

The Great Story and the Great Commission

(Based on *The Great Story and the Great Commission* by Christopher Wright)

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SESSION 1: The Great Story

Christopher Wright (born 1947) - a missiologist, an Anglican clergyman and an Old Testament scholar.

- from "The Biblical Basis of Mission" to "The Missional Basis of the Bible"
- *The Mission of God* (2006), *The Mission of God's People* (2010)
- the chair of the Lausanne Theology Working Group from 2005 to 2011.
(the chief architect of the Cape Town Commitment, from the Third Lausanne Congress in 2010)
- two convictions
 - 1) We need the whole Bible to understand the mission of God and the mission of God's people.
 - 2) When we read the whole Bible in the way God gave it to us, it invites us to take part in God's purposes across the whole spectrum of human life and experience.

The Great Story and the Great Commission: Participating in the Biblical Drama of Mission (2023)

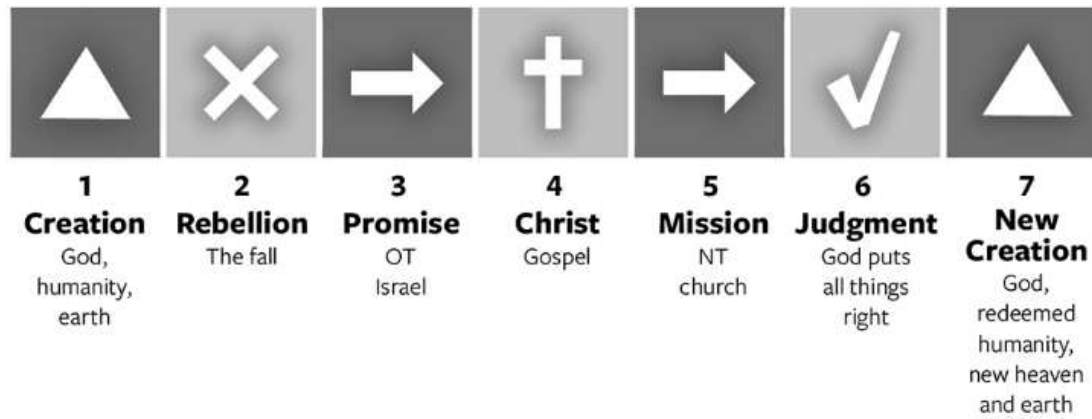
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1. A Missional Hermeneutic of Scripture

- the Bible as **the Record** of God's Mission:
This approach draws attention to *the missional framework and direction of the whole Bible story*.
- the Bible as **the Product** of God's Mission:
This approach draws attention to *the missional origin of the biblical documents*.
- the Bible as **the Tool** of God's Mission:
This approach draws attention to *the missional aim of the biblical documents*.

2. The Great Story as a Drama in Seven Acts

Fig. 2.1. The Seven Acts of the Biblical Drama



Act 1: Creation

Act 2: Rebellion

Act 3: Old Testament Promise

Act 4: Christ

Act 5: New Testament Mission

Act 6: Final Judgment

Act 7: New Creation

"Already, but Not Yet."

- Already:
- Not yet:

[Workshop]

Work in pairs. Take turns explaining the Bible as a seven-act drama to your partner. Five minutes each. If you can explain the Bible's story this way, using this picture, it will also help you share the gospel with others.

3. What Does the Great Story Do?

1) A Missional Hermeneutic Challenges Us to "Inhabit" the Whole Bible Story

We inhabit the whole Bible story in all its acts by faith. And we live out our faith in practice within the act where God has placed us, Act 5. To play our part in the drama of Scripture means to act in accordance with the script and the Director's instructions.

2) A Missional Hermeneutic Challenges Us to Live Out the Story We Are In

We are called, then, to live within the Bible's story, to live lives that are "worthy of the Lord" whose story it is.

3) A Missional Hermeneutic Reshapes Our Worldview

Now such an understanding of the mission of God as the very heartbeat of all reality, all creation, all history and all that yet lies ahead of us generates a distinctive worldview that is radically and transformingly God-centered, and thus disturbingly subversive.

4) A Missional Hermeneutic Governs Our Doctrinal Theology

It should be the Bible's own grand story that provides the framework and substance for the work of systematic theology.

5) A Missional Hermeneutic Sends Us Out to Play Our Part in the Mission of God

Our mission, both as individuals and as the church, is to participate in God's mission, as "God's co-workers." This missional story calls for a missional people.

SESSION 2: The Great Commission

4. The Great Commission and the Five Marks of Mission

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.
And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matt. 28:18-20)

The whole Bible is implied in the Great Commission. But we need to be careful about two things.

- We are not arguing that the Great Commission is the only or the most important biblical text on which our theology and practice of mission can or should be built.
- When we observe how thoroughly God-centered and Christ-centered the Great Commission is, it should restrain our tendency to shift its focus entirely onto us and our missional aspirations, agendas, urgencies, and timetables.

Whose mission is it?

[God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. (Eph. 1:9-10)

We participate in God's mission as God's co-workers. Everything we do should reflect and respond to what God has planned and purposed to accomplish through his people.

The Five Marks of Mission

The mission of the church is the mission of Christ.

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. - **evangelism**
2. To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers. - **teaching**
3. To respond to human need by loving service. - **compassion**
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and to pursue peace and reconciliation. - **justice**
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.
- **creation care**

All of them are true of God. If these are marks of our mission, it is because they flow from the character, actions, and mission of God.

All five dimensions of mission depend on the lordship of Christ. (Fig. 4.1)

Three focal points of mission (Fig. 4.2)

- Building the church
(Evangelism and Teaching)
- Serving society
(Justice and Compassion)
- Caring for creation
(Creation Responsibility)

5. Building the Church through Evangelism and Teaching

Evangelism

How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
"Your God reigns!" (Isa. 52:7)

So when Mark opens his Gospel with the word "gospel," Jewish readers immediately connected it to this idea—the good news of Israel's God, "God reigns."

The gospel announces as good news the historical events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. (Cape Town Commitment)

"the Primacy of Evangelism" vs. "the Centrality of the Gospel"

True integral mission requires both parts working together:

- Sharing, in words, the good news and truth of historical facts through evangelism.
- Embodying that message through real, contextual engagement in society and in creation.

Fig. 4.1. The Five Marks of Mission



Fig. 4.2. Church, Society, Creation



Teaching and discipling

Teaching is deeply rooted in Scripture.

Jesus said, "All this I have spoken while still with you.

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:25-26)

Teaching is an essential part of obedience to the Great Commission.

6. Serving Society through Compassion and Justice

Compassion and justice together

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (Matt. 5:6-7)

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!

You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.

You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. (Matt. 23:23)

Christians who have felt moved to respond purposefully to human need in works of love and compassion have also recognized the need to actively redress the factors that give rise to those conditions – usually some form of long-term injustice manifested in exploitative and oppressive systems and culturally deep-rooted inequalities.

Deuteronomy and the Great Commission

In Deuteronomy, God commanded God's people to reflect God's character by "walking in his way."

Light of the world

The third and fourth marks of mission create a kind of "missional magnetism."

The New Testament church

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today...

There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land. (Deut. 15:4-5, 11).

Within or beyond the church?

God's people in the Bible was called into existence to be a model or paradigm of what God wants for human society among the nations.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people,
especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Gal. 6:10)

7. The Goodness and Glory of Creation

The Goodness of Creation

Creation is good in relation to God.

- The Good Creation Reveals the Good God.
- Creation receives its intrinsic value from God.
- Creation is owned by God.
- Creation is God's temple.

Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. (Isa. 66:1)

Creation is good in relation to human beings.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."...

God 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." (Gen. 1:26-28)

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.
(Gen. 2:15)

Creation functions as the dwelling place of God, and human beings function as the image of God, ruling and serving creation on God's behalf.

Creation Care and Mission

First, in exercising care for God's creation, we are reflecting both the compassion and the justice of God. Second, when we care for creation, our care is an extension of another biblical principle: namely, that our treatment of other humans is an embodiment or expression of our treatment of God. How we treat the earth reflects how we treat its Creator—and ours.

8. The Goal of Creation

God's Redemptive Purpose Includes Creation

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. (Rom. 8:19-21)

Creation Has Been Reconciled to God through the Cross of Christ

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.
For in him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,
whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;
all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things,
and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church;
he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead,
so that in everything he might have the supremacy.
For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,
and through him to reconcile to himself all things,
whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.
(Col. 1:15-20)

What is our final destination? Our final destination is not for our souls to escape upward to heaven when we die. The final, dynamic movement at the end of Revelation is not upward—it is downward. What John sees in the Revelation is not us all going up to heaven, but God coming down here.

Our ecological action today is both a creational responsibility, given at the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis, and an eschatological expression, pointing toward the ending of the Bible.

[Workshop]

Work in pairs. Talk about how these three focal areas and five marks are currently being lived out in your own church—and how they could be lived out more fully. Five minutes each.

SESSION 3: The Great Story, the Great Commission, and the Church's Mission

What implications for ourselves and our churches emerge from this survey of the great story, the Great Commission, and the contours of integral mission? How does such a missional hermeneutic shape not only our theology of mission but also our practice?

1. God's Whole Mission Is for God's Whole Church

Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him. (Gen. 18:18-19)

From the start, the existence of the people of God on earth is bound up with the mission of God for all nations. Mission is not a specialized activity for a few professionals. The church as a whole exists for the sake of God's mission. The whole church is missional. Every local church is a missional church, or it is not really being a church at all.

But everybody can't do everything. Each person, according to the gifts and calling God has given, does something specific. In that way the whole church, in all its diversity, will be involved in multiple ways in participating in the mission of God.

2. The Whole Church's Mission Includes Every Church Member

"Our church sends out 1,500 mission partners every week and a few of them are serving overseas."
(Hugh Palmer, All Souls Church)

The whole church's mission includes every church member with different callings and sendings.

"the General Calling" vs. "the Specific Callings"

- All of us are to be ready to bear witness to our faith, while some are specifically gifted as evangelists.
- All of us are to be ready to do acts of compassion and kindness and speak up for what is just and right, while some are specifically called into professional work in politics or judicial advocacy or in tackling global poverty, hunger, and disease.
- All of us should live responsibly in our use and care of creation, while some are called, academically qualified, and professionally trained to pursue environmental biology and to do ecologically appropriate scientific research and advocacy.

"You Are Now Entering Your Mission Field"

Every church member participates in their missional calling through the ordinary, universal experience of living as a committed Christian, as part of God's people, out in the world. And God also calls some people to a specific missional vocation, equipping them and leading them to follow that calling through their profession. We need to encourage, motivate, and honor both dimensions of mission.

3. Every Church Member's Mission Includes the Whole of Life

We have to break the ingrained habit of thinking in two spheres – the secular and the sacred.

It is a wonderful privilege to be a missionary or a pastor, if God calls us to it.
But it is equally wonderful to be a Christian lawyer, industrialist, politician, manager, social worker,
television scriptwriter, journalist, or homemaker, if God calls us to it...
There is a crying need for Christian men and women who see their daily work
as their primary Christian ministry,
and who determine to penetrate their secular environment for Christ. (John Stott)

Biblically, the very concepts of ministry and mission should define and characterize the whole life of every disciple of Christ.

In the Great Commission, standing at the central climax of the great story, Jesus begins with a vast, cosmic claim: he is Lord of his whole creation. That must include his lordship over every area of life on this planet. There is no place on earth where our lives are lived, or our work is done, outside the governing authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that the missional call—to be disciples, and to make disciples—is present everywhere Jesus is Lord. And that means: everywhere.

[Reflection]

- What was the most meaningful insight you gained from what you learned today?
- What practices can you try personally and in the church?

**Mission is the mode of existence for the whole life
of every member of God's whole church.**

May God help all of us, and our churches, to live out the full meaning of this truth.

For God's glory. Amen.