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# Where Do I Come In?

JOINING GOD'S MISSION

Brian Keepers



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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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This study is part of In the Works, a faith formation program for adults.

Studies in this series include:

*Where Do I Come In? Joining God's Mission*

*What Do I Do with My Life? Serving God through Work*

*What Do I Owe? Managing the Gifts God Gives You*

*How Do I Make It Right? Doing Justice in a Broken World*

*How Do I Begin? Sharing Your Faith*

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# How to Use This Book

*Where Do I Come In? Joining God's Mission*, as well as the other books in the In the Works series, offers a unique format that combines insightful daily devotions with a discussion guide for small groups. It's simple and easy to use. Here's all you need to do:

**Before your group meeting, please carefully read the five daily readings** that offer insights on the topic for the week. You'll find them stimulating and full of practical ways to help you join God's mission in the world. We suggest reading one devotional on each of the five days rather than reading through all five at once. That way you can take your time and reflect on what the reading says to you personally. You may want to highlight lines that speak to you or jot questions or comments in the margin.

*Note:* Before your first small group session, you should have received a copy of this book so you can read the daily readings for Week 1 prior to your first meeting.

**During your group meeting**, use the small group discussion guides found at the end of each week of readings. These self-directing guides offer plenty to talk about for forty-five minutes to an hour or more. Groups should feel free to use them selectively, choosing the questions or activities that fit the group and the amount of time you have.

Each discussion guide includes

- an **Opening** question or activity that takes group members into the topic for the session.
- a **Bible Study** of passages that relate to the topic of the week. Group members should bring their own Bibles to the meetings or arrange to have a supply of Bibles available.
- **Group Discussion** questions that take participants back into the daily readings for the week and help relate them to their daily lives. Groups should feel free to select which of these questions they want to discuss; of course, you can

always substitute questions and comments from group members for our precooked ones!

- a brief **Closing** time of focus and prayer.
- **Action Options** for groups and for individuals. These are suggestions for follow-up activities that flow from the daily readings and group discussion.

From time to time, the discussion guides offer **Options** or **Alternative Approaches**, giving groups a choice of activities or questions.

Of course you'll want someone who's willing to lead the discussion and keep things moving for each small group meeting. But the discussion guide is written for the whole group, not just the leader. Together, may you grow in your understanding of God's mission in the world as you consider your own place in it.

—Faith Alive staff



# Introduction

One of my favorite books of all time is C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Four children named Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy are sent to the English countryside to live with Professor Digory Kirke during World War II. While exploring the professor's house, they stumble through an old wardrobe and discover the magical world of Narnia. But all is not well—Narnia is under the curse of the wicked White Witch, who makes it “always winter and never Christmas.” The children are fortunate enough to meet Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, friendly creatures who are no allies of the White Witch. Like all animals in Narnia, the beavers can talk:

“Are you the Sons of Adam and the Daughters of Eve?” [Mr. Beaver] said.

“We’re some of them,” said Peter.

“S-s-s-sh!” said the Beaver, “not so loud please. We’re not safe even here. . . .”

Here the Beaver's voice sank into silence and it gave one or two mysterious nods. Then signalling to the children to stand as close around it as they possibly could, so that their faces were actually tickled by its whiskers, it added in a low whisper—

“They say Aslan is on the move—perhaps has already landed.”

And now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do; but the moment the Beaver had spoken these words everyone felt quite different. . . . At the name of Aslan each of the children felt something jump in his inside. Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy

got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer.

—C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), pp. 63-65. Permission granted by The C. S. Lewis Company Ltd., April 2010.

*They say Aslan is on the move.* The quiet rumor starting to rumble throughout the frozen land of Narnia is that the great lion Aslan, the true king of Narnia, is about to reclaim his kingdom and set things right. The world of Narnia is about to change. Aslan is on the move!

The Bible tells the story of how the God of this universe is *on the move*. In a dark and broken world, God is on the move to make all things new. The God of the Bible is not an absent God who stays away, nor a passive God who sits back and lets the world destroy itself. This God who *so loves the world* is actively present, entering into the mess and darkness of the world to bring new life.

All through the Bible we see God on the move, but this comes into clearest focus in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. On the first Easter morning, when the women came with arms full of spices and hearts empty of hope, they discovered that the stone had been rolled away. Staring into the empty tomb, the women, like the four children in the Narnia story, felt something inside them come alive. The world had changed. In the risen Jesus, God was on the move!

To be disciples of Jesus means that we are also on the move! Disciples *follow* Jesus. And where does Jesus lead us? *Into the world to join God's mission*, that's where. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we follow Jesus in all that we think, say, and do in order to be the presence of Christ in this lost and broken world that God so loves. You can't truly be a disciple of Jesus without caring about God's mission in the world.

This study is about mission. Chances are, most of us associate the word *mission* with a two-week trip to rebuild homes or a line

item in the church budget or a person who brings the gospel to faraway places. All of these certainly are a part of God's mission, and are important to the life and work of the church. But mission encompasses so much more. Recently the word *missional* has been getting a lot of attention among Christians, followed by an avalanche of books and articles, all trying to get at the heart of what this word means.

Here's what I mean by *missional*: it is *the call to join in God's mission in the world to redeem the whole creation*. I want to challenge you to think about mission not as another program or activity at church or as "another thing" to add to your already busy life but as a *lifestyle*. Think of mission not just as something that happens "over there" but "right here" in your own community. Think of yourself as a *missionary*. It sounds kind of intimidating. But try not to let the word intimidate you. To think and live as a missionary means seeing *all of your life* as a way to be engaged with the mission of God in the world.

Seriously. *All of life*. Throwing in another load of laundry, changing dirty diapers, driving kids to soccer practice, preparing for a meeting, punching in for another shift, interacting with coworkers, getting to know your next-door neighbors, volunteering at the soup kitchen . . . all of it is the stuff of joining God's mission. Maybe you haven't thought about it this way. My hope is that this study will help you to change the way you see your own life, and that it will open your eyes to the way God is on the move in the everyday places you go and the people you meet.

So let's get started. *God is on the move*. Are you ready to be on the move with God? Are you ready for an adventure? There's nothing more satisfying to be a part of than this kingdom of God movement! "As the Father has sent me," says Jesus, "so I send you" (John 20:21).

Jesus is sending *you*.

WEEK 1

# God on the Move: The Missionary God of the Bible



# The Biblical Drama of God's Mission



*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

—John 3:16-17

Imagine that you've stumbled upon the dusty old script of a play written by William Shakespeare, lost hundreds of years ago. No one else knows about the script you're now holding in your hands. As you begin to read, you notice that this play is written in six acts. You read through the first four acts in their entirety, but when you get to Act 5, you discover a problem. A big chunk of Act 5 is missing. After the first scene, there are no more. Oddly enough, Act 6, the final act, is intact.

Let's say you have some friends who happen to be actors, and they're intimately familiar with the works of Shakespeare. You share with them your remarkable discovery and the problem of the missing scenes of Act 5. You ask if they could reconstruct the missing part, based on their knowledge of Shakespeare.

A couple weeks later, after immersing themselves in the script, the actors perform the play for you. When they get to the missing scenes, they improvise. Brilliant! Their improvisation fits seamlessly with the four acts that came before and the final act that follows. It's as though none of the script had ever been missing.

How on earth did they manage that? By allowing their performance to be shaped by the first four acts and by the trajectory of the final act, the actors were able to get into character and move the plot along until it reached the author's intended conclusion.

Bible scholar Tom Wright offers this helpful analogy for reading, interpreting, and finding our own place in God's story. Wright suggests that the Bible is the drama of God's redemptive work in this world. It unfolds in five acts: creation (Act 1); the fall into sin (Act 2); Israel's story (Act 3); the story of Jesus Christ (Act 4); the story of God's people, the church (Act 5); and Christ's return, the grand conclusion we are still waiting for (Act 6).

At its heart, the biblical drama is about God and what God is doing in the world. We discover right away in the first three acts of this drama that God is a *missionary* God. God has not left us, even after the tragic second act when sin entered the picture and made a mess of things. Instead God moved onto the stage of human history. God made a covenant with Abraham and chose a people, Israel, to participate in God's mission to renew the whole creation.

The story comes to a shocking climax in Act 4, when God became human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus fulfilled the mission of Israel, who failed to keep the covenant and be a light to the nations.

But the story doesn't end there. At the end of Act 4, Jesus enlisted a group of followers to be a part of his kingdom movement. He appeared to them as the risen One and breathed his Spirit on them. "As the Father has sent me," he said, "so I send you."

And that's where we come into the story—Act 5. But, like the players in the Shakespeare drama with missing scenes, we don't have a script in front of us. We have the final act, the book of Revelation, describing how God wins. We know how the story ends. So we're going to have to *improvise* our part, attentive to our own unique cultural situation. Our challenge is to stay consistent with the scenes that have gone before and the trajectory of how the story ends as we improvise in a new time and place. This is what missional living is all about: sticking with the past *and* following the Holy Spirit's lead as we face the fresh challenges of the present.

Over the next five weeks, we're going to spend some time absorbing this script into our bones and seeking the Spirit's leading as we explore what it means to do faithful missional improvisation!

# Discussion Guide



## Opening *(10 minutes)*

When you think of God as a “missionary God,” what image or Bible story or personal experience comes to mind? Briefly share your thoughts without getting into any discussion or detail.

Then have someone read the following focus statement aloud:

Mission is at the very heart of who God is and what God is up to in our world. Mission is not just a New Testament idea that begins with Jesus and the early church; rather, God has been on a mission since the first humans were sent east of Eden with their bags packed. Certainly God’s mission reaches its fulfillment in Jesus and the New Testament church, but it has been going on long before. As we read the story of the Bible, let’s pay attention to the way that mission is really the primary thrust of the whole biblical drama from beginning to end. And let’s pay special attention to how mission is always first and foremost about God. Yes, we are invited to participate in God’s mission. But it’s always ultimately about who God is and how God is actively at work.



## Bible Study (20 minutes)

Read as many of the following Bible passages as time permits. For each passage, ask: **How does this passage reveal the missionary heart of God?**

- Genesis 12:1-9
- Mark 1:14-28
- Acts 2:1-4, 14a, 22-39
- Revelation 21:1-8, 22-27

### Activity Variation

Divide into groups of two or three, with each group taking one passage. Have each group summarize its passage and how it shows the missionary heart of God.

### Alternate Approach

Jesus' parables were powerful and memorable ways for him to teach about God's kingdom breaking into the world. Have someone read aloud Luke's parable of the father and the two sons (Luke 15:11-32) while others act it out. Afterwards, talk about what you heard *and* saw. How did you experience this story differently seeing it acted out? What does this story reveal about the missionary heart of God?

## Discussion (20 minutes)

As time permits, discuss some or all of the following questions, or use questions raised by group members.

1. Quickly review the six "acts" of the single drama of the Bible (Day 1). How does thinking this way about the Bible help you better understand it and its relevance for us today?
2. We often tend to associate *mission* with the New Testament and don't think of God as being "missionary" in the Old Testament. Why is this? What may make it difficult to see

God's missionary heart in the Old Testament? Where do you see God as "missionary" in the Old Testament?

3. Reread the paragraph (from Day 3) that begins, "But Jesus not only announced . . ." How does knowing that God's kingdom has already come in Jesus Christ affect you and the way you live day to day as a follower of Christ?
4. "We have the final act, the book of Revelation, describing how God wins. We know how the story ends. So we're going to have to *improvise* our part, attentive to our own unique cultural situation. Our challenge is to stay consistent with the scenes that have gone before and the trajectory of how the story ends as we improvise in a new time and place." (Day 1). What things must stay the same as we improvise for a new time and culture? What should change? In what ways does knowing the final act—how the story ends—make a difference as we improvise in the present?
5. What does the "final act" described in the book of Revelation (see Day 5) tell you about God? About our own future?

### **Closing** (5-10 minutes)

Select one thought from the daily readings or one idea discussed in today's session that that will encourage or challenge you in your Christian living this week. Share it with the group.

As your closing prayer, sing or say together the words of the beloved hymn "Spirit of the Living God" (*Psalter Hymnal* 424).

### **Action Options**

Being *missional* means moving beyond words into action. "As the Father has sent me," says Jesus, "so I send you" (John 20:21). While there are many ways to serve, you may want to consider the following action options for the group and for yourself:

**Group:** Brainstorm some ways your group could participate in God's mission by reaching out to others. For example, do you know of a shut-in in your church or community who could use a meal once a week? Or could the group volunteer to serve at a local food pantry or provide transportation for an elderly person to the store and doctor appointments? Group members will likely have other ideas appropriate to your group and local situation. Your deacons may also have ideas for how the group could serve.

**Personal:** Here are a couple of suggestions, but feel free to substitute your own ideas.

### **Option 1**

If you feel the need to become more familiar with the whole dramatic script of the Bible, choose a plan that helps you read through the Bible in a year, or find some resources that help you better understand the larger story (such as *The True Story of the Whole World: Finding Your Place in the Biblical Drama*, Faith Alive, 2009, or online resources such as [www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com)).

### **Option 2**

Read Genesis 12:1-3 and 15:1-6, the story of how Abraham and Sarah were blessed by God to be a blessing to others. Practice being a channel of God's blessing this week. Look for opportunities to bless others through a spoken word, a listening ear, or an act of service.