

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Fourth Quarter 2023: *God's Mission—My Mission*
Lesson 5 “Excuses to Avoid Mission”

Read for this week's study

Jonah 1–4; Nahum 1:1; 2 Kings 17:5, 6; Psalm 24:1; James 1:27; Isaiah 6:1–8.

Memory Text

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me’” (Isaiah 6:8, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Our Excuses: Fear
- III. Our Excuses: False Views
- IV. Our Excuses: Inconvenience
- V. Our Excuses: Uncomfortable Confrontations
- VI. Here Am I, Send Me
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. The lesson this week zeros in on a single, biblical example of someone avoiding mission; the story of Jonah. Since Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, the story of Jonah is set in the context of that nation's interactions with Old Testament Israel. What do the following texts tell us about the background to the story of Jonah (Nahum 1:1; 3:1-3; 2 Kings 17:5-6; 19:32-37)? When it comes to mission, what are you afraid of? (Sunday's Lesson)
2. Read Jonah 1:1-12. What picture of God did the sailors in Jonah's story have? Read Jonah 1:17 – 2:10. What did Jonah learn about God from the fish experience? What kind of sacrifices did Jonah and the sailors make (2:9; 1:14-16)? Read Jonah 1:14-16. What did Jonah do to convert the sailors? What caused Jonah to change from unwillingness to willingness? (Monday's Lesson)
3. Read Jonah 3:1-3. What changed Jonah's unwillingness into willingness? Read Jonah 3:4-5. What is the difference between the response of the Assyrians and the

- response of the sailors in chapter 1:14-16? What does this difference imply about working with people who have little knowledge of God? (Tuesday's Lesson)
4. Read Jonah 4. What was Jonah's actual excuse for not going immediately to Nineveh? Why would God's gracious character bother him so much? What lay behind the question God asks Jonah in verse 4? According to the story, God mercifully provides the plant to Jonah and then arranges its destruction. How shall we understand this? Where in this chapter is God's side of the story most clearly expressed? Do you think the repentance of Nineveh was genuine? Why did God accept their repentance when they were so ignorant of His name and His ways? (Wednesday's Lesson)
 5. Reflecting on Jonah 4:10-11, how should we respond to God's concern for bullies, abusers and killers? What implications does that have for mission? (Wednesday's Lesson)
 6. If the Holy Spirit is everywhere and in every place, why do missionaries need to go out into the world? (Thursday's Lesson)
 7. Nineveh was an early megacity and God cared for it. When I was small, there were three megacities in the world; New York, London and Tokyo. All three had about eight million people each. Today there are 48 cities in the world with more than eight million people in them. What implications does that have for mission? (Thursday's Lesson)
 8. When God called Abraham in Genesis 12:1-4a and 22:1-3a, Abraham complied with God's command without even a murmur of protest. On the other hand, in Genesis 18:20-25 Abraham resists what God is saying. What do you think caused the difference in Abraham's reaction? If God called you to go somewhere without telling you where, what would you do? How would you know it was God calling? (Sabbath Afternoon's Lesson)
 9. What other Bible stories of God's callings can you think of? Which of these Bible characters were very compliant, and which offer some words of protest? Of the many excuses people make to avoid mission, which are legitimate? (Sabbath Afternoon's Lesson)
 10. Make a list of ten people you know are not believers. You may want to call them "disciples". Pray daily for each of your ten disciples. Pray that your relationships with each of them will grow in a deeper, more trusting direction. (Friday's Lesson)
 11. Another option: Choose a city near you and one in another part of the world and begin praying for the people those cities. (Friday's Lesson)
 12. How do you deal with fear as an excuse for not doing mission?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Maybe more seriously, sometimes God's incredible graciousness has even been an embarrassment to some of His people. Do you remember when the prophet Jonah was asked by God to go and give a serious message of warning to Nineveh? At first he ran away. Later, under considerable pressure, he went and delivered his message, hardly a "missionary volunteer." Think of the pressure the Lord had to put on Jonah to get him to go up there to Nineveh and deliver a very serious message, and to a very dangerous people, to be sure. Jonah walked the streets and said, "Forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed."

Then he went out and sat down on a hillside nearby to watch the city come to its end. But it didn't. The people of Nineveh repented, and the city was not destroyed. And Jonah complained angrily to God. He said, "God, that's why I ran away. I knew You were far too kind to go through with that threat, with that prediction. You've made me look like a false prophet. I'm humiliated enough to die."

See part of his words here, on the Bible Reference Sheet, in Jonah 4:2, 3. Imagine saying this to God!

Lord, didn't I say before I left home that this is just what you would do? That's why I did my best to run away to Spain! I knew that you are a loving and merciful God, always patient, always kind, and always ready to change your mind and not punish. Now then, Lord, let me die. I am better off dead than alive. (GNT)

Think of this man knowing God that well in Old Testament times. Those are words Isaiah, Jeremiah, Moses, or Abraham would have been proud to speak. They never used better words than that about our God. But Jonah was ashamed. This had caused him embarrassment. He was humiliated enough, he felt that his reputation had been so destroyed, that he was prepared to die!

God reasoned with frustrated Jonah. "Have you no pity for these people? Aren't you glad that they have chosen to repent?" He even mentioned the cattle in the city, "Don't you even care about them?" at the end of the book. But Jonah was much more concerned about his own reputation, his own reputation as a reliable prophet. Moses, Abraham, Jeremiah, Paul, all announced themselves as proud to know God as they did. They were proud of Him and proud of the good news. Jonah also knew God, but he was ashamed. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #19, "How Soon Will the Conflict Be Over?" recorded June 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/19MMCAG>*

Further Study with Ellen White

Yet Nineveh, wicked though it had become, was not wholly given over to evil. He who “beholdeth all the sons of men” (Psalm 33:13) and “seeth every precious thing” (Job 28:10) perceived in that city many who were reaching out after something better and higher, and who, if granted opportunity to learn of the living God, would put away their evil deeds and worship Him. And so in His wisdom God revealed Himself to them in an unmistakable manner, to lead them, if possible, to repentance. {PK 265.3}

The instrument chosen for this work was the prophet Jonah, the son of Amittai. To him came the word of the Lord, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me.” Jonah 1:1, 2. {PK 266.1}

Thus God’s people, exposed to the deceptive power and unsleeping malice of the prince of darkness, and in conflict with all the forces of evil, are assured of the unceasing guardianship of heavenly angels. {GC 513.1}

The Lord is our helper, our defense. God has provided that no soul that trusts in Him shall be overcome by the enemy. {CTr 47.4}

In the closing scenes of this earth’s history, when intensity is taking possession of every earthly element, the Lord requires of us a vigilance that knows no relaxation. But we are not left to struggle alone. Amid the dangers increasing on every hand, those who walk humbly before God, distrustful of their own wisdom, will have angels as their helpers and protectors. In times of special peril they will know the power of God’s keeping care.—RH April 25, 1907. {TA 272.3}

Nothing can happen in any part of the universe without the knowledge of Him who is omnipresent. Not a single event of human life is unknown to our Maker. While Satan is constantly devising evil, the Lord our God overrules all, so that it will not harm His obedient, trusting children. The same power that controls the boisterous waves of the ocean can hold in check all the power of rebellion and of crime. God says to one as to the other, “Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther.” {3BC 1141.5}

Heavenly beings are appointed to answer the prayers of those who are working unselfishly for the interests of the cause of God. The very highest angels in the heavenly courts are appointed to work out the prayers which ascend to God for the advancement of the cause of God. Each angel has his particular post of duty, which he is not permitted to leave for any other place. If he should leave, the powers of darkness would gain an advantage. . . . {4BC 1173.5}

The angels are with us every day, to guard and protect us from the assaults of the enemy. {TA 19.1}

God has given us these precious things as an expression of His love. The Lord is a lover of the beautiful, and to please and gratify us He has spread before us the beauties of nature, even as

an earthly parent seeks to place beautiful things before the children that He loves. The Lord is always pleased to see us happy. Sinful as it is with all its imperfections, the Lord has lavished upon this earth the useful and the beautiful. The beautiful, tinted flowers tell of His tenderness and love. They have a language of their own, reminding us of the Giver. {UL 327.3}

The glory of heaven is in lifting up the fallen, comforting the distressed. And wherever Christ abides in human hearts, He will be revealed in the same way. Wherever it acts, the religion of Christ will bless. Wherever it works, there is brightness. {COL 386.1}

All whose hearts are in sympathy with the heart of Infinite Love will seek to reclaim, and not to condemn. Christ dwelling in the soul is a spring that never runs dry. Where He abides, there will be an overflowing of beneficence.— *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 39. (1896) {Ev 174.3}

The work of Christ is to redeem, to restore, to seek and to save that which was lost. If we are connected with Christ, we also are partakers of the divine nature and are to be laborers together with God. We are to bind up the bruised and wounded soul; and if a brother or a sister has erred, we are not to join with the enemy in destroying and ruining, but to work with Christ to restore such a one in the spirit of meekness. {HP 291.2}

He who called the fisherman of Galilee is still calling men to His service. And He is just as willing to manifest His power through us as through the first disciples. However imperfect and sinful we may be, the Lord holds out to us the offer of partnership with Himself, of apprenticeship to Christ. He invites us to come under the divine instruction, that, uniting with Christ, we may work the works of God. {DA 297.1}

As His representatives among men, God does not choose angels who have never fallen, but human beings, men of like passions with those they seek to save. Christ took humanity that He might reach humanity. A divine-human Saviour was needed to bring salvation to the world. And to men and women has been committed the sacred trust of making known “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Ephesians 3:8. {AA 134.2}

All heaven is interested in the work going on in this world, which is to prepare men and women for the future, immortal life. It is God’s plan that human agencies shall have the high honor of acting as co-workers with Jesus Christ in the salvation of souls. {5T 573.3}

And the effort to bless others will react in blessings upon ourselves. This was the purpose of God in giving us a part to act in the plan of redemption. He has granted men the privilege of becoming partakers of the divine nature and, in their turn, of diffusing blessings to their fellow men. This is the highest honor, the greatest joy, that it is possible for God to bestow upon men.

Those who thus become participants in labors of love are brought nearest to their Creator. {SC 79.1}

God might have committed the message of the gospel, and all the work of loving ministry, to the heavenly angels. He might have employed other means for accomplishing His purpose. But in His infinite love He chose to make us co-workers with Himself, with Christ and the angels, that we might share the blessing, the joy, the spiritual uplifting, which results from this unselfish ministry. {SC 79.2}

It is the glory of the gospel that it is founded upon the principle of restoring in the fallen race the divine image by a constant manifestation of benevolence. This work began in the heavenly courts. There God gave to human beings an unmistakable evidence of the love with which He regarded them. He “so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16. The gift of Christ reveals the Father’s heart. It testifies that, having undertaken our redemption, He will spare nothing, however dear, which is necessary to the completion of His work. {9T 254.1}

The work of beneficence is twice blessed. While he that gives to the needy blesses others, he himself is blessed in a still greater degree. The grace of Christ in the soul is developing traits of character that are the opposite of selfishness,—traits that will refine, ennoble, and enrich the life. Acts of kindness performed in secret will bind hearts together, and will draw them closer to the heart of Him from whom every generous impulse springs. The little attentions, the small acts of love and self-sacrifice, that flow out from the life as quietly as the fragrance from a flower—these constitute no small share of the blessings and happiness of life. And it will be found at last that the denial of self for the good and happiness of others, however humble and uncommended here, is recognized in heaven as the token of our union with Him, the King of glory, who was rich, yet for our sake became poor. {MB 82.2}

Through the gospel, souls that are degraded and enslaved by Satan are to be redeemed to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God. God’s purpose is not merely to deliver from the suffering that is the inevitable result of sin, but to save from sin itself. The soul, corrupted and deformed, is to be purified, transformed, that it may be clothed in “the beauty of the Lord our God,” “conformed to the image of His Son.” “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” Psalm 90:17; Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 2:9. Eternity alone can reveal the glorious destiny to which man, restored to God’s image, may attain. {MB 60.3}

The blessings of salvation are for every soul. Nothing but his own choice can prevent any man from becoming a partaker of the promise in Christ by the gospel. {DA 403.2}

God has bound our hearts to Him by unnumbered tokens in heaven and in earth. Through the things of nature, and the deepest and tenderest earthly ties that human hearts can know, He

has sought to reveal Himself to us. Yet these but imperfectly represent His love. Though all these evidences have been given, the enemy of good blinded the minds of men, so that they looked upon God with fear; they thought of Him as severe and unforgiving. Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice,—one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgments upon them. It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men. {SC 10.3}

By the revelation of the attractive loveliness of Christ, by the knowledge of His love expressed to us while we were yet sinners, the stubborn heart is melted and subdued, and the sinner is transformed and becomes a child of heaven. God does not employ compulsory measures; love is the agent which He uses to expel sin from the heart. By it He changes pride into humility, and enmity and unbelief into love and faith. {MB 76.3}

All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, ... that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. {TMK 99.5}

The Lord has His eye upon every soul that is seeking Him. He is interested in every soul needing help, and He will not leave one in the darkness of error, but step by step will lead him into the full light of the truth that is shining from every page of the Scriptures. . . . The Lord sees our every act. He knows just what progress we have made in the Christian pathway. How kind, how tender, our Great Shepherd is! With intense interest He looks down from His exalted throne upon the sheep of His pasture, and gives them grace and strength. . . . {HP 322.3}

The parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son, bring out in distinct lines God's pitying love for those who are straying from Him. Although they have turned away from God, He does not leave them in their misery. He is full of kindness and tender pity toward all who are exposed to the temptations of the artful foe. {COL 198.1}

The wheellike complications that appeared to the prophet to be involved in such confusion were under the guidance of an infinite hand. The Spirit of God, revealed to him as moving and directing these wheels, brought harmony out of confusion; so the whole world was under His control. Myriads of glorified beings were ready at His word to overrule the power and policy of evil men, and bring good to His faithful ones. . . . {5T 752.2}

In the visions given to Isaiah, to Ezekiel, and to John we see how closely heaven is connected with the events taking place upon the earth and how great is the care of God for those who are loyal to Him. The world is not without a ruler. The program of coming events is in the hands of the Lord. The Majesty of heaven has the destiny of nations, as well as the concerns of His church, in His own charge. . . . {5T 753.3}

He who slumbers not, who is continually at work for the accomplishment of His designs, can carry forward His great work harmoniously. That which appears to finite minds entangled and complicated, the Lord's hand can keep in perfect order. He can devise ways and means to thwart the purposes of wicked men, and He will bring to confusion the counsels of them that plot mischief against His people. {5T 754.2}

God does not expect that with their different temperaments His people will each be prepared for any and every place. Let all remember that there are varied trusts. It is not the work of any man to prescribe the work of any other man contrary to his own convictions of duty. It is right to give counsel and suggest plans; but every man should be left free to seek direction from God, whose he is and whom he serves. {6T 334.1}