Missions
The Mission of The Local Church

Introduction: Two weeks ago, my father-in-law launched our four-week series on missions by discussing the Mission of God. In short, Paul summed it up this way in his letter to the church in Rome,

15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. ... 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose [(His Mission!)]. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:15-17, 28-30)

God has been working throughout human history to justly redeem His people from the curse of sin, so that they may be conformed into the image of His Son. All who are in Christ, whether dead or alive, including all Old Testament believers who lived by faith in God (Romans 4), are now called Christ's Church. Additionally, all in Christ have the privilege of being adopted as children of God and are being transformed into the image of Christ — not as some kind of trophy for God, but so they can enjoy oneness with Him and with everyone else in Christ forever; having the curse of sin, which makes that impossible, permanently removed from our existence and reality. Therefore, by combining these insights, we conclude that God's Mission is to establish a perfect, eternal relationship with us and among us, transforming us from sinners to saints.

That set up the second part of our series. In part two, Thomas Crane discussed what Christ called His Church to do in God's Mission. He took us to the five key Great Commission passages in the New Testament, the most thorough being Matthew 28:19-20:

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Now here's the key. The "Great Commission" of Christ to His Church is to go and make disciples of people from every ethnic group (or people group) on the planet. However, it's not something Christ gave to us because He didn't feel like doing it, but rather, the mission of God is the Mission of Christ, and for all who are in Christ (the Church), it becomes our mission as well. The Mission of Christ is the Mission of the Church, and it's why Jesus said, "I am with you always"! If Jesus invites us to follow Him, then He has called us to go with Him and do what He is doing with Him (Mark 1:17).

It's also important to remember that the Mission of the Church is not to preach the Gospel to every people group on the planet, but to lead people from every people group to be disciples of Christ, that is, to be rescued from sin and death and into His righteousness and life to enjoy knowing Him and all who are in Him forever! Preaching is part of the process, but it's not the mission. We are not called to simply proclaim; we are called to make disciples!

However, after outlining the mission of Christ's Church, Crane then provided a status report on how well the church is participating in it. Sadly, 2,000 years after the resurrection of Christ, there are still thousands of people groups on the planet who have little to no access to the Gospel to become followers of Christ! It's a challenging task to obtain an exact number, so there are variations among organizations. But to illustrate the point, this was published by Global Frontier Missions:

"It is estimated that of the 8.08 billion people alive in the world today, 3.42 billion of them live in unreached people groups with little or no access to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. According to Joshua Project, there are approximately 17,269 unique people groups in the world with 7,188 of them considered unreached (over 42% of the world's population)! The vast majority (85%) of these least reached groups exist in the 10/40 window and less than 3% of missionary work is done among these people."[1]

So, Thomas gave us two terms to help us understand the context of lostness around the world. There are places in the world, like the United States, where there are millions of lost people who have access to the Gospel but have either rejected it or not been approached. Crane labels those people as "unsaved." They are indeed lost and need Jesus, but because there are healthy, growing churches in their culture, there is an existing opportunity for them to be reached if those churches will do their job.

The other label is "unreached." That's the term he and other missionaries use to refer to people in places around the world that are not only unsaved, but they are also unreached, meaning the Gospel hasn't reached them at all. They have no reasonable access to the Gospel because the church essentially doesn't exist in it. As such, we don't just label them "unsaved," but we emphasize the severity of their situation by labeling them "unreached." There is no observable potential for them to be reached.

Now, because Jesus has already commanded His church to participate in His mission, we don't have to pray about whether or not we should be doing something to reach those people. However, Venture Church, nor I, could ever possibly engage 7,188 unreached people groups.

[1] https://www.globalfrontiermissions.org/missions-101/the-unreached-peoples-and-their-role-in-the-great-commission#:~:text=It%20is%20estimated%20that%20of,the%20Gospel%20of%20Jesus%20Christ.

So, if we can't reach them all, nor are we called to do so, then what do the pastors of Venture feel God is calling Venture to do, and what role do we play as individuals in that effort? I'm going to answer the first part of that question in a few minutes (what do the pastors feel God is calling Venture to do). Then next week, we will discuss what that looks like Biblically for you and me as individual followers of Christ with different life situations, giftings, and passions.

However, before I delve into the practicalities of this, let's take a moment to examine how a healthy, growing, and prominent church in the first century understood the mission of God for them … the Mission of the Church. The church is known as the Church at Antioch. Interestingly, one author notes about Antioch,

"This city, one of many bearing the same name, was the third largest in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria. Located on the Orontes River 15 miles inland, it was known as Antioch on the Orontes. Beautifully situated and carefully planned, it was a commercial center and the home of a large Jewish community. In spite of the fact that it was a vile city, with gross immorality and ritual prostitution as part of its temple worship, the church at Antioch was destined to become the base of operations for Paul's missionary journeys. The Roman satirist, Juvenal, complained, "The sewage of the Syrian Orontes has for long been discharged into the Tiber." By this he meant that Antioch was so corrupt it was impacting Rome, more than 1,300 miles away."[2]

We meet one of the presumed future original "members" of the church in Antioch in Acts 6:5 while he was still living in Jerusalem.

5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, <u>and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.</u> (Acts 6:5)

The church in Jerusalem had grown so rapidly that the Apostles needed help, so they decided to ordain some leaders who were passionate about Jesus to lead the ministry that distributed food to the multitudes of people within the church who were living in extreme poverty at this point. Remember, months earlier, the church was started in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, when people from all walks of life repented and believed in Jesus, many of whom were not from Jerusalem. Many converts had traveled there for Passover and stayed for an additional seven weeks to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, while others had traveled there specifically for Pentecost. Either way, by the time we reach Acts chapter 6, most of them were running out of money and food and didn't want to leave Jerusalem because that meant leaving their only access to the teaching and preaching of the Apostles about Jesus.

Additionally, you had widows, orphans, and others from Jerusalem who, because they had become followers of Christ, were being pushed out of their families, communities, and

[2] Toussaint, S. D. (1985). Acts. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 383). Victor Books.

opportunities to earn a living, and as such, needed help as well. There were so many people in dire circumstances that the ministry of simply ensuring people had something to eat required an enormous amount of effort, an effort that detracted from the Apostles' ability to preach and teach the Gospel. Therefore, these deacons or servants were appointed to serve under the Apostles to ensure that the physical needs of those in the church were being met. One of these deacons was a gentile proselyte to Judaism from Antioch named Nicolaus. He, like so many others, was presumably in Jerusalem for Pentecost and had repented and believed in Jesus while he was there!

Now, the interesting part of this entire situation is that Jesus had clearly given the Apostles a command to GO to places other than Jerusalem. He told them the Gospel was for people in every people group on the planet. However, nobody wanted to leave Jerusalem to take it to them, that is, until the Jewish leaders martyred Stephen in Acts 7 and Saul (who later got saved and became Paul!) went on a rampage of persecution to try and stamp out the movement of the Gospel. The persecution was so severe that many of the people who had come to Christ in Jerusalem, including some people who were themselves from Jerusalem, decided it was time to leave! If you skip ahead to Acts chapter 11, we find out what happened when they left. In **Acts 11:19-26**, we read,

19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen <u>traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch</u>, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 <u>But there were some of them</u>, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch <u>spoke to the Hellenists also</u>, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Concerning the debate on what is translated in the ESV as "Hellenists," Kistemaker wrote,

> Hellenistic Jews who resided in Cyprus and Cyrene made their way to Antioch and communicated the gospel to the Greeks. We know that numerous Jews lived in both places. Because the distance between Cyprus and Antioch is relatively short and direct, we can understand that Jews traveled from one place to the other. But we are unable to explain why Jewish people from Cyrene in North Africa came to Antioch.
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> Nevertheless, when these Hellenistic Jews arrived in Antioch, they preached the gospel to the Greeks. As the Jews in Antioch customarily taught the Old Testament Scriptures to the Gentiles, so the Christians brought the gospel to the Greeks. And these Greeks were ready to put their faith in Jesus Christ.
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> Some scholars favor the translation *Greeks* in the text, while others opt for the reading *Hellenists*. The problem stems from a variant in the text: the word for "Greeks" is *Hellēnas* and that for "Hellenists" is *Hellēnistas*. The Problem of the variant in the Greek text is reflected in translations, which try to convey the significance of the underlying Greek word. Here are a few examples:
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> Gentiles (GNB)

Grecians (KJV)
non-Jews (SEB)

How do we approach this matter? First, the textual variant has strong external support, so we are unable to make a choice on the basis of manuscript evidence. Consequently, we are forced to rely on internal evidence. Luke states that Greek-speaking Jewish Christians from Cyprus proclaimed the gospel, not to the Jews, but to people either who were born in Greece or whose native tongue was Greek. With this stark contrast, he intimates that the Jewish Christian missionaries addressed not the Greek-speaking Jews, whom he elsewhere calls *Hellēnistas*, but the non-Jewish Greeks, whom he repeatedly classifies as *Hellēnas*. The internal evidence, therefore, seems to favor the reading *Greeks*.

Next, how should we interpret this reading? In the New Testament, the term *Greeks* denotes either natives of Greece and Macedonia or non-Jewish Hellenized residents of major cities, including Antioch, Iconium, Ephesus, Thessalonica, and Corinth.

Luke indicates that the Jewish Christians, in addition to preaching the gospel to Jews in Antioch, proclaimed Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. Not only Luke in Acts, but also Paul in his writings, stresses that the gospel is first for the Jew and then for the Greek, that is, the Gentile (Rom. 1:16, see especially the NIV).[3]

Luke continues,

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and <u>a great number</u> who believed turned to the Lord.

So the church in Antioch was growing like crazy! It is essential to understand that this was happening because of a HUGE intentional effort by the believers in Antioch to reach the nonbelievers in Antioch. That effort was going so well that word got back to the church in Jerusalem, and here's what they did,

22 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, <u>and they sent Barnabas to Antioch</u>.

Barnabas was so solid in his understanding of the Gospel of Jesus and in his ability to teach it that the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem entrusted Barnabas to go to Antioch and ensure that this rapidly growing church was being properly taught the Gospel of Jesus. If they trusted Barnabas at this level, it was because he had been doing it well in Jerusalem, meaning he was a ministry asset in a large, healthy church, filled with all kinds of mature,

[3] Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Vol. 17, pp. 418–419). Baker Book House.

informed believers who could teach and lead the ministry, which means the church in Jerusalem could keep reaching more and more people while they now helped Antioch do the same.

When Barnabas got to Antioch, here's what happened.

23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. <u>And a great many people were added to the Lord</u>. 25 <u>So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch</u>. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. <u>And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians</u>. (Acts 11:19-26)

So Barnabas got there, saw how many people were repenting and believing in Jesus, saw the potential of the church to lead a massive amount of people in the third largest city in the Roman Empire to Christ but also saw the huge need for these Hellenists, who had no idea who God was prior to hearing the Gospel, to be properly taught the Gospel. Therefore, Barnabas went and recruited Paul to help him prepare all these brand-new converts in Antioch, so that they could create a sustainable, thriving church that would continue to reach more and more people in Antioch, who would become mature followers of Christ and lead others to do the same.

But it didn't stop there. Barnabas and Paul were Jews who both had a calling in their life to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, not just the Gentiles of Antioch, but to non-Jewish people all over the world. It's not that they didn't preach the Gospel to Jews; they typically started with the Jews in whatever city they arrived in. However, unlike others, such as Peter, who focused primarily on reaching Jews living in the diaspora, Paul and Barnabas felt uniquely called to reach non-Jews (Gentiles). This was indeed happening in Antioch. They were reaching multitudes of them. But God had not called Paul and Barnabas to just reach Gentiles in Antioch; meanwhile, He had clearly brought them to Antioch to help build and mature a rapidly growing church that now had all kinds of influential people from the city of Antioch involved in it as well a bunch of highly gifted preachers and teachers leading it. So, let's fast forward again and skip over to Act 13. The Bible says,

1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 <u>Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.</u> (Acts 13:1-3)

> "**The church at Antioch** now became the base of operation for Saul's ministry. Jerusalem was still the mother church, <u>but the missionary church was Antioch on the Orontes River.</u> Furthermore, Peter was no longer the central figure; Saul became that. The diversity in the backgrounds of the leaders of the church at Antioch shows the cosmopolitan nature of the

church. **Barnabas** was a Jew from Cyprus (4:36). **Simeon** was also a Jew, but his Latin nickname **Niger** not only indicates he was of dark complexion but also that he moved in Roman circles. He could be the Simon of Cyrene who carried Christ's cross (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21), but this is highly debatable. **Lucius** was from **Cyrene** in North Africa (cf. Acts 11:20). **Manaen** had high contacts for he **had been** reared **with Herod the tetrarch**, actually Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist and who treated the Lord so shamefully at His trial (see the chart on the Herod family at Luke 1:5). One in that court (Manaen) became a disciple; the other (Herod) an antagonist! At the end of the list, for he was last on this scene, was **Saul**, a Jew trained in Rabbinical schools. Despite their variegated backgrounds, these men functioned as one. Perhaps the name of Barnabas appears first in the list because as the delegate from the mother church in Jerusalem he held the priority position. 13:2. Evidently God made His will known by means of the "prophets" in the church (cf. v. 1). Frequently in Acts **the Holy Spirit** gave directives to God's leaders (e.g., 8:29; 10:19; 13:4). Here He directed the five, **while they were worshiping … and fasting**, to **set apart for** Him **Barnabas and Saul**. Once again the principle of two men working together is underscored. The verb "set apart" (*aphorizō*) is used of three separations in Saul's life—at his birth he was separated to God (Gal. 1:15); at his conversion he was set apart for the gospel (Rom. 1:1); and in Antioch he was separated for a specific service (Acts 13:2). 13:3. The church leaders **placed their hands on** Barnabas and Saul **and sent them off**. The laying on of hands identified the church with their ministry and acknowledged God's direction for them (cf. Ananias' identifying himself with Saul by laying hands on him, 9:17). Two of the choicest were sent on this significant mission."[4]

In sending them, that didn't just mean they said leave; it meant they officially partnered with them to go do in other cities what they had helped create in Antioch.

Note: **"The ordination service plainly denotes that the missionaries and the church are united in mission work."**[5]

God gave the church of Antioch a vision to financially, spiritually, and physically support Barnabas and Paul to go take the Gospel to places around the world that had no access to it. In general, they would first go to the synagogue and preach to the Jews, but they would soon pivot to engaging the Gentiles in the community, plant a local church with new converts (both Jews and Gentiles), disciple leaders, and then move on to do it again in another town.

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[4] Toussaint, S. D. (1985). Acts. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 387). Victor Books.

[5] Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Vol. 17, pp. 455–456). Baker Book House.

After they finished their first missionary journey, a situation arose that threatened the movement of the Gospel to the Gentiles, and the Church in Antioch took the initiative to resolve it. They sent Paul and others to the church in Jerusalem to deal with the false teachers who, although they were not being sent by the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, were nonetheless coming from it, teaching that Gentiles needed to become Jewish to truly be God's children. In this way, the church in Antioch was not only praying for and supporting Paul and Barnabas as missionaries but also addressing issues with other churches that hindered the Mission of the Church. We will not address it today, but you can read more about it in Acts 15. In short, it's known as the Jerusalem Council, which paved the way for more effective mission work among Gentiles worldwide. However, this wouldn't have been possible without the influence and support of the Church in Antioch.

In conclusion, I want to make sure we learn three of the crucial lessons the story of the church of Antioch in the book of Acts gives us about being a local church that's truly committed to the Mission of the Church:

(1) The Church in Antioch was completely committed to reaching the citizens of Antioch with the Gospel of Jesus of Christ. As a result, they were rapidly increasing in <u>size</u> due to the large number of people in Antioch who were repenting and believing in Jesus.

(2) The Church at Antioch was committed to maturing the faith of those who committed to Christ so that those new converts could repeat the process with others (<u>discipleship</u>). Therefore, the church was deeply committed to empowering mature believers skilled in teaching and preaching to lead that effort.

(3) The Church at Antioch was committed to recreating what was happening in Antioch in other gentile towns and cities around the world that had no access to the Gospel, and thus <u>they</u> sent Paul and Barnabas.

OK, so what does that mean for Venture? Well, more and more, I've been referring to it over the last few months.

The Mission of Venture is the Mission Christ gave the Church. The Mission of God! We state it this way, but it's nothing more than a rewording of the main Great Commission passages in the New Testament that tell us the Mission of the Church:

"Engage (go to and intentionally connect with) those far from God (unsaved and unreached people) with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to know and follow Him (make disciples!)."

In addition, like the church in Antioch, our vision for accomplishing that mission is to do it locally with a global context. Therefore, the VISION of Venture is to,

"Localize the movement of the Mission of The Church throughout the counties on the western side of the Charlotte metro region (unsaved) and in people groups around the world that have no access to the Gospel (unreached)."

Practically, there are five keys for us to fulfill that vision successfully:

The first key is,

(1) Planting Venture satellite <u>CAMPUSES</u> throughout the region that localize the Mission of The Church.

A. Each satellite will be led by a Campus pastor, charged with building a team of pastors, staff and leaders who can equip those involved on that campus to establish robust ministries that effectively engage the lost in their community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and lead them to become fruit-bearing Christians who do the same with others.

B. Every campus will work together to help one another, especially in planting new satellite campuses to mobilize more people to reach more people with the Gospel in counties on the western side of the Charlotte metro region.

C. Why is this so critical? Well, in January 2025, WCNC ran a story that stated, **"The Charlotte Regional Business Alliance released results from a study Thursday that indicates the Charlotte region is projected to experience significant population expansion over the next 25 years, with the population expected to increase by more than 50% by 2050. The study forecasts the region will grow from its current population of 3 million to 4.6 million residents by that year, with the most substantial growth concentrated in several counties."**[6]

D. Meanwhile, the church in America is at a MAJOR tipping point of catastrophic decline. The number of people in America who follow Jesus has been in noticeable decline for decades, particularly when viewed from a generational perspective. At this point, the decline is so extreme that Pew research stated, "**This means that, for lasting *stability* to take hold in the U.S. religious landscape, something would need to *change.* For example, today's young adults would have to become more religious as they age, or new generations of adults who are more religious than their parents would have to emerge.**"[7]

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[6] https://www.wcnc.com/article/news/local/charlotte-nc-regional-population-growth-1-23-2025/275-fe397fd2-0697-462b-b264-cab44be9f629#:~:text=CHARLOTTE%2C%20N.C.%20—%20A%20Charlotte%20business,just%20more%20than%20192%2C000%20people.

[7] https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/decline-of-christianity-in-the-us-has-slowed-may-have-leveled-off/

E. The decline of love for Jesus and the Mission of the Church among those who call themselves Christians in America is so prominent that organizations like Pew Research now have to ask people if they attend church at least once a month just to find some sort of evidence that there is a chance they are connected to a local church. However, here's what's even more sad: Pew doesn't have the ability to truly distinguish whether the church the person attends at least once a month even preaches the gospel. That assumption can no longer be made in the United States!

F. In the United States, we now have three generations that are considered extremely lost (The Millennials, Gen Z, and the Alpha Generation). Of those extremely lost generations, two of them are having children, meaning the decline is poised to grow exponentially in the next twenty years if the church doesn't significantly increase its efforts to reach them. When it comes to where we live, while the Charlotte-metro region is booming as one of the fastest-growing population centers in the United States, like the rest of the country, churches actively participating in the Mission of the Church in this region are in major decline! There are church buildings everywhere, but now most of them house 20 to 40 people. A Seminary professor at Liberty University told me that the studies he's currently seeing indicate that upwards of 85% of churches in the United States are either plateaued or in decline.

G. Therefore, please understand that our vision for localizing the movement of Christ in the counties on the western side of the Charlotte metro area is not something we can take lightly or casually. America is running to become an unreached people group. It's only a few generations away. We don't have time for religious games and denominational stupidity. We need to get it done!

The second key is to,

(2) Be a church of <u>GROUPS</u> that are multiplying quickly enough for everyone in Venture to live in community with a small group of people who help each other grow in their faith as they serve together in the Mission of The Church.

A. We are NOT a church <u>of</u> groups yet; we just <u>have</u> them. However, our goal for this fiscal year is to change the things we've got to change, align what we've got to align, create the systems and processes we've got to develop, and put the leaders in place that need to be put in place to ensure we become a church of Gospel centered, mission driven groups!

B. To learn more about what we're trying to achieve in groups, check out Season Two of our We Who Dare Podcast, available on Spotify (link), Apple (link), and YouTube (link).

The third key is to,

(3) Capitalize on strategic <u>PROJECTS</u> that help advance the Mission of The Church in cultures unlike the one we live in.

A. The intention is to help cultivate "going," which is a key component of the Great Commission. It starts with the word GO! The idea of projects is that if we can find short-term opportunities that require people to get trained to GO serve in places beyond our region and outside of our culture, it will not only help them learn how to better reach their own neighbors, but it will also give them an entry-level type of experience with cross cultural missions and increase their passion to help get the Gospel to those who have no access to it!

B. We are currently in communication with a ministry in Alaska that hosts a camp for Native Alaskan youth, most of whom reside in areas with at best very limited access to the Gospel. We are still working with them to see if this is a project that makes sense for Venture to support in 2026. If we decide it makes sense for Venture, the church will be informed no later than fall 2025.

C. Finally, I've asked our mission team to reach out to a ministry about possible short-term mission projects for Venture's High School students. Stay tuned!

The fourth key is to,

(4) Form strategic <u>PARTNERSHIPS</u> to support ministries and missionaries that effectively localize the Mission of The Church with unreached people groups.

Note: Right now, we are financially supporting and actively working with Calvary Road Ministries (more on them in a second!), The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and two missionaries serving with them from Venture—"Rocky" and "Jude."

The fifth key is to,

(5) Adopt UNREACHED <u>PEOPLE</u> GROUPS and work to remove them from the list!

A. First up – The Fur people who are native to Darfur in Sudan.

1. "The Joshua Project estimates that 1.435 million of them exist, with 1.392 million of them living in Sudan. 4% are considered "Christian," but only 0.7% are considered Evangelical Christian. 96% are Muslim. Meanwhile, the Christians among the Fur in Sudan live in a place ranked 5th on the list of most persecuted people in the world by Open Doors."[8]

[8] https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/

2. The Fur people have been around for millennia; however, they are currently a minority ethnic group in Sudan and have been treated with extreme disregard and even violence by the ethnic group that makes up 70% of the Sudanese population (Sudanese Arabs). The tiny population of Christians who live among the Fur people, live under some of the most severe persecution on the planet. A Fur Christian is not only persecuted as an ethnic minority in Sudan but also by the people in their own ethnic group, which is 96% Muslim.

3. Decades of corruption and constant war have left the entire nation in shambles. If hell were places on earth, places like Sudan, and especially Darfur, would be one of them. The poverty and flat-out evil brought on by the militant radical Islam that dominates the landscape are just horrifying.

4. To no surprise, then, the Fur people are largely an unreached people group because it is literally one of the most dangerous places in the world to live. This truth is exponentially more true if you are not committed to living according to Sharia (Islamic law) and even more so if you are committed to following Christ! Therefore, the idea that a white U.S. citizen is going to be a missionary in Darfur to plant churches like Paul did in Galatia is irrational.

5. So, how do we do it? Well, the civil war has sadly displaced millions of people from Sudan, but the silver lining is that many of them are ending up in refugee camps in places like Uganda, which has freedom of Religion and doesn't persecute Christians! This is where Calvary Road Ministries comes into play. They are helping Darfurians lead others in their refugee camps to know and follow Jesus, and to catch a vision for one day returning to Darfur to plant churches and live out the Mission of the Church in Darfur! And listen, they have a little more protection in a refugee camp in Uganda, Ethiopia, or South Sudan, but, as you heard with Adam's testimony last week, those camps are still massively dominated by militant Islamic ideology; therefore, persecution within those camps is still very real!

6. In May 2025, Keri and I were privileged to join a team led by David Crane and Calvary Road Ministries to teach God's Word to some of the most inspirational followers of Christ I've ever met. I taught the book of Galatians to 35 Darfurian men who all have a vision to go back to Darfur and plant churches. I can't tell you how fulfilling it was to know I was helping ground future church planters in the Gospel that they can't wait to take to one of the darkest corners of the earth. Meanwhile, while I was teaching the men, Keri and the team of women she was with taught an oral version of the Gospel to 35 women as it appears in the Bible from Genesis through the Ascension of Christ. Many women in Islamic countries like Sudan are not allowed to learn to read; therefore, learning it in an oral format is essential for them to be able to repeat it to others.

7. Caleb Sutton accompanied us on the trip in May and documented numerous stories of God working in and through these incredible people. Instead of showing you all of them at once, we will continue to share them in the months to come!

8. I've also asked our missions team to lay out a prayer calendar for everybody in Venture to pray together for the people of Darfur but to do so in very specific ways related to how our partner, Calvary Road Ministries and others are needing prayer support in their efforts to fulfill the Mission of The Church with the Fur people. Future mission trips are also being discussed. So … Stay tuned!

B. Who is the next people group we are going to adopt? … well … let's see where Rocky and Jude end up in a few years!

Challenge: If God is calling you to be a part of Venture's vision to participate in the Mission of The Church, then let's go!!! <u>Partner</u> up with Venture and let's do this! If Venture is not the right fit, please email me and I'll send you some other churches to consider.

Now, I imagine that many of you are wondering what it looks like or means for you as an individual to serve in the Mission of the Church. Well, come back next week, and we will discuss what the Bible says about how we, as individuals, should participate in the Mission of the Church.

If you're not a partner at Venture or just need a refresher on getting plugged in, then sign up for Venture 101. Scan the QR code on the back of the bulletin or the screen and sign up. If you'd like to speak with someone first, please visit the Next Steps area before you leave.

The world doesn't stop turning. At the end of today, you and I will have one less day left in our lives to participate in the Mission of the Church, one less day on this earth to influence people to life in Christ. So, stop dilly-dallying around and playing games in the movement of Christ. Stop making excuses to go slow and do things that are easy. Get plugged in to Venture or some other local church trying to live out the Mission of The Church and do what you've been called, gifted, and privileged to do—labor with Christ in God's Mission to rescue people from the curse and damnation of sin and give them HIS LIFE!

Go Man Go!