

Theological Basis and Motivation: Witness to God's Glory among All Peoples

PANORAMA SERIES

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Scripture Focus

“To whom would you liken Me
And make Me equal and compare Me,
That we would be alike? ...
For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is no one like Me”

Isaiah 46:5, 9 NASB

“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
To Him be the glory forever.”

Romans 11:36 NASB

“... but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

Acts 1:8NASB

Quotes

“As our blessed Lord has required us to pray that his kingdom may come, and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven, it becomes us not only to express our desires of that event by words, but to use every lawful method to spread the knowledge of his name.”

William Carey, 1792

“My heaven is to please God and glorify Him, and give all to Him, and to be wholly devoted to His glory. I do not go to heaven to be advanced, but to give honor to God. It is no matter where I shall be stationed in heaven, whether I have a high or low seat there, but to live and please and glorify God.”

David Brainerd, 1747

Learning Objectives

As a result of the readings, discussion and activities in this session, the cross-cultural witness candidate should be able to do the following:

- discuss motivations for missions
- reference scripture passages related to the glory of God among the peoples of the earth
- understand the means by which we give witness to God's glory
- understand the need for mission formation that leads toward life transformation
- know which personal choices need to be made in order to glorify God

Why Missions?

Why do missions? While most Christians can answer in the affirmative that we should do missions, most cannot give a clear answer as to why. In addition, it could be that some of the reasons for doing missions are not drawn from Scripture but are assumed to be required because we were told they are right or they make good sense to us.

In this session, we seek to answer the basic question – ‘Why do missions?’ Simple, naïve answers are not adequate when we are confronted with the harsh realities of hard situations or lack of fruit, or when we go through days of suffering or deal with difficult people. A well-reasoned biblical foundation is needed in order to be sustained and to bolster our resolve as we seek to be faithful cross-cultural witnesses.

Case Study: Growing Up to Be a Missionary

The church in which I grew up was typical of most Baptist churches. Because of an active youth ministry and strong outreach program, the church was a vibrant and essential part of my life. Along with annual revivals and Vacation Bible School, there was always a seasonal emphasis on missions. During this time, two things usually happened: we heard missionary speakers talk about their work and we gave to the annual offering for foreign missions.

As a young person, I was awed by the stories of these modern day heroes of the faith. In these men and women, I saw a clear expression of what Christian commitment and service should be. I knew that even though I could be a pastor, minister of education, or youth minister and that these would be worthy callings, being a missionary would be the height of pursuing God and His purposes. In my young mind, mission was an ideal to be pursued in order to be the best Christian possible. The chief question was not “Why do missions?” Rather, the question was “Why not?”

Reasons for doing missions were certainly given. Missionary speakers, as well as my pastor, Sunday school teachers, and youth minister frequently listed the reasons as to why we should do missions. These reasons became part of my thinking and calling and eventually led me to leave the United States to serve as a career missionary. They became my stated and unstated reasons for doing missions. As I recall, three reasons were central to my doing missions: commands, need, and love.

Commands

Along with the biblical injunctions against murder, telling falsehoods, and coveting another person’s possessions, I was told that Jesus commands us to go and preach the gospel to all creatures. Missions was one among a number of commands to obey. If I did not obey the missions commands, then I was being disobedient. The mission task was another obligation that must be met lest I find myself disobedient, and thus, living as a sinful Christian.

Because meeting an obligation was motivation for missions, I began to think that I had to do missions in order to please God and to measure up to His expectations. Even though Christ had died for my sins and reconciled me with God, this was not enough. I had to do something more, such as missions, in order to continue deserving God’s salvation and favor. For me, missions became a matter of doing good works for God.

Need

Highlighted in almost every talk, sermon, and lesson of missions was the tremendous need of people around the world. This was usually expressed in numbers and statistics. The speaker would first give us numbers of people in a particular country who did not know Jesus Christ. Then, in order to create maximum impact, the number of ministers in the United States was cited in comparison to the number of missionaries in that particular country. The need was obvious.

Because the desperate spiritual plight of men, women, and children was placed front and center, these unsaved people and their need became the primary point of missions. Missions, for me, became the pictures of their faces and the stories of their plight.

Love

Communicated in most mission messages was the thought that I was a fortunate recipient of God’s love. And thus, because I had been loved by God, I was to love others with the same kind of love.

The problem was that I did not, could not, love others as God had loved me. At best, my love became a kind of condescending pity or paternalism. It was an emotional response to ‘pitiful humanity’. Missions, for me, became reaching down to the less fortunate in order to take care of them, to minister to them.

Reasons to Go but Not Reasons to Stay

These three reasons provided impetus for me to leave my country of birth and travel halfway around the world to do missionary work. However, within a matter of months, this initial impulse evaporated in the face of hardships, separation from family, and resistant Buddhism. I found that merely obeying commands was not enough. This was chiefly because I was obeying in order to prove myself worthy of God's love. What I came to realize in time was that there was nothing I could do to deserve or earn God's love. If I spent the whole of my life in missionary service, I would not merit God's favor. For by grace that I had been saved through faith; and not of myself, it was the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

I found the physical and spiritual needs all around me to be overwhelming. Need in theory is quite different than need in front of me and at my feet. I began to reason

that needs existed in Dallas and that they were of the kind that I could actually do something about. The needs in front of me in Sri Lanka were pervasive and seemingly unsolvable.

I found that my love was emotionally driven and at best was a kind of pity. My love went only so far and did little to change people. In fact, in many ways, my love was about me doing something to assuage guilty feelings about my unusual and privileged place in the world.

Early in my missionary service, I came to the conclusion that what had caused me to go to Sri Lanka was not enough to keep me there. My reasons for doing missions were self-centered and about my religious and social needs. I had to rethink why I was to do missions.

Think About #1

Think through and record a short response to the following questions:

#1 Why do you want to do missions?

#2 What do you understand as adequate or biblical reasons for doing missions?

#3 In what ways might obedience to commands, need, and love become less than pure mission motives for you?

Whose Mission?

While obedience, need, and love are not bad motives and are part of the reason for mission service, they are insufficient in themselves. They will inevitably center the mission in our feelings, our aims, and our ability. In short, mission becomes our mission.

Our reason for doing missions must be continually refined by and redirected to God's mission and His eternal purposes. Mission does not belong to any one group or church – it is God's mission. Nor should it be reduced to what we initiate, service we render, or activities we do – it is God's mission. We are called to the mission originated in God, motivated by God's concerns, and propelled by God's power. **Mission is to be the Mission of God.**ⁱ

Several key questions will help us to base what we do in God's mission –

- Who is God?
- What does God ask of His creation?
- What is God's ultimate aim?
- By what means are we formed for God's mission?
- How are we made ready for mission?

Who is God?

He is Like None Other

The world is full of gods. Some of these are made of wood, metal, or stone, looking wild and evil. Others are more subtle and seductive, going by names such as Lexus and BMW, religion and tradition, theories and ideas, agendas and plans, children and jobs, the stadium and the mall. While their worship is not overtly religious, they are likewise a god, revered just as much as those made of wood, metal, or stone.

A god is whatever or whomever we value or give disproportionate honor above the Creator God. Created things are not bad in themselves. Created things are good and to be enjoyed. It is when they are elevated above the Creator that they become god. People of every culture and all levels of society inflate the value of created things, possessions, or fellow human beings. False gods are everywhere.

Around the world, false gods are being worshipped, as if they are the true God. In temples, homes, and street corners, people give love and honor that belongs only to holy God to that which is less than God. Therefore, the reason for missions must begin with an understanding of who God is. **He is like none other.**

God is Creator

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light."

Genesis 1:1-3 NASB

If the earth was "formless and void" and darkness covered the earth, then what is the extent of what God created? God created everything that is: all form, color, ability, potential and essence. He created light, darkness, water, the heavens, dry land, roses, pine trees, mustard seeds, apples, snow, salmon, whales, hawks, sparrows, elephants, mice, men, and women. He created it all. He merely spoke and day came into existence, trees appeared, and men and women stood on earth.

"All things have been created through Him and for Him."

Colossians 1:16 NASB

Who is this God? **He is Creator.**

God is Absolute

"Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all."

1 Chronicles 29:11 NASB

The background of this text is King David at the end of his reign over the nation of Israel. He uses a string of supreme, kingly adjectives to describe the Lord God: greatness, power, glory, victory, majesty, dominion. What is King David communicating?

God demonstrates through His power that He is the only true God and King. Through creation and His activities with humans, God shows that no other god has power like His. Other gods are pretenders to power when in fact they are empty and void of power. Only God, as revealed as Yahweh, makes clear His absoluteness through His mighty and powerful activity.

Who is this God? **He is Absolute.**

God is Awesome

"Say to God, 'How awesome are Your works! Because of the greatness of Your power Your enemies will give feigned obedience to You. All the earth will worship You, and will sing praises to You; they sing praises to Your name.'"

Psalms 66:3-4 NASB

What is the extent of and response to God’s power and greatness – His awesomeness? All the inhabitants of the earth will eventually acknowledge the power and greatness of God and worship Him. Even those who are enemies of God will be struck with the awesomeness and terror of God. Their acknowledgement of God as God will be certain.

Who is this God? **He is Awesome.**

The chief aim of God’s creation and acts of power are to demonstrate His glory. His design is that all of creation point to Him as the mighty and powerful Creator, and exclaim: “You are Creator God, Absolute and Awesome.” All honor, glory, renown and praise belong to Him and Him alone. He is Absolute, Awesome, Creator—He is God!

¹ For a more complete discussion of *missio Dei* or the Mission of God, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 389-93; and Mark Laing, “*Missio Dei*: Some Implications for the Church,” *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. XXXVII, no. 1 (Jan. 2009).

Think About #2

Put in your own words what is meant by these descriptors for God:

Like None Other-

Creator-

Absolute-

Awesome-

There is no person or thing with which God can be compared. He is without equal. All pseudo-gods pale in the light of God's power and glory. In fact, it is absurd to even speak of them as gods. Most of them are non-beings and have absolutely no existence on their own. They exist only because the Lord God created them.

Can any man, object, or cause be compared to Him? No one is His equal ... He is Like None Other!

*“Who is like You among the gods, O Lord?
Who is like You, majestic in holiness,
Awesome in praises, working wonders?”*
Exodus 15:11 NASB

*“There is none like You, O Lord;
You are great, and great is Your name in might.”*
Jeremiah 10:6 NASB

Mission exists because of who God is. He moves toward humankind in order that they might know Him as Creator God, Absolute and Awesome.

What Does God Ask of His Creation?

Because the Creator is Absolute and Awesome, there is no room for other gods. He demands and deserves everything. And yet, humankind does not know and worship Him as God. Instead of honor, men and women choose to ignore and reject God. Instead of worship, men and women bow before other creatures and created objects, and they give their allegiance to their possessions and things.

God chose Abraham and Israel that they might know and worship Him, but His purpose is not restricted to them alone. Neither is His goodness confined to one nationality, language, or country. Scripture gives ample evidence that God's purpose is that all peoples know and worship Him.

Peoples

The knowledge of God is promised to peoples - linguistic, ethnic, and family groupings of the earth. The language of nations or geographical entities (e.g., Turkey, Brazil, or Asia) does not convey the intended meaning. The breadth of God's blessing includes the most basic of human groupings - tribes, languages, families, households.

*“And in you all the **families** of the earth will be blessed.”*
Genesis 12:3 NASB

*“All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the **families** of the nations will worship before You.”*
Psalm 22:27 NASB

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all **nations**.”*
Matthew 28:19 NASB

All Peoples

The knowledge of God is not just for one people, or for a certain kind of people, or for those of a particular time or place. It encompasses all people of all places and all times.

*“That Your way may be known on the earth,
Your salvation among **all nations**.”*
Psalm 67:2 NASB

*“Arise, O God, judge the earth!
For it is You who possesses **all the nations**.”*
Psalm 82:8 NASB

*“The Lord has bared His holy arm in the sight of **all the nations**, that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God.”*
Isaiah 52:10 NASB

*“For I know their works and their thoughts, the time is coming to gather **all nations and tongues**. And they shall come and see My glory.”*
Isaiah 66:18 NASB

*“I will shake **all the nations**; and they will come with the wealth of the nations, and I will fill this house with glory,” says the Lord of hosts.*
Haggai 2:7 NASB

*“And that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to **all the nations**, beginning from Jerusalem.”*
Luke 24:47 NASB

The word ‘all’ is used in conjunction with the nations 119 times throughout Scripture.ⁱⁱ God creates all the men and women of the earth and desires that they know and worship Him as God.

All Peoples Worshipping God

All the peoples of the earth in their diversity of language, ethnicity, and culture are meant to worship God. Their words and songs of praise are His delight. Worship is not to be in a monotone, uniform chorus but in one that is colorful, diverse, and full. Songs, chants, and shouts of praise in Arabic, Mandarin, Portuguese, Farsi and Hindi, through dance, chants, drums, and guitars, in cathedrals, caves, homes, and under trees make full the worship of God.

*“All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and they **shall glorify** Your name.”*
Psalm 86:9 NASB

*“O clap your hands, all peoples; **shout to God** with the voice of joy.”*
Psalm 47:1 NASB

*“The time is coming to gather all nations and tongues.
And they shall come and see My glory.”*

Isaiah 66:18 NASB

All the peoples of the earth are a result of God’s creative activity. They belong to God; thus, they are meant to worship Him.

All the peoples of the earth are the focus of God’s covenant relationship with Israel. God’s covenant with Abraham is a means of blessing to the peoples of the earth, so that they might know and worship Him.

All the peoples of the earth are meant to know Christ, the visible expression of God’s glory and love, in order that they might worship God.

The End of Time

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’ ”

Revelation 7:9 NASB

John, a disciple of Jesus, is in exile on the island of Patmos. As he is praying, the curtain of time draws back so that John sees God in all His glory and what God’s rule will look like at the end of time. John sees that God will reclaim His creation from the rule of other gods.

¹ In addition to these uses, ‘all’ is used with ‘earth’, ‘ends of the earth’, and ‘world’ 91 times and ‘flesh’ 15 times.

Think About #3

#1 In Revelation 7:9, what is the significance of the words - nations, tribes, peoples and tongues?

#2 What will be the purpose of the gathering described?

What is God’s Ultimate Aim?

The aim of missions is the worship of God by all the peoples of the earth. No one and nothing else is worthy of His worship!

Researchers tell us that there are approximately 13,000 ethno-linguistic groups in existence.ⁱⁱⁱ Best estimates are that the worship of God is void or nearly absent among approximately 2,000 of these groups.^{iv} The population of these groups totals approximately 1.2 billion or 19 percent of the world’s population.^v God’s desire is that He be known and worshipped not just among some people, or people of a certain region of the world, or a particular language, but among all these peoples.

*“Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel,
Who alone works wonders.*

*And blessed be His glorious name forever;
And may the whole earth be filled with His glory.*

Amen, and Amen.” Psalm 72:18-19 NASB

Why Do Missions?

God calls a people from all the peoples of the earth to Himself and for His purpose – Israel first and then the church. He calls His people to take His character and purpose, in order that He might make His name great in and through their actions and words. In this way, the purpose of the people of God joins the mission of God - to make God’s name known and call the peoples of the world to worship Him.

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” 1 Peter 2:9-10 NASB

In this passage, Peter reminds us that God calls His people to a supernatural relationship and a unique purpose. Through imagery and descriptors usually reserved for Israel (see Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 43:20-21), the nature of the church is underscored. The church is “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession.” The people of God are a new entity made up of different races, nations, and people groups. Biological and cultural traits no longer distinguish the people of God. Rather, the constituting element for the church is its call to be holy and set apart as a chosen race and a holy nation. The church, called from darkness to light, remains within the world as a distinct culture, placed on the side of God and His purposes, and called to His holy character.

For what purpose is the church called into this relationship? The church exists for the proclamation of God’s glory to the peoples of the world. As a chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation, and His possession, the church proclaims the wonderful deeds of God. The church can be the chosen race only in and through this proclamation.

The content of this proclamation is not just religious talk, systematic theology, or spiritual self-help. The people of God proclaim what they have witnessed firsthand - the “excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” – the glory of God.

By What Means are We Formed for God’s Mission?

“... but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Acts 1:8

God’s mission is accomplished via the witness of His people. However, witness is more than an act; it is an identity and way of being.

The root of the Greek words *martus* (“witness”) and *marturein* (to “bear witness”) conveys the sense of “one who remembers, who has knowledge of something by recollection, and who can thus tell about it.”^{vi} A witness remembers, has knowledge, and thus can speak from personal comprehension or first-hand experience. In general usage, a witness is one who vouches for the facts in a legal case or one who speaks of truths of which he himself is convinced.^{vii} Because Peter is an eyewitness of the crucifixion of Jesus, he describes himself as a “witness of the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter 5:1).^{viii} And yet, the writers of the New Testament, especially Luke, add the dimension of “emphatic appeal ... for the recognition [of facts] in faith.”^{ix} Witness becomes more than an objective reporting of facts; it is a confession of belief in those facts with the intention to persuade others to accept them as true.

By the second century, *martus* developed a step further to signify those who bear witness at the risk of their lives. Emphasis on participation in Christ’s sufferings is certainly present in the New Testament (Mark 8:34; Colossians 1:24), but witness and suffering are specifically linked together in the years that follow as the church experiences severe persecution. Bearing witness means they emulate Jesus’ witness to the Father; just as Jesus goes to the cross, believers give witness unto death. Thus, a martyr is one who gives the ultimate witness.^x That which they give witness to with their lips, they prove as true with their blood. The rapid expansion of the early church is due in part to the witness of those willing to suffer and die. According to Tertullian (AD 160-225), an early church leader, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”^{xi}

For the followers of Christ in the New Testament and early church, witness is not peripheral or circumstantial. It is an essential part of life. Historian Stephen Neill makes the following assessment of these first believers: “What is clear is that every Christian was a witness.”^{xii} Witness is central to the believer’s identity and purpose;

it is the “overarching definition of Christian life and practice.”^{xiii}

Witness is Our Identity

Like the early Christ followers, once we see God’s glory and experience His love, we **become** witnesses of His glory and love. Witness is more than a task that must be done, an obligation that must be fulfilled, or a job that we are paid to do. It is who we **are**. Even in baptism, we verbally and physically confess Christ and identify ourselves with His community, and thus, we are witnesses of Him. Witness is the identity Jesus gives His followers: “... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses...” (*Acts 1:8*).^{xiv} A few days after these words are spoken, the Spirit falls on the disciples, and they boldly tell “of the mighty deeds of God” (*Acts 2:11*). They become what Jesus said they would be – witnesses. Peter, speaking for the group, gives an account of the death and resurrection of Jesus, which they had witnessed (*Acts 2:32*). Even though they are fishermen, tax collectors, and common people, they are witnesses above all else.

The role of witness is much larger than vocation or cause. Most of us have been taught from an early age to interpret the witness of Paul in terms of a vocation. This way of seeing Paul is so engrained in us that without a second thought we explain Paul’s passionate witness with a profession –missionary. Thus, we give Paul a vocational designation that he never uses of himself. Paul refers to himself as “an apostle” (*Colossians 1:1*), “a bond servant” (*Romans 1:1*), “a prisoner” (*Ephesians 3:1*), and “a witness” (*Acts 22:15*), but never does he use the term missionary to define himself.^{xv} And though Paul supports himself through making tents, this vocation does not define him. Vocation is a secondary issue. Witness is primary and defines who he is. His ambition (*Romans 15:20*), hope (*Philippians 1:20*), longing (*Romans 15:23*), and passion is that he might bear witness to Jesus.

Just like Paul, no matter what our vocational choice or gifting is –engineer, teacher, social worker, student, or computer programmer –our identity is first and foremost that of a witness.

If ‘witness’ is your identity, how is this identity currently reflected in your vocation, talents, family, plans, etc?

Witness is Our Purpose

God’s purpose in sending the Son is the glory of His name. As holy and eternal God, He becomes man and empties Himself in sacrificial love and thereby reveals “the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (*2 Corinthians 4:6 NASB*).

Jesus’ prayer in John 12 anticipates the means through which God’s glory is to be realized. With the prospect of death before Him, Jesus yields Himself to God’s purposes. He finally prays, “Father, glorify Your name.” A voice from heaven responds, “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” (*John 12:28 NASB*).

Jesus’ purpose was to reveal God’s glorious love and mercy. Likewise, He commissions His followers for the same purpose. He exhorts those who would be His followers to “let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (*Matthew 5:16 NASB*).

Paul states the same purpose in a different way: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (*1 Corinthians 10:31 NASB*).

Because God’s love through Jesus Christ is His glory on earth, we glorify Him as our lives reflect and tell of this love. Much of the confusion about purpose stems from two misunderstandings. First, if we believe we must work for our salvation, then we will feel compelled to do something for God. Witness is too simple of an act or not substantial enough, so we want to do something more tangible or grand, such as build a church, raise money for a cause, or do something heroic. We forget that salvation is by grace alone, so that we might not boast in ourselves. Rather, the best we can do is boast of God and point to what God has done and who Jesus is. In fact, witness to God is our declaration of His unmerited love and grace toward us.

Second, because we do not trust the power of a simple witness to change lives or change the world, we give ourselves to other activities that either supplement witness or are in place of it. This is clearly seen in missionaries who think that the ‘natives’ have to be civilized before they can receive a proper witness. In the end, schools and hospitals become the purpose of missions. Education and health care are certainly part of our response to the problems of our world and expressions of love for others, but these need to be accompanied by a verbal confession of our transformation in Jesus.

In what ways do you make your life's purpose something other than witness? Why?

In order to maintain a clear understanding of our purpose, we need to continually remind ourselves that the Holy Spirit is the fundamental witness. He Himself bears witness of Jesus (*John 15:26*), and He empowers the believer for witness (*Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49*). Through the work of the Spirit, our pale and faulty words and actions become brilliant and true messages of witness. Not only our words and actions, but our lives are transformed into true witnesses by the mysterious work of the Spirit.^{xvi}

Becoming Witnesses

In order to understand how one becomes a witness, the lives of the Apostle Paul and Perpetua illustrate this process and encourage us to do the same.

Paul - a Witness

On the road to Damascus, Paul encounters Christ and thus begins a journey that produces life change and converts him into a witness. At the outset of this journey, while still in Damascus, he proclaims Jesus as the Son of God (*Acts 9:20*). As he begins to convince those around of Jesus' life and death, the local Jews become agitated and devise a plot to kill him (*Acts 9:23*). Paul escapes over the city wall in a basket. After time in Arabia (*Galatians 1:15-18*), he travels to Jerusalem where he seeks to present himself to the disciples.

Paul's reputation as a persecutor of Jesus' followers is so great that the disciples are afraid to meet with him. It is Barnabas who takes Paul to the disciples, describes his encounter with Christ, and vouches for the boldness of his proclamation in Damascus. After being received by the disciples, Paul begins witnessing to the Jews in Jerusalem. Once again, he causes a stir, so the disciples have to send him to Tarsus. He stays there until Barnabas collects him on his way to Antioch.

From Antioch, Paul and Barnabas make their way to Cyprus and beyond. The book of Acts gives an account of how witness takes Paul and his companions throughout the known world. As the account of his life comes to a close, Paul is in Rome confined to a house still giving witness to all who come to him (*Acts 28:31*).

Paul does more than journey from Damascus to Jerusalem to Tarsus to Antioch and beyond. He takes a journey of another type. From the time in Damascus, his identity as a witness is set. But this is not the end of the story. This identity grows and changes, as he journeys in his understanding of the ways of God and how to proclaim God's glory and love to the Gentiles. Barnabas and others walk alongside him, teaching him about the life and death of Christ and defending him against those who would take his life. He is being formed as he journeys in witness.

Perpetua - a Witness

At the beginning of the third century, Christianity is spreading rapidly throughout North Africa. The center of this growth is a vibrant Christian community in the city of Carthage. When the Roman Emperor Septimus Severus issues a decree in AD 202 forbidding conversion to Christianity, the local proconsul in Carthage immediately arrests six students of the Christian faith (Catechumen), who are awaiting baptism. Vibia Perpetua, newly married and the mother of an infant boy, is among those arrested.^{xvii}

Perpetua's father pleads with her in prison and at her trial to renounce her faith. He appeals to her as a mother that she think of her child; as a daughter that she not bring grief on her father; and as one born of nobility that she not bring shame on her family. With each appeal, she becomes more resolute in her confession of Christ. In one exchange, Perpetua asks her father, "Do you see this vase here, for example, or waterpot or whatever?" "Could it be called by any other name than what it is?" Her father answers that it cannot be called by any other name. She declares, "Well, so too I cannot be called anything other than what I am, a Christian."^{xviii} Thus, she maintains her confession to the end. When the judge implores her to make sacrifice to the gods for the health of the emperor, she simply answers, "I am a Christian," and thus seals her fate. At the age of twenty-two, Perpetua follows Christ into an arena where she is mauled by wild animals.

In reading the personal account of her arrest, imprisonment, and trial, one hears this young woman become more and more resolute in her faith and in her determination to give witness to Christ in the arena. Though she is arrested as only a new follower of Jesus, in a matter of days she dies as a valiant witness to a stadium full of pagans, to the community of believers in Carthage, and to Christians throughout the centuries.^{xix} She does not choose martyrdom but journeys down a road of choosing Jesus that leads to her witness before crowds in the stadium.

Present-day Witness

You and I are on the same journey as that of Paul and Perpetua. Through a series of events, the witness of a friend, a caring Sunday school teacher or a parent, you learned of the love of Father, believed in the Son and now worship God. You confessed Jesus through baptism, as you gave witness to the death of your old life and the beginning of your new life in Christ. From that point, you sought God's guidance in life choices and actions, because you believe that your life has divine purpose. In schooling, marriage, and vocation, your concern is that you do the will of God and that you honor and glorify God.

Possibly a call to missions is part of your journey, and thus you are doing everything you can to prepare for cross-cultural witness. Or, maybe you are already involved in missions and have journeyed to places like Indonesia, Brazil, or Paris. Because you need to increase your understanding of God and grow in your capacity to give witness to God's glory, you are seeking other like-minded people with whom you can study and grow.

No matter where you are in the journey, your course is to know Christ, be conformed to His image, and glorify Him with your life. The aim of your journey is not more knowledge for the sake of knowledge, or more religious activity for the sake of activity. Rather, the aim of your journey is that you be formed more and more into a witness of God's love and glory.

The reason you do missions is because **you are a witness** to the glory of God. You do not have to become someone else, but you are on a journey of formation into a witness.

Write in your own words what it means for you to give witness to the glory of God.

How Are We Made Ready for Mission?

We are made ready for mission through life transformation. Why transformation? Simply put, transformation is necessary because **mission is people being transformed by people who are being transformed by the glory of God.** Transformation is essential to witness, and thus, the journey to the nations takes us through formation that transforms us. In the same way that Paul and Perpetua were transformed for and by the journey, our journey is about our own transformation.

Transformation

Life is a never-ending chain of circumstances, events, and encounters that require adjustment and change. As human beings, we are constantly moving from one state of being to another. On the molecular level, our cells are dividing, growing, and mutating at a rate that is beyond comprehension. The constant alteration in our cellular structure is part of a complex process whereby our bodies grow, adapt to and defend against the changing environment within our bodies and the threats from outside. On the macro level, we navigate countless successive changes as we move through the course of a day.

From bed to shower, table to car, home to office, encounters with people to performance of technical activities, mental decisions to physical activities, we are constantly adapting, acting, and re-acting. For example, in the course of driving a car from one point to another, we encounter, process, and adapt to thousands of bits of information and circumstances. A non-response or a mis-adjustment may mean that we take a wrong exit, rear-end the car in front of us, or even lose our life. Change is necessary for life, and life is defined by change.

In the same way and with the same intensity, our journey with Christ is full of alternatives, events, and encounters that require a series of responses. The question is not whether change is necessary or desired. Change is a fact. Rather, it is a question of response. The manner in which we respond to our changing environment and the alternatives in front of us determines whether change results in transformation or stagnation. Paul had this choice and took the path that led to Rome. Perpetua was arrested and then responded in faith toward God's purpose and glory.

Stagnation in the Christ journey is like cellular mutation that eventually results in cancer or a missed turn that

becomes a long, costly detour. Stagnation is the result of wrong or uninformed responses, or a continual refusal to respond. While it may seem as though things are static or unchanged about our life in Christ, in reality every wrong, uninformed, or neglected response produces regression or deterioration.

Transformation means conversion to a fresh perspective, transition into a new understanding or change of character. The Apostle Paul describes transformation as the desired outcome for the Christian life. To the believers in Rome, he writes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is...” (*Romans 12:2 NASB*). Transformation is a necessity if the believer is to know God and participate in His mission. Once again, in his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes transformation as the dynamic, ongoing work of the Lord. “But we all, with unveiled faces, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being *transformed* into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (*2 Corinthians 3:18 NASB*).

Our image, our identity is transformed to that of the Son of God and our new image demonstrates His glory. In both cases, transformation produces persuasive proof of God’s purpose and glory; it produces witness. It is the basis of mission.

While we may prefer to view transformation as sudden and instantaneous, it is usually the result of a long and deliberate string of events. In the case of cancer, the resulting melanoma is the latest mutation in a long series of mutations. The disease begins on the microscopic level years before the signs of cancer appear. Even the collision of two vehicles is the conclusion of a series of conditions and events: wet roads, bald tires, a morning argument with a spouse, a distraction in the back seat, or poor performance on an exam. It all adds up and is part of the failure to brake, the collision, the car being totaled, and the trip to the hospital.

Transformation to the image of Christ takes place over time and through a process. Formation is *trans*-formation, meaning that formation takes place over time. The prefix carries the meaning of ‘across’ or ‘through’ and thus implies progression or process.^{xx} We may imagine that change in the spiritual realm operates according to special rules. Change in our interior life, we think, is the result of a “Holy Ghost-induced moment” in which we are changed in the twinkling of an eye, with the closing “amen” of a prayer or as the result of a special ‘call’. While this can and does happen, it is

certainly presumptuous to assume that this is the way in which spiritual change always happens. God can and does heal individuals of their cancer, rescue a child from the arms of death in response to parents’ prayers, or redeem a drug addict from her sin in an instant. And yet, God routinely works through the processes of life.

In addition, we view change in our spiritual nature to be disconnected from the physical or secular events and circumstances of our lives. Thus, we understand discipleship as something that takes place in the interior life alone, disconnected from the exterior processes of life. In this view, spiritual formation is narrowly focused on a person’s spirit through discipleship activities such as prayer, fasting, and contemplation. The emphasis is usually on strengthening the spirit in isolation from the world, so that it might do battle against the flesh. Historically, spiritual formation has resulted in withdrawal from the world. The Desert Fathers escaped to caves, monks of the medieval period gathered in monasteries, and the Amish retreated to secluded communities. Church can become our cloistered, sacred space where we worship, pray, and form our spiritual life. The classroom, office, supermarket, and gym are the places where we do battle.

To the contrary of these assumptions, formation that is transformational and thus missional must include and take place in every aspect of our lives.

Formation is a process, and it encompasses the whole of life. If limited to that which is experienced in a moment or confined only to the sphere of the spiritual, then it has little or no bearing on the world. I want to suggest that a more holistic and realistic way to view formation is to see it as mission or missional.

Summation - Why Missions?

Our motivation for missions is not from a need to earn God's love, or guilt over what we have, or pity for people's plight. We do missions because of who God is and for His glory. We do mission because of who we have become – **witnesses**.

Principles for Those Who Are Witnesses of God's Glory

- Our motive for mission can be about us if not focused on **who God is** and His eternal purposes.
- Mission is grounded in the Creator God who is Absolute and Awesome and like none other. Mission originates in and is sustained by God. Our **God is a missionary God**.
- The purpose of God is that He be known, glorified and worshipped among **all the peoples of the world**. He is the God of all peoples; they are created for Him and His purposes.
- We participate in making God known through our **witness** of what we have experienced of Him and how He has changed our lives.
- We are witnesses by means of God's transformative work in our lives. We do not go to witness or do witnessing activities as much as **we are witnesses**.
- Mission in the end is **people being transformed** by people who are being transformed by God's love and glory.

Learning Activities ~ Before You Go, Be Formed

Mission does not necessarily mean 'missionary', nor must it refer to the missionary enterprise. Missionary is a vocational designation, and the missionary enterprise is only one avenue through which we give witness. Mission is larger than one vocation or a particular endeavor. Mission signifies a way of being or a lifestyle. It denotes a way of being with God and in the world as a witness to His glory. Therefore, mission formation is the particular process through which we are transformed into God's people for witness of who He is to the world. There are a number of things to keep in mind that will help you in your formation.

First, formation should orient your life toward the *missio Dei*, **the mission of God**.^{xxi} God's movement toward creation in redemptive and healing love is the focus, rather than a program of the church (ministry), or an organization of the denomination (mission board), or a vocation (missionary). Formation should push us beyond temporal emphases and programs and cause us to look for the activity of God. By focusing on God, the primal missionary, we become party to what He is doing in the world.

Second, formation should take place within **the realities of life**. Instead of retreating from life or disengaging from the realities of the world, formation engages the needs of the world and the lives of people. In no way does this negate spiritual disciplines or emphasis on the interior life. Yet, outside of engagement with the world, formation is incomplete and can even be malformed.

Third, formation must focus on **the peoples of the world**. Because the Creator loves the world, He sends his Son, Jesus Christ. As the Father sends His Son, the Son sends His followers (John 20:21). Formation exists for the preparation of followers for witness to the nations. If formation becomes an end in itself, then the Christian life can become solely about our development or our personal and national interests. If election becomes about us, our families, and our nation, as it did for Israel, then we become disqualified as witnesses.

Talk is cheap. Doing is expensive. Obeying what we know to do and what we know to be right is the hard work of any kind of formation, but especially that which is missional.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “*You can only learn what obedience is by obeying. It is no use asking questions; for it is only through obedience that you come to learn the truth. With our conscience distracted by sin, we are confronted by the call of Jesus to spontaneous obedience.*”^{xviii}

The call to God's mission does more than give us a new vocation, or relocate us outside the border of our native

country, or require us to learn a new language. Because it is an expensive call to obedience, to know God's truth, it requires a lot from us.

Below are some things formation might require of you. Read each of these and record how they might become realities in your life.

Imagine

Try to imagine Arab, Persian, Chinese, Indian peoples worshipping God.

Read Revelation 7:9 and visualize the reality that is to come.

Lifestyle

What lifestyle choices can you make right now in order for God to be glorified in your actions, words, relationships, spending habits, attitudes, etc.?

Peoples

The peoples of world do not just live beyond our borders, but in our cities and neighbors. What might you do to connect to these people and know of their lives and needs?

Witness

In what ways can you live out your identity as a witness? How might you reflect who God is in your conversations, relationships, work, and play?

Transformation

In what ways and through what kinds of life experiences is God transforming you into His witness?

Resources for Witness to God's Glory among All Peoples

Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission by David J. Bosch.

Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 1991.

Bosch provides a reasoned basis for mission activity that is biblical, historical, and strategic. This book is an essential resource for any person who wants to explore any topic related to missions. 534 pages.

The Open Secret by Lesslie Newbigin. Revised edition. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans. 1995.

Newbigin forms a mission theology around an examination of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Spirit. From this vantage point, he touches a number of topics related to missions: liberation theology, witness to people of other faiths, and church growth. This accessible book offers the reader an introduction to a biblical manner of seeing the mission of God. 200 pages.

The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative by Christopher Wright. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. 2006.

Wright is an Old Testament scholar and thus does more than give the standard New Testament perspective on mission. Rather, he interprets the whole of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, in light of God's mission. He deals with a number of difficult subjects, such as election, covenant, and idolatry, in light of mission. 581 pages.

“The Story of His Glory” by Steven C.

Hawthorne. In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, edited by Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne. Pasadena: William Carey Library. 2009.

15 pages.

Christianity Rediscovered by Vincent J. Donovan. 25th anniversary edition. Maryknoll: Orbis Books 2003.

169 pages.

PANORAMA - a broad view of the world and your place in it.
PANORAMA is a web-based multi-media small group experience facilitated by a Network church to prepare their people for cross-cultural service in the world.

End Notes

¹ William Carey, *An Inquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* (Leicester, England: Ann Ireland, 1792), 1.

² Jonathan Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd* (1749), ed. Norman Pettit, vol. 7 in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 330-31

³ For a more complete discussion of Missio Dei, or the Mission of God, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 389-93; and Mark Laing, "Missio Dei: Some Implications for the Church," *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. XXXVI, No. 1 (Jan. 2009).

⁴ In addition to these uses, "all" is used with "earth", "ends of the earth", "world" 91 times, "flesh" 15 times.

⁵ Research cited by Global Evangelization Movement (GEM) at <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/globalchristianity/>. Resource no longer available online.

⁶ David Barrett and Todd Johnson describe and quantify this portion of the world's population - include 1,030 cities and closed countries as unreached segments in addition to the 2,000 people groups. See *Our Globe and How to Reach It: Seeing the World Evangelized by AD2000 and Beyond* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1990), 26; and David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson, and George T. Kurian, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2 volumes, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁷ From <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/globalchristianity/resources.php>. Resource no longer available online.

⁸ Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 475; see also Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), 70.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 476-86.

¹⁰ See also 1 John 4:14.

¹¹ Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 492.

¹² The first use of the word in this way is found in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (AD 155-167) written immediately after the death of Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna. This use of witness is hinted at by Paul in his description of Stephen: "And when the blood of Your witness was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him" (Acts 22:20).

¹³ Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, trans. S. Thelwall, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986).

¹⁴ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 22.

¹⁵ Darrell Guder, "Worthy Living: Work and Witness from the Perspective of Missional Church Theology," *Word & World*, vol. 24, no. 4 (Fall 2005), 426. Guder goes on to say, "Everything that the Christian community is and does relates, either obediently or disobediently, to this vocation of witness."

¹⁶ See also Luke 24:48.

¹⁷ While apostle can mean "sent one," Paul usually employs it to refer to the twelve apostles of Jesus and to himself as one "abnormally born" (1 Corinthians 15:8). Paul's reference to himself as an apostle says that he is a commissioned spokes person for the risen Lord.

¹⁸ Look at the work of the Holy Spirit in our witness, see Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1962).

¹⁹ Among other catechumens are Revocatus, Saturninus, Secundulus, and Felicity. Last of these was Perpetua's slave girl, pregnant at the time of her arrest but delivers a child in prison prior to her martyrdom.

²⁰ W. H. Shewring, trans. *The Passion of SS. Perpetua and Felicity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931). The account of Perpetua's arrest, trial and martyrdom is considered historical by most modern scholars. Some believe Tertullian, a contemporary of Perpetua, added narration to the account.

²¹ By the next century, a church is dedicated to the memory of Perpetua and Felicity. Feast day in their memory is added to the church calendar during the reign of Constantine. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430) delivered 4 sermons on martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity.

²² "trans," *Kernerman English Multilingual Dictionary*, K Dictionaries Ltd., accessed on 20 Dec. 2006 at Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/trans>

²³ Mission in this sense is different from missions, which refers to the activity of missionaries or the existence of the church. Missions, while usually giving witness to God, must always be considered human and thus limited. See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991) 389-92.

²⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995) 78.
