



Getting the Most Out of *Missions*

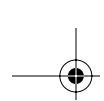
Morning services at a local church we visited were excellent in many ways. They offered great programs, led the services with outstanding worship and offered good and relevant Bible teaching. But when my wife, Christie, and I discussed it later, we agreed that something was missing. There was little emphasis on outreach to others and mission to the world.

Our discussion then shifted to bigger questions. We asked, “What motivates evangelism, outreach and world missions involvement? Why would individuals or a fellowship group or church dedicate themselves to outreach? What could drive people to give away resources—like time, money or career—to spreading Christ’s love to the world?”

It would seem that resources like satellites, the Internet and jet travel would make people even more ready to reach the world. The concept of the global village has dramatically reduced our perception of the size of the earth, even though the world population now exceeds six billion. But, we concluded, the realities of the global village are not reason enough to mobilize us for evangelism and world-wide outreach. If they were, every Christian would be anxious to be involved around the world. Instead the global village often overwhelms us or numbs us into inactivity.

Then I brought up the inequities in the world. “Shouldn’t we be motivated,” I argued, “by the world of economic haves and have-nots that we live in?” The vast majority of the global population (“Two-Thirds” or more) live as have-nots, struggling to survive and without choices. The remainder of us live in excess, consuming vast amounts of resources on ourselves—often at the expense of the have-nots. But the needs and inequities of the world often serve only to create guilt or “compassion fatigue.” The unequal distribution of wealth in the world is not enough





to mobilize us for local or global ministry.

As the discussion progressed, we recalled an article in a Christian magazine in which experts reported that the task of world missions is nearly over. They celebrated reports which indicated that the Christian church moves closer daily to “completing the task” of presenting the message of God’s love through Jesus Christ to every ethnic group on earth—to the end of establishing self-sustaining churches in those ethnic groups. Is “completing the task” reason enough to mobilize us for evangelism and world outreach?

I thought our discussion would go on for quite a while longer until Christie offered the most succinct response. She said, “It’s simple. We’re involved in outreach to reflect the character of God. Missions is God’s heart.”

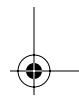
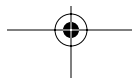
This Bible study guide focuses on God’s heart for lost people as revealed in the Bible—from Genesis to Revelation. It builds on the conviction that at the foundation of our desire to mobilize ourselves, our groups or our local churches for global outreach stands the “heart” or character of God.

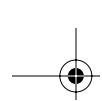
The studies do not focus on the typical missionary texts, like the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. Why? Because in the words of David Howard, former director of the Urbana missionary convention, “The missionary enterprise of the church is not a pyramid built upside down with its point on one isolated text in the New Testament out of which we have built a huge structure known as *missions*. Rather, the missionary enterprise of the church is a great pyramid built right side up with its base running from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. All of Scripture forms the foundation for the outreach of the gospel to the whole world” (*The Great Commission for Today* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1976], p. 31).

In the Bible, God reveals

- his love for lost people
- his passion to bring these people back into fellowship with himself
- his desire to use our lives to fulfill that purpose
- the reality of the sacrifices involved for all three

Because we believe that as followers of Christ our supreme desire is to live our lives in ways that reflect God’s character to the world,





Getting the Most Out of Missions ————— 7

each study includes something that all of us are asked to do to reflect God's love practically to the world—starting right where we live.

May these Bible studies help you understand, internalize and then demonstrate God's heart for our world.

Suggestions for Individual Study

1. As you begin each study, pray that God will speak to you through his Word.

2. Read the introduction to the study and respond to the personal reflection question or exercise. This is designed to help you focus on God and on the theme of the study.

3. Each study deals with a particular passage—so that you can delve into the author's meaning in that context. Read and reread the passage to be studied. The questions are written using the language of the New International Version, so you may wish to use that version of the Bible. The New Revised Standard Version is also recommended.

4. This is an inductive Bible study, designed to help you discover for yourself what Scripture is saying. The study includes three types of questions. *Observation* questions ask about the basic facts: who, what, when, where and how. *Interpretation* questions delve into the meaning of the passage. *Application* questions help you discover the implications of the text for growing in Christ. These three keys unlock the treasures of Scripture.

Write your answers to the questions in the spaces provided or in a personal journal. Writing can bring clarity and deeper understanding of yourself and of God's Word.

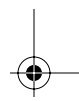
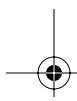
5. It might be good to have a Bible dictionary handy. Use it to look up any unfamiliar words, names or places.

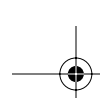
6. Use the prayer suggestion to guide you in thanking God for what you have learned and to pray about the applications that have come to mind.

7. You may want to go on to the suggestion under "Now or Later," or you may want to use that idea for your next study.

Suggestions for Members of a Group Study

1. Come to the study prepared. Follow the suggestions for individ-





ual study mentioned above. You will find that careful preparation will greatly enrich your time spent in group discussion.

2. Be willing to participate in the discussion. The leader of your group will not be lecturing. Instead, he or she will be encouraging the members of the group to discuss what they have learned. The leader will be asking the questions that are found in this guide.

3. Stick to the topic being discussed. Your answers should be based on the verses which are the focus of the discussion and not on outside authorities such as commentaries or speakers. These studies focus on a particular passage of Scripture. Only rarely should you refer to other portions of the Bible. This allows for everyone to participate in in-depth study on equal ground.

4. Be sensitive to the other members of the group. Listen attentively when they describe what they have learned. You may be surprised by their insights! Each question assumes a variety of answers. Many questions do not have “right” answers, particularly questions that aim at meaning or application. Instead the questions push us to explore the passage more thoroughly.

When possible, link what you say to the comments of others. Also, be affirming whenever you can. This will encourage some of the more hesitant members of the group to participate.

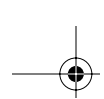
5. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. We are sometimes so eager to express our thoughts that we leave too little opportunity for others to respond. By all means participate! But allow others to also.

6. Expect God to teach you through the passage being discussed and through the other members of the group. Pray that you will have an enjoyable and profitable time together, but also that as a result of the study you will find ways that you can take action individually and/or as a group.

7. Remember that anything said in the group is considered confidential and should not be discussed outside the group unless specific permission is given to do so.

8. If you are the group leader, you will find additional suggestions at the back of the guide.





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God the Seeker

Genesis 3:1-9

Why be involved in missions? Our mission in the world is rooted in the character of God. What we do flows from our understanding of who God is. If this is true, then the key question becomes, Who is this God?

GROUP DISCUSSION. When you think of God, what comes to mind? What adjectives or images would you use to describe God's character?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. When you contemplate your own relationship with God, what aspects of God's character are the most personal or intimate to you?

At this point in the Bible the story of creation has been recounted twice in Genesis 1 and 2. Adam and Eve are living in complete harmony in their relationship with God and with each other in an environment that God himself has declared "very good" (Genesis 1:31). *Read Genesis 3:1-9.*

1. What does the serpent do to undermine the harmony of Adam and Eve's relationship with God (vv. 1-5)?

2. Imagine yourself as Eve. What factors would you have been weighing as you decided whether or not to eat the fruit?

