



BE THE CHANGE

WHAT IN THE WORLD AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?

STUDY THEME

A Missional God

FOCAL PASSAGES

Matthew 9:35-38; 28:18-20; Romans 15:23-28

BACKGROUND PASSAGES

Matthew 9:35-38; 28:18-20; Romans 15:20-28

SESSION OVERVIEW

Do you remember when you learned how to ride a bike? What about when you learned to swim? You didn't read a book or watch a how-to video, did you? You put your feet on the pedals and your hands on the bars. You put your face in the water. You touched it and experienced it first-hand. More than likely someone showed you how—more out of love than duty. And more than likely that same person offered lots of "here, let me show you" moments throughout your life. Missions is the same way. It's a "here, let me show you" kind of action, motivated more by love than by duty.

We often think of missions as a one-time-a-year proposition. It's that trip we take to do good things in another part of the world. But often it's what we do after we've taken care of things at home. What if we have it backwards, though? What if the church exists because of mission? What if mission is the main thing? And what if the point is more about people than duty? These New Testament passages help answer those questions.

- 1 Go On, Now (Matthew 28:18-20)
- 2 Wanted: Workers (Matthew 9:35-38)
- 3 Give It Away, Now (Romans 15:23-28)

PREPARATION

Use PACK ITEM 3, "Weekly Preparation Reminder," as a preparation tool this week. Adjust the schedule to meet the needs of your class.

Check out the *LifeMatters Blog* at www.threadsmedia.com/lifematters for additional thoughts on the lesson.

Make copies of PACK ITEM 4, "Weekly Prayer Journal," to distribute to the class.

SESSION OPENER

Missio dei. It's a Latin term that means "mission of God," but it can also be translated "sending of God." The sending is the mission—it's part of God's nature. Throughout human history, God has been sending. He continues to send today. It's our choice to decide whether we'll move. But when we do, big things happen.

- *Going sometimes means leaving. What might you have to leave in order to go?*
- *Is there anything keeping you from joining God in His work in the world?*
- *Does going always mean somewhere far away or is it sometimes nearby?**

GO ON, NOW { MATTHEW 28:18-20 }

¹⁸Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Sometimes it's easier to stay put, to camp out where it's safe and familiar. But God isn't stagnant, and following Him means movement on our part.

God is a sending God (See the sidebar "Is God a Sending God?"), and Jesus sends us into the world. Not to the church building around the corner. Not to the apartment of a best friend. Not to a retreat center in the woods. Not that there's anything wrong with those things, but Jesus sent His disciples then—and continues to send us today—into the world.

We are a sent people. Sent into real life to live it as He lived. The point is to live among people and rearrange our lives for a purpose greater than ourselves: to impact the world with the love of Jesus. The purpose of the movement is to make disciples.

- *Do you think God desires to send all Christians or just a few?**
- *What's the mission of the church anyway?**

The purpose of the movement is to make disciples. For many of us, that brings back negative images of awkward door-to-door gospel presentations that treat people like projects or statistics. But Jesus doesn't give a picture of hit-and-run evangelism here. Matthew was writing to Jews who had come from a formulaic, rule-following background, and he was simply reporting Jesus' call to put into action what they believed. He didn't give a step-by-step plan for how to do that. No specifics. No techniques. Just a simple command: Go out and change your world.

- *Does the lack of formula appeal to you, or would you rather have a plan to follow?**
- *What images come to mind when you hear the word "disciple"?**
- *Who is a person who has shown you what it means to be a follower of Christ?*
- *What have you learned from that person?*
- *What does discipleship look like in your life?*



During the Session

Display PACK ITEM 8, "Be the Change Session Poster."

Distribute copies of PACK ITEM 4, "Weekly Prayer Journal," so the learners can write down prayer needs of the class and remember them in prayer during the week.



Is God a Sending God?

He sent Noah out on a boat for 40 days and nights so that He could make things right. He sent Abraham into the desert so that He could bless others through him. He sent Moses into the wilderness so that the old man could lead God's people home. He sent Joshua out, saying, "Get up and go, and have no fear." He sent the prophets to Israel to bring a message of reconciliation. ... Then He sent Jesus. His mission? To restore relationships.

*Additional discussion question that does not appear in the learner guide.

NOTES ↴

We follow in the ways of Jesus, becoming more and more like Him, and along the way we help others connect to Jesus by showing them the how's and why's of what we've learned. This is discipleship at its base level: walk with Christ personally and help those around you to do the same.

The Greek "go" in this passage is in the aorist tense, meaning "having already gone"—something that has already been done and yet continues on into the future. Matthew ends his Gospel narrative with a bit of a cliffhanger. Of course, we know a piece of what has happened since, but readers are still asked to imagine how the mission of the church will continue to play out. The possibilities are as limitless as our imaginations.

- *What has your experience with missions looked like?*
- *Have your experiences been positive or negative?*
- *What kind of barriers have you tried to cross to connect with someone of another culture?*
- *Do you believe it's possible for Christians to change the world?*
- *What would that look like?*
- *What do you imagine moving with God would look like in your life?*

WANTED: WORKERS { MATTHEW 9:35-38 }

³⁵Then Jesus went to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When He saw the crowds, He felt compassion for them, because they were weary and worn out, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. ³⁸Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

Throughout His life, Jesus showed what movement looks like. He went out teaching and talking about a new way of living. He went out and met physical needs. And He went to where the people were. Missions has a mission: connecting people to the living God through Jesus. To do that means moving outside ourselves in order to participate in God's reality. That could be as simple as rearranging our schedules so there's flexibility and time for people other than ourselves or our friends. And it could mean packing up to go live in another place for a while. No matter where it is, movement leads to change.

- *How do you discover God's reality?*
- *What does "good news" mean to you?*
- *What does movement look like in the lives of Christians today?**
- *What makes moving into God's reality difficult at times?**

Funny thing is, as we begin to open ourselves to God's reality, we become more sensitive to other people and their needs. *Compassion* literally means "to suffer with." So compassion requires proximity—a "withness." Today Jesus is still in the healing business. Sometimes it still takes the form of physical healing. Sometimes it brings an emotional healing or a mental healing. Always it brings a spiritual healing—and a chance at a new way of life.

- *What kind of healing do the people in our community need?**
- *What are some ways we can we participate in that healing?**
- *What does healing disease and sickness look like today?**

Sheep are pretty dumb (not to mention smelly). So it would be easy to interpret this passage as saying, “Jesus felt sorry for the poor who were dumb like sheep.” But that’s not what He meant. Jesus didn’t feel compassion because the people were ignorant. He felt compassion because they were without able leadership. The people weren’t stupid, but they needed guidance. It’s easy for us to take knowledge for granted. We have limitless access to knowledge online. We own multiple Bibles in multiple versions. We’ve heard so much about how to live the Christian life that, frankly, we’re spoiled. But for the majority of the world, that’s not the case. (See the sidebar “Not Everyone Knows Like We Do”.)

- *What’s the difference between compassion and pity?*
- *How well are you responding to the needs of those around you?*
- *Which author writing about the Christian life has had the greatest impact on you?**
- *Who has served as a “shepherd” in your life?*
- *Who are you “shepherding”?**

If we’re honest, the concept of a harvest and workers can feel a little icky. So can phrases like “go out and win souls” or “win the world for Christ.” That’s because we like to think of people as, well, people. We like to think that people are more than notches in our belts. We like to focus on relationships more than “evangelism.” And that’s a positive thing. People are people, not projects. And relationships are more important than tallies or statistics. But in congratulating ourselves on a more enlightened view of evangelism, we shouldn’t forget that there is a world full of people with a desire to connect to something—to Someone—bigger than themselves. There’s a world full of people seeking truth. So even if the farming metaphor doesn’t connect, the idea of giving people the choice to believe or not should connect.

- *Jesus used a lot of farming metaphors to connect with people in first-century Jerusalem. What metaphor do you think we might use today to talk about missions?*
- *What do you think keeps the “workers” from going into the field?**
- *Do we shy away from talking about faith with others? Why/why not?**

Of course, even Jesus realized that one person couldn’t do all the teaching by himself or herself. By its very nature, the mission of movement is communal. The church exists because of God’s mission, and we can all participate in that mission. We won’t all cross major cultural boundaries or work as full-time missionaries, but we can all pray. And by doing so, we’re acting together as the church. We each have different gifts and callings, but we devote time and energy and resources to a common purpose.

- *Why pray for people to join God in His work? Doesn’t He already know the needs?*
- *In what other ways can we join together as the church with a common mission?*



Not Everyone Knows Like We Do

According to oneverse.org, there are more than 2,200 groups still waiting to hear the Bible in a language they can understand. And 1.6 billion people have virtually no access to the gospel message. Then those who do hear are often stuck trying to figure out what it all means on their own.



Display PACK ITEM 11, "Threads Foundation #2," near the "Threads Foundation #1" poster from the Fall 2008 LifeMatters Leader Pack. Discuss what it means to be personally responsible for helping meet the needs of people in your community, region, country, and around the world.

Then take a moment to discuss the importance of Lottie Moon and her Christmas offering. Learn more about her life on page 29. Consider setting a class goal to give to The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® for International Missions.

GIVE IT AWAY, NOW { ROMANS 15:23-28 }

²³But now I no longer have any work to do in these provinces, and I have strongly desired for many years to come to you ²⁴whenever I travel to Spain. For I do hope to see you when I pass through, and to be sent on my way there by you, once I have first enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵Now, however, I am traveling to Jerusalem to serve the saints; ²⁶for Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷Yes, they were pleased, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to Jews in material needs. ²⁸So when I have finished this and safely delivered the funds to them, I will go by way of you to Spain.

Paul was always on the move, and his movement generally involved going to people who hadn't yet heard the gospel message (see Romans 15:20). That obviously took lots of time, what with long boat trips, living in a place long enough to build relationships, and staying long enough to help new churches become healthy enough to stand on their own. Of course he wanted to spend time getting to know the Roman Christians, to encourage them and be encouraged by them—you know, to be the church together. But he also wanted them to be partners in the mission.

Let's speak plainly: Paul was looking for cash money. "To be sent on my way" implied more than a going-away party or a ride to the local boat dock. It implied that Paul was counting on the church in Rome to provide financial and other resources so he could continue the mission God had given him.

- *What's your first instinct when people start asking for money? (Be honest.)*
- *Do you find it easier to give of your money or your time?*
- *What kind of humility do you think it takes to be on the receiving end of this kind of support?**

We don't really like to talk about money, especially in church. The thing is, giving, if we want to get down to it, is a duty—which makes it sound like something we just don't want to do. But maybe instead of a begrudging duty, we can think of it more as an opportunity to be part of what God is doing in the world. It's also another picture of the communal nature of missions. Really, it's a response to needs.

- *Do you see giving of financial resources as a natural part of living out your faith? Why/why not?*
- *What makes giving sacrificially of money difficult?**
- *What does "sacrificial" even mean in the U.S. culture?**
- *Do you think we in the American church see ourselves as connected with the church around the world?**
- *Do you see yourself as connected with the church around the world? How?*

AND FINALLY . . .

We talk a lot about being “relevant” these days, but relevance is about so much more than style. It’s about substance. It’s about connecting with people at the core of who they are. It goes beyond surface interests and begins to dig into the depth of others’ stories. It means engaging—really engaging—in people’s lives in order to help connect them to the living God. The focus of relevance is other people, not ourselves. Relevance always ties back to mission.

Relevance takes place through presence and conversations. It takes place through time and through serving. It takes place through paying attention to what God is doing in the world and joining Him.

- *How do we get beyond “hanging out” with people to pointing them to God through Jesus?*
- *What are some of the problems people create when trying to be relevant?*
- *Can you truly separate biblical truth from relevance?*
- *How can we connect with people at the core of who they are?*
- *How do we get past the style to the substance of relevance?*

*A local ESL program is a great way to connect with the “world” without leaving your community. Discuss the possibility of volunteering with your group.

LEAD YOUR CLASS TO CONNECT . . .

Direct learners to page 21 of the learner guide. Go over “Connect with Your World” with the class as a whole and discuss ways to connect to the world at large. Refer to pages 144-145 and encourage the class to take time to read about the *Threads Mocha Club* (also on page 21 of the learner guide). Consider participating as a class.

CONNECT WITH YOUR WORLD

Pick a country or region or city to pray for over the next month. Maybe it’s a place you visited on a mission trip or an area where a friend grew up or a spot that grabbed your heart when you heard its story on the news. Then be intentional about it. Choose a day of each week when you’ll spend time in prayer. Consider fasting one meal on that day as you pray. Then learn all you can about that spot. *Operation World* by Patrick Johnstone is a prayer handbook with info about countries and people around the globe, and operationworld.org offers specific ideas on how to pray. Sign up for Google alerts for news stories about the area (google.com/alerts). Over time you’ll know better how to pray. And chances are, God may even begin to give you ideas of how you might get involved there.

CONNECT AS A COUPLE

Direct couples to read through their section together this week and remain on the lookout for ways they can strengthen their relationship with each other and with God.



Conclude the Lesson

Wrap up the class discussion by addressing the personal application questions listed in the AND FINALLY . . . section. If your class is too large to actively interact with these questions, split them into smaller groups. Make sure to allow enough time to process the lesson and application.

You can decide to include discussion of the CONNECT section during the session or direct the class to read and discuss it in their small groups.



Spend a few minutes in prayer with your group:

Close in prayer by asking your group for the first names only of people who need Jesus. Pray these names out loud, asking God to facilitate deep relationships with them.



Read the articles “The Rise of Macedonia” and “All Authority—A Word Study” in the Winter 2008-2009 issue of Biblical Illustrator or on the Winter 2008-2009 Biblical Illustrator Plus (CD-ROM).

The previous Biblical Illustrator articles “To Make Disciples” (Summer 2001) and “The Spread of the Gospel by AD 100” (Summer 1984) relate to this lesson and can be found on the Winter 2008-2009 Biblical Illustrator Plus (CD-ROM)

BE THE CHANGE

GO ON, NOW

Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus’ compassion for people’s needs prompted Him to call on His disciples to pray for workers to be sent into the harvest. The call to engage in missions didn’t stop with a call to pray. Jesus continued to emphasize the priority of missions in His Great Commission, in which He commanded His followers to make disciples in every corner of the earth.

After Jesus’ resurrection, He directed His disciples to meet Him on a mountain. When they joined Him there, they heard Jesus affirm the authority that had been given to Him. By using the word “all,” Jesus assured the disciples of the scope of His authority in their lives. They could count on Jesus having the last word in everything that happened “in heaven and on earth.” Knowing His authority no doubt gave the disciples assurance as they carried out Jesus’ work in their missions fields.

When Christians today take the good news of Christ to every people group on earth, we too go in His authority. Going in the authority of Jesus means we can trust Him to empower us as we carry out the Great Commission.

Since Jesus has all authority, we have no reason to excuse ourselves from carrying out His missions mandate. That’s why the word “therefore” makes such a huge difference to us as we seek to obey His command. It provides the direct

connection between the Jesus’ lordship and His church’s mission. We can carry out Christ’s commission with a sense of certainty because of His authority. For that reason, the words authority and therefore form the basis for the worldwide mission of all Christians.

The Great Commission is Jesus’ command to His church. Therefore, Christians have an obligation to make it a priority in their lives. As a priority, the Great Commission should make a difference in the choices we make about how we use our time and money. In order for the Great Commission to become a priority, believers must be intentional about fulfilling it. Otherwise, we will not carry out Jesus’ mandate for missions.

What has Jesus commissioned us to do? The answer is the specific command to “make disciples.” The words “go,” “baptizing,” and “teaching” are actions believers do to fulfill this command. As Jesus elaborated on the singular imperative “make disciples,” He gave us the extent of our work as disciple-makers—to reach out to “all nations.” The word “nations” comes from the Greek word *ethne* from which we get the term *ethnic*. It refers to the world’s distinct cultural, racial, and language groups.

To carry out Jesus’ missions mandate, we should begin thinking about people groups around the world and the need to reach all of them. Doing so involves stretching ourselves to think internationally. The Great Commission



- Are you open to going where God sends, or are you reluctant? (Why do you think that is?)
- What are some tangible ways you can rearrange your life to move with God?
- Is there anything keeping you from joining God in His work in your world?
- Who are you discipling right now? How are you being disciplined?
- What do you see as your role in the mission of the church?

also requires us to think interculturally as well as interracially.

Help is available for us as we begin to think of the vast number of the world's people groups. Information on them can be found at the Southern Baptist missions Web sites <http://peoplegroups.org> and www.imb.org.

Not only did Jesus give us the objective of making disciples, He also taught us the methods for carrying out our work. His methods are to go, then follows baptizing and teaching. To go involves being deliberate about taking the gospel to all the nations. At the same time, the word prompts us to nurture relationships with people who need Christ in the missions

we will not be left alone to carry out this assignment, the most important work on earth! He will go with us. We can always count on His presence until the work is finished and the "end of the age" comes.

We met Mike at the beginning of this session. He struggles to find a way to get involved in missions. The Bible passages we've studied show Mike and other Christians who have a heart for missions how to get involved. We can engage in missions work by giving financially, praying for workers, and making disciples of all people everywhere. With this information Mike and you face the question, *Now that you know what you can do, what will you do?*

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION RESTS ON THE SHOULDERS OF ALL CHRISTIANS AND CHURCHES.

field we live in every day. Baptizing is the work of guiding people who receive Christ to publicly identify themselves as His disciples with others who have the same identity. Teaching is instructing believers about the person and work of Jesus and how they should live as His followers. Everything Jesus commanded His disciples needs to be shared with new believers so they can grow toward spiritual maturity in their relationships with Him.

The responsibility of carrying out the Great Commission rests on the shoulders of all Christians and churches. Being aware of such a daunting task can overwhelm believers. That's why Jesus assured us that

WANTED: WORKERS

Matthew 9:35-38

According to Romans 15:23-28, Paul hoped he could count on the Christians in Rome to help him get to Spain. Their support would enable him to go into new territory and share the gospel with an unreached people group. By inviting the believers at Rome to support missions, Paul followed Jesus' example, who took His disciples "to all the towns and villages." As they went, He urged them to get involved in missions by praying for workers.

Jesus' extensive ministry took Him throughout Galilee where He went to



- ▣ *What does movement look like in your life today? How are you connecting people to the living God?*
- ▣ *What groups of people are you involved with?*
- ▣ *In what ways are you meeting needs around you?*
- ▣ *How are you praying for people to join God in His work in the world?*

synagogues and taught God's Word, but He didn't stop there. He also served needs by preaching and healing. By preaching the "good news of the kingdom," Jesus met the most pressing spiritual needs among the people who listened to Him. By healing "every disease and every sickness," He also attended to their most pressing physical needs.

As a result of Jesus' teaching, preaching, and healing ministry, crowds gathered around Him. As Jesus saw them, His heart broke. He was stirred deep down in His heart. Having "compassion" for the sea of humanity meant aching for them, feeling in His "gut" the depth of their spiritual and physical needs. Let's ask ourselves some hard questions. Do we care? Do we go out on missions? Are we empty of compassion, insulated from unbelievers? Are we afraid of what people might think if we showed compassion to sinners? When Jesus saw people, He had compassion. Do we not even look, not even care?

carried heavy spiritual and physical burdens. Israel's shepherds neglected God's people (Ezekiel 34); nobody seemed to care for them. But Jesus, the Shepherd of the sheep, had come. He cared and even gave His life on the cross for the sheep. Today He sends out Christians to join in and to continue His work.

As the crowds made their way to Jesus, He could see "they were weary" because of the oppression they endured. Also, He saw how their needs had worn them out, leaving them pillaged and plundered but not helped. No wonder Jesus' heart broke for the people of Galilee.

Christians should follow Jesus' example and respond to human needs in the same way. We should see people not with cold hearts of indifference, but with hearts of compassionate care. Ask the Lord to fill you with His compassion for people's spiritual and physical needs.

Jesus' love for the needy Galileans fostered a sense of urgency. He wanted to meet their needs as soon as possible.

HE SAW HOW THEIR NEEDS HAD WORN THEM OUT, LEAVING THEM PILLAGED AND PLUNDERED BUT NOT HELPED. NO WONDER JESUS' HEART BROKE FOR THE PEOPLE OF GALILEE.

Because of Jesus' loving heart for the people, He looked on them as sheep abandoned by their shepherd. God had directed the leaders of Israel to care for the people. But instead of caring for them, the religious leaders neglected and abused them. They imposed heavy religious obligations on the people, who already

In addition to seeing the people as sheep, He spoke of them in terms of a great harvest. A farmer knows when grain needs harvesting, and he wastes no time gathering it. He realizes the window of opportunity soon will be gone, and the grain not gathered in time will be lost in the field. Jesus saw the opportunity for a



➤ *Think about missionaries and the burdens they may carry physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Take time to visit the Web site of Southern Baptist missionaries at <http://pray.imb.org>. Pray specifically for two missionaries by name. If you are unable to access the Web site, pray for the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of missionaries whose names are unpublicized for security reasons.*

rich spiritual harvest and that He should waste no time in gathering it. Otherwise, the window of opportunity would pass.

The same opportunity exists today. A tremendous “harvest” awaits Christians who join God in His work. “Workers” need to go into the fields and get to work gathering people into the kingdom. Although the harvest has the potential for being “abundant,” as in Jesus’ day,

What a comfort and an encouragement this is for believers. God is the “Lord of the harvest,” not us. We are not responsible for the kingdom’s growth; God is. Yet God calls us to cooperate with Him both in praying and in going. As we pray, we ask Him to “send out workers.” In other words, we ask the Father to give His people a push. We pray for Him to shove us out of our snug and cozy

LISTENING TO GOD IN PRAYER LEADS TO OBEYING HIM WHEN HE GIVES US DIRECTION. IN THAT WAY, WE BECOME THE ANSWER TO OUR OWN PRAYERS.

relatively few believers are helping reach people for Christ.

Seeing the needs of people, Jesus called on His disciples to pray that God would “send out workers into His harvest.” The harvest is great; opportunity is there for us. Believers today should pray for God to call workers to missions, for we know God works through the prayers of His people.

How does God work through praying Christians? One way is that as we pray, we become more open to His direction and, therefore, more willing to obey Him. Listening to God in prayer leads to obeying Him when He gives us direction. In that way, we become the answer to our own prayers.

Jesus instructed His disciples to direct their prayers to the “Lord of the harvest.” A reference to God, the phrase implies His sovereignty to direct people into fields to reap the abundant harvest.

spiritual environments and into the world filled with people who need what Christ alone can give them. We can share in answering our own prayers.

Because of Jesus’ instruction, we do well to pray for God to send out missionaries. Also, we should pray for the missionaries already serving among the world’s peoples. You can visit <http://pray.imb.org> to read about the needs of missionaries and thus pray more specifically for them.

GIVE IT AWAY, NOW

Romans 15:23-28

In Romans 1–11, Paul explained his understanding of God’s priceless gift of salvation through Jesus Christ to both Jews and Gentiles. In chapter 15, he told the Roman Christians about his desire to preach the gospel where no missionary



- *What's your first instinct when people start asking for money? (Be honest.)*
- *Do you find it easier to give of your money or your time?*
- *Do you feel tight-fisted or free with money? Why do you think that is?*
- *Do you see yourself as connected with the body of Christ around the world?*

had been (v. 20). The apostle already had traveled to many “provinces” in order to share the message about Jesus. Paul’s missions journeys took “many years” of his life, but he had not yet traveled to Rome.

Having completed his missions work in the regions of Asia Minor (modern Turkey)

response, the churches collected money for those needy believers. Paul intended to deliver the churches’ “contribution” to the Christians in Jerusalem before he journeyed to Rome and then on to Spain. Paul also had alerted the Corinthian Christians to the need in Jerusalem

TO PAUL, CHRISTIANS CONTRIBUTING TO POOR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST WAS AN IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITY.

and Greece, Paul turned his heart toward Spain. He looked forward to sharing God’s good news in that far-away place. On his way to Spain, Paul intended to “pass through” Rome and fulfill his desire to visit the believers in that strategic city.

Paul had missions in mind when he wrote about his desire to visit the Christians in Rome. He wanted to know them better, but not for his own sake. He wanted them to become partners with him in his journey to Spain. He looked forward to enjoying their company, and he hoped “to be sent on [his] way” by them to this new mission field. The Roman believers’ sending Paul to Spain meant more than their merely wishing him well. Their sending Paul implied financial assistance and fervent prayers for his successful labors on Christ’s behalf.

Before Paul journeyed to Rome, however, he planned to go to Jerusalem because the “saints” (believers) there needed help. Many were poverty-stricken. Paul had shared their plight with the churches in Macedonia [MASS uh DOH nih uh] and Achaia [uh KAY shuh], and in

(1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8–9). To Paul, Christians contributing to poor brothers and sisters in Christ was an important responsibility.

For Southern Baptists, meeting the needs of the poor is also a priority. For example, the World Hunger Fund provides resources for missionaries as they work with people gripped by hunger and imprisoned by poverty. World hunger funds are available to Southern Baptist missionaries to meet food-related needs, such as assisting people to receive food, buying food, growing food, and using food properly.

Paul affirmed that the opportunity to help believers in Jerusalem “pleased” the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia. Although the believers in these two regions were Gentiles, they felt “indebted” to the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem. “Spiritual benefits” had come to these Gentile converts through Jewish believers, and they felt “obligated” to help the Christians in Jerusalem. In the same way, Christians today need to be reminded of our obligation to meet

people's physical and spiritual needs. After all, that's the essence of missions work. Once Paul "finished" the task of delivering the contribution to the Christians in Jerusalem, he planned to journey to Spain. Along the way, he wanted to see his Christian friends in Rome. Paul hoped they would become his partners in missions work.

Churches today face the same challenging opportunity Paul did in his time. We understand that the responsibility of taking the gospel to people who have never heard about Jesus rests on the shoulders of all believers. Churches are responsible to financially support missionaries as they go into the world to proclaim Christ. By giving and going, we participate in the missions work God calls all Christians to do.

Through the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists share in missions work. By giving to the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptist support 5,338 international missionaries who work with 1,140 people groups around the world. We also provide resources for more

than 5,000 missionaries (5,153 in 2007) in North America who worked to plant 1,458 new churches. At the same time, we support six seminaries along with other entities devoted to the work of Christ.

Southern Baptists also give to missions through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® for International Missions and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® for North American Missions. (See this lesson's sidebar "Who Was Lottie Moon?") These offerings reflect the legacy of sacrificial giving by Southern Baptists for world evangelism.

Giving to missions is not limited to contributing money. Missions giving includes time participating in missions projects in one's neighborhood as well as around the world. Also, some churches provide missionaries on stateside assignments with homes and transportation, enabling them to work with congregations to reinforce the priority of missions involvement. Giving to missions is what God calls His people to do.

BY GIVING AND GOING, WE PARTICIPATE IN THE MISSIONS WORK GOD CALLS ALL CHRISTIANS TO DO.

NOTES



Who Was Lottie Moon?

Lottie Moon is a Southern Baptist missionary hero. Born on December 12, 1840, she received Christ at the age of 18 after a series of revival meetings on her college campus.

On July 7, 1873, the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention officially appointed Lottie as a missionary to China. Lottie made her way to China and poured herself into her missions work. At the same time, she continued to cultivate missions support groups in the churches back home. Her efforts contributed to women organizing the Woman's Missionary Union to promote missions and to collect funds for missions.

The first Christmas offering for foreign missions took place in 1888. The total amount was more than \$3,000, enough to send three more missionaries to China. Lottie served 39 years as a missionary, mostly in China's Shantung province. She taught in a girls' school and often made trips into China's interior to share the good news with women and girls.

She died on December 24, 1912. The Southern Baptists' Christmas offering for international missions bears her name—The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® for International Missions.