

God's Job Description for Every Christian

Devotional

William Arnot, a distinguished Scottish pastor in the last century, put the matter this way: "To every true Christian these two things may be said: You have need of Christ and Christ has need of you." He then adds this thought: "The simple fact that a Christian is on earth and not in heaven, is proof that there is something for him here to do; and if he is not doing it, the neglect shows either that he is not yet a Christian or that he is a Christian who grieves Christ."

What is it that God left you on earth to do? Let me put the matter another way. What is it that we can do on earth that we can't do in heaven? We can sing on earth and we can sing in heaven. We can pray on earth and we can pray in heaven. We can fellowship with other believers on earth and we will certainly fellowship with them in heaven. The list could be lengthened. But when you think about it, there is one main thing you can do on earth that you will never do in heaven: You can tell a lost sinner about Jesus Christ. There will be no sinners in heaven, so if you're going to tell them the Good News, you've got to do it while you're here on earth.

WE ARE GOD'S WITNESSES

Just before he returned to heaven, Jesus explained to His disciples what they were to do after His departure. What He said to them, He also says to us. He left us on the earth that we might be His witnesses. In heaven there will be no witnesses because in heaven seeing is believing. There the Lamb will be the light and He will need no lesser lights, but in this dark world we are the only light He has. On earth we are His witnesses. He does not send angels to proclaim His name and He does not write the gospel in lightning across the skies. He uses people like us to convince other people like us to believe in Him. We are God's witnesses—His evidence if you will—to convince an unbelieving world. If we do not do our part, God has no other plan.

Listen to the words of Jesus in Acts 1:8 as he imparts this truth to His followers:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8 emphasizes two things we need to know: 1) The Holy Spirit empowers disciples, and 2) Spirit-filled disciples witness about Jesus around the world. It is the first point we need to emphasize for just a moment. Our greatest need today is not for political power but for the power of the Holy Spirit. Political power can change leaders but it can't change hearts. It can win an election but it can't save a life. It can pass righteous laws—or repeal unrighteous ones—but it can't make men righteous. Politics cannot change the way people think because it touches the outside of life. **Only the Holy Spirit can change hearts, restore families and save an entire nation from destruction...**

That's why we need the Holy Spirit. He can take the gospel we preach and use it to bring men and women to repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ. He can replace their old hearts with new ones and give them a hunger to live for righteousness. Jesus told His inquisitive disciples that instead of worrying about the timing of the Second Coming, they should focus their attention on the job at hand. First they would be filled with the Holy Spirit and then they would be witnesses for Christ. This was and is God's plan for His people. **It is not too much to say that this is God's job description for all His children.**¹

Open it

1. Describe a time when you were an eyewitness to something significant (such as a crime being committed, an accident, an extraordinary event or newsworthy situation).

Read it

Acts 1:6-26

Explore it

2. What question did the disciples ask Jesus?
3. What did the disciples do in the upper room after returning from Christ's ascension?
4. What two requirements were given to be considered for Judas' replacement?
5. How did the disciples pick Judas' replacement?

¹ Ray Pritchard. <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/you-will-be-my-witnesses-gods-job-description-for-every-christian/>

Apply it

THE PLAN FOR REACHING THE WORLD

Jesus's teaching about the kingdom of God was often misunderstood. Oppressed Jews looked for a military governor to throw off the yoke of pagan conquerors and restore national independence. These nationalistic ideas were still a sticking point in his disciples' thinking. Patriotic Jews to the core, they dreamed of reviving the old Jewish monarchy. "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1: 6 NKJV). Jesus didn't exactly say "No." Believing Jews would soon put their faith in Him, surrender to God's rule, and experience the kingdom. Someday, as the prophets predicted, the kingdom of Israel would be restored. But not yet. Jesus's response was a gentle rebuke, like saying, "The timing of national and international events is none of your business. Only the Father has authority over times and dates. Give up your dreams of worldly power. More important issues are at stake!" (Acts 1: 7).²

6. Place yourself in the disciples' shoes. What might they have been thinking when they asked the question in verse 6? Based on His response in verses 7–8, what is Jesus trying to teach them?

[The disciples' question] may reflect the Jewish hope that God would establish his rule in such a way that the people of Israel would be freed from their enemies (especially the Romans) and established as a nation to which other peoples would be subservient. If so, the disciples would appear here as representatives of those of Luke's readers who had not yet realized that Jesus had transformed the Jewish hope of the kingdom of God by purging it of its nationalistic political elements.³

7. What personal motivations might have compelled the disciples to ask questions about Jesus' inaugurating a national kingdom? How can our personal motivations cause us to miss the plans and purposes God has for us?

² Girard, Robert C.. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 362-374). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

³ Marshall, I. Howard. Acts: 5 (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (p. 64). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

8. How can we as Americans fall prey to similar thinking as the disciples and how can this affect our outlook on the rest of the world?

ACTS 1:7

But no direct answer is given— at least in terms of time. In language reminiscent of Mark 13: 32, Jesus roundly states that the matter of the time of God’s action is His own affair, and it is not open to men to share His knowledge. Since this is God’s secret, there is no place for human speculation—a point that might well be borne in mind by those who still anxiously try to calculate the probable course of events in the last days. Instead of indulging in wishful thinking or apocalyptic speculation, the disciples must accomplish their task of being witnesses to Jesus.⁴

9. Why are we so worried about times and dates? When can our focus on the future be productive and how does it become detrimental?

A more important war must be fought before the war for Israel’s independence. The original word translated **“but” (Acts 1: 8) is the strongest word in Greek to indicate contrast.**

It’s like saying, “Hold your horses! Instead of indulging in wishful thinking or apocalyptic speculation, hang on to your hats, brothers. You are about to grab a hot wire of power, the likes of which you have not dreamed!” The original word for “power” in verse 8 sounds like “dynamite.”

It means authority and energy. To follow their Commander into battle for the kingdom, followers of Jesus need the spiritual TNT of His presence. In a few days, Jesus would supernaturally enter them in the form of the Holy Spirit. This would empower them to be what Christians must be— **witnesses.**⁵

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ *Girard, Robert C.. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 377-384). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.*

10. What assignment does Jesus give His disciples? Why would the disciples need power to fulfill that assignment?

What towns or locations would Jesus use for your calling as a witness instead of those listed in verse 8?

11. What tangible steps are you taking to reach those areas to fulfill that calling as a Christ follower?

The strategy sessions with the risen Jesus ended abruptly forty days after His resurrection. He led His friends into the country (Luke 24: 50), raised His hands to bless them and, as they watched, He lifted off and disappeared in a strange cloud. As the group on the hilltop strained for a last glimpse of the ascending Lord, two white-clad figures (angels) suddenly “beamed down” beside them. “Why are you gawking into the empty sky?” they asked. “Jesus will come back just as you have seen Him go—in a cloud.”

The Ascension is the game-winning final play of an amazing life. Where did Jesus go? Thirty-three years earlier He descended from the heavenly dimension as a human baby so that he could die as a man for human sins. Mission accomplished, He returned to the heavenly dimension and reassumed His place at the right hand of God.⁶

12. What might have been the emotions of the disciples during the ascension of Jesus? How might this event have strengthened their faith in Jesus?

⁶ ibid

13. Read Hebrews 10:11–14. What does the ascension of Jesus tell us about our sins? How can knowing this truth impact our walk with God?

STOP LOOKING AT THE SKY....START FINDING SOULS.

There are two important truths that we can draw from the angels' words:

First, Jesus will come again. This same Jesus, Who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven (11b). The implication seems to be that they will not bring Him back by gazing up into the sky. He has gone, and they must let Him go; He will return in His own good time, and in the same way.

Secondly, the angels implied, until Christ comes again, the apostles must get on with their witness, for that was their mandate. There was something fundamentally anomalous about their gazing up into the sky when they had been commissioned to go to the ends of the earth. It was the earth not the sky which was to be their preoccupation. Their calling was to be witnesses not stargazers.

The vision they were to cultivate was not upwards in nostalgia to the heaven which had received Jesus, but outwards in compassion to a lost world which needed Him. It is the same for us.⁷

14. Jesus is going to return one day—there is no doubt of that truth. How does this truth bring the Christ follower hope? What things can impede us from experiencing that hope?

15. What similarities and differences do we see when it comes to Jesus' ascension and His second coming? (See Revelation 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Matthew 24:30–31.)

⁷ Stott, John. *The Message of Acts (The Bible Speaks Today Series)* (Kindle Locations 777-780). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

³ Marshall, I. Howard. *Acts: 5 (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)* (p, 64). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

All those gathered in the upper room with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer. "With one mind" expresses the spiritual unity that characterized the early fellowship. "Continually devoting" is a strong expression, denoting persistence in prayer. Contrary to the view of some, they were not praying for the baptism with the Holy Spirit. They had not been told to pray for that but to wait for it, and they knew it was coming soon. The coming of the Spirit did not require or depend on their prayers but on God's promise. They were praying because they were physically separated from the ascended Jesus, and prayer was their only means of communicating with Him. They may have been asking Him to return soon and in the meantime to grant them all they would need to be faithful. This was the beginning of the pattern of prayer offered in the name of Jesus (cf. John 14:13–14) and thus marks another of the many historical transitions found in the book of Acts.³

16. What type of prayers were being prayed at that time? Why would it be important that these prayer times be unified and not divided?

THE SAD DEMISE AND LOSS OF A FRIEND

The joy of those gathered together was tempered by one sad reflection, the tragic hypocrisy and suicide of Judas. As the acknowledged leader of the apostles, Peter took charge. Some were no doubt wondering how the defection of Judas fit into God's plan, or how Jesus' words in Matthew 19:28 were now to be fulfilled. In that passage, He promised the apostles, "You who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, acts to allay those doubts and avoid any possible quibbling over who would occupy the twelfth throne.⁸

17. Why does Luke record Peter's grizzly details that surround Judas' death? What lessons can we learn from such a sad situation?

Judas represents the greatest example of wasted opportunity in all of history. He had the rare privilege, given to only twelve men, of living and ministering with Jesus Christ, God incarnate, for more than three years. He had the same convincing, overwhelming opportunity to come to faith in Him as the eleven did. Yet his motives for following Jesus were never anything but selfish. He no doubt shared the common Jewish hope that Messiah would deliver the nation from the yoke of the hated Romans. When it became obvious that was not

⁸ ibid

Jesus' plan, and he would not get the wealth and power he wanted, Judas decided to cut his losses and get out with whatever he could salvage. Betraying the incarnate Son of God to the authorities for a paltry sum seemed a way to gain some compensation.⁹

18. What do Judas' life and crimes reveal about each of us? What protective steps might keep us from falling away and in turn missing an amazing opportunity as Judas did?

Casting Lots—Small stones or pottery pieces with names or symbols written on them were used to make decisions. Biblical use of lots was not superstitious but based on a belief that God controls everything.... Today we'd draw straws or flip a coin. In Acts 1 they wrote candidates' names on small stones, put them in a bowl, and shook the bowl till one of the stones rolled out. The rolling stone announced the winner—Matthias (Acts 1: 26).¹⁰

19. In Acts 1:23–26 God selects Matthias to replace Judas. What is the process? Observe some of the things that they do. What seems strange about this process? How are Christ followers to go about making difficult decisions today?

The story of the first church election shows how Jesus leads His movement through: (1) His people's concerns, (2) their willingness to listen to each other, (3) their attitude of dependence on His leadership expressed in prayer, and (4) their consensus—agreement, harmony—about a course of action.¹¹

20. What does this passage say about the importance of community? Give specific examples from the text that remind us it is always better to do life together than alone?

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Girard, Robert C.. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 518-534). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition

¹¹ *ibid*