

“Belong, Believe, Bless”: Our Call to Bless
Genesis 12:1-5
2.4.18



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

Read Jesus' prayer in John 17 and discuss the varying postures we can take toward the world and how they fail to fulfill our mission.

In, but out of the world (disengaged)

In, but of the world (distinctiveness)

In, but not of the world (disarming)

*Discuss the relationship between Israel's **identity** and **mission** as the people of God.*

“In your own experience, in what ways have you seen holiness divide people instead of distinguish them? What are some of the challenges of living ‘Christianly’ in a culture with such divergent values?”

“In what practical ways do you find yourself decisively ‘in the world’? How would you describe the nature of your interactions and relationships with those with conflicting values and worldviews?”

“Where is the place to which we have been called?” Here. “Where’s here?” Wherever you are present, presently.

“What would happen if you would choose to not simply love the world, but love your world? Not to simply ‘love your neighbor’, as some abstract ideal, but to ‘love your near one’ with a name a face?”

“What gifts/skills/capacities/opportunities has God entrusted to you? How could you use them to bless (be good for) your world?”

Teaching Notes...

Our initiation into relationship with Christ meant being incorporated into a community of people who share a common Story, a common passion, a common vision of what life in the Kingdom would look like if it happened right here and right now, and a common mission of reconciling love.

As we continue to wrestle with our sense of identity and mission (who we are and why we are), it will require:

A people with whom we might belong. Belonging exposes people to an alternative Story where they are able to experience truth before they are able to explain it.

A faith in which we might believe. Believing allows us to sustain our confidence in the Story and provides the framework for our belonging (ensures that it's not simply "me", but "us").

A divine initiative to bless, in which we might participate. Blessing validates our claims to a watching world that the gospel is true.

Blessing is God's framework for all of life. *"And God blessed them and said..."* (Genesis 1:28). It locates us in favorable conditions for **flourishing**.

Blessing is from a compound word: *"the good that someone has decreed; to cause to flourish"* **and** *"the divine plan or reason"* (logos: John 1).

Ours is to be a means of living into and extending that goodness to the world.

It becomes apparent that the Story is all about "mission": God's love for all that he has created, his relentless determination to lovingly restore order, and his irrevocable commitment to partner with humanity in the process.

"Missional" has become a trendy and often fuzzy adjective used to describe a variety of activities in which the church participates.

Mission is not, as of first importance, an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. Mission is a movement of God to the world, with the church being the instrument for mission. There is church, because there is mission.

What is God's ultimate mission? To bring about the blessing of the nations (all ethnicities), as he promised Abraham.

How will that be achieved? By the existence in the world of a community that will be taught to “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God” (Micah 5).

“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”. Exodus 19:4-6

The biblical conversation is centered in (2) “root” principles: 1) our **identity**, 2) our **mission**.

God’s intention, from the very beginning, was to lovingly preside over the world through his image-bearing and responsive humanity.

Our primary calling is to “*image*” God. Genesis 1:27 says that we are created in the image of God, which is to be understood more as a ‘verb’ than a ‘noun’. It involves representing and expanding the will and desires of God for his creation in every facet of life.

God’s mission is the narrative offered between the curse on the earth of Genesis 3 and the end of the curse in the new creation of Revelation 22.

From, “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1), to, “*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth*” (Revelation 21:1). Not a “different” world, but a world restored and refined so that it reflects its original intent.

Mission sends us into God’s world that is both “good” and “broken”. The church is not just another human organization that has adopted a different mission statement, but a collection of people who are being enlivened by and empowered by the presence of Jesus in and with them, and who are establishing a “faithful presence” in all of their interactions and endeavors. In doing so, we refuse to live within the false dichotomy of “secular” and “sacred” and portray that all of life is “spiritual”.

Abraham Kuyper [theologian and PM of The Netherlands]

“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!”

All of this salvation work that God is accomplishing takes place within the boundaries of our humanity.

No special effects, no sleight of hand, just the fabric of everyday life. We were meant to become part of the rhythm of the culture: investing time and energy in our

community; contributing to the welfare of the local economy; becoming conscious of the many ways that our resources can be shared to inspire worship and meet needs.

There will always be an inextricable link between “theology” and “geography”.

The gospel is to be incarnated in “real-time”. The church always has a mailing address and a zip code. It has always been given names. The church at Ephesus. “*To all the saints at...*” The church’s primary allegiance was to the expression of the Kingdom within their particular context.

By locating mission as decidedly, “over there”, we are able to avoid both our limitations and our responsibilities.

When you understand the call to bless (mission) purely as some ‘global’ expression, it becomes a cause to which you are able to contribute or a short-term effort in which you are able to participate.

It’s one thing to talk about the “world that God loves” and to “love the person right in front of you”. It’s what one author called, “*telescopic philanthropy*”.

Love is never abstract. It is always concrete and personal. Love always has a name and a face.

God’s people, living counter-culturally, under a different rule and with a sacred ethic, is the best thing we could do for the culture.

For such a task, God will need to deploy people with various skills and varying interests, in every social, ethnic and economic sphere, in every locale in an attempt to save “all”.

Our mission, then, is neither to critique the culture nor mimic it, but to actually transform it (help it to become what it was meant to be) as we work alongside those with conflicting values and views.

Sometimes that means that we are able to celebrate and participate in the practices of the culture which seem to reflect common goodness; **and**, at times, we will be called upon to respectfully and humbly call into question values and structures which are de-grading and de-humanizing.

Wherever Jesus was, restoration was happening and wherever restoration happens, you will find repentance and faith.

Martin Robinson...

“No matter where in the world you look, those who have become Christians have overwhelmingly made such a decision because of the actions of ordinary people in their circle of influence.”

God is not to be experienced by principles, strategies, creeds, or mission statements, but by people who “testify”, faithfully, to their own interaction with the Story and their own life-altering encounter of Jesus.