

# A Way of Life



STAGE THREE: *Mission on the Way*

***A Way of Life***  
**Stage 3: Mission on the Way**

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*Helping you discover who God is, who you are,  
and what God wants to do through you.*



# A WAY OF LIFE

## Stage 3: Mission on the Way

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A WAY OF LIFE: STAGE THREE

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# Preface

## THE PROCESS AT A GLANCE

VantagePoint<sup>3</sup>'s *A Way of Life* encourages greater attention to and alignment with God's gracious way in your life, your community, and the world. Three overarching themes structure the learning: friendship with God, community with others, and mission on the way. At its core, *A Way of Life* invites you into a set of reflections, practices, and relationships that will help you explore and sustain a way of life faithful to God's good work.

Stage 1: *Friendship with God* invited us to pay attention to a life of growing intimacy/communion with God. Stage 2: *Community with Others* invited us to pay attention to a life of being with others as God's people. Stage 3: *Mission on the Way* will invite us to pay attention to a life of being sent by God into the world.

## PRAYER OF EXAMEN

We will continue to adopt the practice of prayerfully reviewing our week. Our hope is that through this practice we might become more intentional and more skilled in paying attention with God to the everydayness of our lives. Some participants might find it more helpful to adopt a daily prayer of examen during Stage 3 (optional).

## BIBLE READING & JOURNALING

We will continue reading together John's gospel throughout Stage 3. Continue to pay particular attention to Jesus' relationship with the Father in your reading. Utilize the journaling pages in the back for recording one's thoughts and prayers and wonderings.

## SUPPLEMENTAL STAGE 3 BOOK

Greg Paul's *God in the Alley: Being and Seeing Jesus in a Broken World* will supplement the content and process of our Stage 3 manual. We will be discussing the book and the critical importance of being awake,



alert, and compassionate in the midst of a broken world. Read with both a critical mind and a prayerful spirit. Allow Paul's compelling stories to invite you into a deeper cooperation with God's revealing and reconciling mission in your sphere of influence.

## **MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS**

Continue to meet regularly with your mentor. We pray that this relationship can be a safe place where we can continue to unpack our lives and "learnings" along the way. Throughout Stage 3, we want to continue with our *mutual mentoring groups* within your *A Way of Life* group. Very simply *care for one another* as companions on this journey by listening to one another, asking questions of one another, and praying for one another.

## **WHAT WE CARE ABOUT**

We are committed to the good work of fostering depth and igniting faithful service by providing churches and organizations transformative processes that help people discover in a deeper way who God is, who they are, and what God desires to do through them. In cooperation with the Spirit's leading and work, we hope to see:

- Individuals particularized, awakened and ignited for Kingdom life and influence
- Christian leaders paying greater attention to those around them
- Churches and organizations becoming vital places of learning
- A growing tribe of Christian leaders gripped by a more relational way of doing life and ministry

We believe God is already up to something very good in your life and community, something that calls forth from you a response with the whole of your life (Ephesians 2:10).

*Blessings on the journey,*  
The VantagePoint<sup>3</sup> Team

## *In Preparation for Session 1*

### ***Part 1 – Bible Reading and Journaling: Gospel of John***

For next week, read and reflect upon John 15:1–16:33. In addition to simply paying attention to what grabs you within the passage, ask a couple focused questions: *What does this passage tell me about Jesus' relationship with the Father? What can I learn from Jesus' relationship with the Father, about living as a son or daughter in God's family?* Journal any insights you are gaining or questions that are surfacing or prayers that are stirring as a result of your reading. You will find pages for this journaling at the back of the manual. Be prepared to share your thoughts and discoveries with your group and/or mentor.

### ***Part 2 – Mutual Mentoring Groups***

Be sure to connect with your group about when you will be meeting next week. Some will meet prior to the normal session time to touch base with one another. Our purpose with these groups is simply to *care for one another* as companions on this journey: we will listen to one another, ask questions of one another, and pray for one another.

### ***Part 3 – Read and Prepare for Session 1: God's Mission***

Read and complete the questions in Session 1. Be prepared to share your discoveries with the group.



SESSION ONE:

# God's Mission

# Invitation & Prayer

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,  
the world, and those who live in it.

Psalm 24:1

You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen,  
so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.  
Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.  
I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior. I declared and saved and proclaimed,  
when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses, says the Lord.  
I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is no one who can deliver from my hand;  
I work and who can hinder it?


Isaiah 43:10–13

Mission is more and different from recruitment to our brand of religion;  
it is the alerting people to the universal reign of God through Christ.<sup>1</sup>

David Bosch  
(1929–1992)

The God we know in the biblical narrative creates humanity for a life of faithful and just community  
(Hebrew *shalom*) with God, each other, and the whole of the created order.  
When humans turn away, fail to trust God, and break relationships with God, one another, and the earth,  
God works tirelessly to restore them....  
The community of Jesus created and sent by the Spirit (the church)  
exists as a tangible sign and witness to God's reign over all creation,  
of a promised future already present that will be consummated on the last day.<sup>2</sup>

Dwight J. Zscheile



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# *Prayer of Examen*

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*You who know me so well, God; search me yet again and lead me in your way.* Use the space on this page to respond to four parts of the examen:

- *Where were you most grateful this week? (What gave you life?)*
- *Where were you least grateful this week? (What drained you?)*
- *What is God inviting you to notice?*
- *Convert your thoughts into a written prayer.*





## Overview

This session will introduce the dynamic elements of God's mission throughout history.

- I. An Invitation to Discover
- II. God's Mission Story in the Bible
- III. A Meditation: *Blessed To Be A Blessing*
- IV. Practices for Cultivating Mission

## Focusing Question

- How would you describe God's mission in the world?

## Instruction & Reflection

### I. An Invitation to Discover

[Jesus] came down with [the twelve] and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Luke 6:17–19

After spending the night in prayer and choosing the twelve at dawn, Jesus came down with the twelve apostles and ministered to the crowds (Luke 6:12–19). Throughout *A Way of Life* we have been inviting greater attention to and alignment of our lives with God's good work by looking through the lens of friendship with God (Stage one) and community with others (Stage two). In this third stage, we want to add the lens of God's mission. We are God's people, called to participate in God's mission in the world; that is, God is a missionary God and we are his missionary people.

Luke records that it was Jesus' tight community of twelve apostles—the *sent out ones*—whom he first sent out on mission:

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. (Luke 9:1–2)

Later, Jesus sent out a larger group of seventy followers, to prepare the way for his arrival in the village or town (Luke 10:1–11). He spoke to this larger group,

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way.... (2–3)

He gathered the disciples to himself and commissioned them to bear witness: “The kingdom of God has come near.” Those Jesus draws into community, he also sends out into the world: “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8).

During *The Journey*, it was Sam's question to Frodo—“I wonder what sort of tale we've fallen into?”—that launched our conversations around God's mission. We identified the profound conversion, this shift in our lives, when rather than seeing God fundamentally as part of *our story* we instead see ourselves fundamentally as parts of *God's story*. For some of us, many years pass before it dawns on us: God's concern, commitment, and calling extend far beyond mere life improvement. God has created us for a much larger tale than the tales we often imagine. The Scriptures, church history, and even our own lives point to a much grander story and initiative. We have “fallen into” a tale of the triune God seeking to reconcile everything to himself (2 Corinthians 5:17–21). And we are both recipients and agents of the saving, reconciling, and peace-making work of God.

God calls us to make a Kingdom-difference wherever we are. Jesus, by the Spirit, sends us into this broken and wayward world to embody God's reconciling message. In Stage 3, we want to nurture greater attentiveness to *our life of being sent by God* amidst the everydayness of our schedules and responsibilities and dreams and bank accounts and relationships. Further, though, we ask, How is this *being sent by God* to become something we not only understand, but something we come to *do*?

Throughout this stage, we hope to provide conversations and practices through which we thoughtfully and prayerfully make greater sense of our part in God's mission story. Learning to live as apprentices of Jesus reorders our whole sense of identity and responsibility. We pray that—like Jesus with the twelve and the

seventy, those first apprentices—the Spirit grabs a hold of our attention, graciously infusing our lives with a sense of meaning, power, and direction beyond our wildest imaginations.—*Your kingdom come on earth as in heaven.*

*Reflect & Respond* \_\_\_\_\_

- What jumps out to you?

## II. God's Mission Story in the Bible

Eden was the perfect plan, and God has never had any other. His goal was that the people of God might dwell in the place of God, enjoying the presence of God. This is all our heavenly Father has ever wanted for us.

And everything that lies between Eden's gate and the New Jerusalem, the bulk of our Bibles, is in essence a huge rescue plan. In fact we could, we could summarize the plot line of the Bible into one cosmic question: "How do we get *Adam* back into the garden?"

In Genesis 3 humanity was driven out, in Revelation 21–22 they are welcomed home.<sup>3</sup>

Sandra Richter

In pondering the larger story we find ourselves a part of—and the difference that larger story makes for our way of life—we must allow the triune God to remain the central character in the story. Sadly, though, when it comes to our practice of mission in the church, we too often displace God from the center of our thinking; that is, we emphasize what we need to do for God before we get clear about what God has been up to already. Consequently, our efforts become overwhelmingly need-driven rather than God-driven. And in responding to so many urgent and real needs we can lose perspective and lose heart. As we discovered in our previous discussions of prayer and community, we must first be attentive to what God is up to, and then secondly, we must align our efforts with God's, joining his mission.



## A. God's mission

Randy Reese tells a story of how the whole of Scripture began to make clearer sense to him.

Chuck Van Engen, professor of Biblical theology of mission at Fuller Seminary, asked the class one day, "What do you suppose is the grand narrative of Scripture?" Most of us in the class were hesitant to answer, for fear of not sounding like smart doctoral students. Van Engen broke the long silence with the key question, "*How could the question, 'What is God's mission?' guide you to find the answer?*" That question turned out to be the primary question of the course, our primary assignment for the quarter, and, more importantly, it seems to be the primary question of the Bible. As I have read and re-read the whole Bible through the lens of that question—*What is God's mission?*—the storyline of a grand narrative has finally fallen into place for me: God's wooing love for us and his deep joy in sending held the Story together, and motivated me to take seriously my place in this adventurous mission.

God is a missionary God and we are his missionary people. Christopher Wright's book *The Mission of God: Unlocking The Bible's Grand Narrative* (IVP, 2006) wonderfully demonstrates that the Bible, from beginning to end, is about God's mission to the world. Consider carefully an excerpt from Wright, allowing it to orient our thinking about God's presence, purpose, and activity in the world.

The whole Bible presents a God of missional activity, from his purposeful, goal-oriented act of Creation to the completion of his cosmic mission in the redemption of the whole of Creation—a new heaven and a new earth. The Bible also presents to us *humanity with a mission* (to rule and care for the earth); Israel with a mission (to be the agent of God's blessing to all nations); *Jesus with a mission* (to embody and fulfill the mission of Israel, bringing blessing to the nations through bearing our sin on the Cross and anticipating the new Creation in his Resurrection); and *the church with a mission* (to participate with God in the ingathering of the nations in fulfillment of Old Testament Scriptures).

But behind all this stands *God with a mission* (the redemption of his whole Creation from the wreckage of human and Satanic evil). The mission of God is what fills the Bible from the brokenness of the nations in Genesis 11 to the healing of the nations in Revelation 21–22. So any mission activity to which we are called must be seen as humble participation in this vast sweep of the historical mission of God. All mission or missions that we initiate, or into which we invest our vocation, gifts, and energies, flows from the prior mission of God. *God is on mission*, and we, in that wonderful phrase of Paul, are "co-workers with God."<sup>5</sup>

**Reread Wright's quotation: What stands out to you?**



Mission is ultimately not a human response to human need. The Church's involvement in mission is its privileged participation in the actions of the triune God....

It is insufficient to proclaim that the Church of God has a mission in the world. Rather, *the God of mission has a Church in the world*. Grasp this inversion of subject and object, and participation in God's mission will become a joyous, life-giving privilege. Miss it, and mission involvement will eventually degenerate into a wearisome, overwhelming duty.<sup>4</sup>

Tim Dearborn



This is my Father's world.  
O let me ne'er forget  
that though the wrong seems  
oft so strong,  
God is the ruler yet.  
This is my Father's world:  
why should my heart be sad?  
The Lord is King; let the heavens ring!  
God reigns; let the earth be glad!<sup>7</sup>

Maltbie D. Babcock  
(1858–1901)

From creation (Genesis 1–2) to new creation (Revelation 21–22), it is clear: God is on mission. Wright summarizes three overarching purposes of God's mission in history: (1) God's driving intention *to be known for who he truly is*, the only true and living God over all humanity and over all creation, the Holy One of Israel, incarnate in Jesus Christ, communicated through the Holy Spirit; (2) God's intention to *bless all the nations through the creation of a people who will live out his goal of redemption*; (3) God's ultimate intention that people from *"every tribe and nation and language" will praise him in God's new heavens and new earth* (Revelation 7:9–10).<sup>6</sup>

God's purposes in history weave their way from Genesis 1–2 to Revelation 21–22. Let's walk our way through the Bible, then, exploring in a little greater detail each of these four expressions of God's mission (humanity, Israel, Jesus, the church).

### 1. Humanity in God's mission

Genesis 1:26–28, the climax of God's creation of the heavens and the earth, reflects God's intentions with humanity.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Humanity's distinction from the rest of creation was that God created them (1) in his image and likeness and (2) for the purpose of ruling and caring for the rest of creation (see also Genesis 2:15). In this regard, N.T. Wright points out that humans are "a kind of midway creature: reflecting God into the world, and reflecting the world back to God."<sup>8</sup> He continues:

Just as ancient rulers might place statues of themselves in the far-flung cities to remind subject peoples who was ruling them, so God has placed his own image, human beings, into his world so that the world can see who its

ruler is. Not only *see*, but *experience*. Precisely because God is the God of generous, creative, outflowing love, his way of running things is to share power, to work through his image-bearers, to invite their glad and free collaboration in his project.<sup>9</sup>

God's image bearers mirrored something of God into the world in a way the rest of creation did not. As rulers or caretakers of creation they reflected the Creator to the world. And in turn they were to lead all of creation in praise and worship back to its good Creator. They were to be its rulers and its priests. Thus, within God's good purposes for all of creation, humanity has always been tasked with this "midway" role. Consequently, when humanity rebelled against God there was a profound disruption in all of creation. Their image-bearing role was marred and distorted (but not lost), causing tremendous suffering for all of creation.

## **2. Israel in God's mission**

All of Genesis 3–11—human rebellion and the expulsion from the garden (ch. 3), wickedness and the judgment of the flood (ch. 6), human arrogance and brokenness at the tower of Babel (ch. 11)—provides the back-story for the call of Abraham (ch. 12).

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:1–3)

God's blessing mission in the world would be expressed through a covenant with Abraham and his promised descendants (Israel). They would become God's own people ("my treasured possession" Exodus 19:5), called to live differently than the world lives ("You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" Leviticus 19:2) so that they might be in the world as "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6) and "a light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6). Israel was called to be God's representative people—reflecting God to the world and in turn reflecting the world back to God—for the sake of all creation.

The Old Testament poets and prophets put forth a vision of *shalom*—"a webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight"—to express *the way things ought to be*.<sup>10</sup> God had always intended this vision of a flourishing world, but *shalom* had been broken. God sought to *put things right again*—a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1). Cornelius Plantinga describes the prophets' visionary picture of *shalom*:





But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like  
an ever flowing stream.

Amos 5:24

They dreamed of a new age in which human crookedness would be straightened out, rough places made plain. The foolish would be made wise, and the wise, humble. They dreamed of a time when the deserts would flower, the mountains would run with wine, weeping would cease, and people could go to sleep without weapons on their laps. People would work in peace and work to fruitful effect. Lambs would lie down with lions. All nature would be fruitful, benign, and filled with wonder upon wonder;<sup>11</sup> all humans would be knit together in brotherhood and sisterhood; and all nature and all humans would look to God, walk with God, lean toward God, and delight in God. Shouts of joy and recognition would well up from valleys and seas, from women in streets and from men on ships.<sup>12</sup>

Although things were not as they ought to be, God intended to put things right.

### **3. Jesus in God's mission**

When Jesus repeatedly proclaimed, “The kingdom of God has come near,” he drew on the larger story of God’s mission. As one theologian put it, the coming of the kingdom of God “is just the New Testament way of spelling shalom.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus was announcing that the God of Israel was indeed the true and sovereign God who was intervening decisively in the world—God was putting things right through his life. What humanity in general and Israel in particular had been unable to do, Jesus was able to do through his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and promised return.

Jesus took on his shoulders the hope and mission of Israel—*God's kingdom come on earth as in heaven*. He faithfully lived out God’s intended purpose for all humanity—to be God’s image bearers for all creation (Colossians 1:15)—revealing God’s character and kingdom both to Israel and, in turn, to all the nations. By delivering humanity from its own sinfulness through his voluntary death and resurrection, Jesus assumed Abraham’s blessing vocation in the world—“in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).

### **4. The church in God's mission**

God was reconciling all things to himself through Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17–21). In sending the Holy Spirit, the church then was established, empowered, and entrusted with this message of reconciliation in Christ—we are “ambassadors of Christ,” as Paul puts it (2 Corinthians 5:19–20). Just as Israel testified to God’s identity and purposes in the world, so also would the church. In echoing the exodus-language, Peter testified to the church’s mission:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you might proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9–10)

We are God's people sent by the Spirit to proclaim the identity and purposes of the crucified, risen, and exalted Jesus. "You are my witnesses," Jesus said (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8). We bear witness that Jesus has fulfilled God's image-bearing purposes for humanity, reflecting God to the world (as its true king) and reflecting the world back to God (as its great high priest). Jesus is what true humanity was intended to be like. We live now *in Christ*, as agents of Jesus' sovereign and priestly role for all creation—restoring relationships, reestablishing justice, and rediscovering beauty.<sup>14</sup> In a time when God's justice and healing are far from readily apparent in the world, we—God's servant people, the church—give testimony with our whole lives that the true and living God is blessing and will bless the world in Christ. God's words, "See, I am making all things new," resound from God's throne (Revelation 21:5); God's servants anticipate a new heaven and a new earth when all of humanity will live out its God-given vocation—reigning and worshipping—for the sake of all creation.<sup>15</sup>

Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and *his servants will worship him*. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and *they will reign for ever and ever*. (Revelation 22:3–5, *italics added for emphasis*)

From creation (Genesis 1) to new creation (Revelation 22), God is on mission. Christopher Wright concludes, "The whole Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation."<sup>16</sup>

God is already up to something very good in the world, in our communities, and in our lives. *Are we paying attention? Are ready to join in?* For as Tom Sine puts it, "The God who has always been a part of our stories invites us to become much more a part of God's story, and to see what will happen."<sup>17</sup>



The Kingdom of God life is not a matter of waking up each morning with a list of chores or an agenda to be tended to, left on our bedside table by the Holy Spirit for us while we slept. We wake up already immersed in a large story of creation and covenant, of Israel and Jesus, the story of Jesus and the stories that Jesus told. We let ourselves be formed by these formative stories, and especially as we listen to the stories that Jesus tells, get a feel for the way he does it, the way he talks, the way he treats people, the Jesus way.<sup>18</sup>

Eugene Peterson

## *Reflect & Respond*

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- What about the Bible's larger story of God's mission **grabs** you? What about it **stretches** your thinking?
- How do you see yourself and your church community living out God's mission in the world?
- Why is it so important to keep God's mission story primary and central to our efforts at evangelism or social action or marketplace ministry?



## **B. Some further thoughts on shalom—the way things ought to be**

Peace (*shalom*), his gift to them, is that which belongs to the new age which God has promised.

It is because Jesus bears the wounds of his decisive battle with evil that he has that peace in his gift.

He has “made peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20). But the gift of peace is not for them alone.

On the contrary he has chosen and appointed them to be the bearers of shalom into the life of the world.<sup>19</sup>

Lesslie Newbigin

The Hebrew word *shalom* and its Greek counterpart *eirene* (which has much of the same range in the New Testament as shalom does in the Old Testament) are most often translated *peace* in English. Understood by most today as the absence of conflict, peace fails to communicate the sheer breadth and depth of what shalom meant to the Hebrew culture. In the most comprehensive way imaginable, shalom conveys life, or reality, *as it ought to be*. Nicholas Wolterstorff tells us that shalom is “a vision of what it is that God wants for God’s human creatures—a vision of what constitutes human flourishing and of our appointed destiny.”<sup>20</sup> God even tells the Jewish exiles in Babylon to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city” that is, seek the Babylonians’ well being, the flourishing of your captors, your enemies (Jeremiah 29:7). God’s intent has always been shalom. When Jesus proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God, he was announcing that God was finally putting things right in an ultimate sense—working toward justice, reconciliation, forgiveness, liberation, beauty: *a flourishing of all reality*. The gospel is that—through the events of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension, and anticipated second coming—God is reconciling all things to himself; God is restoring shalom. Isaiah’s vision of God’s future would, in Jesus, be realized:

For I am about to create new heavens  
and a new earth;  
the former things shall not be remembered  
or come to mind.  
But be glad and rejoice for ever  
in what I am creating;  
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,  
and its people as a delight.  
I will rejoice in Jerusalem,  
and delight in my people;  
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,  
or the cry of distress.

No more shall there be in it  
an infant that lives but a few days,  
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;  
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,  
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.  
They shall build houses and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
They shall not build and another inhabit;  
they shall not plant and another eat;  
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,  
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.  
They shall not labour in vain,  
or bear children for calamity;  
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—  
and their descendants as well.  
Before they call I will answer,  
while they are yet speaking I will hear.  
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,  
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;  
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!  
They shall not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
says the Lord. (Isaiah 65:17–25)

**God calls us—the Church—to be agents of shalom, models of shalom, and witnesses to shalom.<sup>21</sup> But the Fall disrupted humanity at every level of relationship—with God, with nature, with neighbor, and with self— and the world is not as it should be. “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now,” writes the apostle Paul (Romans 8:22). What, then, does it mean to be agents of shalom? In this fallen and groaning world, what is the nature of our participation with God’s missionary work? Wolterstorff responds,**

To dwell in shalom is to find delight in living rightly before God, to find delight in living rightly in one’s physical surroundings, to find delight in living rightly with one’s fellow human beings, to find delight even in living rightly with oneself....



The biblical witness is clear. The vision of shalom comes to us, for one thing, as a two-part command: We are to pray and struggle for the release of the captives, and we are to pray and struggle for the release of the enriching potentials of God's creation....And the vision comes to us as a two-part invitation: We are invited to celebrate such manifestations of shalom as appear in our world, and invited to mourn shalom's shortfall.<sup>22</sup>

The Apostle Paul assures us that our efforts are not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). We are God's coworkers; what we do *now* by the Spirit's enabling is somehow connected to, a part of, God's mission brought to completion *then* at Christ's second coming. In the face of injustice, discord, and unkindness in its many forms, we *struggle* and we *pray* toward God's vision of a flourishing world, *your kingdom come on earth as in heaven*. We *celebrate* the presence of justice and harmony, kindness and beauty; and we *mourn* their absence. God sends us into the world to be about more than cultivating personal piety or evangelistic initiatives. Wolterstorff warns,

An ever beckoning temptation for evangelicals is to assume that all God really cares about for human beings is that they be born again and thus destined for salvation....[However] what God desires for human beings is that comprehensive mode of flourishing which the Bible calls shalom....God's love of justice is grounded in God's longing for the shalom of God's creatures and in God's sorrow over its absence.<sup>23</sup>

We are agents of shalom, God's kingdom people working toward God's future in Christ—restoring relationships, reestablishing justice, and rediscovering beauty.<sup>24</sup> “Peace be with you [*shalom*],” Jesus said to his disciples, “as the Father has sent me, so send I you....Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21).

### *Reflect & Respond*

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- What things, lacking shalom, do you mourn? What gives you a deep sadness that *things are not the way they are supposed to be*—in your local community, town, city, etc.?

Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

2 Corinthians 15:58

### III. A Meditation: *Blessed To Be A Blessing*

God invited a seventy-five-year-old man to leave the familiarities of his world, the securities of his life, to go to a land that God would show him, a place where he, a man without heirs, would establish a family and a line that would become a great nation, through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1–4). Why? Because God wanted to bless Abraham, so that he in turn would become a blessing. Abraham's obedient response of radical and *foolish* trust rooted his people—a people of laughter and struggle, of promise and faith and blessing.

The people of God have since lived in the wake of God's invitation and promised blessing. We are each invited to participate in God's "blessing mission," a mission rooted in the work of Jesus Christ. God's promise to Abraham of *being with him* and *being for him* is most fully realized in Jesus and expressed to us by the Spirit. For in Jesus, heir to Abraham, the entire world would be blessed. In Jesus the entire world is invited, like Abraham, to leave its familiar and apparent securities for the hope of a more secure and blessed future in the promises of God.

There is a great biblical legacy to Abraham's radical and foolish faith: Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery that brought him to Egypt and to prison. Only trusting eyes could recognize such circumstances as composing a sort of gracious invitation, a thing of promise and blessing. Jesus invited Peter and John to leave their nets, Matthew to leave his taxing tables, prostitutes to leave their livelihood. Jesus confronted Paul, the zealous Pharisee, inviting him to exchange his own mission, power-seeking and murderous, for God's true mission—the coming shalom in the name of Jesus, which spread throughout the Mediterranean world.

Such is the case in the story in Luke 15: the wonderfully compassionate father pleads with his older, dutiful, and disgruntled son to come and celebrate the return of the lost brother.

Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found. (Luke 15:31–32)

These words echo God's invitation to Abraham, a father inviting his son to leave a familiar way, the way the son had learned the world to be, a way of duty and honor and self-righteousness, for a way of grace and salvation and joy. For all of us who hear Jesus' story of this older son, the question must arise: Will he respond faithfully, like Abraham? Will he be open to another way of living? Will he trust his father?

We might also ask of our community and of ourselves: *Will we be open to another way?* Such openness, such faith—this is not a one-time thing, not a simple prayer or a conversion we might recall. It is rather *a way*





*of life.* When we sense ourselves gripping onto our lives most tightly, when we find our hearts and energies anxiously trying to get by and survive, we must ask, *Will we be open to another way?* For it is in these hurried and worried moments that we can begin to appreciate God's invitation to Abraham: "Go from your country...to the land I will show you."

The great recounting of faith in Hebrews 11 begins this way:

The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It is our handle on what we cannot see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd. (Hebrews 11:1–2, *The Message*)

We live in the legacy of men and women who, within the anxieties and stresses of their particular lives, recognized God's invitation and discovered by faith another foundation, a firm foundation. Confronted with bills to pay, children to raise, jobs to find, relationships to mend, schedules to keep, deadlines to meet—in short, lives to secure—these men and women trusted Someone they could not see, envisioned a larger horizon, and risked another way of life. *Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you...and I will bless you...so that you will be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* (Genesis 12:1–3).

This God with a mission continues to extend, by his Spirit, this invitation and promise, continually offering to us another way. "See I am making all things new!" Will we trust that God's future provides a much grander and more beautiful horizon than what we can possibly imagine? Will we be open to hear and faithful to join God's blessing mission in the world?

*Reflect & Respond* \_\_\_\_\_

- Where in your life are you being invited like Abraham to let go of some of your familiar securities in order to **go another way**?

I pray that these words, "all the families of the earth," may be written on our hearts. It is this expression more than any other which reveals the living God of the Bible to be a missionary God....So may God help us never to forget this four-thousand-year-old promise to Abraham: "By you and your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."<sup>25</sup>

John Stott

## IV. Practices for Cultivating Mission

The church exists...for what we sometimes call “mission”: and when it’s announced it transforms people and societies. Mission, in its widest as well as its more focused senses, is what the church is there for. God intends to put the world to rights; he has dramatically launched this project through Jesus. Those who belong to Jesus are called, here and now, in the power of the Spirit, to be agents of that putting-to-rights purpose. “As the father sent me” said Jesus after the resurrection, “so I am sending you....” (John 20:21)

From the very beginning, in Jesus own teaching, it has been clear that people who are called to be agents of God’s healing love, putting the world to rights, are called also to be people whose own lives are put to rights by the same healing love. The messengers must model the message.

That’s why, though the reason for God’s call of the church is mission, the missionaries—that is, all Christians—are themselves defined as people who have been made whole.<sup>26</sup>

N.T. Wright

We assume that, as an apprentice of Jesus, you want to live a life that gets you involved with what God is doing in the world, in your community, and in your life. Dorothy Bass writes, “Christian practices are things Christian people do together over time in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.”<sup>27</sup> Over the next six sessions we want to pay particular attention to those practices that open us up to a *life of being sent by God* into the world.

- Called to Ministry (Session 2)
- Connecting Faith & Work (*Field Trips*) (Session 3)
- Connecting Faith & Work (*Debriefing*) (Session 4)
- Discerning Personal Calling (Session 5)
- Developing a Rule of Life (Session 6)
- The Adventure (Session 7)

As we walk through Stage 3, let’s pray and ponder together how God is inviting us to live our everyday lives as agents, models, and witnesses of shalom. *How can we provide a bit of “a sneak peek” of God’s kingdom come on earth as in heaven?*<sup>28</sup> *How can we join in on what our loving, wise, and just God is up to in the world?*

## *Prayer*

*Lord, make me an instrument of peace—  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled, as to console;  
Not so much to be understood as to understand;  
Not so much to be loved as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
It is in dying that we awaken to eternal life.<sup>29</sup>*

*Prayer of St. Francis*

## *In Preparation for Session 2*

### ***Part 1 – Bible Reading and Journaling: Gospel of John***

For next week, read and reflect upon John 17:1–26. There will be a John 17 devotional reading exercise within the session. Be prepared to share your thoughts and discoveries with your group and/or mentor.

### ***Part 2 – Mutual Mentoring Groups***

Be sure to connect with your group about when you will be meeting next week. Our purpose with these groups is simply to *care for one another* as companions on this journey: we will listen to one another, ask questions of one another, and pray for one another.

### ***Part 3 – Read and Prepare for Session 2: Called to Ministry***

Read and complete the questions in Session 2. Be prepared to share your discoveries with the group.