or an event. In this case a witness is someone who tells about the Gospel message of Jesus and the impact on their life. It is as though this witness is on the witness stand in a courtroom. They are to witness as to what they heard or saw. In this case witness is a verb, and it is to tell what you heard, saw, or experienced.

⁵ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

In our passage today that is what John says he has done in his writings. Three beginnings in the Bible:

Genesis 1 - *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."*

John 1:1 - *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

1 John 1:1 - *"That which was from the beginning,"* which refers to the time Christ came into the world at Bethlehem.

John and the others were the beginners in regard to giving witness about Jesus. The beginning here has to do with the time of the incarnation of Jesus. He came into the world, and the first century believers gave witness to this significant beginning.

Now it is our turn to tell what we have seen, heard, and experienced regarding the work of Jesus. Ours is not a witness to Jesus' earthly work, but to His work in and through the lives of those who have become His followers. That is a work that continues as Jesus lives in His followers. The first century followers of Jesus were instrumental in giving witness to the incarnate Jesus. We now give witness to the risen, victorious, coming-again Jesus.

Their task was pivotal but so is ours.

DAY 3 OUR ROLE TO WITNESS

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:9-17

Key Idea: Paul gives three motivations for fulfilling our role as witnesses. We have in this passage three motives for bearing witness to Christ.

First of all, all believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to determine the rewards to be received.

We are all going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and we will answer to the Lord for our lives. We are going to give a report to Him. Let me make it very clear that this is not the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15 where only the unsaved will stand. If you are a believer, your name is written in the Book of Life, and you have eternal life. However, you will stand before the bema, the judgment seat of Christ, to be judged for rewards. You and I will stand before Him. This should motivate us to serve Him acceptably. Then when we come into His presence, He will be able to say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."⁶

⁶ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Second, the fear of the Lord urges us to persuade men.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." **Proverbs 9:10**

"He who wins souls is wise." **Proverbs 11:30**

As believers we know God is watching and knows every move we make. He has given us clear mandate to go and make disciples. We want to be doing what He told us to do. We want to be busy when He returns. When my daddy saw me, I wanted to be doing the things he told me to do.

Third, the love of Christ compels us. Warren Wiersbe really drives this home:

"How can such opposite emotions as fear and love dwell in the same heart? Certainly they are found in the hearts of children who love their parents and yet respect them and their authority.⁷ *"Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling"* (**Ps. 2:11**).

The phrase "the love of Christ" means His love for us as seen in His sacrificial death. *"We love Him, because He first loved us"* (**1 John 4:19**). He loved us when we were unlovely; in fact, He loved us when we were ungodly, sinners, and enemies (see Rom. 5:6-10). When He died on the cross, Christ proved His love for the world (John 3:16), the church (Eph. 5:25), and individual sinners (Gal. 2:20).⁷

The love of Christ for us and for all pushes us out to be witnesses:

- WE TRY TO PERSUADE MEN
- WE ARE CONVINCED THAT JESUS DIED FOR ALL
- WE LIVE FOR HIM NOT FOR OURSELVES
- WE HAVE THE MINISTRY AND MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION
- WE ARE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS

⁷ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 1.

DAY 4 DAVID GAVE WITNESS TO GOD

READ PSALM 103

Key Idea: Even in the Old Testament there were those who gave witness to God. The psalmist David gave witness to God's greatness and invited others to come and hear.

Remember that the beginning of the gospel in history goes back to the fall involving Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Genesis 3:15 is referred to by many as the "first gospel." It is the first prophecy of the Messiah, the beginning of salvation's history that finds fulfillment in Jesus. Here is what J. Vernon McGee says of this verse:

"The most prominent thought is not the ultimate victory that would come, but the long-continued struggle. This verse reveals the fact that now there is to be a long struggle between good and evil. This is exactly what you will find in the rest of the Scriptures."⁸

We are on this side of this and we know that the one spoken of was Jesus. We also now know Him as our Savior and Deliverer. David knew God but only with the revelation that he had at that time. Like Abraham he believed God and that was his righteousness. David knew God as the deliverer and he praised God. In Psalm 103 David delighted in the Lord and called others to do the same. Warren Wiersbe says that He did this on three levels.

First, there was personal praise in verses 1-6. David praised the Lord from a grateful heart. Think about the blessings of the Lord on your life. For David that was where his praise came from—from a grateful heart. David expressed praise and thankfulness for six things: forgiveness, healing, redemption, love, satisfaction and renewal. Take time to praise the Lord for all His benefits.

Secondly, there was the national praise in verses 6-18. Talk about a nation that should have been grateful! Israel is the chosen people of God. He rescued them and delivered them time and again even though they were unfaithful. Through all of their rebellion and turning away God's mercy was on them. Today the USA exists out of the providence of God. His blessings have been on us from the beginning of our founding. America should be grateful and give praise to the Lord.

The third level of praise David called for us universal praise as seen in verses 19-22. Warren Wiersbe writes about this section:

⁸Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

"When we worship the Lord God, we worship the King of the universe. The "*Lord of Hosts*" is sovereign over all things He has created, including the stars and planets (33:6; Isa. 40:26) and the angels (91:11; 2 Kings 6:17-20), who are servants, to the saints (Heb. 1:14). As a youth, David confronted the giant Goliath with, "*I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel*" (1 Sam. 17:45, NKJV). The apostle John heard the vast choir of all creation praise the Lord (Rev. 5:13), and one day, we shall join in that anthem. But the final shout of praise in the psalm comes, not from the angels, but from David the psalmist: "*Bless the Lord, O my soul*." After all, redeemed men and women have more to praise the Lord for than do all the angels in heaven and all the galaxies in the universe. Nobody in hell blesses the Lord, but every creature in heaven does nothing else but bless the Lord. We who are in this world can enjoy "*heaven on earth*" as we join them in expressing thanksgiving and blessing to our great God. "*Bless the Lord, O my soul!*"⁹

Cultivate a heart that is grateful and praise the Lord!

DAY 5 ZECHARIAH GAVE WITNESS TO THE COMING KING

READ ZECHARIAH 9:1-9

Key Idea: Once again we have an Old Testament testimony. This one is given by Zechariah, and his testimony anticipates Jesus, the coming Messiah.

God is in control—always: times past, future times, and today. In these nine verses we see how God through Zechariah gives a very interesting testimony. The advent of Jesus was not an afterthought for God; it was His plan before He created anything:

He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you. 1 Peter 1:20 (NKJV)

Zechariah gives testimony under inspiration of the Holy Spirit as God guided him. Prophecy is God writing history in advance. Keep that perspective when you read your Bible. God gives us history in His Word. He not only tells us what has happened but what is going to happen. Zechariah speaks of two coming world rulers. Zechariah wrote his prophecy in 520 BC. Keep that in mind as we read about the first world ruler he wrote about. The first world ruler in these passages was Alexander the Great. Keep in mind that Zechariah was writing about 200 years before the campaigns of Alexander the Great. Warren Wiersbe writes about these verses:

"These verses describe the march of Alexander the Great and his army

⁹ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – Wisdom and Poetry.

through the area north and east of Palestine. Alexander defeated the Persians in 333 B.C. at the Battle of Issus and then turned to conquer the leading cities in Phoenicia. Daniel had predicted Alexander's success; he compared him to a winged leopard (Dan. 7:6) and a fighting he-goat (Dan. 8). It's been said that prophecy is history pre-written, and both Daniel and Zechariah wrote some of that history.¹⁰

God used human world rulers many times to bring judgment. This is one of those occasions. God used Alexander the Great to bring judgment. Verse eight is a transition to verse nine that speaks of another world ruler to come. Verse eight looks beyond Alexander the Great and reminds the readers that God is always protecting His people and that no one can touch them without His permission.

Now the next world ruler is seen in Zechariah's anticipating testimony. He writes about the coming of the Messiah, the King of God. He writes incredible history in advance about the triumphal entry that is fulfilled in the event on what is referred to as Palm Sunday. All four of the gospel writers write about the event (Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; and John 12:12-19). Zechariah writes his testimony in advance of the coming Savior of the world.

A testimony points to Jesus. Today, point the way to God's Savior.

¹⁰Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – The Prophets.

WEEK 4 MORE BIBLE TESTIMONIES-----Chris Watson

Week 3 we looked at two testimonies from Old Testament believers. Of course they did not know Jesus because He had not yet come into the world. However, they knew God in the revelations they had received. This week, in preparation for constructing your own testimony, we will look at testimonies in the New Testament of five people who encountered Jesus.

DAY 1 THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL

READ JOHN 4:1-39

Key Idea: Sharing your own personal experience with Christ may be the very thing others need to come to Jesus for themselves.

Jesus had a divine encounter with a Samaritan woman. The Samaritans were a racially mixed people. They were part Jew and had a mixed religion that included parts of Judaism. They were largely despised by the Jews. It would seem that Jesus would have avoided Samaria, but in verse 4 we read, *"But He needed to go through Samaria."* It was God's plan and purpose. Look also at verse 34 *"Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.'"* Jesus was on mission and He knew there were people in Samaria who needed to know Him. He did not avoid certain places or people because of some human prejudice.

He had a conversation with the woman seeking to remove some ideas she had that hindered her from knowing and worshipping the One True God. Jesus looked beyond her lifestyle, looked beyond her sin, and her unwillingness to listen. He went straight to the heart of the matter. She made the comment that she knew the Messiah was coming. She knew and to some degree, was expecting the Messiah. Jesus said to her, *"I who speak to you am He."* The woman was so overwhelmed that she left her water jar and returned to the city. There she shared about her encounter with Jesus asking, *"Could this be the Christ?"* She was amazed that He knew all about her and told her things about her life that no one else knew. As a result of her testimony about Jesus and her enthusiasm, the men of the city went out to see and hear Jesus for themselves. As a result, many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the testimony of the woman (verse 39). Then Jesus stayed with them for two more days and even more people believed.

Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world." John 4:42 (NKJV)

This is clearly God's plan for us regarding our own testimony. Many people are first brought to Jesus in curiosity because of someone's personal testi-

mony about Him. Though it may not be complete, it is enough to draw the seeking and searching, and as a result, they come to Him in their own faith.

As many men came to Christ through the witness of the woman at Samaria, today many people are led to know Christ through the influence of another. In fact, it is the effect of one life upon other lives, the impact of one personality upon another, which often leads people to Christ.

If you know Jesus, you have a testimony of how He has saved you and what He has done. Don't keep it in. Share what you have experienced with Jesus, and I believe He will do the drawing.

DAY 2 THE APOSTLE PAUL'S TESTIMONY

READ ACTS 26:1-23

Key Idea: Paul shared his entire testimony with King Agrippa in just twenty verses. It probably took him less than five minutes. The result was that the king was "almost persuaded to become a Christian."

Paul relates his personal testimony on at least four occasions. In today's passage, He was appearing before King Agrippa to give an account of why he was under arrest. It was not really a defense of himself but a declaration of the gospel. His hope was to see the king and others come to know Jesus.

He did not attack or speak down to the king. Instead he showed great honor and respect to the king.

He shared about his life before he came to know Christ as his Savior. He spoke of his time as a youth and how he spent his life among his own people. Then when he became an adult, he was a Pharisee. He spoke of his loyalty and faithfulness to his nation's religion. He shared that he was also zealous that his people adhere to the teaching of Moses and the prophets. He then began to point out that he became a person who had hope in the promises of the twelve tribes. He then mentioned the resurrection. He was subtle at this point and then returned to his life before he met Jesus. He talked about persecuting Christians and even arresting them. He spoke of casting a vote to put to death those who were sharing about Jesus such as Stephen.

He then shared about his experience encountering Jesus on the Damascus road. Jesus dealt with Paul's persecuting of believers by asking, "*Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me?*" Jesus told him that he would become a messenger to both Jews and Gentiles, "*to open their eyes in order to turn from darkness to light*".

Next he shared his life since meeting Jesus. He shared with those in Damascus, Jerusalem, and Judea, and then to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God and do works of repentance.

Paul divided his testimony to his life before knowing Jesus, how he came to know Jesus, and his life since coming to Jesus. Paul was simply sharing his journey and telling how God had worked in his life. He was testifying to what God was doing. One way to share our testimony is to share what our life was before Christ, how God saved us, and our life since we have known Jesus. Again, we are simply telling others what God has done for us. It's one thing to tell another person's story, but it is often much more effective to tell our own personal story of what God has done in your life. Share your story today, someone needs to hear it.

DAY 3 THE CENTURION'S TESTIMONY

READ MARK 15:33-39

Key Idea: Only one verse is given to the centurion's witness about Jesus. The centurion did not have the full account of Jesus, but he knew this was no ordinary man, Jesus was the Son of God.¹¹

It is thrilling to read the witness of the Roman centurion, especially when you consider that his words could have gotten him into trouble with both the Jews and the Romans. That Jesus Christ is the Son of God is one of Mark's important themes (Mark 1:1, 11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61-62). This makes His servanthood even more wonderful (Phil. 2:1-11).¹²

I believe this was the confession of faith of the centurion and this was as far as he could go at this time. He couldn't have said anything that would have revealed his faith more than this. He acknowledged that Jesus is God's Son. He acknowledged who He was and certainly what He was doing. I do not believe this man had all the details of theology. He had never read Strong's theology or any of my books, but this man knew enough to take his place beneath the Cross of Christ. And that is all God has ever asked any sinner to do. He asks us to come in faith to Him. That is what this man did. We must remember that he was a pagan Roman, and he had the cruel job of crucifying men. Although he was certainly made very tender at this time.

Who knew or who heard? We cannot find a record of anyone coming to Jesus as a result of his testimony (only one verse written), but here we are 2,000 years later reading and writing about the centurion.

¹¹ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 1

¹² Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

He gave witness to what he saw, and what he saw was totally out of the ordinary. When one truly encounters God, truth is revealed. The centurion saw Jesus for who He was after he had helped crucify Him. We don't know what the centurion did with Jesus after this confession because we don't have the "rest of the story." It does show us though that no matter our background, choices, or plight in life, God can still be real to us, He can show Himself to us. The next decision is crucial. What do we do with Him? What have you done with Jesus? Are you sharing Him? Are you living for Him? Are you letting others see Him in your life? Be thankful, if you are a believer that you know God, and God knows you.

DAY 4 THE TESTIMONY OF THE MAN BORN BLIND

READ JOHN 9:1-25

Key Idea: The greatest testimony is a changed life!

How crazy that the man was brought before the Pharisees! It seems they should be celebrating that this man who had been blind all of his life could now see. The disciples were concerned with why he was blind, and the religious leaders were concerned about how he came to see. There is a lot going on in this account.

The Pharisees questioned the man's parents, and even his parents were fearful of saying too much because they knew that to confess Jesus as Messiah would mean being put out of the synagogue. So they told the Pharisees to ask their son because he was of age and could answer for himself. Here is the exchange:

*So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner."²⁵ He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see." **John 9:24-25 (NKJV)***

This is a very simple testimony. He was saying, "I don't know who you say He is, but I was blind and now I see. He has saved me from my blindness." What a testimony! All the man did was speak the truth. He wasn't sure who Jesus was, but he was sure that he had been blind, and now he could see. Jesus did many other miracles in the Gospels, but the biggest miracle He does is when He takes a blind person (spiritually lost) and gives them sight (saves them).

God used this man's blindness for His plan. In fact, let's look at verse 3 again as the disciples ask if the man was born blind because of his parent's sin. Jesus answered, "*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.*" Wow, think about that for a minute.

Jesus says that this man is blind so that the works of God can be revealed in him. It was all about God. God would work a miracle in the blind man's life, and others would see the miracle and God's works revealed.

Just think of the story that this man had to tell after he could see. I wonder who else He told about his healing. Did he tell his friends, his family, or his children? God had changed his life physically. He could see nothing at all and now he could see. Do you think anyone could shut him up? I don't think so. I have been given spiritual sight, and at times I am bold and tell about my gift, and at other times I don't. We have a story to tell, let's tell it often.

DAY 5 SIMEON'S TESTIMONY

READ LUKE 2:25-35

Key Idea: Salvation is a person, not something you do.

Like the others, Simeon's testimony is still touching lives two thousand years later. He had lived his life in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah and at last, He was here. Simeon was a righteous and reverent man; he was a faithful Jew who worshipped God but was also looking forward to the Messiah—the One who would bring comfort to Israel.

Simeon's testimony was that God had promised the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit had led him to be in the temple at this time when Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple for His dedication.

Simeon now knew he was ready to die in peace because he had seen God's provision. Like all who are saved, Simeon was saved by faith in God's provision. Mary and Joseph were devout Jewish people who loved and worshipped God. They were aware that their newborn son was THE GIFT of God. They were probably not yet aware of the significance of THE GIFT for the whole world, but they knew He was THE GIFT. One of the first things they did was to dedicate Jesus in the temple. They were not alone that day in the temple.

Christmas was born in the heart of a man by the name of Simeon that day in the temple. He was there as a worshipper of God. It is said that he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. He was anticipating the coming of the Messiah—God's Savior.

Simeon took baby Jesus in his arms and worshipped God. He said that he knew that the baby he held in his arms was the Promise of God. Jesus was the fulfillment of all of God's promises. Simeon received that promise by faith in God sending Jesus into the world. Simeon knew this because God had revealed it to his heart. He acknowledged that the child in his arms was

God's salvation. The most wonderful thing in Simeon's words is, "*You now dismiss Your servant in peace.*" He simply said, "I am now ready to die, and my dying will be in peace."

Simeon saw Jesus just before he died. Simeon was ready to die now that He had seen THE GIFT. His readiness to die also means that he was ready to live. THE GIFT of God in salvation does include being prepared to die. I know that if I died today, my heavenly Father would greet me into heaven because of Jesus. He is my Savior and Lord. When a person comes to the point of facing their own death with peace, they are then ready to live. All fear and uncertainty is removed because of the promises of God.

Simeon saw God's provision. He was now ready to die in peace. He was ready to live. THE GIFT of God fits us for heaven, which fits us to live here until we die.

Pray: Father I no longer fear or have uncertainties about my own death. Because of THE GIFT you have given me in Jesus, I can face death with peace. Now I can live.

WEEK 5 SHARING MY TESTIMONY----- Dennis Watson

What is a testimony? What should be or needs to be included? I have heard people share in a formal setting their testimony that lasted longer than half an hour. The last few weeks we have read witness statements that were as short as one verse; just a few sentences. It does not take many words to give a testimony of what Jesus has done in your life.

This week we want to encourage you to write out briefly your personal testimony speaking a brief word about your faith in Jesus. There will be some questions that will help you get your thoughts organized. We will also provide testimonies of three of our members.

DAY 1 WRITE YOUR PERSONAL TESTIMONY

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11

Key Idea: Take some time to write out your testimony.

On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came and filled the followers of Jesus who had been praying and waiting for the promised arrival of the Holy Spirit. On that day, Peter preached to all who were observing what had taken place when the Holy Spirit came on Jesus' followers. As they listened they heard the message of Jesus in their own language. There were people in Jerusalem from many different places and languages. They miraculously heard the message. Peter, who had denied knowing Jesus and was later restored by Jesus, gave clarification as to what was going on. In essence, he preached Jesus. The result that day was the salvation of 3,000 people!

Peter gave the simple elements of the Gospel and that they were "according to the Scriptures." Jesus died for our sins, He was buried and He rose on the third day. People need to hear the basic elements of salvation. We saw last week in Simeon's testimony that salvation is a person and not something we do.

Last week we looked at several biblical testimonies, one of which was the apostle Paul. Paul's testimony is a classic case of the simple form testimony. It included the four parts of a testimony that will help you put your testimony together. If you look back at Acts 26:1-23 you will see these four parts in Paul's testimony as he shared it with King Agrippa.

For you to share your testimony it is imperative that you take some time to write it out in a form that could be shared with someone in less than five minutes and in such a way that it could easily be understood. Here is a simple outline for you to use.

DAY 2 WRITING OUT YOUR TESTIMONY

FOUR PARTS TO YOUR TESTIMONY

- 1. MY LIFE BEFORE I MET CHRIST**
- 2. HOW I REALIZED I NEEDED CHRIST**
- 3. HOW I COMMITTED MY LIFE TO CHRIST**
- 4. THE DIFFERENCE IT HAS MADE IN MY LIFE**

How would you answer this question?

If you were standing before God right now and He asked “why should I let you into My heaven?” What would you say?

Ok, are you ready? Begin writing, keep it clear and concise. When you are finished, please send a copy to your pastor:

Chris Watson for Hollonville (cwatson@harpscrosing.com)
Dennis Watson for Fayetteville (dwatson@harpscrosing.com)

DAY 3 PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF KEITH STALLINGS

Is God really Personal?

Like so many others, I was raised attending church and all the activities there were to offer. At the age of 11, I walked down the aisle at the end of the service, spoke to the preacher, and said a prayer with him. Two weeks later I was baptized. The problem was, all I did was what so many others have done. I prayed a few words and got wet in the baptistery pool. I had accepted the fact that Jesus existed, but that was all it really meant to me.

So, on with my life...?

I continued to attend church, doing all the things church folk do. At the age of 17, Lori and I began to date and were married 6 months later. We decided within a year of marriage we really didn't need church, so, on we lived without it. About 2 years later, God began to show Himself in my In-laws life. They talked to Lori and I about the need for Christ in our lives, but we just didn't believe we needed Him. I remember my father-in-law said “how could anyone live without Christ”, and I said to myself, “I do”.

Time and Change

But God has a way of showing Himself, and He uses time, circumstances and people to do it. At the age of 23, the nature I had to sin against God had brought me very near divorce, and still I ignored the need for Jesus in my life. But then in March of 1987, my brother-in law invited Lori and I to visit a small church they were serving at. After all, it is what we do in The South, attend church. Within a month, we decided to join. Soon, I was asked to teach youth Sunday School. I knew all the stories from growing up in the church, so I did.

God shows up

One Sunday worship service, my brother-in-law began to share how the Holy Spirit had been talking to him and working in his life. Does the Holy Spirit really talk to people? Does God really want to be involved in our lives? These questions began to haunt me. On a Friday evening in July, 1987, we followed a few youth to see a Christian concert at New Hope Baptist Church, but the artist was not able to be there. A movie was shown instead. The movie was "His Last Days" showing Jesus and what He did for me, dying on the cross for MY sin. I left the church that night, driving very fast and angrily. I did not sleep much that night because of the struggle inside me. I remember saying to God, "I wish I had never been born, because I do not want to make this decision".

I will never be the same again

On July 18, 1987, the next morning, I was up early for a softball tournament. On my knees in my bathroom floor, I prayed to God "I want to walk with YOU today" and we did. God touched my life that day and changed me. He began to show me He is a personal God, wanting to have a relationship with me. I remember our next door neighbor saying to me, "no one changes overnight like you did" and I shared "when you find what I did, you do". Today, she is a child of God too.

God has continually worked in my life since, teaching me about Himself. Over the past few years, I have had the joy of working in the drama ministry of our church, helping others know that God wants to have a relationship with them. If we seek to find Him, we will. It is an amazing thing, knowing the God who created all, loves me and wants to always be in my life, and He changed me to want Him in my life.

Keith E. Stallings

Day 4 PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF ELISSA HOLDER

I, Elissa Holder, have the confidence that if I were to die today, I would spend eternity in heaven with Jesus Christ.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. I John 5:13

If I were to die today and stand before God and He were to say to me, "Why should I let you into My heaven?" I would respond:

I placed my trust in Jesus Christ as my Savior when I confessed I was a sinner and asked Him to forgive me and be my Lord.

As best I recall, my salvation experience took place at Grady Memorial Hospital on March 15, 1971 when I was 9 years of age. When I think about that important event, I remember:

My dad had just passed away. I knew he was in heaven and in no more pain. I saw my need of The Savior if I were to spend eternity in heaven.

My life before becoming a believer was characterized by:

Dysfunctional Family in childhood – my confidence and trust was in my grandparents.

So having received Jesus Christ, I can see God's hand at work changing me and equipping me for His service in the following ways:

Immediately after salvation, my hope was in Christ regardless of my family troubles. Currently, I see Christ's refining work in me molding and shaping me for His purposes.

What I would like others to know about what Jesus means to me and what He has done in my life:

Jesus is my El Shaddai – He holds me close and lets me know that He is in control. He will never leave me or forsake me.

I was scripturally baptized at Woodlawn Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama in December of 1971.

Some of the people whom the Lord used to bring me to Christ:

My grandparents and my dad – they "walked the walk" before me and openly shared their faith.

I sign this as a witness of the hope I have within me, the assurance of my eternal salvation purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Elissa C. Holder 10/02

DAY 5 TESTIMONY OF ELI AKIN

My Testimony by Eli Akin

My life before Christ:

When I was a kid, I floated through life. I went to church, Sunday School, I was even a part of a family ministry that traveled. Everything in my life was done because I watched everybody around me and it seemed like the right thing to do. The older I got, I started to question why I did things that I did. I started to wonder why everyone around me seemed so excited about Jesus and I would smile and agree with them but I knew that I didn't feel what they were feeling. I felt a void in my life that I knew needed to be filled. I knew that I needed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

How I came to know Christ:

One night when I was 18 years old, I sat on a hotel bed and I told Jesus that I was sick of my sin and I was tired of playing a game that wasn't even fun. I asked Him to forgive me and to come into my life. I told Him that I hated my sin and I wanted to know Him in a personal and intimate way. That night my life changed dramatically!

My life since Christ:

My life has been completely turned upside down. Now I have an excitement about our Creator like I have never had before. I have become a sponge and I can't soak up enough of His word, worship, and spending time with other people that love Jesus. Now my life has changed and I am growing every day. I have a passion to see people come to know Him like I do.

That is why I am here. Do you have any interest in knowing Jesus?

WEEK 6 KEEP THE MISSION IN PERSPECTIVE-----Chris Watson

Very interestingly in the book of Acts, Luke, the author, goes from what is known as the “they” and “he” passages to “we” passages which means Luke was participating in what was going on in the “we” passages. This is important for where we are this week. The last few weeks we have talked about personal testimony which is focused on the individual believer sharing the gospel. This week we make a turn to the collective work of the church. Here we look at working together as the Body of Christ to join God in His mission. Be reminded that the mission or His mission is not an activity of the church it is the work of the church. God has invited us to join Him in His mission. Therefore, everything we do is about His mission that the whole world will know and glorify the One True God.

DAY 1 WHERE DO THE PEOPLE ON HIS MISSION COME FROM?

READ DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9

Key Idea: The heart for His mission is both taught and caught.

God gave instructions through Moses to the people that they were to be guided in life, choices and actions, by God’s Word and Law. Verses 4-5 are what are called “the Shema.” “Shema” is a word that means “to hear.” It was the basic confession of faith in Judaism. It includes what Jesus said was the greatest commandment; “You shall Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and will all your strength.” From there God instructs Moses regarding teaching the Word and the Law to all the people, including the children, on a constant basis.

These first generations of God’s chosen people were certainly heart connected to Him, His Law and Word. They shall be in your heart. The people were to have the Truth of God in their heart. It was not to be something they were compelled to do out of obligation but they were to have a heart for God, His Word and His Mission. Often I hear people say, “I need to get my kids in church.” By that they mean they feel obligated rather than compelled by a heart for God. If it is just an obligation that is what will be caught. An obligation is a duty. I love my wife. To do things for her is not a duty, it is something that is in my heart. I want to do things for her out of my love and zeal for her, our marriage and our home. That is what needs to be caught. They see us and our love for God, His Church and His Mission. They come to love and have a zeal for that which we love and have zeal.

Out of the heart we are to teach our children diligently. First our children and then the children in the body of Christ. We have the privilege and blessing of teaching all children the Word and the Truth and instill in them a love for God and the things that God is concerned about.

Where do people learn of His Mission? It is caught from people who are on His mission and love Him. It is also taught as we spend time, effort, and energy placing within our children the Truth of God and leading and teaching them to love Him with all their heart, soul and strength.

I grew up in a church that placed within me a heart for God and His Mission. From a very early age I was exposed to the Truth and the things of God. In time God showed me the truth of who He was and He saved me. For me though, it was modeled way before church. In other words, my parents didn't take me to church because they thought it was the church's job to save or teach me right. It was their job to teach me the truth of Jesus and the church came along and helped. It is of vital importance that the mission begins at our own home.

It's not about programs but about Jesus and people. The heart of the mission is taught. What are you teaching your kids, your parents, your spouse, your neighbors, classmates and coworkers? Remember we must first be walking with Jesus and then sharing it with others and the greatest place to first share is at our own address. It may often be the hardest place to share but often the most rewarding.

DAY 2 MENTORS AND MENTOREES

READ 2 TIMOTHY 1:1-7

Key Idea: Mentors are a very significant part of spiritual growth and being on mission.

All of us have had or have mentors. Likewise, we are mentors to some person or several. Mentor is defined as someone who guides another to greater success. (<http://www.yourdictionary.com/mentor>). All believers are to be leading or mentoring others. Our desire is to see them successful in living. True life comes from God and being on mission with Him.

I hesitated to use the word "mentoree" because it is a relatively new term and it refers to one being mentored and the plural is "mentorees." When I first typed it in and even now my spellcheck gives me a red squiggly line under it indicating I have a misspelled word. Well I told my spellcheck to ignore it because YourDictionary.com has it defined as "One being mentored" (<http://www.yourdictionary.com/mentoree>). So I use it here to indicate people being mentored which can and should include our children, grandchildren, other children, young people and people who are growing in their relationship with God. All believers are both mentors and mentorees. We are learning from others and we are helping others to grow.

Paul the apostle wrote to Timothy and called him “a true son” and a “son in the faith.” Timothy was not Paul’s biological son but he was his spiritual son. Paul said that he was thankful that in Timothy he saw the faith that existed first in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Timothy’s father was Greek and probably not a believer (Acts 16:1). In addition to his mother and grandmother, Paul became a spiritual mentor to Timothy.

In the Body of Christ at Harp’s Crossing there are hundreds of children and students between the two campuses. They all need to be mentored in the Faith both at home and when they are attending activities at Harp’s Crossing. The whole idea is to provide teaching and mentoring for people of all ages so that they will catch and learn the mission of God.

A members of our Fayetteville campus, who has already gone on to be with the Lord, would often tutor some of our students. On Wednesday evenings it was not unusual to see Virgil Brownlee sitting in the fellowship hall with a young man and his school books helping him to grasp some idea or concept.

Of course there are many mentoring opportunities that are part of the ministry activities of our church. Here are a few of those:

Mission Friends

Sunday School

Life Classes

VBS

RA’s

GA’s

Acteens

Mission Trips

Music

Being on mission with God includes helping others be on mission with Him too. Do you have someone who you consider a mentor? If not, pray that God would give you someone to pour into your life and invest in you. Are you mentoring someone on a regular basis? If not, ask God to place someone in your life you can pour into.

DAY 3 THE IMPACT OF ONE DEACON

READ ACTS 7:54-8:4

Key Idea: One person who is faithful to God's call can have a huge impact on the spread of the Gospel.

Can you ever really measure the contribution of a Jesus follower who surrenders and make sacrifices in serving the Lord and others? I cannot even begin to name the people who, when I was a child and youth, gave their time and abilities to mentor me. No person ever came to a place of being on mission with God without the sacrifice of time and energy of countless servants of God.

One of the first deacons in the early church stepped up and stood firm for the Gospel message and the mission of God and the sacrifice of his life literally became a turning point for the mission in the first century church.

Stephen, one of the first deacons of the early church faithfully served the Lord being blessed by God to perform miracles and wonders. Some people opposed him and he delivered a lengthy message presenting the truth of the Message of the Gospel. The most important part of this biblical historical account is the resulting outcome. He was faithful in his work and in presenting the truth. As a result, Stephen was stoned to death. A young Pharisee by the name of Saul was there guarding the coats of those stoning Stephen. What happened next was a major "next step" in the missionary work of the early church. The mandate of Acts 1:8 was fulfilled as the believers were scattered into Judea and Samaria and they went preaching the Word.

You can't even begin to measure the impact of one obedient person. D.L Moody once said, "The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully surrendered to Him. By God's grace I'll be that man!" Imagine what can be done with a person fully surrendered to God, Stephen was one such person. By Stephen's obedience he provided momentum for the spread of the Gospel. Notice verse 4 of chapter 8, *"Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word."* Through Stephen's obedience the Gospel was spread through persecution, but God used it.

What are some steps that you and I can take to be obedient to God? Spend time in His Word and in prayer. Another way is by teaching our children the truth of God outside of Sunday, living it out, doing family devotions and talking about the things of God. Another way is to be regularly connected to God's Church, not just when convenient, but weekly! You need to be there, we need it and others need us. These acts of obedience help spread the Gospel to our family and beyond, both daily and weekly. Be consistent.

Here is an exciting example! Twenty-two years ago Harp's Crossing adopted an unreached people group across the world. We had no idea what it meant at that time and what it will still mean years from now. However, there have been over one hundred mission trips to share with this unreached people group and now there are hundreds of individuals (of that unreached people group) professing God as their personal Savior. Remember no one can measure just what obedience will do, but we can know that if we obey, God will use it and we often get to see Him work.

DAY 4 NO ONE PERSON ALONE CAN DO THE MISSION

READ COLOSSIANS 1

Key Idea: No one person alone can carry out God's Mission. It takes each one and it takes everyone.

A good definition of synergy is the combined effort being greater than the parts; the working together of two or more things, people, organizations especially when the result is greater than the sum of their individual efforts or capabilities (Encarta North American Dictionary). The work of the church is to make God and His Gospel message known to the whole of humanity so that all people will love Jesus and lead others to love Him, too. We are about bringing glory to Him and to His name. No one person alone can accomplish this mission.

Paul makes it clear in his writings that the work we have been called to is a work that must be done in connection with other believers. This concept is expressed in Ecclesiastes:

*Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. ¹⁰For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. ¹¹ Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? ¹² Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a three-fold cord is not quickly broken. **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NKJV)***

Consider two truths expressed regarding the work of the church. First, God's work takes each of us. Paul wrote about "fellow-servants" in many of his writings. Then in Colossians 4, he gives a sort of roll call of some of those fellow-servants. He wrote to encourage them and to affirm their contributions to the work of the Gospel.

Tychicus is mentioned in verse 7. He had remained faithful and is mentioned in Scripture as offering help to Paul. Onesimus is mentioned in verse 8. He was the runaway slave Paul met who became a follower of Christ. He made contributions as a faithful follower. Aristarchus is mentioned in verse 10. He had been in prison with Paul. In Acts, he was frequently one

of Paul's traveling companions. He was a burden bearer. He stuck with Paul even in the hardest of times. Mark is mentioned also in verse 10. He and Paul had disagreed but a year later Mark proved to be a valuable part of Paul's team.

Justus is mentioned in verse 11 but, we do not know anything about him except that he was obviously a help to Paul and the Work. Epaphras is mentioned in verse 12. Epaphras apparently started the church in Colossae. He was faithful to lead the church through trying times. Luke is mentioned in verse 14 and is well known biblically as a doctor and historian. He was a companion of Paul throughout his ministry. Of course this is not an exhaustive list but gives us an understanding that there were many who were fellow-servants with Paul.

As difficult as it sometimes seems to be, working together is the plan and you cannot do it alone. We are more effective together. God intends for us to cooperate together pooling our abilities, skills, gifts and resources. You bring something to the team and are important.

The second truth to consider today from this passage is that the work of God not only takes each of us it takes all of us. Each of these individuals made a difference. All of them working together were able to accomplish what none of them could accomplish by themselves. Paul knew that. Each of them individually could make a contribution to the Gospel ministry. But, all of them working together could do far more than any could do by themselves. God intended for the church to be a body. Each part working with all of the others to accomplish the mission.

You cannot do it alone, but by God's empowering Spirit we can do it together as the Body of Christ. We need God and we need each other. Henry Blackaby has said, "no one person alone knows God's Will for His Church." I say this is true not only for the church but for each person. We need each other to be reminded of truth and to carry out God's work, we can do more together than apart.

In 2014 churches gave almost \$479,000,000 dollars to the Cooperative program. This is thousands of churches pooling their resources together to support missionaries, mission trips and seminaries just to name a few. When we work together we can do much.

How might God have you work together for His purpose with others? Remember we need others and others need us.

DAY 5 BE LIKE MINDED TO SHINE THE LIGHT

READ PHILIPPIANS 2

Key Idea: To work together we need to cultivate like-mindedness and unity so that we shine as light in the world.

Paul writes in **I Corinthians 12:25**, *“There should be no schism in the body”*. In **Philippians 2** Paul encourages the Philippians to be *“like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”* The goal of all of this is found in **Philippians 2:14-15**, *“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”*

God’s goal for all believers is that we “shine as lights in the world.”

Paul gives clear guidance in this. First, we need to cultivate like-mindedness. Paul uses three words to express this. The words “one mind” is to think the same way. The next words in this phrase mean literally “ones joined in soul.” The last is similar to the first “one thing thinking.” All of this together is that believers must get on the same page setting aside petty differences for the purpose of His Mission. This is necessary for the church to function. Petty differences must be set aside and leaders followed to take the Message to the world. We will always have differences with others but when it’s concerning things that aren’t very important we must be careful. In the Discovering Church Membership class we talk about the essential and non-essential beliefs. Essential beliefs include things like who Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit are and how one is saved. These are non-negotiable, Scripture is very clear. The non-essentials may be a conviction that one person has that another does not or when a person sees one way of doing things and the other person, a totally different way. We say in non-essential beliefs we have “liberty” meaning we must not put what are “non-essential” beliefs or ways we do things on others. We must put such differences aside.

Secondly, we must follow the example set by Christ. Paul goes on in verses 5-11 and tells us the example set by Christ. He became a servant, came in the likeness of man, humbled Himself and was obedient to God. God wants us to be a servant, humble ourselves before Him and to be obedient to His call. Paul ends the passage with reminding the believers to keep shining the light. A good flow of this chapter is:

Verses 1-4 - Be of one mind, one heart and one love

5-11 - Follow the example of Christ

12-18 - Keep shining the light

As believers we must be what God is about and major on the majors and minor on the minors. We don't have time to fuss or fight about things that are not the major focus, it often gets us off track. We must be unified. That which unifies us is Christ, His blood and the salvation that He has given us. Let's focus there and working toward loving Him and loving others.

WEEK 7 THE MISSION PLAN—HOW WE GO ABOUT THE MISSION -----Dennis Watson

In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells us how to be about the mission.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Acts 1:8 (NKJV)

From this we see we are to be about the mission in our own area and beyond. This is a geographical plan. It was for the first century believers and it is for us in our geographical location.

Our “Jerusalem” is Fayetteville and Williamson, our own local mission fields

Our “Judea” is our surrounding counties and state

Our “Samaria” is North America

The “world” is the rest of the world beyond North America

For the remaining two weeks we are going to take a quick look at our involvement as a Body of Christ in His Mission and the vehicles or instruments we utilize to connect the Body of Christ at Harp's Crossing to His Mission.

DAY 1 SOMEONE NEEDS TO CALL THE PLAY

READ HEBREWS 13:7-17

Key Idea: Jesus is the head of the church, however He has placed pastors in place to shepherd and lead the body to carry out the mission. The pastor leads and the people follow.

For most of my life I have been a fan of football. I enjoy watching and I even played for a very short time. When the eleven players on offense get in the huddle there is one person who calls the next play; the quarterback. The plan is for each of the eleven players to get in the formation and carry out their particular task for the play the quarterback called. There are not several people in the huddle calling different plays, just one person calls the play and the others follow his lead or the team will not accomplish their goal.

Being a pastor is a blessing and a joy. In many ways it is like being a quarterback. I love it. However, there are times when getting questioned about things has a tendency to wear on me. Through the years I have made decisions to lead in a certain direction and have been met with some opposition. Others say, "Why don't we do it this way instead." Here is how I have tried to work it out. As pastor of a particular congregation the pastor has the responsibility to lead and the people have a responsibility to follow (Hebrews 13:17). As long as the pastor is leading and his leading is biblical, moral, and ethical, then the people of the church need to pull together and follow. Can you imagine a quarterback in the huddle calling the play and two or three speak up and say they want to run another play? All of the plays may be great but someone is responsible to make the decision and lead and the others to follow. That is not mean-spirited nor is it arrogant, it is leadership. I have seen pastoral leadership stalled because of differences in opinion. Leadership requires the leader to lead and the others to follow. There may be a dozen other ways to do it but, a decision must be made or division will result and the mission forfeited.

There are multitudes of mission endeavors. There are multiple ways to be on mission with God. But at HCBC we have made the choice to do the majority of our involvement in the mission through Southern Baptist vehicles. We say "yes" to mission endeavors through Southern Baptist Convention entities which means we say "no" to others. That does not mean the others are wrong but we have to make a decision and focus in a clear direction pooling resources in that direction.

I feel an example is on order here. We participate in the mission internationally through the SBC International Mission Board. We have missionaries we support in Thailand. Suppose someone comes to us and says we would like to go to Thailand through ABC Mission organization and we would like the church to support us. We are already involved and supporting missionaries in Thailand therefore, it would not be good stewardship to support missionaries through another organization. Since we have said yes to mission work through the International Mission Board we say no to the others. This does not mean the others are wrong, but we are already working in that area of the world.

May the Lord make us one as we pursue His Mission!

DAY 2 MISSION PERSPECTIVE: THE SHINING LIGHT

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 4:6; GENESIS 1:3; MATTHEW 5:16

Key Idea: The light that shines the farthest shines the brightest at home. Home is the first and greatest place for your light to shine and then it will shine beyond.

C.T. Studd was a British Missionary who lived from 1860 to 1931. He has been credited with saying “The light that shines the farthest shines the brightest at home.” That is one of those statements that definitely measures up to the phrase, “pregnant with meaning!” Talk about perspective! Of course he was making reference to churches and shining the light of the gospel message. It goes both ways. If a church shines bright at home it will shine far. If it shines far it will shine bright at home. To be truly effective, we must be effective at home—home where we live and our home church.

I could say a great deal about this but I want to keep it short and simple. All of us must keep the fires of faith burning in our hearts. We are responsible to keep the fire burning by worship, study and reading God’s Word and meeting regularly with the body for worship, fellowship and the mission. We spent a great deal of time on this when we focused on spiritual habits. All that we do at Harp’s Crossing is about His Mission. Therefore it requires that each member of the body have the light of The Spirit shining in them, in their home, community and church. When the light is shining brightly in us it will shine brightly in our church body. We need to be shining that light in the ministries of our church. In doing so others are inspired, encouraged and become involved in shining the light.

What can you do to make sure the light is shining in your home? In your church? Think about it now so you can make an intentional decision to do your part in making your church’s light shine the farthest by shining the brightest at home.

DAY 3 HOME BASE: A MEANS TO AN END

READ ACTS 8:3-8

Key Idea: The local church is not the end but a means to an end-- the mission that all the people of the earth will love Jesus and lead others to love Him, too.

And Saul just went wild, devastating the church, entering house after house after house, dragging men and women off to jail. ⁴ Forced to leave home base, the Christians all became missionaries. Wherever they were scattered, they preached the Message about Jesus. ⁵ Going down to a Samaritan city, Philip proclaimed the Message of the Messiah. ⁶ When the people heard what he had to say and saw the miracles, the clear signs of God’s action, they hung on his every word. ⁷ Many who could neither stand nor walk were healed that day. The evil spirits protested loudly as they were sent on their way. ⁸ And what joy in the city! Acts 8:3-8 (MSG)

I wanted you to read this passage from The Message paraphrase because it refers to the people who had to leave their “home base.” Because of the persecution of Saul, believers were scattered all over the area, fleeing for their lives and in the scattering they took their faith and the Gospel Message. The Message paraphrase calls them “missionaries.” Although that word is not in the original language it makes the point that they were evangelizing as they scattered.

Three significant points here. First, they went out proclaiming the Gospel Message. They were evangelizing. They did this because they were filled with The Spirit and were witnesses of Jesus (see Acts 1:8). God has an incredible way of getting the Word out. Persecution is often the method God uses to get people out and evangelizing.

The second point is that they had a “home base.” They went out from their home church. You and I have a home church. Our home church is vital to our lives and our witness. Although we may never be scattered due to persecution we are to go into our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and into the whole world.

The third point here is the home base was not an end in itself, it was a means to an end—THE MISSION. The first century believers who scattered had obviously been strengthened and disciplined in their home church. They had the courage that had come from worshipping God, studying the Word and fellowshiping with other believers. This is so very significant in the lives of believers. In a home where the children are loved and encouraged and taught Truth, the children grow up with great security and confidence. The church comes along the family to provide added teaching and love, which brings an additional level of confidence and security.

Ministries like Sunday School, LIFE groups, Music Ministry, Mission Friends, RA’s and GA’s, Women’s Ministries, Men’s Ministries, Preschool and Children’s Ministries, Student Ministries, all of these ministries are not an end. They are a means to an end—THE MISSION. Read it again, none of those ministries are an end but, are a means to an end—THE MISSION.

I hope you and your family are taking advantage of these ministries and connecting self and others to the mission.

DAY 4 KEEP THE HOME FIRES BURNING

READ ACTS 13:1-12

Key Idea: As we invest in people, pouring into them truth, time and the mission we often get to send them out to continue in the mission elsewhere.

I have often heard the phrase “keep the home fires burning.” A little research revealed that in 1914 a song was written in which that phrase became the title. It was a British patriotic song written during World War I. The original name of the song was “Till the Boys Come Home”. It was written to encourage people and families to keep home a strong, positive, and hopeful place until their soldiers returned.

Home needs to be a hopeful, strong and courageous place keeping the fires of faith burning hot to continue to support those sent out and to continue sending others out on His Mission. We can never downplay the importance of the work that is done at our home base—our local body of believers.

In Acts, the church would send people out after prayer, laying on of hands and fasting. In today’s passage we read that they laid hands on Barnabas and Paul and sent them out into surrounding regions for the purpose of presenting The Gospel. We often do this formally on Sunday mornings, sending people out from Harp’s Crossing Baptist Church. People also go out less formally. Perhaps they move away or get transferred and they go and the mission goes with them. All that we do is about the mission. What we do has a lasting impact.

Can things like DiscipleNow, Sunday School, Student Ministry, Music Ministry, Children’s choirs and the like, really have a lasting impact? How about just a few examples:

Did you see the movie “Fireproof?” What about the movie “War Room?” Have you heard about a singer songwriter by the name of John Waller? John Waller wrote and recorded the song “Crazy Faith” which was featured in the “War Room” movie. He also wrote and recorded “While I am Waiting” which was played in its entirety in the movie “Fireproof.”

In 1989 John Waller was a Junior at Fayette County High School. During DiscipleNow that year John Waller trusted Jesus as his Savior and Lord at Harp’s Crossing Baptist Church. Now how far reaching is that? Rest assured that touch is still reaching. Was that just another DNow? I don't think so! But there is never a year that is just another DNow. Each year DNow students come to know the Lord and then they are used in the far-reach of the Gospel Message.

Jason Stewart, a young man who grew up at Harp’s Crossing involved in Music and Student Ministry, is currently serving on staff at the Kentucky Baptist Convention in the area of Worship and Revitalization.

Billy Buchanan is currently serving as Worship and Technologies Pastor at Journey Church in Gainesville, GA. Billy writes, “I often look back on my

time at Harp's and think to myself "man how time flies." I am thankful for the platform you and Steve shared with us "young crazy kids." It was influential in what I am doing today."

As much as I would love to include the names of others who are out there in full-time service and in volunteer positions, space will not permit. Just know there are a lot of people that The Lord grounded and sent out from Harp's Crossing and many more are being prepared to go out from both campuses.

Remember, everything we do is about the mission. When we are doing all we can and seeking to be about the mission, the mission expands.

Let's make sure we keep the home fires burning.

DAY 5 THE "MISSION TRIP MINDSET"

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:12-20

Key Idea: As believers we are always to be on a mission trip.

For many years I played a little game with our kids and now I play with our grandkids and it drives them crazy. When we are on a trip and they ask, "When are we going to be there?" I tell them, "We will never get there because when we get there we will not be there, we will be here." Of course when we got 'there' I could prove my point saying, "See we are not there, we are here."

The place of mission is not out there it is here; the here and now. The mission is not a place out there it is right here—right where you are now.

I have been privileged to go on many mission trips. I have discovered something about mission trips, "The mission trip mindset." When we are there, at the place of the mission trip everyone is all about the mission and the specific work. All else is incidental. We are there for the mission and all else just falls into place. The people on the mission trip take everything in stride knowing they are there to be about the mission. It seems that when the mission trippers return home the "mission trip mindset" goes away. I have an idea to deal with that. Live life as a mission trip. Everyday wherever you are, you are on the mission or His Mission. For the child of God it is not a here and there, on or off thing, it is always the mission.

Paul uses a phrase in **2 Corinthians 5:20** that drives home this point. He says that, "*we are ambassadors for Christ.*" We are here as Christ's ambassadors wherever "here" happens to be. An ambassador is a representative. We are Christ's representatives. As His own possession we are His repre-

sentatives. Our lives are lived representing Him. This is not an occasional thing. It is our life. We are not His ambassadors only when we are in a mission setting; unless we recognize everything is a mission setting and then we are always Christ's ambassadors.

Face every day before leaving the warmth of your bed with this declaration, "Today, all day, I am Christ's representative." Then keep it in mind and practice the "mission trip mindset."

WEEK 8 CONNECTING TO THE MISSION THROUGH HCBC----- -----Chris Watson

How connected are you to God through His Mission? This week we wrap up this series of “Connecting” that has gone on now for over four years! I hope you are growing in your connection to God. One of the ways to connect is through joining Him on some mission event. We are on His Mission! At Harp’s Crossing we seek to have mission connection events and activities so more of us can connect to God through His Mission. This week we will share a few of the overall mission connections so you can jump in and connect through those mission events. At the end of this week there will be a list of mission connection activities with a brief description. Look over these and perhaps try a new mission connection. It could be a real blessing in your connection to God.

DAY 1 THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

READ EXODUS 18:17-26

Key Idea: Reaching the world and being on mission with God requires organization and planning. The Southern Baptist Convention is churches banding together to carry out God’s Mission.

Harp’s Crossing Baptist Church is a Southern Baptist Church. The Southern Baptist Convention was established in Augusta, Georgia in 1845. The Southern Baptist Convention was formed with a Gospel vision. Its founding charter identifies its singular focus: “for the purpose of eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the Baptist denomination of Christians, for the propagation of the Gospel. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has grown to be a network of more than fifty thousand cooperating churches and church-type missions banded together to make an impact for God’s Kingdom. Though as many as two hundred could be counted as ‘mega-churches,’ the vast majority of Southern Baptist churches run less than two hundred in weekly worship. No two Southern Baptist churches are alike; but there are certain commonalities that bind Southern Baptists together, regardless of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, language, size, or locale.”¹³

The Southern Baptist Convention is actually the churches. The SBC is organized with various agencies to enable the nearly 50,000 churches to pool resources and work together.

¹³ <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/>

SBC SEMINARIES

The estimated 46,000 autonomous churches that cooperate with the Southern Baptist Convention pool their resources to support the work of the six theological seminaries. The Convention operates these seminaries to train its ministers and Christian workers. The six are:

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky (1859)

The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas (1908)

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans, Louisiana (1917)

Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention in Ontario, California (1944)

The Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina (1951)

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri (1957).

Other Parts of the SBC Family

North American Mission Board

International Mission Board

LifeWay

The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission

GuideStone Financial Resources

Executive Committee

Baptist Press

SBC Life

Southern Baptist Foundation

Historical Library and Archives

Women's Missionary Union

We share this with you so that you can see the vast array of mission connections where people can make connections and get in on God's Mission. In connecting with these entities we can do more together than we can do apart.

DAY 2 THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

FIRST READ PHILIPPIANS 1:1-5 FROM THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE

Key Idea: The Cooperative Program is the tool of Southern Baptists for the purpose of pooling the resources of Southern Baptist Churches to do the work of the Great Commission.

Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Christ Jesus (the Messiah), to all the saints (God's consecrated people) in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops (overseers) and deacons (assistants): ² *Grace (favor and blessing) to you and [heart] peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah).* ³ *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.* ⁴ *In every prayer of mine I always make my entreaty and petition for you all with joy (delight).* ⁵ *[I thank my God] for your fellowship (your sympathetic cooperation and contributions and partnership) in advancing the good news (the Gospel) from the first day [you heard it] until now.* **Philippians 1:1-5 (AMP)**

I have been a member of a Southern Baptist Church or at least attended one, all of my life. I am thankful for all of the many aspects, institutions and ministries of the SBC. Why am I a Southern Baptist? I am a follower of Jesus first. I am a Southern Baptist because of the way we do the work of The Mission. Southern Baptists get it and I got it from them. The church in the world is to be about God's mission and I see that all over our convention. It provides avenues and coordination for being on God's Mission. A major resource of the SBC is The Cooperative Program.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' unified plan of giving through which cooperating Southern Baptist churches give a percentage of their undesignated receipts in support of their respective state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention missions and ministries.

How Does The Cooperative Program Work?

It begins with you!

You give yourself first to God (II Cor. 8:5). Next, out of gratitude and obedience to God for what He has done for you, you commit to give back to Him, through your church, a portion of what He provides. This is commonly called a tithe and represents ten percent of your income (Lev. 27:30, Mal. 3:10).

Your Church... decides the next step. Every year your church prayerfully decides how much of its undesignated gifts will be committed to reaching people in your state and around the world through The Cooperative Program. This amount is then forwarded to your State Baptist Convention. Our church gives 10% of it's offering to the Cooperative Program.

Messengers at the State Convention Annual Meetings... from your church and other churches across the state decide what percentage of Cooperative Program gifts contributed by local congregations stay in your state to support local missions and ministries. The percentage to be forwarded to the SBC for North American and International Missions and Ministries is also determined at this time.

Messengers at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting... from across the country decide how the gifts received from the states will be distributed among SBC entities. These gifts are used by SBC entities to send and support missionaries, train pastors and other ministry leaders; provide relief for retired ministers and widows; and address social, moral, and ethical concerns relating to our faith and families.

The bottom line – people around the world hear the gospel and receive Christ!

- It presents a unified and comprehensive budget, throwing a funding blanket over statewide, national and international missions and ministries.
- It provides a long-term sustainability for our entities. When a church makes their missions giving as a percentage of their church budgets, it provide consistency and stability.
- It adheres to our long term Baptist principle that "we can do more together than alone."
- The Cooperative Program mitigates competition between entities thereby allowing a balanced Acts 1:8 Strategy.
- It levels the playing field, and makes a place at the table for small and ethnic churches. Every church can stand hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, on level ground, as partners in the gospel (large churches, small churches, new churches, growing churches, graying churches, and ethnic churches).¹⁴

I am thankful for the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program. It has been and continues to be a powerful tool for carrying out God's mission. Take some time today and thank God for the Cooperative Program, for with it we can do more together than apart.

¹⁴<http://www.sbc.net/cp/>

DAY 3 THE INTERNATIONAL MISSION BOARD

READ MATTHEW 9:35-38

Key Idea: Being organized to reach the world includes being connected to the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Limitless. That's a word used recently at the IMB to describe the vision for partnering with Southern Baptist churches and other Great Commission Christians. The IMB wants to vastly expand mission efforts for the spread of the Gospel to every people group on the planet, forging a dynamic network of pathways connecting churches and individuals directly to IMB missionary teams around the world.

Consider our world today:

- Nearly a million people are plunging into a Christless eternity every single month in China alone ...
- Millions of Syrian refugees are more open today to hearing the gospel than ever before ...
- People groups who are not only unengaged and unreached, but up until now have been totally uncontacted by the outside world ...

In view of these realities and opportunities, we don't have time to stay stagnant, much less shrink back. The Gospel is too good and our God is too great. We must do all that we can to see an ever-increasing, Christ-exalting, Spirit-filled force of men and women pursuing the nations for the glory of His name.

That's why the IMB exists: to partner with churches to empower limitless missionary teams who are making disciples and multiplying churches among unreached peoples and places for the glory of God.

FAST FACTS

Total Field Personnel (09/13)	3,612
Field personnel added 2016	299
Overseas baptisms 2015	93,922
Overseas churches 2015	42,704
Overseas church membership 2015	780,215
New churches 2015	6,138
People groups engaged by IMB personnel (8/16)	872
Unreached People Groups not Engaged (6/17)	3,203

<https://www.imb.org/vision-and-mission/>

We connect to the IMB for reaching out to the world. Through this mechanism we can go into areas of the world along with mission teams already in place to give us guidance on how we can best join in the mission. Each year in December we cooperate together with about 46,000 other SBC churches in what is known as the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. 100% of this offering goes to international mission efforts.

Pray for our international mission involvement. Pray asking how God would have you go and be involved in work around the world. We have many opportunities throughout the year for you to consider and pray about.

DAY 4 THE NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD**READ ACTS 8:26-40**

Key Idea: As a church we are given an opportunity to meet people on our own continent even if they are merely passing through.

One of the entities of our Southern Baptist Convention is the North American Mission Board. We have been very closely aligned with the North American Mission Board (NAMB) for many years. The NAMB works with churches to connect them to the work of spreading the Gospel on this continent. Harp's Crossing has connected many times with NAMB to do work in Canada, West Virginia, Arizona and recently in Baltimore. A link is established with NAMB personnel on the field to come alongside to assist in the work that is already going on.

The North American Mission Board exists to work with churches, associations and state conventions in mobilizing Southern Baptists as a missional force to impact North America with the Gospel of Jesus Christ through evangelism and church planting. We accomplish this through "Send North America", our national strategy for mobilizing churches to plant churches and mobilizing church planters and other missionaries to assist with those efforts. Through "Send Relief", the North American Mission Board is assisting churches in reaching people in need with practical help and the hope of the Gospel. The North American Mission Board is an entity supported by the generous contributions of Southern Baptists with the goal of seeing the Gospel change lives and communities. NAMB assists churches with evangelistic church planting strategy, the identification and training of missionaries, chaplains and church planters through the Send Network, and helps churches impact their communities through Send Relief. NAMB accomplishes this by serving in cooperation with churches, associations, state conventions, other national SBC entities and the Canadian National Baptist Convention.¹⁵

This is a great connection to God's Mission, that we have access to, which enables us to connect not only with people in this country as residents but also like the Ethiopian who may be passing through. How would God have you be involved in missions in the USA, across the street or across the United States? Pray and ask how He might want to use you.

DAY 5 INVITATION: TIME TO CONNECT

READ ISAIAH 6:1-8

Key Idea: When God speaks there is always an invitation to respond by joining Him in what He is up to.

Have you had one of those really special times when you knew God had spoken to you? What did you do? The passage today tells of a biblical historical account when God spoke to Isaiah at a very significant time. The good King Uzziah had died. On that occasion Isaiah heard from God and it is often referred to as the call of Isaiah. God spoke to Isaiah and asked this question, "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*" This was not a one-sided conversation. God asked a question and a question asked anticipates and expects a response. This was an invitation. I am sure it was a high and mighty time but the goal was not merely communication but a response to join God in the mission of proclaiming His Truth so that others would join Him. First however, Isaiah had to respond to the Lord's invitation. Isaiah did respond, "*Here am I! Send me.*"

¹⁵ <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/entities/namb.asp>

The invitation given to Isaiah was to deliver the Word of God to people—some would hear and others would not. It is the same for us. Like Isaiah we have a message to proclaim regardless of the response. The response is in the Lord's Hand. It is ours to obey. Isaiah surrendered to the Lord and became His messenger.

God speaks through His Word, through pastors, and others who expound upon The Word and on The Lord's behalf invite people to respond to the Lord's invitation. Each time we have worship together as the body of Christ we have an invitation. This is not the signal to go home. It is the time to respond to what God has said. God does not speak to entertain or to encourage. He speaks so that we might surrender to His voice in obedience. At Harp's Crossing Baptist Church we have a multitude of opportunities to get in on God's Mission to give glory to Him. Some of those opportunities are right here. We have spoken of these as opportunities to keep the home fires burning so the light here will shine way out there. There are also many ways to connect to God through His Mission outside of the local body. You will find a list of such opportunities right after this last devotion.

Have you heard about mission trips to various locations? Have you ever thought the invitation might be for you? Will you be willing to say, as Isaiah did, *"Here am I, send me"*? Henry Blackaby has said, "find where God is at work and join Him." Look where He is at work across the street and across the world and join Him.

HARP'S CROSSING MISSION OPPORTUNITIES

FAYETTEVILLE, STATE OF GEORGIA AND SOUTHEASTERN USA

Georgia Baptist Children's Home: A Christian ministry of services designed to promote the spiritual, physical and emotional well-being of children, youth and families. These children often come from traumatic situations of poverty, substance abuse in the home, human trafficking, extreme abuse, and complex behavioral issues. <http://www.gbchfm.org/>

Fayette Pregnancy Resource Center: A Christian outreach offering help to anyone facing an unplanned pregnancy. There are opportunities to provide maternity clothes and basic necessities, as well as volunteering at the center. <https://fayetteprc.com/>

Calvary Refuge Center: A ministry that provides emergency and transitional housing and food for homeless individuals and families in need. <http://www.calvaryrefuge.org/>

Angel Tree: Collection of Christmas gifts by members of Harps to give to the homeless ministry, Calvary Refuge Center, Fayette Samaritans, the Children's Home, Fayette Pregnancy Center and Fayette DFACS.

Good News Club: After-school Bible clubs in Fayette and Pike Counties led by members of Harp's Crossing. It is an action-packed time that includes songs, Scripture memory, a missions story and review games or other activities. The purpose is to evangelize boys and girls with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and establish (disciple) them in the Word of God and in a local church for Christian living. Volunteer positions are available to lead/teach/help.

Baptist Builders: A group of our men who are involved in construction projects throughout Georgia, and the Southeast, to build churches and to restore homes and churches damaged by natural disasters.

Disaster Relief: Partnering with the Georgia Baptist Mission Board and the North American Mission Board to help people in our state and region affected by natural disasters.

Southside Baptist Network: Our church is a member of this new association representing 80+ churches in the south metropolitan area. We partner together to advance the Gospel through community impact, church planting, church revitalization, and leadership development. <http://www.southsidebaptistnetwork.org/>

Georgia Baptist Mission Board (GBMB): There are numerous volunteer opportunities for students and adults of all ages working directly with GBMB. These might include construction, disaster relief, campground, drama, VBS, Backyard Bible Clubs, evangelism, etc. Log onto their website to learn more: www.gabaptist.org

H.E.A.R.T. Ministry: A Recovery Program for women afflicted with the disease of addiction. <http://www.penfieldrecovery.com/heart-campus>

Penfield Ministry: A Christ-centered ministry for reclaiming the lives of adult men suffering from addiction to drugs and alcohol. <http://www.penfieldrecovery.com/>

Southwest Christian Care: A ministry dedicated to providing the highest quality care and support for terminally ill patients, children with special needs, seniors and their families. Here are ways to help: <http://www.swchristiancare.org/>

TLC2: A unique ministry at the Georgia Baptist Children's Home for unwed teen mothers. This is a residential program that gives these young mothers a safe place to live while receiving medical care, spiritual counseling, parenting classes, continuing education and most importantly - HOPE.

Fayette Samaritans: A benevolent ministry to serve families in our county in critical need of clothing, groceries and emergency financial assistance. <http://www.fayettesamaritans.org/>

Backpacks for Appalachia: Collection of backpacks and school supplies for poverty-stricken children in Appalachia.

Crocheting: A ministry of Harp's Crossing that crochets caps and scarves for Appalachia and a homeless ministry, as well as baby crocheted caps for a birthing center in West Virginia for incarcerated pregnant women run by Baptists.

NORTH AMERICA – US AND CANADA

NAMB: Mission opportunities throughout North America in partnership with NAMB (North American Mission Board). There are numerous volunteer and career opportunities for students and adults of all ages working directly with NAMB. These might include construction, disaster relief, campground, drama, VBS, Backyard Bible Clubs, evangelism, etc. Log onto their website to learn more: www.namb.net

Through the years, individuals and teams from Harp's Crossing have served on national mission trips in connection with NAMB to Alabama, Alaska,

Arizona, Baltimore, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, and numerous places throughout Georgia.

Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions – Each year, we honor the life of Annie Walker Armstrong (1850-1938) when we give to this annual offering at Easter. 100% of the annual offering goes to the North American Mission Board to support our missionaries and mission work in the US and Canada.

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS: (COUNTRIES AND PEOPLE GROUPS AROUND THE WORLD)

East Asia: A long-term mission focus of Harp's Crossing to a particular unreached people group in partnership with the IMB. Also, we have expanded to other parts of this region. Multiple trips are planned each year.

Chengdu Exchange Program: Each summer we host a group of high school students from Mainland China for a 16-day summer camp experience at our church. Church members serve as host home parents, co-hosts, teachers, conversation assistants, tour assistants, van drivers, cooks and more.

Emerging Mission Partnerships: In recent years, we have sent mission teams from Harp's Crossing to North Africa/Middle East and Russia in connection with the International Mission Board. We are praying to see if God would lead us to a long-term commitment to these areas.

International Mission Board: Mission opportunities throughout the world in partnership with the IMB. There are numerous volunteer and career opportunities for students and adults to go directly with IMB. These might include construction, disaster relief, mission VBS, prayerwalking, building relationship, literature distribution, backpacking, medical, etc. Log onto their website to learn more: www.imb.org

International Mission Trips with Teams from Harp's Crossing: Through the years, individuals and teams from Harp's Crossing have gone on international mission trips in connection with the IMB to Africa, Australia, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, China, Ecuador, Germany, England, France, Germany, Haiti, Holland, India, Ireland, Jordan, Lesotho, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Philippines, Poland, Puerto Rico, Russia, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, Venezuela, and Wales.

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions: Each year, we honor the life of Charlotte "Lottie" Diggs Moon (1840-1912) when we give to this annual offering at Easter. 100% of the annual offering goes to the International Mission Board to support our missionaries and mission work

HARP'S CROSSING MISSION ORGANIZATIONS

WMU – An organization at Harp's Crossing that provides the following age-level groups: Mission Friends (preschool boys/girls), Girls in Action (GAs) (1st-6th grade girls), Acteens (7th-12th grade girls) and Women on Mission (WOM). WMU provides numerous opportunities for missions awareness and involvement, including praying for missions/missionaries, engaging in Mission Action and witnessing, learning about missions, supporting missions, and spiritual development. Volunteer positions are available to lead/teach/help.

Brotherhood – An organization at Harp's Crossing that provides the following age-level groups: Royal Ambassadors (RAs) (1st-6th grade boys), Challengers (7th-12th grade boys) and Baptist Men. There are numerous opportunities for spiritual growth, games and sports, mentoring relationships, and "hands-on" mission projects. Volunteer positions are available to lead/teach/help.

By far the most significant issue of life is to be connected to God! This is a quick review of where we have been over the past year.

Connecting to God through His Church. Of course this begins with being connected to God through the salvation that He provided through the sacrificial death and resurrection of His only Son Jesus Christ. This makes a person a member of God's family—the church. In His church we are united with other believers—God's children for encouragement, accountability, support, training and carrying out the mission of God's church.

Connecting to God through Spiritual Habits. As God's children, growing needs to be a way of life; always learning, always growing. God has given us habits that we need in our lives that become automatic:

- Bible Reading
- Bible Study
- Prayer
- Fellowshipping with other believers
- Tithing and giving

Connecting to God through Serving. God has gifted His children to serve. Jesus said the greatest will be servants. He has equipped us and gifted us for service. He commanded us to serve. As we follow Him in serving He makes us even more aware of our dependence upon Him.

Connecting to God through His Mission. *"God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."* (2 Peter 3:9). Sin has plagued all people and all people need God's gospel message. It is God's plan that that gospel message be announced to all people of the world. Each of us are participants in this mission. He gave us very clear instructions to go and make disciples of all peoples. We cannot do this alone. We need Him and His church.

God has connected us to Him. We need to live our lives connected. I am convinced that the more connected we are, the safer we are.

May the Lord cause the message of these devotionals to grow you toward greater dependence upon Him.

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