

The Cause of the Kingdom



3 Marks of an Effective Missionary

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3 Marks of an Effective Missionary

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What's Your Mission?

Missionaries live dangerously. They face a colorful variety of challenges, from mastering obscure languages to surviving strange diseases. Some of them regularly skirt death and witness last-minute miracles. Often, the mere stories of God's work in their lives can keep an audience on the edge of their seats.

Even if we know better, it's easy to harbor odd ideas about missionaries. Are missionaries VIP saints who got exclusive invitations to a higher plane? Have they shrugged off the temptations and drudgery of everyday life like an old jacket? Not the ones I've met. So what's the key to a missionary's life?

We believe Jesus calls each of His followers, not just a select few, to some mission. That means He has a rewarding assignment for you, likely quite nearby. Your success in that mission depends on following His example.

The life of Jesus was marked by 3 character traits that identify all successful missionaries. Thank you for joining us as we consider how Jesus demonstrated those in His earthly mission, and how you can make them a part of your life.

A Scene From the Life of the Master Missionary

The following account from John 4 is an excellent example of how Jesus approached His mission.

¹Therefore, when the LORD knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John ²(though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), ³He left Judea and

departed again to Galilee. ⁴But He needed to go through Samaria. ⁵So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." ⁸For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

⁹Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

¹⁰Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

¹¹The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? ¹²Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"

¹³Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst, but the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

¹⁵The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

¹⁷The woman answered and said, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

¹⁹The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we know what we



**My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me,
and to finish His work.**

worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

²⁵The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things.”

²⁶Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

²⁷And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, “What do You seek?” or, “Why are You talking with her?” ²⁸The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, ²⁹“Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” ³⁰Then they went out to the city and came to Him.

³¹In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”

³²But He said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.”

³³Therefore the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?”

³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. ³⁵Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest?’ Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! ³⁶And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. ³⁷For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”

³⁹And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I ever did.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged

Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of His own word. ⁴²Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”

The Marks

What made Jesus so effective as a missionary? The story above illustrates three key marks of Jesus’ approach to His mission.

- First, Jesus lived with a purpose. He knew why He was here and He knew where He was going. He told His disciples, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me.”
- Second, Jesus was committed to finishing His task on time. In verse 35, He tells His disciples, who expect no harvest for four more months, that the harvest is already ripe. The work is pressing, and it’s time to begin.
- Third, Jesus was nourished by the fulfillment of doing His Father’s will. He found His assignment so satisfying that He had no desire for the food His disciples brought from town.

In Philippians 2:5 the apostle Paul tells us, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” To follow Christ is to adopt His behavior, His attitudes, and His thought patterns. To be effective in God’s work, we must be stamped with the marks of Christ’s life. Like Christ, we must lead a life of purpose. Like Christ, we must work with a sense of urgency, aware that we have limited time to complete our assignment. Like Christ, we need to gain our personal fulfillment and nourishment from doing the Father’s will. Let’s explore how these three marks look in real life.



To be effective in God’s work, we must follow Christ’s example.

1: A Life of Purpose

Jesus clearly understood that He had been sent to the world for a purpose. In John 6:29, He says, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” The “sent one” He refers to here is Himself. Later in this chapter, He mentions repeatedly that He has been sent:

³⁸“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:38-40). Again, He says, “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me” (John 6:57). In John 7:28-29, Jesus says, ²⁸“You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. ²⁹But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me.”

Jesus gained this keen sense of purpose early in life. Luke chapter 2 tells how Jesus went with His parents to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem, but stayed behind when they left for home. Partway home, His parents learned that He wasn't with the party and returned to Jerusalem to search for Him. When they finally found Jesus in deep discussion with the religious leaders at the temple, His mother rebuked Him for His carelessness. He answered, ““Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?’ But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them” (Luke 2:49-50). Even at 12 years old, being in God's house, learning about God, was so natural and appropriate to Jesus that He seemed surprised at His parents' agitation.

Jesus knew He was here with a purpose, and that purpose shaped His lifestyle. It affected everything—His rest, His privacy, His travel, His relationships, His “free” time, and His meals. The purpose was the controlling force in every decision He made.

Paul: Another Example of Purpose

Like Jesus, the apostle Paul knew he was called, and worked with a sense of purpose and destiny. Once, recounting his conversion to a disgruntled group of fellow Jews, Paul described what happened after a light struck him down on the road to Damascus.

“So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’” Paul also recounts how later when he was praying in the temple, he received a vision in which Christ told him, “Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me” (Acts 22:17-18). Then Jesus told him, “Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21).

Paul had received a clear calling. He knew God’s purpose for his life, and he was consumed with carrying it out. But this calling was terribly unpopular among the Jews—when Paul told them about it, they became so angry that the Roman army actually had to arrest Paul to keep him from being killed. Stuck in Roman custody, so hated by his own people that he couldn’t even safely walk the streets, Paul received another visit from Jesus.

“The following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome’” (Acts 23:11). “Be of good cheer, Paul! I have a plan for this, too!” For Paul, trapped in jail, this clear reminder that God was still in control must have been cheering indeed. God was using even the hateful plots of Paul’s enemies to bring him step by step along the path of success God had prepared for Paul’s life.

If God has called you and you’ve responded, you’re also a sent one. Like Jesus and Paul, you have a mission to complete. Like them, you must design your entire lifestyle around that mission if you want to succeed. But before you can do that, you must have a clear understanding of your unique mission. Do you know why you were sent?

Understanding the Task

Jesus didn’t come to earth with a mere foggy idea that He should try to help people somehow. He clearly understood what was expect-



Jesus clearly understood what was expected of Him.

ed of Him. He knew He was sent, and He knew what for. In chapter 4 of Luke's gospel, Luke describes how Jesus, after driving out demons and healing diseases in Capernaum for most of the night, withdrew into the wilderness to rest. A crowd from the village soon tracked Him down, begging Him not to leave. "But He said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent'" (Luke 4:43).

Jesus knew that to fulfill His purpose, He could not just hang around as long as He chose. There was more work to do at Capernaum, and the people would have been glad to have Him stay longer, but He never lost sight of the big picture. He had been assigned to preach the Kingdom of God throughout Israel, and that didn't leave time to heal every sick person in Capernaum and the surrounding area. He had to move on, or He wouldn't complete His task on time.

John 5:30 records Jesus as saying, "I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." Later in John, Jesus says, ²⁸"When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. ²⁹And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:28-29).

These words show us why Jesus understood His task so well. Jesus always maintained an intimate relationship with His Father, and His sole purpose was to do the Father's will. With a mind and will untainted by self-interest, Jesus could hear His Father's voice with complete clarity. He knew without a doubt what the Father expected of Him, and He obeyed it perfectly. That's why He could confidently say, "He who sent Me is with Me."

Does this match your testimony, or do you find yourself confused about God's purpose for your life? Do you doubt whether you can accomplish anything for God? You can gain the confidence Jesus had—

the certainty that you are fulfilling God's mission for you—if you are willing to follow Jesus' example. You can have His clarity, confidence, and discernment if you are willing to live as He did, in total submission to the will of God, regardless of personal consequences. Rich blessings await those who take this narrow path.

What If I'm Not Doing Enough?

No matter how much you do for God, you'll see more work than you can do. The more a person learns to see the world through Jesus' eyes, the more clearly he sees the greatness of the harvest Jesus described, and the scarcity of laborers. This can create a nagging sense of guilt and condemnation. If you are in this situation, Jesus' example, as always, can point you in the right direction.

Jesus faced this same problem, but He didn't let it distract and discourage Him. He knew God hadn't asked Him to do everything. He knew He was doing what the Father expected of Him. Remember how Jesus turned down the invitation to stay longer at Capernaum? Certainly there were still opportunities to do good in Capernaum, but Jesus passed them up in order to move on with the task the Father had given Him to do. It takes courage to walk away from opportunities that pull at our hearts, but Jesus could do it because of His sensitivity to God's guidance. As you develop that same sensitivity through submission to God's will, the calm assurance it brings will free your heart from condemnation and give you the courage to pass up inviting opportunities that would distract you from God's purpose for your life.



God didn't ask Jesus to do everything.

Why did Jesus' active ministry on earth end after a mere three years, when He was in the prime of His life? Isn't it tempting to think how much more good He could have done had God given Him another 20, 30, or even 60 years? Yet the amazing truth is that in those three years, Jesus accomplished more lasting good than any human before or since.

This should tell us something about God's requirements for effectiveness. In a culture driven by the motto that "more is better," it's easy to assume that effectiveness depends on doing more, going faster, making bigger headlines, or filling stadiums. It's easy to feel inferior to missionaries who claim throngs of converts and dominate news headlines.

People measure your success by the visible, short-term results of your life, but God doesn't. Remember, this work is not about us at all, it's about Him. He asks us simply to do what He asks of us, to fit into His big picture, and then we can be sure our lives will count for Him, even if we die young and the world forgets us.

The Fields Paul Didn't Harvest

⁶Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. ⁷After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. ⁸So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. ⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' ¹⁰Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:6-10).

Have you ever considered that God might actually turn someone away from an opportunity to share the gospel? In the passage above, Paul experienced that at least twice. There were certainly lost and needy people in both Asia and Bythinia, but God didn't permit Paul to go to either place.



God turned Paul away from certain opportunities to share the gospel.

When we look at the needs around us, we can start feeling personally responsible to save the world, to speak about Jesus to every single person we meet, to make sure we don't close a conversation without giving someone a tract, and to feel a sense of failure if we

miss a chance here and there. Paul didn't think that way. No one was more zealous for the Kingdom of God than Paul, but he willingly bypassed places that needed the gospel when the Spirit of God nudged him in another direction.

This is not an excuse for shrugging off responsibility. After the Spirit turned him away from Asia, Paul didn't just go home and watch chariot races. He forged ahead toward Bythinia until the Spirit redirected him again. Still he didn't give up, but kept going until finally, at Troas, he received a vision leading him to Macedonia. Verse 10 describes Paul's response to the vision: "Immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them." Clearly Paul wasn't trying to avoid risks and hard work; once he knew where God wanted him, he headed there right away.

Paul's actions demonstrate the attitude of a true Kingdom builder. His response to God's call was neither lazy nor frantic. Motivated by his Kingdom vision, he moved confidently ahead, yet he didn't let himself be driven by the desire to accomplish everything. When God nudged him, he changed direction instantly, even though at first he didn't know why. He knew he would be most effective wherever God wanted him, and this kept him from becoming discouraged at what he couldn't do.

To be effective missionaries, we need to cultivate the calm, focused attitude of Jesus and Paul. Remember that the work is God's, and you are His coworker. God alone sees the big picture and how you fit into it. He offers you the amazing opportunity to help Him change the world, but He knows your limitation, and He doesn't expect you to do it all by yourself.

The Burden

While an effective missionary has to be realistic about how much he can accomplish, he must be driven, as Jesus was, with a personal sense of responsibility to complete the mission God has assigned him. Jesus was so consumed with fulfilling God's purpose for His life that He was willing to suffer terribly for the cause, even to die. We can see this in some of His conversations with other Jews.



Instead of adjusting His message or waiting for better times, Jesus simply kept going.

⁴¹“The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, ‘I am the bread which came down from heaven.’ ⁴²And they said, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, “I have come down from heaven?”’” (John 6:41-42).

Here Jesus’ sense of mission clashes with the view of Him held by His acquaintances. At first they seem merely puzzled. But as Jesus makes more astonishing statements, they become angry.

⁵¹“I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

⁵²“The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, ‘How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?’” (John 6:51-52).

Step back and imagine the situation. Jesus grew up in this neighborhood, and nearly everyone knows Him. As far as they’re concerned, He’s always been an honest businessman and a fine, godly neighbor. Now He calmly explains to them that He’s been sent from heaven—and He offers eternal life to anyone willing to eat His flesh! Really, what would you have thought?

“After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him” (John 7:1).

Jesus was fully aware that His mission was putting Him in increasing danger, but instead of adjusting His message or waiting for better times, He simply kept going. John 7:28 records that Jesus attended the Feast of Tabernacles, where His enemies were watching for a chance to arrest Him.

²⁸“Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, ‘You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. ²⁹But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me.’

³⁰Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come” (John 7:28-30).

Jesus’ confidence during these encounters shows His commitment to His calling. The most powerful men in the Jewish nation were plotting to arrest Him on the very grounds of the temple. Anyone could see where their malice would lead if Jesus persisted in teaching. But the pain and danger ahead made no difference to Him; He had a job to do, and He forged on fearlessly. And with each passing day His enemies hated Him more. In John 8:48, they ask Him to His face, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”

These are deep and painful insults. Jesus knew He was carrying out the key mission in God’s awesome plan for the restoration of mankind. He had been present as the plan unfolded throughout the ages, and He had made the unimaginable sacrifice of leaving heaven and accepting a human body, with all its weakness and vulnerability. He was performing a terrible mission with absolute faithfulness, only to have His countrymen nod their heads wisely and remark, “It’s quite clear You’re not even a real Jew, and besides You’re demon-possessed.” Yet in spite of the shameful accusations, in spite of a reputation that was in tatters, Jesus kept responding in calm and constructive ways, and above all He stuck to His mission.

⁴⁹“Jesus answered, ‘I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. ⁵⁰And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. ⁵¹Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.’

⁵² “Then the Jews said to Him, ‘Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, “If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.” ⁵³Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?’... ⁵⁸Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’ ⁵⁹Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by” (John 8:49-53, 58-59).

It’s hard to comprehend the determination and inner strength it must have taken for Jesus, amid such tension and hatred, with death hanging over His head, to continue teaching those who came to Him,

preparing His disciples for their future trials, even raising Lazarus from the dead. He carried all that weight without being distracted from the task before Him, and He kept carrying it all the way to the cross.

¹⁵“But they cried out, ‘Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!’

“Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’

“The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar!’¹⁶ Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away ¹⁷And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, ¹⁸where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center” (John 19:15-18).

For Jesus, there was no such thing as too much dedication to the mission. His focus on completing His God-given assignment was stronger than any other motivation, even His human instinct for self-preservation. Forced to choose between faithfulness and survival, Jesus chose faithfulness and died.

Paul's Success Story

Remember how Paul bypassed one promising mission field after another and followed God's direction to Macedonia, a place that wasn't even on his itinerary? After that supernatural call from God, Paul must have had high hopes for the Macedonian mission work. Sure enough, God led them to people with open hearts, and they began baptizing converts. It wasn't long, however, before things took an ugly turn.

¹⁶“Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. ¹⁷This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’¹⁸And this she did for many days.

“But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour. ¹⁹But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.

²⁰“And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, ‘These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; ²¹and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.’ ²²Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. ²³And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks” (Acts 16:16-24).

What would you be thinking in Paul’s place? The call of God had seemed so clear, yet now, with the work barely begun, Paul and Silas found themselves in stocks, unable to even change position, with unknown punishments ahead. Not only was their situation painful and humiliating, it didn’t even look like a good evangelistic opportunity. Had they left work undone in Asia and Bythinia, following God into new territory, only to rot in prison for crimes they hadn’t committed?

Paul and Silas didn’t know. But they had confidence that God knew what He was doing, and that even if He had brought them to Macedonia just to be thrown into prison, He must have something good in mind. That confidence was the source of the startling response recorded in the next verse.

“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25).

When we live in obedience to God’s purpose, we can be just as untouched by circumstances as Paul and Silas were. When we face trials, we can trust God, knowing that we’re simply walking the path He chose for us and that He will pour out His grace on anyone who is within His will. A person with this confidence becomes nearly impervious to circumstances.

Paul and Silas soon had plenty of evidence that God hadn’t forgotten them.

²⁶“Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed. ²⁷And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill

himself.²⁸ But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.’

²⁹“Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’

³¹“So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ ³²Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household” (Acts 16:26-34).

So that’s what God was doing! Paul and Silas’s suffering and their hours in the stocks were part of God’s plan to bring salvation to an entire family. God chose Paul and Silas for that mission because He knew they had a sense of purpose that wouldn’t diminish in tough circumstances. Had they compromised to avoid jail time, they would not have met the jailer, whose heart God had prepared for a message only they could deliver.

When you, like Jesus, Paul, and Silas, discover God’s purpose for you and set out to fulfill it regardless of cost, you’re likely to run into suffering, just as they did. Rejoice! God has miracles in store for you. Following His purpose is guaranteed to take you out of your comfort zone, but being successful in His work requires the dedication to keep going through inconveniences, poverty, pain, and death.



Following His purpose is guaranteed to take you out of your comfort zone, but being successful in His work requires the dedication to keep going.

That’s the example of Christ. Have you experienced that sense of purpose? Are you aware that you’ve been sent for a unique task? Have you identified your mission? Are you walking by God’s direction, so

that you know what to do and what to leave undone? Are you willing to experience hardship, pain, and death to succeed in His work?

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3).

2: Finishing By Nightfall

Talking with His disciples by the well outside Sychar, Jesus told them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34). This idea was constantly at the forefront of Jesus’ mind.

As we mentioned before, Jesus had no intention of doing everything, yet He had a clearly defined task that He was committed to finishing before He left the earth. At the end of three years of active ministry, He could close His life with the words, “It is finished.”

As Jesus spoke those final words, there remained many people who had not heard the good news He came to bring. Many were still sick, and many still suffered under demonic oppression. Yet Jesus’ sensitivity, focus, and obedience enabled Him to carry to the cross the absolute assurance that He had fulfilled the Father’s plan for His life. His mission had succeeded; His earthly ministry was complete.

For a glimpse of the approach to life that resulted in Jesus’ success, let’s look at an account from John 9. This passage records how Jesus and His disciples encountered a man who had been born blind. The disciples, conditioned to believe that such a handicap represented God’s judgment, asked Jesus who was to blame for the man’s blindness—he or his parents?

Jesus replied, ³“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. ⁴I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:3-4). These words reveal His awareness that His time was limited. His work must be finished by nightfall.



“I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4).

Jesus didn't live as if He had 40 or 50 years to spend on His assignment. He wasted no time in the foolish pursuit of pleasure and ease. He knew God had not provided enough time for Him to spend an occasional day goofing off and still complete the work on time. Always He saw ahead of Him the darkness, getting closer and closer, and every choice He made was driven by the need to finish His work before the opportunity slipped away.

Is *your* life shaped by the drive to finish the work to which God has called you? Are your choices helping you pursue the Kingdom most effectively? Or are you choosing to spend some of your time, your money, or your attention on pursuits that waste your time and hinder you in carrying out your assignment?

For a Kingdom missionary, there are no unimportant decisions. A true missionary weighs the impact of each decision on his effectiveness. The need to finish God's work on time will be the first consideration whether he is buying groceries, choosing a place to live, building a business, or designing a schedule. Night is coming, and there's no time for wasted moves. Let's be among those who share Christ's passion for the work of God, and make every decision serve that end.



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Speaking with His disciples by Jacob's well, Jesus told them they were mistaken in thinking the harvest was still four months away. Obviously, the grain wasn't ripe yet, so what was He trying to tell them?

He was telling them to change their way of thinking. They were missing opportunities; they were complacent when they should have been alert. The fall harvest was the next big event on their mental calendars, and they didn't even notice that a far more important event was unfolding under their noses.

In Luke 10:2, Jesus said, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” Dedicated missionaries are conscious that the work is great and there are few people doing it. They feel an urgency to pray, not only for God’s help in their own work, but for more workers to help in the task.

What If I Burn Out?

Although Jesus’ life was marked by a sense of urgency, He did take time to rest. No matter how dedicated we are, our bodies and minds have limits, and we will be more effective if we take some time to nourish our spirits through fellowship, prayer, and meditation outside the demands of everyday work. This kind of rest strengthens us for future challenges, rather than distracting us from our task.



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On the other hand, there were times in Jesus’ life when crowds followed Him and His disciples all the way to a wilderness retreat to make more demands on Him. At those times, He laid aside His need for rest and served the hungry people who had discovered Him. He refused to turn them away for the sake of His personal need for rest. When God allowed circumstances to interrupt Jesus’ much-needed rest, Jesus yielded, changed His plans, and served whatever need was before Him.

Discovering Your Mission

God never creates anyone without a purpose. His purpose for your life is unique and full of rewarding surprises, but it can only be discovered through complete surrender. If you offer yourself to Him with no reservations, you can be certain He will give you something to do. He will open your eyes to the work for which He has uniquely

equipped you, and you will find endless ways to get involved in Kingdom building.

How can we profess to follow Christ while squandering our precious time and resources on sports, luxury, or entertainment? If our Christianity is to be more than talk, we must place our priorities where Jesus placed His. Like Him, we must be so consumed with fulfilling the Father's purpose that this one goal reshapes our life and gradually crowds out everything else.

3: Jesus' Mysterious Food

Giving up comforts and privileges, being despised, persecuted, or even killed, and working each day under an unknown deadline—does all this sound gloomy and scary? If our mission consisted only of suffering and sacrifice, it might be more than we could face. But that's only part of the picture.

When Jesus told His disciples that He had food to eat of which they knew nothing, they were puzzled, and He had to spell it out for them. His food, He said, was doing the will of the Father and finishing His work. Jesus was telling them that His Father's will brought Him the same kind of inner satisfaction a hungry person feels at sitting down to a loaded table. He was nourished in a tangible way by the fulfillment of carrying out God's mission for His life. From that secret banquet, Jesus gained the strength to faithfully continue in a lonely mission with little visible encouragement.



His Father's will brought Jesus the same kind of inner satisfaction a hungry person feels at sitting down to a loaded table.

Doing the Father's will was a continual feast for Jesus. From this abundant source of nourishment He gained not only the stamina to carry out a difficult mission, but also an inner satisfaction and pleasure that protected Him from the allure of temptation. Have you found yourself seeking fulfillment in second-rate food sources like money, clothing, cars, or even other people? Even legitimate pursuits

and relationships will become miserable disappointments if we look to them for our fulfillment, because sooner or later they let us down, leaving us emptier than before. Worse yet, people keep returning to these false sources no matter how often they have failed to satisfy. But once you taste the joy of working alongside Jesus in the Kingdom of God, those other things begin losing their power to seduce. Day by day the appetite for them diminishes as the heart feasts on Jesus and His mission in the world.

Although Jesus' first announcement of His secret food source left His disciples puzzled, they eventually found that banquet themselves. That's what gave them the awesome stamina to keep testifying to the gospel in the face of horrible persecution. That's what buoyed them up as they faced cold, hunger, false accusations, imprisonment, and martyrdom for the truth they had seen with their own eyes and touched with their hands. "What keeps them going?" their enemies must have asked often. But only those who have given themselves up for God's service can know the outpouring of grace, courage, joy, and hope that the Spirit of God pours into the life of those who eat and drink the Father's will.

Your Mission

Have you clearly seen God's purpose for your life? Do you feel God's urgency driving you forward into the work? Are you tasting the secret rewards of carrying out God's will in your life and surroundings? This is the missionary pattern of Christ's life. This is the pattern of success for us who follow Him.

When we live with God's will as the focus of our activity, we can live without regret. Instead of a sinking feeling as we realize how quickly our life is passing, we'll experience the rich memory of God's grace and power working in us, and the joy of anticipating the adventure yet to come, followed by the crowning joy of seeing our King and Elder Brother face to face and hearing Him say to us, "Well done." What could be better than that?



About Lighthouse Publishing

The ministry of Lighthouse Publishing is founded on the burden presented in this book. Our focus is to provide Christian discipleship literature for prisoners before the night comes when no one can work. Truly, the fields are white for harvest, but the workers are few.

Circulation of our free discipleship magazine *Loaves & Fishes* has spread into hundreds of prisons and jails across the USA. Our goal is to publish four issues of this magazine per year. We also have plans for a Spanish version of *Loaves & Fishes* and a magazine targeted toward women in prison. We see huge opportunities to make more of a difference in the prisons if the workers and funds were available.

We are actively looking for individuals, churches, and business owners who are willing to partner with us in giving the chaplains what they need in their outreach and to supply hungry souls in prison with solid, Biblical teaching.

Visit our website or contact us using the information in the front of this book to learn more about Lighthouse Publishing and how you can make a difference.

www.lighthousepublishing.org

3 Marks of an Effective Missionary

Are you alarmed with the speed of time and how little you have left? Do you wonder how God wants to use you in His Kingdom?

Discover the secret to being an effective missionary—simply following the example of Jesus. In three short years, Jesus accomplished more lasting good than any other human before or since. When your life is completely dedicated to the cause of the Kingdom, you can also enjoy the Father's grace and power upon your life, working success in ways you never imagined.

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Free Discipleship Tools for Prisoners