

You Are Free to Follow God's Heart

Four misunderstandings about missions, and the galaxies in a drinking straw

SPEAKER	Mark Proeger
DATE	Sunday, September 4, 2022
PASSAGES	Psalm 46:10; Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 1:18-20; Matthew 25:24-30; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 Samuel 17:42-46; Daniel 3:13-30; Revelation 7:9-12; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:15:29 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

God has said he will be exalted among the nations, and he will be. We are not frantically trying to make that happen; we are invited to join him. In Christ you are free to follow God's heart — no lightning bolt required, no spiritual ranking, and not necessarily a move overseas.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Not everyone is called to go overseas, but every believer is called to help world missions happen. Guilt is a fuel that only gets you so far.
- ◆ The God who scattered ten thousand galaxies into one speck of sky can certainly make his name great among the nations — and use you and me to do it.
- ◆ You do not need a special call to do missions. Sometimes God speaks through desires that line up with his word.
- ◆ The Great Commission tells the apostles to teach “all that I have commanded you” — which includes the Great Commission. None of us is off the hook.
- ◆ There is no spiritual hierarchy in the kingdom. Paul, the great missionary, called himself the chief of sinners.
- ◆ God's heart for the nations runs through the Old Testament; it was never a last-minute thought before Jesus ascended.

- ◆ Missions does not always mean leaving. Goers, senders and supporters all belong to it — and short-term trips are not a waste.

► 1:16:04

Mark Proeger has been coming to this building since he was about eleven. “I love this building, but I love the people in it way more.” Asked to speak on missions, he titled the message *You are free to follow God’s heart*.

We are joining God, not rescuing him

► 1:16:32

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

PSALM 46:10 ↗

Any talk about missions has to start with God’s sovereignty. He is working out his purposes through all of time. “We’re not trying to frantically make something happen. We’re joining with God, co-laboring with Christ.”

► 1:17:27

Then the punchline, early: not everyone is called to go overseas, but everyone is called to help missions happen — and some are called to go and have not figured it out yet. Many are already doing exactly what God has called them to do, “and you can rest in that grace.”

► 1:18:56

So this would not be a guilt-fuelled talk. Steve Hawthorne once told him something that stuck: “Guilt is a fuel that only gets you so far.” Like a New Year’s resolution, obligation always runs dry. Let the Spirit turn it into “I get to be a part of this.” Mark plugged the *Perspectives* course, which he resisted for twenty years and which, once taken, dismantled the guilt entirely.

Light pollution

► 1:21:22

“For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

ROMANS 1:18–20 ↗

► 1:21:53

When the 1994 Northridge earthquake knocked out the power in Los Angeles, people walked outside and looked up. Most had never seen the night sky without city lights. Griffith Observatory started getting calls about “weird lights in the sky” and “a silvery cloud.” It was the Milky Way.

► 1:23:54

Stars have been there for eons; a light bulb lasts a few years. “Isn’t it funny how something so temporary as a light bulb can distract you from something far more real?”

► 1:24:20

Then the Hubble telescope. Astronomers pointed it at a patch of sky about the size you would see through an eight-foot drinking straw — one twenty-six-millionth of the sky — for eleven and a half days, catching about one photon a minute. The image showed some ten thousand points of light — not stars, but galaxies, each holding a hundred million to a billion stars.

► 1:26:27

“That’s the God that we serve, the God that spun out the heavens with his word.” Is it possible that he could make his name exalted on the earth, let alone use you and me? “I think it’s not only possible, I think it’s quite probable — and since he said he was going to do it, it’s a certainty.”

“How did God tell you to do that?”

► 1:27:27

Mark asked the room to imagine a friend telling them, one by one: I’m volunteering at a soup kitchen after church. I’m buying a beautiful house at a great price. I’m taking an upper-management job downtown at Google. I’m going downtown to share the gospel. I’m moving to Africa with a mission agency.

► 1:28:23

When he and his wife Ceci did the last one, many people asked, “How did God tell you to do that?” Not a terrible question, he said — but would you have asked it about the soup kitchen? It quietly builds a

ranking of Christians with missionaries on top, “especially if you go to like a place like Africa, because everyone in Africa lives in mud huts — that’s not true.”

1. “You must have a special call”

► 1:30:23

We expect a missionary to have seven prophecies, a recurring dream or an angel. Those stories are true and Mark loves them. The problem is the person with an open door who thinks, *God never told me to, so I guess I can’t*. “Sometimes God just speaks to our desires,” and if those desires line up with his word, they are not to be blocked.

► 1:31:43

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:18–20 ↗

The usual protest is that Jesus was speaking to the apostles. But read one line further: they are to teach every disciple to observe all he commanded — and this is one of the commands. “You didn’t get off the hook.” For some, obeying it is the Google job and generous giving so that others can go.

► 1:33:04

Mark read the end of the parable of the talents ([Matthew 25:24–30](#)), where the servant who buried his talent is rebuked: “you ought to have invested my money with the bankers.” The master expected his servants to make decisions on their own. We have the plumb line of Scripture and communion with the Spirit, “but the Lord doesn’t tell us our every move, nor did he intend to. You get to move in freedom because you’re in Christ.”

How the Proegers ended up in Cape Town

► 1:34:49

Mark talked about missions constantly but never really wanted to go, and Ceci was clear: the Lord would have to come down himself or send an angel. In 2006 they took college students to Turkey with ten-month-old Asher — Mark walking dark streets at night with a screaming baby — and came home sure they were not going.

► 1:36:32

Six years later, on January 12, 2012, they flew to Cape Town. Near the end of a sabbatical in California, Mark remembered something about Floyd McClung in South Africa, found All Nations online, and showed Ceci.

► 1:37:52

That night he asked her, as a test he was sure she would fail: September comes, and it is Austin or Cape Town — which? “South Africa.” The Lord had been laying it on her heart for weeks that their next step would be overseas.

► 1:38:41

Here is the part Mark wanted heard: “There was never a crazy confirmation.” No angel, no prophecy, no dream — just a growing sense that they wanted to do it, that it lined up with the word of God, wide agreement among friends and family, and the blessing of Hope’s elders, to whom they submitted it. So next time someone tells you they are going overseas, try asking, “How did you decide?”

People who simply lived from who they were

► 1:40:00

David was bringing lunch to his brothers when he heard a giant mocking the God of Israel, and something in him rose up. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego kept living as worshippers of the God of Israel and refused to bow: our God will save us, “but even if he doesn’t, we will not bow.” Mark hears not resignation in that but courage. The Bible is full of people who did what God says without a vision.

► 1:41:55

He was careful to correct himself: pray, and ask God for dreams and visions. But if you are sixty and choosing between golf and joining what Hope is doing in Turkey, and you would be excited to go, “get rid of that thought” that God has to tell you first. Talk to the missions team. And keep submitting it: he and Ceci told the Lord half a dozen times, “If this is not you, we don’t want to do it — you can stop us by not letting the support come in.” They went, “and it was life-changing.”

2. “Missions is only for the super-spiritual”

► 1:42:44

“There is no striation of Christendom.” Mark is not more spiritual because he is speaking; Matt is not more spiritual because he is the pastor. Teacher, lawyer, doctor, trash collector — the question is whether you honour God in the role you are in.

► 1:43:44

Proof: Paul, a tentmaker by trade and a missionary by calling, wrote thirteen books of the New Testament, and the further he went the lower his self-assessment sank — an apostle, then the least of the apostles, then a sinner, then this, which Mark read in the King James:

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”

1 TIMOTHY 1:15 ↗ (KJV)

“If a guy that was killing Christians before he came to Christ can still be a missionary, I think you can too.”

3. “Missions was a last-minute thought”

► 1:44:49

After twenty years of walking with the Lord, Mark admitted, he half-assumed the Great Commission was something Jesus added on his way out. *Perspectives* walks through story after story in the Old Testament where God's heart was for the nations all along. Look again at David:

► 1:46:31

“You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.”

1 SAMUEL 17:42–46 ↗

The story we know ends with a proclamation to the whole world. So does the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:13–30): the fiercest king of the ancient world ends up blessing “the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego” and decreeing that no people, nation or language may speak against him, “for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.”

► 1:49:00

And this, Mark said, is where we are all heading:

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

REVELATION 7:9-12 ↗

► 1:49:35

Back to the streetlights: what distracts you from eternity? A UT football game, Mark offered, might be one of his; maybe Netflix gives way to a book that stirs your heart. You are free to help get us to that multitude “in whatever ways your sanctified imagination leads you” — always submitted to the Lord, “not maverick Christianity.” Maybe there is a box you have painted yourself into that never applied to you.

4. “Missions always means leaving”

► 1:51:05

If leaving sounds absolutely terrible to you, you are probably not called to it. God does sometimes ask for the hard thing, and is with us in it. But Mark’s lifelong default — “I’ve got two options, I’ve just got to choose the hard one” — is not how God works.

The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy, but Jesus came that we might have life more abundantly. Abundant life is going where the Spirit leads you by your love for him.

► 1:52:21

So there are goers; there are senders — Ceci now leads Hope’s global operations; and there are supporters, with perhaps more room in the budget than we think.

► 1:52:49

And an aside on short-term missions. The complaint that they waste money echoes Judas grumbling that Mary’s nard could have fed the poor (John 12:3-6). Mark cannot remember meeting a missionary who did not go short-term first. Swap Cancún for Turkey or Bulgaria one year; you may come home giving more, praying more and more engaged.

The mind of Christ

► 1:54:05

In Christ you are free to pursue what aligns with his word. “Let’s stop separating the sacred and the secular.” A job that honours God is good; keep doing it to his glory. And the dream you have shelved while waiting for a lightning bolt may be exactly what God has put in your heart.

► 1:55:00

“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him... The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ‘For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”

1 CORINTHIANS 2:14-16 ↗

“If you have the mind of Christ, you have the freedom to follow God’s heart.”

► 1:55:29

Mark’s example: overseas workers from Hope who chose medical school in their host country despite some pushback at home. He and Ceci loved it. Professionals rooted in the country, eventually self-supporting — “that’s a sustainable missions movement.”

► 1:56:26

He closed by praying for anyone who had realised they held misperceptions about missions, or who had dreams of advancing the kingdom in Austin, America or abroad but had painted themselves into a corner — that God would birth dreams and visions, raise up givers, goers and senders, and give hearts to give “where it hurts and more than we thought possible.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Psalm 46:10
- Romans 1:18–20
- Matthew 28:18–20
- Matthew 25:24–30
- 1 Timothy 1:15 (KJV)
- 1 Samuel 17:42–46
- Daniel 3:13–30
- Revelation 7:9–12
- John 10:10
- John 12:3–6
- 1 Corinthians 2:14–16

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Where has guilt been the fuel for your involvement in missions, or your avoidance of it, and what would “I get to be a part of this” look like instead?
2. What in your life works like the streetlights of Los Angeles, keeping you from seeing the God who made the galaxies?
3. Mark and Ceci went to South Africa without a dramatic confirmation. How do you usually expect God to guide big decisions, and what did their story challenge?
4. Which role fits you right now — goer, sender or supporter — and what desire might God have placed in you that you have shelved while waiting for a lightning bolt?
5. What is one concrete step you will take this week to help the nations hear of God's name?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Mark Proeger served with his family as a missionary in Cape Town, South Africa, for about three and a half years, after seven and a half years as a college pastor and two and a half as Hope Chapel's youth pastor. He now manages the Hope Hill RV park in Elgin. He has been coming to Hope's building since he was about eleven, and his wife, Ceci, leads Hope's global missions operations.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKgp8fc-gSw&t=4529s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.