

Topic 30: Missions

Embracing God's Heart for the World

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

—Acts 1:8

In 1916, a young Irish woman by the name of Irene Webster-Smith went to Japan with the Japan Evangelistic Band (JEB) and began to minister to prostitutes. Eventually, she decided that it would be better to prevent girls from becoming prostitutes in the first place—or in her words, “Erect a fence at the top of the precipice rather than driving an ambulance at the bottom.” To that end she began to adopt unwanted babies and began the Sunrise Home. Her work continued until 1940, when she was forced to leave Japan at the advent of World War II.

Following the war, when General Douglas MacArthur was supervising the rebuilding of Japan, he personally invited Irene to come back and minister to war criminals who were to be executed. Irene was able to lead fourteen of these war criminals and some of their guards to Christ.



In her last years, Irene, who was known as *Sensei*, worked with InterVarsity Fellowship, teaching Japanese college students about Christ and founding the Ochanomizu Christian Student Center at Tokyo University.



1. When someone brings up the topic of *missions* what sorts of thoughts and ideas run through your mind?

Perhaps you've heard of the Great Commission of Christ. This biblical passage is what gets Christians and churches thinking about the global task of making disciples.

The Great Commission

“God has made you for global purposes. God has made you for something very large.”—John Piper

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18–20).

2. Do you think Christ's command to “make disciples of all nations” means we all need to pack up our belongings and move to foreign soil? Why or why not?

Some believers regard cross-cultural ministry as “one more thing the church does”—an optional program, sort of like the men's softball team or the hand bell choir. Others cringe from guilt at the “m” word, because they're not involved. Still others feel they have no way to contribute to God's global cause.

In this session, we hope to demonstrate, first, that making disciples of all nations isn't a side venture of the church, it's our reason for being! Second, we want to explore some very practical ways ordinary followers of Jesus can have a worldwide impact, often without leaving their own zip code!

Let's begin!



Bible Study

God has a heart for the nations of the world.

The New Testament Greek word commonly translated “nation” is *ethnos* (Matthew 28:19). This is the word from which we get our English word “ethnic.” That’s the idea—a distinct ethnic group, people, or race.

In North America, there are more than 1,430 distinct people groups and almost 147 of these are considered “unreached.”

We tend to think of nations as political entities or geographical areas marked by lines on a map. But God in his Word always focuses on groups that share a common affinity and self-identity—cultural background and language. Think of the Kurdish People, spread

out across Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran; the Choctaw Nation in the United States; or the Maasai Tribe who spill out of southern Kenya into northern Tanzania.

An unreached people group refers to an ethnic group that lacks an indigenous, self-propagating Christian church movement.

After God created the world (Genesis 1–2) and mankind sinned (Genesis 3–9), we see the rise of nations. These distinct peoples—with divine help—begin to spread out across the earth (Genesis 10–11).

Then, in Genesis 12, we see God choose one man and give him remarkable promises:

“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’” (Genesis 12:1–3).

3. What reason does God give for blessing Abram (later called Abraham)?



Clearly, since humanity's "fall" into sin (Genesis 3), God's desire has been to rescue and bless all peoples. God has a heart for the nations of the world! Carefully read and consider the following passages from Genesis to Revelation:

- ▶ "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed" (Genesis 26:4).
- ▶ "May your ways be known throughout the earth, your saving power among people everywhere. May the nations praise you, O God. Yes, may all the nations praise you" (Psalm 67:2–3, NLT).
- ▶ "God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him" (Psalm 67:7, NASB).
- ▶ "All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name" (Psalm 86:9).
- ▶ "Praise the LORD, all nations; laud Him, all peoples!" (Psalm 117:1, NASB).
- ▶ "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).
- ▶ "He said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles'" (Acts 22:21, ESV).
- ▶ "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers'" (Mark 11:17).
- ▶ "Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel'" (Luke 2:27–32).
- ▶ "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'" (Revelation 7:9–10).

4. What do you see here in all this talk about nations, peoples, and Gentiles?



5. According to the passage above from Revelation 7, where is history headed?

6. How would you summarize God's desire, his heart, for the peoples of the world?

Cultivating a Missionary Heart like God's

God doesn't call every believer to move to a foreign country. But he does want us to think about the world, pray for its needs, and do our part in fulfilling the Great Commission—even if it's a behind-the-scenes role. There's an old saying that some can go, most can give, and all can pray. The more we learn and engage, the more we'll sense our heart beating for the nations.

Here are thirty-one simple, doable, and creative ways to be a "World Christian" right where you are now.

- ▶ Read the book of Acts in one sitting. Imagine traveling with Peter or Paul, doing evangelism, discipling believers, planting new churches.
- ▶ Discover a wealth of information about reaching the unreached people groups of the world at www.joshuaproject.net.
- ▶ Offer to serve on your church's missions committee, or on a long- or short-term missions team.
- ▶ Get a whirlwind short-course in the history of world missions by reading Ruth Tucker's missions classic *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*.
- ▶ Get a list of church-sponsored missionaries. Memorize their names and where they serve. Find out their birthdays, anniversaries, etc. and fuss over them on those special days.
- ▶ Take the life-changing Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course. To find out about classes in your area check out www.perspectives.org.

- ▶ Get your passport or make sure it is up to date just in case you have the opportunity to go on a short-term mission trip.



- ▶ Every chance you get, invite furloughed or retired missionaries into your home for dinner. Let family members and roommates rub shoulders with disciples whose hearts beat for the nations.
- ▶ Identify culturally diverse people who live in your neighborhood. Reach out to them by inviting them over for dinner, asking them to go on a picnic, etc. In short, pray that God will enable you to develop a redemptive relationship with your neighbors.
- ▶ Begin asking the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest (Luke 10:2). Pray that some, even from your own church, would be thrust out into places of effective ministry among the unreached.
- ▶ If you're an empty nester, single, or a family with an extra bedroom in your home, inquire about missionary couples or families on furlough. Offer to host them whenever they pass through your area.

- ▶ Fast one day a week. Use those meal times to pray for an unreached people group. Give the money that you would have spent on groceries that day to a missionary working to plant a church among an unreached people group. If you estimate two dollars for breakfast, three dollars for lunch, and five dollars for supper, that would be ten dollars a week or forty dollars a month that could be spent supporting missions.
- ▶ Put an acrylic photo holder in the center of your dining table. Put a different missionary picture or prayer letter in it each day. Make these servants of God, their activities, and needs a regular part of your family's daily dining experience.
- ▶ Buy a small globe and make it a dining table centerpiece. At supper each night, discuss a different country. Learn the capital cities of the world.



- ▶ If you are financially able, don't sell or trade in your old car. Instead, donate it to your favorite mission agency for use by missionaries who are home on furlough and must make frequent trips to visit their supporters.





- ▶ Email a missionary you know and love. Ask, “If I could buy you any two books to help you in what you’re doing, what two titles would you want?” Order those desired resources and mail them to the missionary.



- ▶ Take a picture of your Sunday school class, family, or small group holding up a poster that says, “We love you and are lifting you up!” Mail it to a sponsored missionary family.
- ▶ If you have an area in your city where different ethnic groups live (Chinatown, little Havana, a Hispanic neighborhood, etc.), gather a friend or two and go on a prayer walk through that neighborhood. A “prayer walk” is just what it sounds like. You walk and pray at the same time—for the salvation of those in the area who don’t know Christ, for workers to reach out to them, for believers in the area to be strong witnesses, etc.
- ▶ Get an international cookbook from the library and one night a week, try cooking a dish that would commonly be served and eaten in another country. Allow your whole family to experience life from a different perspective. For extra fun, check out a

“travel videologue” about that country from your public library. These DVDs, usually 60 minutes in length, can give you a whirlwind, “up close and personal” peek at places and peoples around the globe!

- ▶ Make an appointment with a financial advisor about getting out of debt and living by a budget. For some, this is a long, slow, difficult process. For others, it requires only a minor adjustment in lifestyle. For all, it opens up new opportunities to live for the kingdom and to allocate more resources to eternal ventures.
- ▶ Start reading up on “International News.” Many believers ignore these stories because they claim they don’t understand political developments taking place around the world. The irony is that we will *never* come to understand global events until we make the effort to get informed.
- ▶ Consider offering your professional services (dental, medical, legal, accounting, etc.) for free to missionaries on furlough.



- ▶ Visit an ethnic market in your community. Take your children and allow them to experience the different sights, sounds, and smells. Better yet, once every three months or so, visit an ethnic restaurant in your city.
- ▶ Have a garage sale and donate the proceeds to a missionary family in need. They get necessary funding. You get a de-cluttered attic, garage, basement, and closets!



- ▶ Get a copy of *Operation World*, the definitive prayer guide to every nation. This resource looks at the world country by country, gives a brief glimpse of what God is doing in each place, and suggests ways believers can pray. Find out more or get other resources at www.operationworld.org.
- ▶ Look at the labels on your clothing. If your shirt says “Made in Malaysia,” pray for that country—for God to open eyes and hearts there, for the church there to grow and be strengthened and emboldened, for missionaries working there, etc.
- ▶ Set your watch alarm to go off daily at a certain time, as a reminder to pray. For example, set it to beep at 2:22 P.M.

When it does, pray for two workers in two places for two minutes.



- ▶ Surprise a missionary family with a care package filled with goodies and hard-to-find items. Make sure you first find out about customs requirements and restrictions—you don't want your gesture of love to cost your overseas friends an arm and a leg!
- ▶ Minister to a missionary family on furlough. Take them to lunch. Bring them a batch of cookies. Offer to provide childcare for an evening. Take him golfing or fishing. Take her shopping. Give the family a gift certificate.



- ▶ Almost all universities have sizable international student communities.





These bright and influential visitors are often very open to your friendship. Many times the wives and children of such graduate and doctoral students lead lives of isolation and loneliness. If you live near a university, contact the International Student office and find out how you can reach out to these future leaders.

- ▶ Invite international students into your home and your life. Help them with English. Inform them about local customs. Have them teach you a song or authentic dance from their

hometown. Or have them plan a native meal of two or three dishes. You buy the necessary ingredients; they come over and cook and tell you about their lives and culture.



The point is, whether you're a young professional, a small business owner, or a stay-at-home mom, you can play a role in God's global and eternal cause—right where you are. Every disciple can be a World Christian. Little acts of faithfulness can and do make an eternal difference.

7. What are some things you'd like to explore in terms of becoming a more missions-minded "world Christian"?

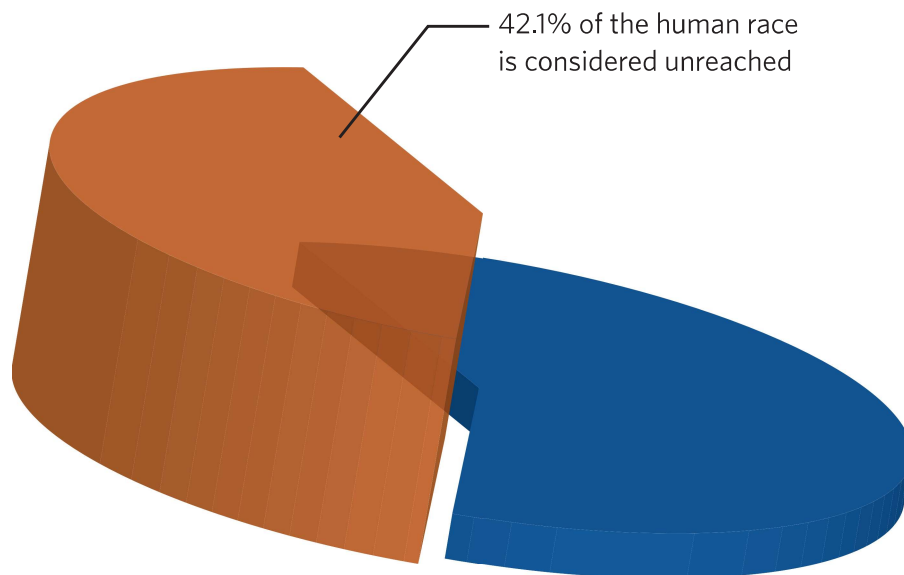
Take-Home Reflections



World Missions: By the Numbers

(as of 2016)

7,300,000,000	People in the world
865,000,000	Muslims with no gospel witness
550,000,000	Unreached Hindus
275,000,000	Buddhists who haven't heard of Christ
4,190,000	Full-time Christian workers
16,761	Distinct people groups
6,500	Languages in the world
900	Number of churches for every unreached people group in the world
105	People who die every minute
1	Life you have to give





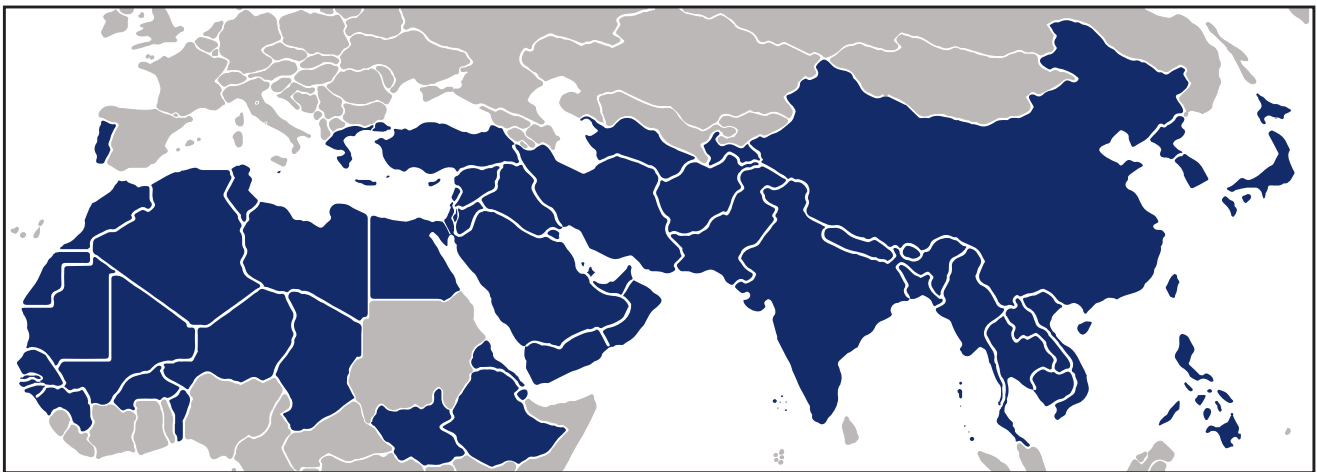
Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God's truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you've learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our memory verse, Acts 1:8.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

2. Learn about the 10/40 Window:



Within the rectangle formed between ten degrees north and forty degrees north latitude lies much of Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa.

This land area is home to almost 5,500 unreached people groups and some three billion individuals. This is where most of the world's Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists live. Many have never heard of Christ's love and sacrifice for them.

3. Ponder these words:

"Most men are not satisfied with the permanent output of their lives. Nothing can wholly satisfy the life of Christ within his followers except the adoption of Christ's purpose toward the world he came to redeem. Fame, pleasure, and riches are but husks and ashes in contrast with the boundless and abiding joy of working with God for the fulfillment of his eternal plans. The men who are putting everything into Christ's undertaking are getting out of life its sweetest and most priceless rewards."

—J. Campbell White

Journal your thoughts on a separate sheet of paper.

4. Pray, asking the Lord, "What is my specific role in fulfilling the Great Commission?"