

# The Setting: On Mission Wherever You Are

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** All God's people are called to live on mission wherever He has placed them.

I was flying home from a work trip quite tired. I had been talking to others all day and was looking forward to some time by myself reading a book. The gentleman seated next to me, however, kept trying to invite me into the animated conversation he was having with the lady next to him. When he nudged me the first time, I smiled and chuckled, while keeping my earphones in and my book open. A couple hours later, and many interruptions aside, the plane began its final descent. I felt like I had some good “me” time—despite the occasional interruptions. So I decided to take my earphones out in case my neighbor still wanted to talk. He did. In fact, both of them did.

With a grin across his face, he asked me, “What are you reading anyway?” I was reading a book on missional spiritual disciplines written by my friend, but I thought that might scare him. So I just told him that I was reading a book about cultivating my spiritual life. He and his lady friend were both intrigued. So over the next fifteen minutes, we had a vigorous discussion on spirituality, idols, and what it means to be a follower of Christ.

While I was having my “me” time and trying to ignore the party boy beside me, I felt the Holy Spirit nudge me a few times. I felt like God was telling me to put the book down and talk to him, but frankly, I just didn't want to. It wasn't until later on in the plane ride that I finally relented and took the earphones out. And guess what happened? The guy beside me initiated the conversation, and the rest is history.

Date of My Bible Study: \_\_\_\_\_



When have you felt the leading of the Holy Spirit to share the gospel with someone? How did you respond? What happened?

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God wants us to see every moment and interaction of our lives as opportunities to spread the gospel and strengthen the church. Sharing the gospel is not something you add to your schedule or something that has to happen at church. Instead, sharing the gospel is something that you can do while grocery shopping, while on a run in the park, and yes, also on an airplane.

While on his second and third missionary journeys, the apostle Paul focused on two things: spreading the gospel and strengthening the church. As we look at parts of this ministry in this session, we will discover that God's primary calling on all of our lives is to be on His mission, regardless of what our day jobs are. As a result, we will also learn how to see our occupations as platforms for proclaiming the gospel and discover new ways to mentor and strengthen those around us. Focusing on these two things will help us leave a legacy of faithfulness for those behind us.

### Voices from the Church

“St. Augustine taught that all people everywhere are longing to find the true happiness that lies in the distant memory of the human race from our original intimacy with God, lost since the fall. We search endlessly for this true happiness and goodness. Christians who give others a small taste of that goodness with such inexplicable acts of kindness can jog the memory, reawaken that desire for a God who is goodness itself.”<sup>1</sup>

—Graham Tomlin

## 1. See your occupation as a platform for proclaiming the gospel (Acts 18:1-4).

*<sup>1</sup> After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup> And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, <sup>3</sup> and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. <sup>4</sup> And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.*

When Paul left Athens to go to Corinth, he did it to continue to spread the gospel throughout the world. Most of the time when we read about Paul in the New Testament, it is typically about him teaching, preaching, discipling, or evangelizing. Once in a while, we hear about Paul's other occupation: tentmaking. We see it here in Acts 18:3. And in Acts 20:34, Paul shares that the work of his hands—referring to his tentmaking trade—has provided for his needs and those with him.



What do you see as the pros and cons of a fully-supported missionary? Of a working missionary?

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When Paul arrived in Corinth, he providentially met two other newcomers to the city, Aquila and Priscilla, who were also tentmakers by trade. Obviously, this was not a coincidence. As much as Paul rejoiced in the fact that he was a tentmaker and able to preach the gospel free of charge, he knew that God was the One who ultimately provided him with his daily bread and his every need.



### Voices from the Church

“Every believer is called to full-time paid ministry—God just chooses to route our paychecks through different sources.”<sup>2</sup>

—Jeff Vanderstelt

When you read through the New Testament, most would think that Paul was a full-time preacher and evangelist based on his writing and travel schedule. However, as a tentmaker, Paul lived off of whatever he worked for and earned from this business. This was not passive income or a case of living off the interest from a trust fund or endowment. Paul worked hard in his occupation but committed his entire life to proclaiming the gospel.



How can you use your occupation as a platform for proclaiming the gospel?

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## 2. Find ways to mentor and strengthen those around you (Acts 18:24-28).

It's so easy to see everything as a competition. Whether it's trying to get in line at the grocery store before the lady down the aisle or driving in the HOV lane with a mannequin in your back seat, many of us have this incessant need and addiction to win. Unfortunately, we have also learned that in order to win, we need to push others down. We say things like "There's only one gold medal, and the silver medalist is the biggest loser" because we believe that we need to step on others to win. But that's not always the case. It's actually possible to win by helping others win.

*<sup>24</sup> Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. <sup>27</sup> And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, <sup>28</sup> for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.*

Instead of viewing Apollos as competition, Priscilla and Aquila saw him as a brother in the Lord and a coworker in the gospel. And so, they helped him "win." After all, if he was able to powerfully and eloquently use the Scriptures to preach about Jesus Christ, even though he only knew about John's baptism, how much better would he be able to proclaim the gospel after he learned from more knowledgeable believers "the way of God more accurately"? Yet even with this shortcoming, Apollos had made proclaiming this Christ to others his first priority in life; everything else paled in comparison.



How does Apollos' example challenge our excuses that we aren't ready to share the gospel with others?

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May this be an encouragement to you on two fronts. First of all, understand that the Lord can use anyone, regardless of their past and what they know or don't know. God is looking for those who are faithful, who possess a humble heart, and who want to do His will whenever, wherever, and whatever. We see this in Jesus' disciples and here with Apollos.

Second, find ways to mentor and strengthen those around you. A funny thing happens when you begin pouring into the lives of others—you continue to grow! Sometimes we think that we need to grow to a certain point, memorize enough Scripture verses, or know how to refute particular arguments before we can disciple others. But this cannot be further from the truth.

So, we should help others take their next step. Guide others into a deeper relationship with Christ and help them live out the Great Commission. You can do this one-on-one as the Lord lays individuals on your heart, or you can do this as a peer in the Bible study group that you are a part of. Or perhaps this session itself is God's call for you to step up and lead a Bible study, trusting that God will go before you and give you what you need to help others draw nearer to Him.



What are some ways you can participate humbly in the discipleship of your group?

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How have you benefited from a mentor or the encouragement of a fellow Christian?

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## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

### 86. *Discipleship*

Discipleship is a process that takes place both formally and informally to effect spiritual maturity as people follow Jesus. Informal discipleship, as passages like Deuteronomy 6:4-9 suggest, happens everywhere, in every arena of life. Growing in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ is something that requires our whole life, not just the mind. Formal discipleship refers to periods of instruction. We make disciples through our words and actions, providing verbal instruction from God's Word and non-verbal examples through our lives (Acts 20:17-24).

### 3. Leave a legacy of faithfulness behind you (Acts 20:17-38).

<sup>17</sup> Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. <sup>18</sup> And when they came to him, he said to them:

*“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, <sup>19</sup> serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; <sup>20</sup> how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, <sup>21</sup> testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. <sup>24</sup> But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself; if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. <sup>25</sup> And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, <sup>27</sup> for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. <sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. <sup>32</sup> And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup> I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. <sup>35</sup> In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

<sup>36</sup> And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. <sup>37</sup> And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, <sup>38</sup> being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.



What parts of Paul's message to the Ephesian elders stick out to you and challenge you with respect to your faithfulness to Jesus' mission? Why?

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Think about the conversations you've had with school friends, coworkers, and family members. Moments around the bonfire, on a bus with friends, or at camp. Have you taken advantage of every single opportunity to share and proclaim the gospel to those you live, work, and play with? I know I haven't. What keeps us back from this kind of devotion to our Lord and concern for the spiritual well-being of others?

Perhaps we just put a higher value on other things. Paul, however, put his value in completing his gospel mission that he received from Jesus, and to that end, he was willing to sacrifice his own life (v. 24). Nothing mattered more to him than Jesus and sharing His gospel.

Let's be honest here. Most of us like our pleasures, comforts, and privileges too much to live this kind of unashamed life. We give our tithes and offerings, serve at our church, pass an Easter invitation card to a neighbor, and say to ourselves, "That's better than most!" But it's not! You can't judge your Christian walk compared to your next-door neighbor's standards. You need to see how your life compares to the Scriptures.



### Voices from Church History

"There are two things that the gospel teaches: contrition...which is repentance of mind and life, and faith, which is founded on Christ Jesus' death and stirs up courage...Indeed these things should be proclaimed not only to Jews, but also to all Gentiles."<sup>3</sup>

—Heinrich Bullinger  
(1504–1575)



What would it look like to leave a legacy of faithfulness in your home? At work? In your career?

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What objections and difficulties might we need to sort through to live with a full devotion to the Lord and His gospel mission?

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## Conclusion

Your primary calling is not your career, occupation, or family. You have the same primary calling as the missionary who is leading people to Christ in central China, the janitor in your neighborhood school who walks the halls and prays for the students, the pastor in rural Kentucky who is preparing a sermon, and the investment banker on Wall Street who is struggling to figure out how his faith meshes with his morals. If you are a follower of Christ, your primary calling is to be on God's mission proclaiming the gospel to those far from God and strengthening those around you. Let us answer that call in faith and share the good news about Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** On his second and third missionary journeys, the apostle Paul saw whatever situation he was in as an opportunity for spreading the gospel and strengthening the church. His way of life reflected the selflessness and grace of Jesus, who taught us to tell the truth, help the weak, and give generously as an act of worship. Paul's endurance was a testimony to the supreme worth of Jesus Christ, the One who called him.



# HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** God calls us to see our earthly circumstances as opportunities to spread the gospel and strengthen the church.

1. How can you use your occupation to help support the proclamation of the gospel around the world?

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2. Whom has God brought into your life that you could mentor in the faith, and how could you initiate that kind of relationship?

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3. How can your group/church leave a legacy of faithfulness in your community in the name of Jesus Christ?

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