

# Mission

On September 22, 2004 the hit TV show *Lost* debuted on ABC. It was one of the most popular shows of all time in the era before Netflix and streaming services were on the scene (which I realize sounds like *ages* ago, or yesterday, depending on your age). The initial season of *Lost* averaged over 11 million U.S. viewers per episode. Wildly popular show. I remember getting together with 20+ people each week to watch the episode as it aired (which I'm realizing is an experience that only makes sense to people born *before* the year 2000).

But *what *Lost* would eventually become known for*, even more than how many people watched it or how good the show was, was actually how it *ended*. The finale absolutely *bombed*. It was atrocious. Videos began to circulate on YouTube detailing the 25+ unanswered questions and massive plot holes that the show never resolved. Hit pieces were written online about how the ending actually *ruined* the six full seasons of the show. People wanted refunds for the DVD box sets they had purchased because the show was now "unwatchable."

One of the *creators* of *Lost* even *started pitching* his new projects to the general public by promising that they "wouldn't end the way *Lost* did." Which to me, is so funny. Imagine if a local chef here in Knoxville opened a second restaurant, and up at the top of the menu it said, "don't worry—the food doesn't taste as bad here as it does at my other restaurant." My point is that the ending of the show was incredibly, *notoriously* bad.

So *what went wrong* with *Lost*? I mean that's the type of question you guys pay me the big bucks to answer up here, right? I'm sure that's the pressing question that was on all of our minds this morning when we walked in. Well, here's my stab at it: ***they lost the plot line. The writers, somehow, somehow, completely forgot the things that made the show great.*** The show was built on this constant rhythm of building mystery and intrigue for episodes or entire seasons, and then resolving that mystery in an emotionally satisfying way. But at the end of the show, they just *didn't* resolve any of it. It's like they just *forgot* what kind of show they were. They completely lost the plotline.

I *bring that up*, one, because I loved the show and am still a little bitter about how it ended. This felt like a safe place to vent. But two, because it's an exercise in *just how easy it is to completely lose sight* of a plotline. How easy it is to just forget and neglect the things that make you unique or different or intriguing. And how easy it is to turn *anything*—even a show with a multi-million dollar budget and top-notch producers and writers—into something it's not. And if the *Lost* situation tells us anything, it's that ***it's***

really easy to become known more for the things you do poorly, than for the things that made you great.

And I don't know if you've noticed, or watched the news, or scrolled through Twitter, or just if you've been out in public and interacted with other humans at all—but Christianity, right now, in America, isn't typically known for what it's great at. Depending on who you talk to, we're a little more known for what we're doing *poorly*. And sometimes I wonder if that's because we, too, at times, lose the plot line. **I wonder if there are ways that we have forgotten—or at least significantly neglected—the thing that makes us, us.** And I want to talk about at least one of those things this morning.

So if you've got a bible nearby, you're welcome to go ahead and turn with me to **Genesis 1**. If you've been here the last couple weeks, you know we've been working through a **Vision Series**, where we've just been unpacking the things we want to be most known for as a church. And this morning, I want to bring all of that to a close by talking about the last component of our vision. And I want to briefly unpack for you a key part of the *plotline* of the bible. And I want us to look at **how God's people, including us, have sometimes lost sight of that plotline.** Because I think that, obviously, has tremendous relevance for how we go about being the Church here in the 21st century.

So let's kick things off in **Genesis 1**, starting in **v. 27**:

*[27] So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. [28] God (notice this language) blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

So we read that God creates humanity—both male and female. And **immediately**—right away—he **gives them a job to do**. He “blesses” them—with land and vegetation and food and provision and raw materials and each other. But after he *blesses* them with all of that, he makes it abundantly clear that their job isn't *just* to kick back and enjoy it all. **God doesn't create Adam and Eve and place them in a hammock with a Mai Tai in-hand. He creates them, blesses them, and gives them a job to do. He actually wants them to do something with the blessing they've received.** Specifically, he wants them to rule over and subdue the rest of creation. He wants them to order and structure the world around them such that it thrives and flourishes as a result. **He blesses Adam and Eve, so that they might bless the rest of the world.** The blessing wasn't just *for them*; it was *for the world, through* them. Do you see that? Are you with me so far?

And notice that it says that *all* of this **was a part of them being** “created in [God’s] image.” That was at the very beginning of our passage. That word *image* could be translated *likeness*, or *resemblance*. It was the word used in the ancient world for when people would set up a statue or a memorial of someone. So if there was a *statue* of me, which, just to be clear, there should never be (not that anyone was actively considering it), that would be called an *image* of Kent, according to the bible.

I tell you all of that to make **this simple point**. *Evidently*, humans receiving blessing from God, and *using* that to *bless* the rest of creation, **is all part of how we show off to the world what God is like**. Do you see that connection? Being blessed, and *becoming* a blessing to the world around us, is literally hardwired into who we are as human beings. It’s not just something we *should* do—it’s something we were literally *designed* to do. We see that, literally, in the first chapter of the bible: **we are blessed, in order to be a blessing**.

But **if you know the story**, things didn’t function that way for long. It wasn’t long before Adam and Eve forgot their purpose to bless the world around them and instead saw the garden as existing for their enjoyment alone. They ate of the fruit they weren’t supposed to eat from and did it in the hope that it might allow them to *become like gods themselves* rather than image the *true* God to the world around them. **Instead of becoming a blessing, they decided to take and keep the blessing for themselves**. They decided to let God’s blessing stop, *terminate* on them.

And **thus begins** the aggressive, rapid, downward spiral of humanity. Starting with this massive misstep by Adam and Eve in the garden, all of humanity follows suit and things grow worse and worse and worse. To the point that one day, God says he regrets making human beings—because all they seem to do is hurt, harm, and exploit each other. All of humanity has lost all sight of what they were created to do. So God starts over.

And eventually, he starts over with **another man and his wife**. Turn with me, or follow along on the screen, with **Genesis 12**. This time, it’s a man named Abram, and his wife Sarai. God is going to attempt to make them into a new version of the blessing that he intended Adam and Eve to be. Look with me there, starting in **v. 1**:

*[1] The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. [2] “I will make you into a great nation, and I will (what’s that next word?) bless you; I will make your name great, and you will (look at this:) be a blessing. (God says I will bless you, in order that you might be a blessing to the world around you. Strangely familiar concept there. And we get a little more in v. 3...)* *[3] I will bless those who bless*

*you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples* (or that could read “all nations or ethnicities”) *on earth will be blessed through you.*”

Fascinating. So God wants to do with Abram and Sarai what he attempted to do through Adam and Eve. Except **now he doesn't just want to bless creation itself—he wants to bless people**. He says he's gonna make Abram and Sarai into an entire *nation*, and then *their* nation is going to bless *all the other* nations in turn. They're going to be this shining example of what the God of the universe is like. They're going to show the world around them how God *intended* the world to be. The beauty and creativity and peace and justice that results when God is king, and when people live life with him. That's what God wants them to do.

But if you know *this* story, there's **one pretty massive problem** with Abram and Sarai becoming this “great nation.” Anybody know what it is? They don't have any *kids*. **And generally speaking, not a whole lot of two people nations out there.** And the problem actually goes a lot *deeper* than that. We find out in the very next verse of Genesis 12 that Abram is already seventy-five years old, and his wife is around the same age. We find out a little later in the story that “the way of women had ceased to be with Sarai.” Which is a very delicate way of saying that biological children weren't in the cards for them at this point in their lives.

But God said he was going to make their offspring specifically into a “great nation.” So **Abram and Sarai hatch a plan**. They decide to take matters into their own hands, and have Abram conceive a child with their *servant*, Hagar. Which, in that day and age, wasn't as uncommon as it might seem, but still: ill-advised, right? And that's not at all what God meant when he made the promise to Abram. When he said “I'm going to bless you,” he most definitely did *not* mean “sleep with someone who you're not married to.”

But this is when we remember that human beings have never been great at receiving and comprehending God's blessing. Right? So just like Adam and Eve forgot they were supposed to *be* a blessing, and just *took* the blessing for themselves, so did Abram and Sarai. They forgot that *God* was going to bless them, and decided to reach out and *manufacture* the blessing *themselves*. Instead of *being* a blessing, turn the blessing in on themselves. God's people lose sight of the plotline, *again*.

But God still works and moves through *all* of that. Turns out he still does create a great nation out of Abram and Sarai's family tree, and showers blessing upon blessing on them. Generations later, a famine hits, but God orchestrates an elaborate plan his people to be provided for in Egypt, one of the great empires of the ancient world. They eventually become *enslaved* by that empire, and God rescues them out of that in a

remarkable show of power. God provides for them miraculously as they wander through the desert, where they could've *died* in a couple days. And then he delivers them into Canaan, a "land flowing with milk and honey." Like I said, showers them with blessing upon blessing upon blessing upon blessing.

And the goal with all of this is that they would *become* a blessing. That they would become and continue to be, in the language of the Prophets, a "light to the nations."<sup>1</sup> That they would fulfill the calling that God originally gave Adam and Eve: to show the world what life looks like when God is king. And occasionally, they succeed. But *mostly*, they fail. In fact, they fail in some pretty spectacular and face palm-worthy ways. There are so many examples of it throughout the Old Testament that I could cite here, but at the bottom of it all, I would argue, was this: they misunderstood the purpose of God's blessing. They thought the blessing was meant to end with *them*. So they took it, enjoyed it, and let it stop there. **Instead of remembering that God blessing them was never just *about them*. It was his way of blessing the rest of the world.**

Sharon Hodde Miller puts it this way in some of her teaching on the book of Amos. This is about to be a really long quote, but I don't think I can say it any better than she does. She says this:

*Mistakenly, the Israelites hoarded their opulence (their wealth, their ease of life) as "blessing." They saw the provision as an end in itself, a gift from God to be indulged. They also drew security from it. They took pride and comfort in being more powerful than the countries around them. They measured success by having more of it than their neighbors.*

*God rebuked them for their greed, and in the strongest possible terms, because (look at this) He viewed blessing quite differently than the Israelites. God did not intend for the Israelites to prosper simply to luxuriate in it. He did not provide them with wealth simply as an assurance of security. And He did not allow them ease of life simply to grow complacent. (I love this next sentence) The blessings of God were never meant to be stored up like grain.*

*Just as Israel was meant to be a light to the nations, and the Church a light in the world, everything we are given has a greater purpose. May we steward our blessings accordingly.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> See Isaiah 42:6

<sup>2</sup> "Woe to the Complacent," as published by *She Reads Truth*, [here](#).

I told you it was good. That's it. **Blessing was never, ever, ever meant to end with us. It has always been, and always will be about us *being* a blessing.** About showing the world what life is like when God is king. That was what God intended to do with Adam and Eve in the garden, it's what he intended to do with Abram and Sarai by making them into a great nation, it's what he intended to do with Israel as a whole, and it's what he intends to do with his Church today.

So with that in mind, I want you to look at one final passage with me that should make a lot of sense in light of everything we've just talked about. This one's found in **Matthew 5**, starting in v. 14. Here's what it says:

*[14] "You are the light of the world. (So here, Jesus is now talking to all followers of Jesus. Anyone who claims to know and love the God of the bible—they are now the "light" that he always wanted Israel to be. He says to all of them, "you are the light of the world.") A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before others, that (here's the purpose...) they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

So we—followers of Jesus—are the light of the world. "But," Jesus says, "nobody *hides* a light like that. Nobody lights a lamp and then hides it under a bowl. They put it up high on a stand, and it gives light to everybody else." That's who *we* are supposed to be. We are light, in order to *offer* that light to everyone else. We are blessed, in order to *be* a blessing. God did not bless us so that the blessing could end with us. He blessed us to bless the world. Just like he wanted Adam and Eve to do. Just like he wanted Abram and Sarai to do. He now calls *us* to do the same.

So here's where this idea cuts to the very heart of our series. The past two weeks we've talked about being *Jesus-centered*, and being *family*. About the incredible *blessing* we have in the love and grace of Jesus, and the incredible *blessing* that is other followers of Jesus to walk alongside us and with us to help us follow Jesus ourselves. Those things are, to put it mildly, *incredible blessings* that you and I have received. *Incredible* blessings.

But if everything we just talked about is true, what are *blessings for*? What are they *for*? For kicking back and enjoying? For storing up for ourselves? For just sitting and marinating in from now until Jesus comes back? Absolutely not. Blessings are for *sharing*. We—you and I—are the light of the world. We're a city on a hill. And a city built on a hill *cannot*, and *should not*, be hidden. People don't light a lamp and then put it under a



bowl. Light is meant to serve a purpose. And if it doesn't serve a purpose, it's not worth *having*. God's blessings to us are never meant to terminate with us; they are meant to be *shared. Imparted. Distributed.* God blesses us, to *be* a blessing.

**We have a word for all of this at City Church: we call it *mission*.** We are a Jesus-centered family...*on mission*. And that mission is to share and offer and channel everything God has given *us*, with those who don't yet have it. With those who don't yet know what it's like. **So listen: I love what we have here at City Church. I love that we have a community that is fixated on and motivated by the good news of Jesus. I love that we have places and spaces where we can remember that and be reminded of that. I love that we have a really *close-knit* group of people. Like I even love that sometimes it makes other people uncomfortable how well we know each other. I love that we love hanging out with each other, like a lot. Like so much that we get on each other's nerves sometimes. I love that we care for one another and sacrifice for one another and serve one another. All of that is amazing. I literally wouldn't trade it for the world. I hope you wouldn't either.**

**But—but!—I do hope we realize: *none* of that exists just for *us*. It's not for *us*. It's for the *world*.** The reason we remember and celebrate the gospel isn't just because we need it—it's so the world around us can see what a life centered on the gospel *looks like*. As John Piper himself once said, "*mission* exists because *worship doesn't*." Us being centered on the gospel is so that more and more people might be drawn to do the same. The reason we have a close-knit community that operates like a family isn't just for *our* sake. It's for the *world's* sake. The reason we've been blessed is to *be* a blessing. This is the plot line of the Scriptures, beginning to end.

To put it even more emphatically, **if we keep on being exactly who we are right now as a church, and no one ever comes to know Jesus or is drawn towards Jesus through it...we will have missed the point *entirely*.** God created *this* for the *world*. He blessed *us*, so that we might *be* a blessing. That's what the whole thing is about, that's what it's *always* been about. And I so badly don't want us to forget that. I so badly don't want us to replace the mission of God with just coming here and doing church. That's a bad trade. And it misses entirely who God has created us to be. And being God has created us to be is the most exciting thing in the universe to be a part of.

So in light of that, I just want to end with some practical questions. I want to help us all, best I can, put this vision of being on mission into practice in our day to day lives. Three questions for you, and then we'll be done. First...

## Who do you know that doesn't know?

Who do you know, right now, that doesn't know Jesus? Could be most anybody. A coworker. A classmate. A close friend you grew up with. A roommate. Another mom from the preschool drop-off. Another dad on your kid's tee-ball team. A neighbor. The barista you see every day or *multiple* times a day, depending on your caffeine addiction—I don't know. But who is it? Who has God put you in regular proximity to, who doesn't yet know who God is and what he's like? And maybe you're thinking, "well I don't *know* if they know Jesus." Great. So you've figured out your first step: figure out whether or not they know Jesus. Not necessarily meaning you ask them that question point blank, right off the bat, next time you see them—you may not know them that well yet. Or maybe you *do*.

But either way, your objective is to figure out if they know Jesus. Which conveniently, is in many ways the same as getting to know them as a person! Ask them what they like to do in their spare time. Ask them what's really good about their life right now. Ask them what's really difficult about their life right now, assuming you know them well enough that they'd be willing to share that. You'll find that as you get to know people, it becomes easier and easier to figure out where they're at spiritually. The more you talk to them, you'll find out whether or not the kingdom of Jesus factors into their day-to-day thinking or not.

And I'll just add: just because a person says they go to church, or uses the word "God" in a conversation, doesn't necessarily mean they know Jesus. It might, but it also might not. What you're looking for is tangible fruit of the Spirit. Evidence that the good news of Jesus is impacting their lives in regular, ongoing ways. If so, great! You've met another follower of Jesus that you can talk to about spiritual things. If *not*, you've just found someone God may want you to be on mission with, and *for*.

Who do you know that doesn't know Jesus? Second...

## How do you get *them* around God's people?

Assuming that you've identified somebody you're in regular proximity to, who doesn't know Jesus, start asking the question *how can I get them opportunities to see how me and my community live life together?* And I don't mean here on Sundays necessarily. ~~This is where we remember that we are family, for the purpose of mission—right? Blessed, to be a blessing.~~ And according to Matthew 5, we are a *city* on a hill. Not a one-man show on top of a hill. A *city*. A community of Jesus-followers that regularly interacts with each other in a way that shows the world what God is like. If you don't have a community like that, please go back and refer to last week's teaching on *family*.



But what your friend or coworker or neighbor ultimately needs is to see that city on a hill in action. They need an up close view of what life looks like when Jesus is king. They need to see how we interact with each other, and sacrifice for one another, and care for one another, and love one another. Jesus puts it this way in [John 13:35](#):

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

In other words, Jesus is of the impression that if people see, often enough, how we love and care for each other within the community of Jesus, they will realize that something is different, and eventually come to know that we are disciples of Jesus.

But for them to see that sort of thing, they need to *be around* it. So how can you get *them* around *this*? This is why we encourage our LifeGroups to have what we call *rhythms*: regular time spent together outside of a “churchy” setting. The random non-Christian friend in your life might not want to attend a church service with you, and they may not want to go over to somebody’s house where you and a bunch of other Christians study the bible or confess your deepest, darkest sins.

But they might absolutely want to hit up that new restaurant in town with you and a few people from your LifeGroup. They may absolutely want to go to that brewery and play trivia with you and some other followers of Jesus. They may absolutely want to go to a coffee shop and kind of get work done, kind of procrastinate with you and a few people from City Church. Be creative with it. But ask the question, *how do I get them, around this?* And then do it.

And finally, flip that question around too. In other words...

## **How do you bring God’s people to them?**

One of the most eye-opening, helpful things that anyone has ever taught me about living on mission is this: **don’t just try to get people to come to your thing; go to theirs** (repeat). So often as followers of Jesus, we spend the majority of our energy trying to get people who don’t follow Jesus to come to our thing: attend our church, try out our small group, come to this Christian concert (which is still a very odd one to me, but it’s a thing). We try to get non-Christians to come to the things *we* do. And there’s occasions where that works.

But I would suggest that if you want to communicate to another person that you care about them...you should also go to things that *they* do. **Even if they’re not fun things to**

go do. They have to go to a work party and they ask if you'll go because they're dreading going alone—*go*. They're going to watch a football game, they invite you, and you *hate sports—go anyway*. Don't just invite people to attend your thing—go to *theirs*. I'm telling you: often, that makes people feel so cared for as human beings.

So a few weeks ago, Eric and Sara, who usually lead music for us up here on Sundays moved in basically right across the street from our house—it's awesome. We're likely going to annoy the crap out of each other, and I'm gonna love it so much. But also, when they moved in, they met *their next door* neighbor—we'll call her Hailey. And Hailey is super into planning events for the neighborhood to hang out together. So she invited all four of us to a planning meeting for an upcoming event. Since we just met her, I'm sure it was just a formality; she was probably thinking "no way will they come to this." Well, we show up. And you could tell in her posture that she was a little caught off-guard that we actually showed. And once we were there, we start to introduce ourselves to people there, got to know them. And then we offered to bring stuff for the upcoming event, to help with whatever was needed.

And now, she's wanting to plan playdates with our kids, get us together with the other families in the neighborhood—all this is happening because she invited us to a thing she thought we'd never come to, and we came to it. And what's going to happen, inevitably, as she invites us to stuff and we show up, is that she's going to see how me and Ana and Eric and Sara interact with one another. And I for one am praying that she sees something about it that stands out to her. And I'm praying that it leads to some questions about why we treat each other that way, and that the Holy Spirit uses it to draw her to herself. Do you see what that is? It's bringing *this*, to *her*. It's seeing our *blessing* (relationship with each other) as a way to bless the *world*).

And I'm telling you guys: it's what we were *made for* as followers of Jesus. All we've gotta do is follow Jesus into it.

Let's pray.