

# South Bay Church Plant Sabbath School

## 3 – The Purpose of the Church

### The Purpose of the Church

The early Christian Church challenges contemporary views of the church. Here are two popular views of the church that distract us from the Acts model:

1. The church is a *fortress*. In this view of the church, we *protect* at any cost. While it is true that the church must maintain truth (Acts 2:40; 1 Timothy 3:15), if we make this our focus, we will tend to become focused on tradition and insular and disconnected from those around us.
2. The church is a *resort*. In this view of the church, we *please* at any cost. The purpose of the church is to put on programs that are attractive so that we can grow our membership. While it is true that we must be seeker-sensitive, our goal should not be entertainment or services, but transformation.

### **Acts 2:47; 4:4**

What was the early church known for?

### **1 Peter 2:9**

What is the focus of this verse and how does it match with the phrase in Acts 2:47, “praising God and having favor with all the people”?

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, which means “called out ones”. It was used for when an important political assembly was being held, and people were called out from their homes. Paul used this word, instead of the Jewish word for synagogue, because he wanted to describe the church not as a building with programs, but as a community of people on a mission. They were called out of darkness into light.

What is the mission of the church?

“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. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to “the principalities and powers in heavenly places,” the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.” *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9

Based on this quotation, what is the mission of God's last day church?

Notice the two elements of this mission – to carry the gospel to the world and to show the glory of God. What is the glory of God?

### **Exodus 33:18-19**

The glory of God represents His character. The mission of the church is to reflect who God is.

“The last message of mercy to be given to the world is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 415, 416

### **Acts 3:1-10**

What was the lame man expecting? What did he get instead? What was the result?

How is this like the way people relate to the church?

How did Peter and fulfill the mission of the church?

Sometimes the church makes their goal meeting people’s needs and giving them their necessities. While this is a good thing to do and even mandated by Scripture (see Matthew 25:31-46), it does not fulfill the mission of the church unless it offers something more. It’s interesting that the word for “healing” in Greek (not used in this particular passage) is the same word used for “salvation.” As we bring health to people’s bodies, we can direct them to seek God. Rather than simply giving handouts, we can give an embodied gospel that changes people’s lives in every way.

### **Acts 3:11-26**

What did Peter do when a crowd gathered? What was the focus of his message?

Personal ministry led to public proclamation. And public proclamation resulted in personal conversion.

Why is it important to have both personal ministry and public proclamation? What would this look like in our church plant?

### **Acts 4:1-12**

What was the focus of Peter’s message to the Sanhedrin?

How should this be the focus of the church today?

“In order to break down the barriers of prejudice and impenitence, the love of Christ must have a part in every discourse. Make men to know how much Jesus loves them, and what evidences He has given them of His love. What love can equal that which God has manifested for man, by the death of Christ on the cross? When the heart is filled with the love of Jesus, this can be presented to the people, and it will affect hearts.” *Letter 48, 1886.*

### **Acts 4:13-31**

What key word describes the faith and witness of the disciples? (verses 13, 29, 31)

Why were the disciples so different now from those who had fled at the arrest of Jesus? What was their focus?

### **Final Reflections**

Instead of a fortress or a resort, what metaphor would you use to describe what the church should be?

What is your personal role in helping the church to become more like the biblical model?

## **Ellen White on the Task of Every Believer**

Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life.—[The Desire of Ages, 195](#).

God expects personal service from everyone to whom He has intrusted a knowledge of the truth for this time. Not all can go as missionaries to foreign lands, but all can be home missionaries in their families and neighborhoods.—[Testimonies for the Church 9:30](#).

Christ was standing only a few steps from the heavenly throne when He gave His commission to His disciples. Including as missionaries all who should believe on His name, He said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” God's power was to go with them.—The Southern Watchman, September 20, 1904 ([The Review and Herald, October 6, 1896](#)).

To save souls should be the life work of everyone who professes Christ. We are debtors to the world for the grace given us of God, for the light which has shone upon us, and for the discovered beauty and power of the truth.—[Testimonies for the Church 4:53](#).

Everywhere there is a tendency to substitute the work of organizations for individual effort. Human wisdom tends to consolidation, to centralization, to the building up of great churches and institutions. Multitudes leave to institutions and organizations the work of benevolence; they excuse themselves from contact with the world, and their hearts grow cold. They become self-absorbed and unimpressible. Love for God and man dies out of the soul. Christ commits to His followers an individual work,—a work that cannot be done by proxy. Ministry to the sick and the poor, the giving of the gospel to the lost, is not to be left to committees or organized charities. Individual responsibility, individual effort, personal sacrifice, is the requirement of the gospel.—[The Ministry of Healing, 147](#).

We should all be workers together with God. No idlers are acknowledged as His servants. The members of the church should individually feel that the life and prosperity of the church are affected by their course of action.—[The Review and Herald, February 15, 1887](#).

Every soul whom Christ has rescued is called to work in His name for the saving of the lost. This work had been neglected in Israel. Is it not neglected today by those who profess to be Christ's followers?—[Christ's Object Lessons, 191](#).

There is something for everyone to do. Every soul that believes the truth is to stand in his lot and place, saying, “Here am I; send me.” [Isaiah 6:8](#).—[Testimonies for the Church 6:49](#).

It is the privilege of every Christian, not only to look for, but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.—[Christ's Object Lessons, 69](#).

He who becomes a child of God should henceforth look upon himself as a link in the chain let down to save the world, one with Christ in His plan of mercy, going forth with Him to seek and save the lost.—[The Ministry of Healing, 105](#).

All may find something to do. None need feel that there is no place where they can labor for Christ. The Saviour identifies Himself with every child of humanity.—[The Ministry of Healing, 104](#).

Those who have united with the Lord in the covenant of service are under bonds to unite with Him in the great, grand work of soul saving.—[Testimonies for the Church 7:19](#).

So vast is the field, so comprehensive the design, that every sanctified heart will be pressed into service as an instrument of divine power.—[Testimonies for the Church 9:47](#).

Men are instruments in the hand of God, employed by Him to accomplish His purposes of grace and mercy. Each has his part to act; to each is granted a measure of light, adapted to the necessities of his time and sufficient to enable him to perform the work which God has given him to do.—[The Great Controversy, 343](#).