



# FACING A TASK UNFINISHED

***TAPESTRY CHURCH***

**PRAY.**

**GIVE.**

**GO.**

**2021.**



## Dear Tapestry Church:

There are very few things in life that feel better than checking off the last box on my to-do list at the end of a busy day. I have a very *checklist-minded* personality. I don't remember what enneagram number I am. I assume I'm whichever one needs structure and observable objectives the most. The problem with all this is that I very seldom actually get everything done that I write down to get done. Most days there are a host of unchecked boxes. I'm not a fan of unfinished tasks.

Recently as I was in a time of personal worship, I came across a hymn called "Facing a Task Unfinished." You can see how this song immediately caught my eye. As I read the lyrics, I couldn't help but think about our church and about our upcoming *Pray Give Go* missions week. Some thoughts came to my soul: You're a task seeker. You're a box checker. How are you dealing with the unfinished task of missions and evangelism? Do you have the same urgency about God's tasks as you do about your own? Is there any urgency at all?

Let me preface all that I am saying with the reminder that the gospel and human flourishing are not about what we can *do*. The gospel is the good news that Christ has accomplished the salvation of his people through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. It is a gift of grace that no person deserves and that no person can purchase with their own merit. Thankfully, Jesus is the one who has finished and will finish His task.

However, there is still biblical tension when it comes to God's sovereignty and his Great Commission. The eternal victory is promised, but the work has also been left to pursue. There is an authentic unfinished task when it comes to Kingdom expansion. Jesus has given us the Great Commission on purpose.

I believe that Jesus' Great Commission is still binding on the church. I confess to you, family, that in the middle of a pandemic, political divisions, and all kinds of cultural turmoil, the call to go and make disciples has been too often dismissed for the inward desire of self-preservation in my own heart. I have been convicted of my own lack of gospel love for my unbelieving family members, neighbors, friends, and the more than 3 billion souls in the world without access to the gospel.

I am praying that God will use our *Pray Give Go* emphasis in 2021 to do a mighty work in our hearts and in the soul of our church. I am praying for renewed gospel urgency and energy in our minds and bodies. Finally, I pray that we will face the task unfinished and not be content with our current effort to engage the world with the gospel.

I am thankful for those who have helped plan this week to give our church visible and practical avenues to pray, give, and go. I am confident that the Birmingham community and the nations will be impacted by how we submit to the leading of the Spirit and the Word in the coming days.

What follows in these pages are some devotional thoughts that flowed through my heart and mind as I read through the hymn "Facing a Task Unfinished" by Frank Houghton.<sup>1</sup> Each of the short sections begins with a verse of the hymn and a connecting passage of Scripture. My prayer is that some of these thoughts will resonate with you as we consider the Great Commission together this week.<sup>2</sup>

Pastor Jared





## Praying, Giving, and Going: Motivation for Mission

"Facing a task unfinished  
that drives us to our knees,  
a need that, undiminished,  
rebukes our slothful ease,  
we who rejoice to know you  
renew before your throne  
the solemn pledge we owe you  
to go and make you known."<sup>3</sup>

*"I heard the voice of the sovereign master say, 'Whom will I send? Who will go on our behalf?' I answered, 'Here I am, send me!'"*  
Isaiah 6:8<sup>4</sup>

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In Isaiah 6:1-13, the prophet gets a unique and powerful vision of the throne room of God. Isaiah experiences the presence of God on his throne, angels singing praise and worship, the foundations of the place violently shaking, and then an intense recognition of his own unworthiness to be around God. In the middle of this throne room event, Isaiah catches a taste of the beauty and grace of atonement for his sin. He sees the Lord. His sin is forgiven. In the glorious moment, Isaiah probably would have been content to stay right there, forever singing with the angels, "Holy, holy, holy!" But, God's revelation to Isaiah comes not with an invitation to comfort but an urgent and challenging call to obedience. The Lord asks, "Who will go for me?" Isaiah can't help himself. When you come into contact with the power of God mixed with the grace of God, obeying the commission of God is the only option. So, Isaiah responds, "I will go! Send me!"

A few hundred years after Isaiah obeyed his assignment from the Lord, another group of people got to experience the presence of God. This time, though, it was not the presence of God in a heavenly vision but the physical revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The same Lord who the angels worshipped in Isaiah came to earth to walk with fishermen, tax collectors, and regular Joes. The response to encountering Jesus was not much different than back in the book of Isaiah. The Gospels show us the disciples recognizing their unworthiness, falling on their faces, confessing Jesus as Messiah, and asking questions like, "Who is this man?" We see how the disciples' sins are forgiven by the ultimate atonement of Jesus' blood. Interestingly, after Jesus' time on earth is complete and he ascends to the Father's right hand, his disciples aren't invited immediately into comfort and eternal worship. Instead, they are commissioned to "...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."<sup>5</sup> Notice a pattern? We know that, just like Isaiah, the first group of disciples spent their lives obeying their commission from God.



Since the creation of the Universe, the pattern has been on repeat: God reveals himself, sinful people stand awestruck, God gives grace and mercy, and God calls people to go and tell others about his love. From Genesis until today, God is a God on a mission to display his glory and cultivate the eternal flourishing of his people. Jesus shows us the ultimate and final chapter of the pattern: everyone who believes in him gets the throne room presence of God complete with forgiveness of sin. When humans experience God's presence and receive his grace, something awe-inspiring takes place. God is honored and glorified, and at the same time, people are made entirely whole. Have you experienced this kind of encounter with Christ? Have you seen his glory, recognized your sin, and received his grace?

My challenge then is this: do we recognize the *whole* pattern is for us as well? Are we tempted to leave something out? I'll get to the point: are we content with the throne room experience and the forgiveness of our sins *without* the commission to *go and tell*? Do we want the exciting part of meeting Jesus for ourselves without the call to invite others into this glorious plan of God? I want to be careful here because it is easy for us pastors to try and guilt people into outward activity without inward change. Though there is certainly a time for self-reflection in response to Holy Spirit conviction, I want to argue here that mere guilt is not the right motivation for missions. Maybe a good question to ask, then, is *what is your motivation for missions*? Do you recognize the call not to be a passive recipient but an active agent in God's Kingdom story?

I want to propose to you three biblical motivations for missions to dwell on. Of course, these aren't the only three, but I believe they are a good start:

(1) We pray, give, and go because God deserves *all the worship*. John Piper says, "Missions exists because worship doesn't. Missions is our way of saying: the joy of knowing Christ is not a private, or tribal, or national or ethnic privilege. It is for all. And that's why we go. Because we have tasted the joy of worshipping Jesus, and we want all the families of the earth included."<sup>6</sup> We pray, give, and go because we have been in the presence of God, and we have seen that he is worthy! Psalm 22:27 says, "*Let all the people of the earth acknowledge the Lord and turn to him! Let all the nations worship you!*"

(2) We pray, give, and go because people can't be made whole *without Christ*. The gospel tells us that every person on planet earth ultimately deserves God's wrath and not his goodness. The Bible plays no favorites: "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"<sup>7</sup> It may seem exclusive, hateful, and even wrong to say such things in our culture, but Jesus has no issue being exclusive. He claims to be the *only* way for people to find forgiveness, abundant life, and an eternal relationship with their Creator. As we seek to see God glorified among all peoples, we also seek people to be made whole through worshipping God with their entire lives. Acts 4:12 says, "*And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved.*"

(3) We pray, give, and go because our Lord *commands it*. I used to hate when my dad would say, "Because I said so." People generally like explanations. We want to see the reason behind things. We want to know if doing something or not doing it will ultimately benefit us or not. I want to propose that though we have been given wonderful answers to the "why" of missions, we should not overlook the truth that our Father knows best! When my dad would say, "Because I said so." It wasn't because he was mean or wanted me to suffer. It was because he ultimately knew what was better for me than I did. In the same way, we ought to pause and ask, "Do I trust that God knows better than I do?" If so, we ought to be eager to obey his commission! God sees a great picture that is invisible to you and me. He calls us to trust and obey his command to *"Tell the nations about his splendor! Tell all the nations about his amazing deeds!"*<sup>8</sup>

The pattern is set. The commission is confirmed. God's glory is the motivation. My prayer for this week at Tapestry Church is that God will give us renewed passion for singing: "we who rejoice to know you renew before your throne the solemn pledge we owe you to go and make you known."

So let's pray, give, and go!





## The Urgency for Praying, Giving, and Going

As of today there are **3.24 Billion people** living who are unreached with the gospel.<sup>9</sup>

"Where other lords beside you  
hold their unhindered sway,  
where forces that defied you  
defy you still today,  
with none to heed their crying  
for life and love and light,  
unnumbered souls are dying  
and pass into the night."

*"For although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles."*

Romans 1:21-23

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**H**ave you ever experienced a counterfeit? Have you ever asked for your favorite brand of soda and, upon taking the first sip, realized that you've been given *the other one* instead? Maybe you have bought a generic product that promised to be as effective as the real thing. You sadly learned that trading in cost meant losing value. When I was about 11, I took a whiffle ball bat, taped it all over, and carved a Nike swoosh into it. It lasted about four and a half innings.

There is something to be said for *the real thing*. Think back with me to the glory of God witnessed by Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1-13. Imagine Isaiah going into any other throne room for the rest of his life (which he most likely did often). I would think that he probably chuckled at the thrones of men when he had visited the throne room of the *real* Lord of all. Much of Isaiah's ministry dealt with calling out the physical and cultural idols of the people around him. Isaiah mocks the absurdity of people creating counterfeit gods:

*"[Man] cuts down cedars and acquires a cypress or an oak. He gets trees from the forest; he plants a cedar and the rain makes it grow. A man uses it to make a fire; he takes some of it and warms himself. Yes, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Then he makes a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of it he burns in the fire— over that half he cooks meat; he roasts a meal and fills himself. Yes, he warms himself and says, 'Ah! I am warm as I look at the fire.' With the rest of it he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships it. He prays to it, saying, 'Rescue me, for you are my god!'"<sup>10</sup>*



Locked in the heart of every human being is the drive to worship something. Though many modern people do not shape gods from trees or iron, every person will in some way create a throne room and place a King over their lives. For some, that king is wealth and the idea of power through influence. The king is relational acceptance for some people—if I can be liked, I will be made well. Some people worship the idol of achievement—if I am accomplished, I will be saved. Ultimately, in some shape or form, all people recognize we are not whole we find a king and we pray, *"Rescue me, for you are my god!"*

The problem is that idols are cheap counterfeits of the real thing. They can't do what the true God does. They don't possess the glory, power, and grace of Yahweh. In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul tells us that the chief issue of the human condition is that we trade the real God for fake ones that fit better into our lives. We spiritually buy the cheaper knock off hoping to get the same result. Sadly, what we purchase from idols only ever leaves us looking for more. Paul gives us the remedy to our idol disease: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, just as it is written, 'The righteous by faith will live.'"*<sup>11</sup>

The gospel of Jesus has the power to break us free from idolatry and place our faith in the true God who *can* make us whole. In the gospel, we get to see the *authentic* thing. We get the grace to recognize our own ignorance and the incompetence of our worldly kings. Like Isaiah, we can walk into the throne rooms of this world and immediately see that they are not the real deal. We also share the responsibility of doing all that we can do to show others the superiority of Jesus over every idol of the world.

Christians live on mission both at home and across the globe because we have seen the true Lord and recognize the hopelessness of counterfeits. Paul says, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel."* And, neither are we! The reality of the world of idols and the truth that "unnumbered souls are dying and pass into the night" should give us a Christ-centered urgency to see others freed from the foolishness of false gods. Rather than continuing to invest in gods that cannot save, we count all the world as loss as we seek to free people from their spiritual suicide. Though speaking out against idols is never a popular task, it is the most loving thing we can do for a lost and dying world. Idols cannot save. Only Christ can! Let's pray, give, and go!



## Bearing the Torch By Praying, Giving, and Going

"We bear the torch that flaming  
fell from the hands of those  
who gave their lives proclaiming  
that Jesus died and rose;  
ours is the same commission,  
the same glad message ours;  
fired by the same ambition,  
to you we yield our pow'rs."

*"Therefore stay alert, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."*

Matthew 24:42

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I'm a major Marvel movie nerd. I love to watch Iron Man, Captain America, and the Hulk in action. At the start of the first *Avengers* movie, covert organization Shield sees its base begin to crumble under the power and energy of an alien source. Commander Nick Fury gives a subordinate agent a charge to relay to the team. She questions the commission, "Is that really a priority right now?" Fury intensely clarifies, "Until such time as the world ends, we will act as though it intends to spin on."<sup>12</sup>

Christians live in a unique in-between Kingdom. When Jesus came to the earth, he announced that His Kingdom had come to conquer, yet, it will conquer in unseen ways. Ultimately, there will someday in the future be a final and visible revelation of Jesus' rule and reign. Since Jesus ascended to the Father and gave his church the Great Commission, Christians have struggled to understand the tension between the world as we know it and the return of our King. The chaos of earth sometimes feels like a contradiction to the hope of heaven. Yet, this is where we live.

Different individual Christians and generations of the church have responded differently to this Kingdom tension. On one end of the spectrum, some Christians have isolated themselves from the world, built communes, and anticipated the Lord's return through *separation* from society. On the other end of the spectrum, believers have essentially reasoned away the Second Coming and wholly *merged* with secular society. They have argued away the mysterious reality of a coming Kingdom.

Neither of these paths seems to fit Jesus' teaching about being the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Moreover, both approaches neglect the responsibility to spread the gospel and pass the torch to future disciples. I would like to ask a couple of probing questions about your views of the coming Kingdom: (1) When was the last time you thought about the second coming of Christ? (2) How does your view of Christ's return impact your current lifestyle?

If we believe that Christ will really come back and that there is an *unfinished task*, we will live our daily lives with an urgency to pass the gospel torch to others. Therefore, I want to challenge us with two guiding principles for the urgency of understanding the tension of Jesus' Kingdom.

(1) *Remember that we are pilgrims.* The picture in your mind of a pilgrim may be rooted in the Thanksgiving celebrations of elementary school days. Tall hats. Large belt buckles. Somehow turkeys are also involved. We call the first Puritan colonists in North America Pilgrims because a pilgrim takes a journey to new and often uncharted territory. The image of Christians as journeying pilgrims helps us learn how to live here and now while waiting on eternity. Hebrews 13:14 says, *"For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come."* When we understand the temporary nature of our current physical environment, we know better which Kingdom to invest in. We know that our life on Earth is a journey to our lasting home and not our final destination.

(2) *Remember that we are ambassadors.* As we walk the pilgrim journey to the everlasting Kingdom, we also remember that we are called to invite others to join the trip. The Apostle Paul explains that *"we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His plea through us. We plead with you on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God!"*<sup>13</sup> An ambassador is someone who represents someone else's interests. Christians are all heavenly ambassadors, and our local churches should all be Kingdom embassies. In God's wisdom, he has designed his glorious mission to be a progressive work of his disciples rather than an overnight transfer of heaven and earth. Amid this progressive work, God has ordained you and me as ambassadors of the reconciling gospel. We are privileged to pass the torch from family to family, nation to nation, and generation to generation.

When we fail to recognize that we are pilgrims, we will make this earth our home. We will invest all our efforts in building as much comfort in the here and now as possible. In doing so, we will trade heavenly rewards for temporary comfort.

When we fail to recognize that we are ambassadors, we will isolate ourselves on our journey to heaven. We will build forts to keep the world out rather than embassies to invite the lost in. We will consider the gospel a special message for a few, rather than a peaceful announcement for the world.

The key to bearing the torch of the gospel rests in embracing the tension of the Kingdom that has come but is not yet fully here. Let's engage this tension by better understanding how we are pilgrims and ambassadors. When we understand our identity, we will better pray, give, and go!





## Two Enemies of Praying, Giving, and Going

"O Father, who sustained them,  
O Spirit, who inspired,  
Savior, whose love constrained them  
to toil with zeal untired,  
from cowardice defend us,  
from lethargy awake!  
Forth on your errands send us  
to labor for your sake."

*"Then Jesus came up and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'"*

Matthew 28:18

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**F**rank Houghton mentions two enemies of the unfinished task in the last stanza of his hymn: "From *cowardice* defend us, from *lethargy* awake." Cowardice is a "lack of courage to face danger."<sup>14</sup> Lethargy is "the quality of being...indifferent and lazy."<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, in Christian mission and evangelism, these two enemies seem to always go hand in hand.

Let's consider cowardice. Have you experienced some anxiety when prompted to have gospel conversations with family members, co-workers, or even strangers? Our minds begin asking a series of panic-fueled questions: What if I say something wrong? What if this person asks a question I can't answer? What if they reject Christ? What if they reject me? What if this conversation has long-term consequences on how I relate to this person? Fears are multiplied when considering gospel expansion across the globe: What if I'm called to some remote part of the world to preach the gospel? What will it *really* cost me to pray, give, and go?

On the other side of the coin is lethargy or apathy. How many of us have felt guilt for not sharing our faith enough? Why is it that I can go days, weeks, or even longer so focused on myself that I completely forget the billions across the globe who have little or no access to a Bible, church, or missionary? In my busyness, I become apathetic towards anything or anyone that doesn't directly impact me. It isn't that I don't know about the mission of God; it's that I don't really care about it.

First, it is essential to see *the reality of the Enemy*. Notice the capital *E*. Fear and apathy towards spreading the Kingdom don't come from the Holy Spirit. Christians have not been given a heart of fear but of freedom. Where then do fear and apathy originate? I believe the Bible teaches us that the temptation to not wholeheartedly and courageously embrace obedience comes from God's enemy, Satan, who hates the gospel's truth and is waging war

in every way to stop it. I certainly don't want to dismiss our responsibility in giving in to temptation. Disobedience is not the Devil's fault alone. Still, I desire to highlight the truth that you're not going to win a fight against an enemy you don't see coming. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that the believers "*struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.*"<sup>16</sup> When we recognize the reality of spiritual warfare, we can tactically defend ourselves from the mission's enemies. We can pray, "*do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*"<sup>17</sup> We can put on the whole armor of God. We can fight against fear and apathy because we see their origin and reject their false promises. We can recognize and anticipate what feelings, emotions, and ideas are contrary to zeal for Jesus.

Second, we must see *the task correctly*. Correct execution comes from precise understanding. When the Enemy, or our own blindness, confuses us about what it means to spread the gospel to the ends of the Earth, the result is fear and apathy. When we do not understand the urgency of the exclusive nature of the gospel, we are doomed to be careless about the souls of our neighbors both near and far. When we misunderstand God's plan for Kingdom expansion, we become paralyzed by the fear that the unfinished task's success depends entirely on our efforts. There is a lot we could discuss here. But, for the sake of clarity, I will leave this idea with a simple challenge: dig into seeing the task of missions correctly through solemn prayer, Bible study, and discipleship. When we see the task correctly, we can approach it courageously!

Finally, and most importantly, we must see *the Leader*. Jesus' command and commission to his disciples begins with a simple but ultimate promise: "I am with you." The unmatched antidote to fear and lethargy in mission is fixing your eyes on the King of the Kingdom. Jesus fought the Enemy and defeated him. Jesus courageously faced the fear of the cross, both its spiritual and physical torment. He won the battle. Jesus was not apathetic towards the brokenness of all humanity; instead, he willingly left heavenly comfort to suffer for the sake of others. Jesus has all authority in the Cosmos, and he comforts his people with his presence. Guilt will not motivate us past our fears and apathy, but a glimpse of Jesus will! Imagine those disciples receiving the Great Commission in person. Here stands a man who they witnessed die a horrible death. Yet, he is alive! And not only is he alive, but he is also ascending to the Father's right hand and promising his presence and power forever. If he is alive and he is in charge, his mission is assured.

The promise of the Bible is that Jesus wins. His followers win through connection with him. Fear and apathy will not stand in the way of Jesus' authority. Nothing keeps us from wholeheartedly engaging in the unfinished task because the end of the story is already written. When we grasp this truth, nothing will stop us from praying, giving, and going!



## A Prayer for Tapestry Church

*"So the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain Jesus had designated. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came up and said to them, "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 the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.""*

Matthew 28:16-20

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**L**ord, motivate us with an intense zeal for your glory and grace. Teach us to love you supremely and love our neighbor as ourselves. Enable us by your Spirit to freely share the grace that you have freely given to us with others.

Give us gospel urgency. Put before us the hopeless state of so many who are lost and dying with no hope of hearing how they can be made right with you. Help us to better hate our idols and the idols attempting to steal glory from you all over this planet. Allow us to recognize all counterfeit gods and to run to you.

Your Kingdom is here. Your Kingdom is coming. Help us to lean into the tension that exists in living for you. Help us to recognize that we are pilgrims and ambassadors. Show us where our hope really lies and make your case to the world through us.

Free us from fear and apathy. Forgive us for our selfishness. Fix our eyes on you. Remind us we are at war but that you have won the victory. Bless us with courage and care.

To you belongs all glory, honor, and praise.

Until you return, show us how to pray, what to give, and where to go.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



## NOTES (Blue References Linked)

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- <sup>1</sup> For more information about Frank Houghton [Hymnary.org](http://Hymnary.org).
- <sup>2</sup> Photographs in Order By: [Andrew Stutesman](#), [Revolt](#), [Pedro Dias](#), [Patrick Fore](#), [Zach Farmer](#), [Gaël Gaborel](#), [Nick Fewings](#), and [Alex Grodkiewicz](#). ([unsplash.com](http://unsplash.com))
- <sup>3</sup> Frank Houghton, *"Facing a Task Unfinished"*
- <sup>4</sup> All Scripture references from the *New English Translation* unless noted.
- <sup>5</sup> Matthew 28:19-20.
- <sup>6</sup> John Piper, *"Missions Exists Because Worship Doesn't."* ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org))
- <sup>7</sup> Romans 3:23.
- <sup>8</sup> Psalm 96:3.
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.joshuaproject.net>
- <sup>10</sup> Isaiah 44:14-17.
- <sup>11</sup> Romans 1:16-17.
- <sup>12</sup> *Avengers*, Marvel Studios, 2012.
- <sup>13</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20.
- <sup>14</sup> "[Cowardice](#): lack of courage to face danger, difficulty, opposition, pain, etc."
- <sup>15</sup> "[Lethargy](#): the quality or state of being drowsy and dull, listless and unenergetic, or indifferent and lazy; apathetic or sluggish inactivity."
- <sup>16</sup> Ephesians 6:12.
- <sup>17</sup> Matthew 6:13.

