

Lesson 1: God's Plan for His Church

Intro

Welcome to module 3 of this discipleship course. In module 1 ("Jesus, My life") we looked at the plan of salvation from different perspectives and learned what discipleship really is. In module 2 ("With Jesus Ahead") we learned how our faith can grow. In short, if you want to be successful in evangelism, the principles that we studied in the first 2 modules are absolutely fundamental. It doesn't matter what methods we use to reach people, if our mission is not motivated and driven by a deep love for Jesus and the Holy Spirit who lives in us, it will all be futile. It is for this reason that we cannot overemphasize the importance of the concepts we discovered up to this point.

Module 3 takes the next step and seeks to answer the question, "How can we lead others to Jesus and help them to live as disciples of Jesus?" Get ready for the fascinating discoveries that await us in module 3 ("My Life for Jesus"). You can be sure they will change your life and service for Jesus.

The first church

The first church had a clear understanding of their calling. Jesus had given them a clear mission: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) There is no doubt that the church took this commission seriously! Nothing could hinder them from spreading the Good News of salvation. "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20) In Jerusalem alone, thousands believed the gospel and joined the church through baptism. "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem." (Acts 6:7).

Mission in the End Times

The same thing that happened back then is happening now and will continue to grow until Jesus returns. Before Jesus comes again, the whole world will be reached with the gospel. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Mathew 24:14) The book of Revelation describes how the everlasting gospel will go, "to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people." (Revelation 14:6) We are waiting for and anticipating the second Pentecost, which will finish God's work on this planet.

But let's not assume for one moment that this work is saved for future generations or that we need to wait for the latter rain to come before we go to work. Even today we may experience people giving their lives to Jesus!

Where are we today?

When we compare our church today with the church back we immediately notice that something is wrong. If we open-eyes our eyes and take an honest look around us, we will see that we are still very far away from fulfilling the mission Jesus gave to us. Of course, in our worldwide church there are many encouraging things taking place. Every day thousands of people are being baptised, new churches and groups are being established. For this we can be very thankful. But we cannot escape the hard truth that many of our churches fall short of God's will and expectations. They are not growing, are occupied with internal problems, and exist only to care for themselves. If they were to close, hardly anyone in the local community would notice.

If we don't want things to continue like this, then there must be a decided change, a radically new way of thinking, a new paradigm. We have to reconsider what our church is here for. Jesus' vision for the church must be ours. If we have goals other than the ones that Jesus has for us, then we, in a biblical sense, cease being a church.



So let's begin with the most important question. What was Jesus' purpose for the church? Please read the following passages and write down the answers!

Matthew 28:18-20: _____

Acts 1:8: _____

Revelation 14,6: _____

Quote #1

"The Saviour's commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister. All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come are put in trust with the gospel. All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ" (*The Desire of Ages, p. 822*)

Quote #2

"The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world." (*The Acts of the Apostles, p. 9*)

**Is Jesus
commission
really our
priority?**

The commission is clear. We are called to take the gospel to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. Our responsibility is to draw people to Christ and encourage them to follow Him. This commission is the reason for our existence. It may sound simple and cliché. But we must ask ourselves, "Is Jesus' commission *really* our top priority? How much of our time, energy, and money do we as a church use to fulfil this commission?" Think about your local church and ask yourself this question! What is your honest evaluation?

In reality, many churches are investing most of their resources in themselves. Only a small percentage of the available resources are being invested in outreach. Unfortunately, the money that is allocated towards outreach is often used ineffectively and thus, few actually find their way into the church.

If this is going to change, we must first accept God's commission and make it the vision for our church. A church can't be on the right track if it doesn't recognize what God has called them to do and accept His commission as their vision. When our eyes are fixed on God's mission, we will clearly see the direction in which we must move forward. But, we must be fixed on Him!

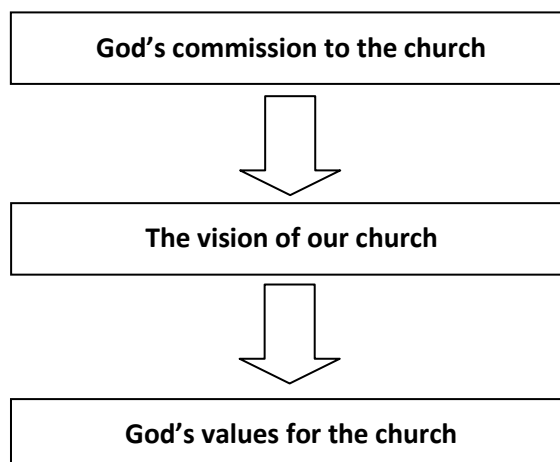
**God's
commission
to His
church!**

Please write down in your own words what God's commission for the church is!

As we have seen, the commission is to preach the everlasting gospel to all people and call as many as possible to follow Jesus. Our vision is derived directly from this commission. It can be formulated as follows: **"We exist in order to bring the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angel's message to the people of our community, to serve them, and thus to reveal the character of God to them. Our churches are a place in which people can meet God, grow in faith and together fulfil God's commission."**

The next step

When we have caught this vision for our church, we must then ask ourselves, "How does our church have to look in order to fulfil this vision? What biblical **values** must impact our lives, and the service of the church, so that we can fulfil His mission in His desired way?" In other words: What must our church look like to be able to do what Jesus commissioned us to do?



Clear biblical values

The mission and life of the New Testament church were characterized by clear values. If we want to be a church after God's pattern and be successful in evangelism, then we need to live these biblical values. They can be summarized as follows:

1. Based on the Bible
2. Dependent on Christ
3. Focused on seekers
4. United in fellowship
5. Committed to discipleship
6. Active in training
7. Together in service

We don't want these values to just become slogans. Therefore it is important for us to specify how we can actually live them out. Please do that in the next step. Write down in your own words what it would be like for your church to live out these principles.

1. Based on the Bible

2. Dependent on Christ

3. Focused on seekers

4. United in fellowship

5. Committed to discipleship

6. Active in training

7. Together in service

These values mean

In order for us to practically apply these principles in our churches, we must first define them. Now compare what you wrote with what we have provided:

1. Based on the Bible

The Bible is the basis of our beliefs and our church work. We seek a clear Adventist identity.

2. Dependent on Christ

We strive to have a Christ-centered theology and want Jesus to be the center of everything we do as a church. We are a church that makes prayer a top priority.

3. Focused on seekers

All of our church activities are focused on the goal of winning souls for Jesus and the Adventist message. Our members are encouraged and empowered to individually share their faith with seekers in their every day live.

4. United in fellowship

We strive toward the unity for which Jesus prayed. We live Christian fellowship and want to have close relationships that are characterized by openness, authenticity, accountability, and compassion. The expression of this unity is also the connection and loyalty to the world-wide Seventh Day Adventist Church.

5. Committed to discipleship

We intentionally support the spiritual growth of our members, especially the newly baptised ones, so that we can lead them to be disciples of Jesus.

6. Active in training

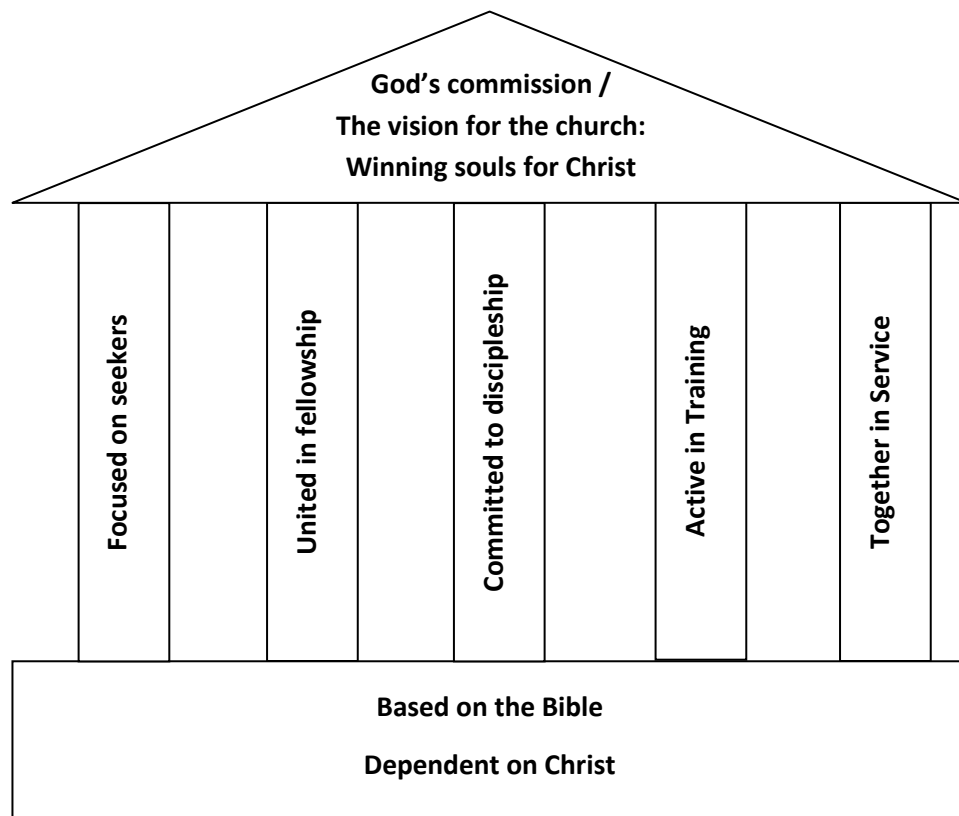
Our church is a training school for every important area of our church life and mission. We intentionally train our members for different lines of service.

7. Together in service

We make sure that all of our church members serve according to their spiritual gifts.

The church as a temple

In the New Testament the church is described as a temple. Just as in the Old Testament the temple was to be carefully designed according to the pattern that God gave to Moses on the mountain (Heb. 8:5), so also the New Testament church must be built according to God's pattern as described in His Word.



The foundation of the church is Jesus Christ and His word. The rest of these values are built upon this foundation. They make sense only as long as they are based on the Bible and come from a living connection with Jesus Christ. These values carry the vision of our church and enable us to fulfil Jesus' commission. In short, we can only fulfil our commission if we follow unswervingly these biblical values. One could say that these values are the DNA of our church, impacting our entire work. It can also be said that many of our church activities remain fruitless because they are not driven by these core values.

Mission & Identity

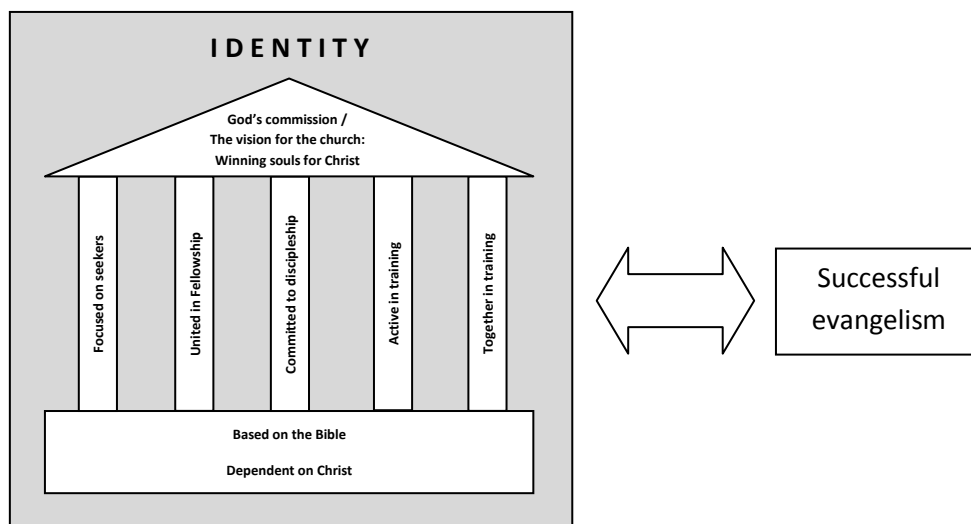
Mission always starts with a simple question, "Who are we?" When John the Baptist called people to repentance, the priests and Levites came to him asking, "Who are you?" His answer was short and to the point, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said." (John 1:23) His prophetic mission to prepare God's people for the first coming of Jesus gave him his identity. He could preach with power because he knew that God had called him to preach.

The same is true for us. As Seventh Day Adventists, we need a clear understanding of our prophetic calling and identity in order to be able to reach people. We need to know who we are! Our identity is defined by the following criteria.

- God's commission to preach the everlasting gospel (our message)
- Our vision that derives from this commission
- The biblical values for the church

This identity, clearly understood and consistently lived out, is *the* indispensable prerequisite for successful evangelism and church growth. Without this identity we have nothing to say and are irrelevant. Our efforts will be in vain.

But our identity must be coupled with a passion to reach lost people. When we have a strong conservative identity without the desire to reach out to lost people, we end up like the Pharisees who were so proud of their identity that they built a wall between themselves and the people they should have reached. This is true for our church as a whole, every local church, and every individual believer.



When we look at the worldwide Seventh Day Adventist church, we see that wherever our church has a clear understanding of its calling to preach the Three Angels Message and is driven by biblical values it experiences church growth. And wherever Adventist churches have lost their identity, they shrink or stagnate.

It is clear that knowing who we are is the key to successful evangelism. Therefore, before we talk about methods and programs to reach people, we must have clarity about our identity. Where do you personally stand in regard to this identity? Would you like to accept God's commission and His values as *your* identity? Write down

your answer!

To make sure these values aren't just written words on pieces of paper, it is important that they are clearly communicated to the church and regularly studied together. In addition, the activities of the church should be regularly reviewed to make sure that they are in line with these values and help to fulfil God's commission.

Outlook

In Module 3 we will study methods and plans to fulfill our commission in accordance with the 7 values. Are you excited to embark on that journey? If you carefully study and apply these lessons to your life and church you will discover the joy that can be yours as you lead souls to know Christ and help to prepare them for eternal life.

