



LIFE GROUP CURRICULUM

WHATEVER IT TAKES
for the gospel

COTTONWOOD CREEK CHURCH

Lesson 3: Whatever It Takes To Join God's Plan

Main Passage: Acts 5:17–41

Focus Verses: Acts 5:38–39

Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

Big Idea: God is calling us to join His perfect plan.

As the disciples continue to share the name of Jesus, they are constantly challenged. But our God is sovereign and He has been working since the beginning to bring salvation to His people. We are foolish if we think we can make a better or more fulfilling plan than God. Therefore, we are called to do "Whatever It Takes" to join His plan.

To Join God's Plan, We Must Believe:

The World's Plans Are WORTHLESS

***Acts 5:29**, Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings!" ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." ³³ When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.*

In Acts 5, the apostles continued to preach and as a result they were thrown in jail. But an angel let them out and told them to go stand in the Temple to preach to the ones who had just persecuted them. As they do, the High Priest finds out and questions them, "Didn't we tell you not to preach the name of Jesus?"

Over and over again in the book of Acts, opposition arises and the world tries to make plans against God's people. This has also been true through the history of the Church. But God's plan always prevails. Psalm 2:1–4 reads, "*Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, 'Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.' The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.*" God laughs at the plans of the world because He knows all things and is working in all things to bring them to their full and final completion. Nothing will deter His work.

Discussion Questions:

- How often do you consider God's plan when you make your plans?
- Think about your own life – what excuses do you most often use as a "reason" for not doing something you know that God wants you to do?

God Can Use ANYTHING TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PLAN

Acts 5:34, *But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵ Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶ Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷ After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸ Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”*

While the apostles are before the Jewish counsel, notice that God uses a Pharisee to communicate an extraordinary truth: The plans of man fail, but God’s plans will never fail! All throughout history, God uses believers and unbelievers alike to accomplish His plans. When the world seems to crumble and all around us darkness seems to prevail, it won’t. We have peace in God and He should calm our fears and anxieties. Additionally, we have hope in God knowing that nothing will stop His plan to redeem and rescue the world back to Himself. God can use anyone and anything to make that happen.

Discussion Questions:

- How does knowing that God’s plan will be accomplished regardless of your personal actions impact your acts of obedience or disobedience?
- What do we miss when we fail to be obedient?

Joining God’s Plan FILLS US WITH JOY

Acts 5:40, *His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.*

Some may ask: why should we join His plans if they are going to happen anyway? Listen to the joy of the apostles in this passage. Their joy was unending and couldn’t be stopped. Their contentedness was not found in their circumstances or the fact that they were suffering, but their joy was in Jesus alone. No matter what happened to them, they knew they were joining God’s plans, and that filled them with joy because they were able to live out their purpose.

Can God accomplish His purposes without us? YES. But we will be miserable and joyless apart from walking in what He has called us to do!

Discussion Questions:

- How does our own obedience to God's mission fill us with joy – regardless of the outcome?
- Can you think of a time where your own act of obedience impacted others who witnessed/heard about the situation? Please explain.
- What does a “Whatever It Takes” attitude look like in following God's plan?

Lesson 3 Additional Commentary (Acts 5:17–42)³

All the Apostles Before the Council (5:17–42)

As in 3:1–4:5, the apostles' healing led to their arrest by the temple authorities and to a hearing before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Many similarities exist between this section and other portions of Acts, especially the twofold trial scenes of 4:5–22 and 5:27–40 and the escape scenes of 5:17–26 and 12:6–11. This has led many scholars to postulate Luke's use of different sources that covered the same events, but this tends to overlook the real progression that takes place in the narrative. The conflict between the Christians and the Jews steadily intensified. With the growing success of the Christian witness, there is a heightened reaction on the part of the Jewish authorities—at first only a hearing, warning, and release (4:5–22). Now those on the Council would impose the death penalty (5:33) and were only thwarted in their intentions by the sage advice of a Pharisee (5:34–39). The apostles were again released, but this time the Council had them whipped before so doing (5:40). The conflict became even stronger with the killing of Stephen (6:8–8:2) and the resulting persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem (8:1); and it reached its apex in chap. 12, where the execution of James and the attempt to do the same to Peter found the support not only of the Jewish officials but the populace as well (12:3).

This second encounter with the Sanhedrin can be divided into three main parts: the initial arrest and its almost ludicrous result (5:17–26), the hearing before the Sanhedrin (5:27–40), and the release of the apostles with their continued witness (5:41–42).

(1) Arrest, Escape, and Rearrest (5:17–26)

5:17–18 As before, the Sadducees were enraged by the apostles' preaching. They were described as being “filled with jealousy,” undoubtedly over the tremendous success of the Christian witness (5:15–16). The word translated “jealousy” can also mean *zeal*, and there may well have been an element of zeal in their determination to stamp out this growing messianic movement before its increasing popularity aroused the concern of the Roman authorities and led to severe reprisals. The high priest was again the spokesman. He was ultimately responsible for the proper maintenance of the temple precincts and its cultus, and so it was very much on his turf where the Christians were having all their success (cf. v. 12b). His cohorts in the local party of Sadducees would have shared his concern for preserving the peace against such popular movements and supported him in putting the apostles in the public jail (v. 18). One should not miss the irony of their being placed in the public jail, i.e., openly and for everyone to see. Soon they would be unable to find these very ones who were so openly placed in jail.

5:19–21a The miraculous escape of the apostles is told with the greatest economy here. In vv. 21b–26 it will be retold in far greater detail. The emphasis is placed on the total helplessness of the Jewish authorities. In this way the lesson of Gamaliel's speech is illustrated vividly beforehand—“If it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men” (v. 39).

An “angel” of the Lord appeared to the imprisoned apostles at night, opened the prison doors, and led them out (v. 19). The angel gave the apostles God's instructions. They were to return to

³ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 164–174.

the temple and speak “the full message of this new life.” They were to resume their witness, preaching the gospel that leads to life, the message of salvation. The apostles went and did as the angel bade them, early in the morning when the crowds would be gathering in the temple to observe the morning sacrifice. They obviously were not concerned for their safety. They returned to the very spot where they had been arrested, preaching the same words of life for which they were arrested. Perhaps there is irony in their deliverance by the angel. Sadducees did not believe in angels.

5:21b–24 Now the interesting part of the story begins. The scene shifts to the Council chambers where the Sanhedrin had gathered for its morning session. The first item on the agenda was the interrogation of the apostles; so officers were sent to the jail to fetch them. But they were not there. The officers hastened back to deliver the startling news. The prison doors were securely locked. The guards were duly *standing* at their posts (and thus evidently awake). Yet there was no one inside. How in the world did they get out through locked gates, past the guards? The Council was at a total loss.

5:25–26 Finally someone arrived with the good news, or was it bad news? The prisoners hadn’t totally escaped. They were on the temple grounds, back to their old tricks, teaching the people. Now the captain, the *sagan*, decided he had better handle the matter personally. After all, he was second in rank to the high priest himself and ultimately responsible for order on the temple grounds. Unusual circumstances like this had best not be left to lesser officials. So he went with his officers to gently persuade the apostles to accompany him to the Council chambers. He personally might have desired their execution by the usual procedure of stoning, but at this point he was more concerned about being stoned to death himself by the people, who held the apostles in the highest regard (cf. v. 13). One must not miss the irony in this entire fiasco.

The Sanhedrin was totally thwarted in its designs, totally helpless to control the situation. All was in God’s hands. The only reason the apostles finally appeared before the Council was their own willingness to do so. And they were willing to do so because the events of the night had convinced them once more that they were very much in God’s hands.

(2) Appearance Before Sanhedrin (5:27–40)

This second appearance before the Sanhedrin is significantly different from the first (4:5–22). That one only involved two apostles, Peter and John. Here all the apostles stood before the Council. There was no formal charge leveled against Peter and John; the questions mainly regarded their authorization (4:7). The apostles now were confronted with violation of the Council’s interdiction (5:28). The possibility of a verdict of death was not raised before, but at this point it became explicit (5:33). Most significant of all, there was no particular spokesperson for the Christians. Now there was, and he was a Pharisee (5:34–40). The trial scene falls into two rather balanced parts, focusing on the witness of the Christians (5:27–32) and the intercession of Gamaliel (5:33–40).

5:27–28 The trial began with the apostles being brought before the Sanhedrin. The Greek text has them “stood up” (*estēsan*) before the body, and this was the usual procedure, the defendants standing, the judges sitting. The high priest as presiding officer began the interrogation, charging the apostles with two offenses. First, they had broken the interdiction of the Sanhedrin and continued to preach “in this name.” Second, they were determined to lay the guilt for “this man’s blood” on them, the Jewish leaders.

What the high priest did not say is perhaps more significant than what he did say. He made absolutely no reference to the apostles' escape. Was this out of total embarrassment? Further, he scrupulously avoided mentioning Jesus by name. Does this reflect that already at this early stage mentioning the name of Jesus was considered in some circles as blasphemous? In any event, there were formal charges this time. The apostles had been duly warned by the court not to continue further witness, and the interdiction had been fully ignored. They were unmistakably culpable. The high priest's concern about being charged with responsibility for Jesus' "blood" may have had more significance than appears at first sight. To "lay someone's blood" on someone is an Old Testament expression for a charge of murder and in accordance with the *ius Talionis* demanded the death of the guilty party. In essence the high priest was saying, "You are trying to get us killed for responsibility in this man's death" (author's paraphrase).

5:29 Peter, of course, was not trying to get the leaders killed but rather to get them saved. As in the first trial, his response was more of a witness than a defense. As then, he referred to the basic principle of obeying God rather than man (cf. 4:19), this time the form being even closer to that of Socrates' famous quote in Plato's *Apology* 29d. This principle underlies this entire section of Acts. Where God's will lay in this instance was fully demonstrated in the escape with its command to resume the preaching in the temple. Not impeding God's purposes would be the main thrust of Gamaliel's speech. Peter had no choice. He had to remain true to the divine leading. His saying has continued to be used by Christians throughout the centuries, by Christian martyrs making the ultimate sacrifice in obedience to their Lord, and by power-hungry medieval popes exerting their influence over the secular rulers. It is a dangerous saying, subject to abuse and misappropriation; and one should be as clear as Peter was about what God's purposes really are before ever using it.

5:30–32 Peter's witness before the Sanhedrin was basically a summary of the Christian *kerygma*, as it had been at his first trial (4:10–12). The basic elements are all there—the guilt of the Jewish leaders for crucifying Jesus, the resurrection and exaltation, repentance and forgiveness in his name, the apostolic witness. There are some differences in detail. Jesus' crucifixion is described as "hanging on a tree," probably in allusion to Deut 21:23, an Old Testament text the early Christians saw as pointing to Christ.

In v. 31 the exalted Christ is described as "Prince" and "Savior." Neither term was new to Peter's sermons. The first term occurred in his temple sermon (3:15), where it had the nuance of author or originator of the resurrection life. Here it has the sense of "leader" or "prince" but still in close connection with the new life he brings through repentance and forgiveness of sins. It is thus closely connected with the title "Savior," which Peter had not used before. The concept of the salvation in his name, however, was at the very heart of his previous witness before the Sanhedrin (cf. 4:12). Here as there Peter's purpose was the same—to demonstrate that Christ is indeed the risen Savior and to urge repentance and commitment to his name. Peter was issuing an invitation to the Sanhedrin. They had indeed sinned in hanging Jesus on the cross, but there is forgiveness and salvation for Israel in him. If they needed further proof that he is their deliverer, risen and exalted to God's right hand, the apostles could bear eyewitness testimony to these realities (v. 32).

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit, so evident in all the miraculous works that were being accomplished, was bearing his own witness. Then as now, the Spirit is granted to all who obey God. Peter had been obedient, obeying God rather than man. Now his implicit appeal was that the Sanhedrin follow him in the same obedience.

5:33–34 The Jewish leaders were not the least inclined to respond to Peter’s appeal. Their reaction was quite the opposite. They were infuriated (*dieprionto*; lit., “sawn in two”). Some called for the death penalty, undoubtedly the Sadducees on the Council. Theologically they were not inclined to be convinced by Peter’s appeal to the resurrection, and politically Peter’s messianic message only served to further confirm that this was a dangerous, rabble-rousing group. They might have passed the verdict then and there had not a voice been raised urging moderation. It was a voice from the Pharisaic minority on the Council.

One wonders how much of a part politics played in the Sanhedrin’s decision on this particular occasion. Josephus said that the Sadducean officials usually yielded to the recommendations of the Pharisees because the latter enjoyed the support of the masses. Gamaliel may have used this occasion as another opportunity to assert this Pharisaic ascendancy over the Sadducees. As a Pharisee he would have had more sympathy with the Christians theologically. Pharisees believed in a coming Messiah, in the resurrection, and in a life after death, none of which the Sadducees accepted. The Pharisees also had an oral tradition of interpretation of the Torah that gave them considerable flexibility and openness to change. Not so the Sadducees, who accepted only the written Torah and were far more rigid and conservative in attitude. Such differences must have contributed considerably to Gamaliel’s more tolerant stance toward the apostles.

The Gamaliel in question here was Gamaliel I, who is referred to in several places in the rabbinic literature, though surprisingly sparsely for a man of his stature. He was the son or grandson of the famous Hillel and seemed to have been at the prime of his influence from about A.D. 25–50. Rabbinic tradition gives him the title of Nasi, or president of the high court, and has his son Simeon follow him in that role. His grandson Gamaliel II held the presidency after A.D. 90, when the court met at Jamnia. Perhaps nowhere is the esteem in which he was held better expressed than in the following statement of the *Mishna*: “When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died.” For Christians he is best known through his pupil, Paul (Acts 22:3).

5:34–39 Gamaliel’s power in the Sanhedrin is subtly reflected in his ordering the apostles to be removed “for a little while.” Such matters were generally the prerogative of the high priest, and his reference to “a little while” reflects his confidence that it wouldn’t take him long to sway the court. He began by urging the court to “consider carefully” what they were about to do to the apostles. Considering that the death penalty had just been suggested, he was implying that this might be a bit rash and bring unfortunate results down on them, particularly given the Christian popularity with the masses. There was a better way. Simply leave the movement alone. Leave it to God. If he was not in it, it would fizzle out (vv. 38–39).

5:36–37 To make his point, Gamaliel cited two examples of similar messianic movements in recent Jewish history. His reasoning was simple. Neither movement succeeded—God was not in them. The examples he chose, however, raise serious historical problems. These revolve primarily around the first example—Theudas. According to Gamaliel, this Theudas appeared “some time ago,” claiming to be somebody (cf. 8:9), raised a following of about 400 men, and was killed. With his death the followers scattered in every direction, and the whole movement ended. The only other Theudas during this period of whom there is record is mentioned in Josephus’s *Antiquities* (20.97–99). According to Josephus, this Theudas raised a considerable following from the masses, persuading them to take along all their possessions and join him at the Jordan River. Claiming to

be a prophet, he insisted that at his command the waters of the Jordan would part (as in the days of Joshua). Getting wind of the movement, the Roman procurator arrived on the scene with a squadron of cavalry, took many prisoners, and beheaded Theudas, taking the trophy to Jerusalem (for a public object lesson).

If Luke and Josephus were talking about the same Theudas, there is a serious anachronism, for Josephus's Theudas is dated during the procuratorship of Fadus, whose term began in A.D. 44, some ten to fifteen years later than the time when Gamaliel would have delivered this address. To make matters worse, Gamaliel then gave the example of Judas the Galilean, who he said arose after Theudas, when in fact Judas's rebellion occurred in A.D. 6, nearly forty years earlier than Theudas's movement.

Many approaches have been taken in dealing with this problem, but basically three possibilities emerge: (1) either Josephus was in error, (2) or Luke was responsible for the anachronisms, or (3) they refer to two different Theudas. It is unlikely that Josephus would have made such an error. He lived in Palestine during the period of Fadus and would have had personal recollection of such events as the movement under Theudas. This leads many scholars to attribute the anachronism to Luke. Obviously for those who are impressed with Luke's general historical accuracy elsewhere and who are not disposed to according him such a mistake, the third option remains the most viable route.

Although it is an argument from silence, there is solid basis for arguing that the Theudas of Acts may be a different person from the one mentioned by Josephus. For one, the Acts account is very brief and could be applied to any number of messianic pretenders. Apart from the name Theudas and the fact of his death, it has little in common with Josephus's account. All the colorful highlights are missing—the parting of the Jordan, the arrival of the cavalry, the beheading. Acts gives the modest following of 400 men; Josephus spoke of “the majority of the masses” following Theudas. Acts says they were dispersed; Josephus, that many were arrested.

A second consideration is that the name Theudas may be a nickname or a Greek form of a common Hebrew name. In such a case the Theudas of Acts may be identified elsewhere by a different, Hebrew name. Finally, Josephus spoke of innumerable tumults and insurrections that arose in Judea following the death of Herod the Great (4 B.C.). Though he mentioned no leaders of these movements by name, this would be a plausible context for the Theudas incident mentioned in Gamaliel's speech.

Gamaliel's second example is less problematic. He referred to Judas the Galilean who arose “in the days of the census.” This is almost surely the same Judas who is referred to by Josephus in both his *Jewish War* and his *Antiquities*. He started a major rebellion in protest of the census under Quirinius (A.D. 6–7), which was undertaken for purposes of taxation. Josephus did not mention his death, but Gamaliel referred to his being killed and all his followers being scattered. Although the original rebellion under Judas was stifled by the Romans, such was not the case with the general movement begun by Judas. According to Josephus, he laid the foundations of the Zealot movement within Judaism, a movement that would grow to such proportions that in less than twenty-five years after Gamaliel's speech, it would initiate all-out war with the Romans.

5:38–39 Gamaliel's point is clear (vv. 38–39). God will work out his will. A movement that has his backing will prevail. Otherwise it will abort. So leave these men alone, lest you find yourselves fighting God. At this point in time Gamaliel might also have been concerned about their finding themselves fighting the Jewish populace. In any event he enunciated a sound rabbinic principle: “Any assembling together that is for the sake of Heaven shall in the end be established,

but any that is not for the sake of Heaven shall not in the end be established.” Gamaliel’s advice was sound and yet also a bit ironical. Already his counsel was finding fulfillment—in the growing Christian community, in their signs and wonders, in their escape from jail just the night before. It had become obvious whose side God was on. Already the Council were finding themselves fighters against God.

5:40 The Sanhedrin concurred with Gamaliel’s advice. Again they released the apostles, but this time with a flogging. The flogging referred to was the customary punishment used as a warning not to persist in an offense. It consisted of thirty-nine lashes, often referred to as the forty less one (cf. 2 Cor 11:24). Based on the provision for forty stripes given in Deut 25:3, the practice had developed of only giving thirty-nine in the event of miscounting, preferring to err on the side of clemency rather than severity. It was still a cruel punishment. With bared chest and in a kneeling position, one was beaten with a tripled strap of calf hide across both chest and back, two on the back for each stripe across the chest. Men were known to have died from the ordeal. As before, the apostles were warned not to continue their witness in Jesus’ name. This time the warning was reinforced with somewhat stronger persuasion.

(3) Release and Witness (5:41–42)

5:41–42 The apostles were not persuaded. They would continue to obey God rather than men. In fact, they rejoiced at having suffered for the name, very much in accord with the beatitude of their Lord (Luke 6:22f.). And the witness to the name continued—publicly in the temple and privately in the homes of the Christians. Luke seems to have used a common Greek rhetorical construction in v. 42 called a chiasm, which is most easily pictured as an A-B-B-A pattern. In the temple (A) and in homes (B), the apostles taught (B) and preached the gospel (A). Teaching was the task within the Christian fellowship, preaching the public task in the temple grounds. If there is any significance to his using such a device, it would be to give emphasis to the beginning and concluding elements. Their witness, their preaching of the gospel, was their primary task and occupation.

Lesson 3 – Whatever It Takes To Join God’s Plan – Missionary Story

William Carey (August 17, 1761 – June 9, 1834)

William Carey, who is often credited as being the Father of modern Protestant missions, was born in a small, obscure village in middle England. His father was a school master and instilled in William the practice of diligent study and hard work. However, it was his Uncle Peter who told him stories of ships and the sea, of people in other countries, of wildlife, and of trees and flowers which created in William a great fascination of the New World.

In spite of the daily ritual of Bible reading by his parents and their insistence on strict church attendance, William had little interest in religious books or things of a spiritual nature. He later acknowledged it was this early training that remained in his heart and mind and were of great influence in his adult life. His real interest was to be a gardener like his favorite uncle. However, William suffered with an illness that caused a severe skin irritation to get much worse when he was in the sun; and after two years he had to abandon his plan to be a gardener. It is interesting to note that he was able to later spend more than 40 years in the heat and sun of Bengal when he had been unable to withstand the sun of England. This is perhaps an illustration of what can happen when one follows God’s plan for their life rather than one’s own plan or the world’s plan.

When his work as a gardener ended, his father arranged for him to be an apprentice to a cobbler. Another apprentice in this shop was a young man named John Warr. Though not a believer in Christ when he and William initially met, John Warr soon after accepted Christ and in William’s words, “he became importunate with me, lending me books which gradually wrought a change in my thinking, and my inward uneasiness increased.”

Warr’s changed life along with his persuasive witness to William soon had Carey attending prayer meetings and church services with John. Within a few months, William Carey accepted Christ and there found peace and joy, and an unsatiable thirst for the Word of God. The more he learned of God’s truth, the more he wanted to know. This combined with his interest in the world beyond England, led him to think of those in the regions beyond who did not know God.

This compelling thirst for knowledge and his growing questions about taking the Gospel beyond England was proving to be a terrible distraction for his work as a cobbler. He had begun an evening school to supplement his income and he had also started to do some preaching. One of the most interesting things to note about William Carey’s life is that while he was diligent and described himself as a “plodder and one who could persevere,” he did not experience “success”. He was not successful at being a cobbler; in fact, his shoemaker employer agreed to continue to pay him his part-time salary if he would stop making shoes and just focus on his studies -- Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He was not popular as a preacher either. His sister said to someone after he had preached in his hometown, that his family preferred for him to go away home than come home to preach.

However, it was William’s desire to see the Gospel taken to the ends of the earth that gave him the courage to speak up at a local minister’s association meeting and propose that they discuss the topic “Whether the command given to the apostles to teach all nations was not binding on all succeeding ministers to the end of the world.” An older pastor in the meeting strongly rebuked Carey publicly. He shouted at him, “Young man, sit down, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he’ll do it without consulting you or me.” Carey sat down, but the fire in his heart to reach the lost with the Gospel was not quenched. Rather, he went home and wrote the pamphlet, “An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens” which called upon the

churches to engage in taking the Gospel to foreign lands. At a later association meeting that year, he was asked to preach and again in his sermon he pressed them to heed Scripture (Isaiah 54:2-3 KJV) to “enlarge the place of thy tent . . . lengthen thy cords.” It was in this sermon that he declared that they should “Expect great things!” And that they should “Attempt great things!” From this, the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel amongst the Heathen was formed. The name was later changed to the Baptist Missionary Society.

William Carey believed that God would use anyone and anything to accomplish His Plan and he knew that it was God’s plan for the Gospel to go to the ends of the earth. Carey told his pastor friends in England that he was willing to go if they would hold the ropes. With the assurance that he had the support of the Society, he began to make plans to leave for India. To the human mind it was a daunting venture -- just the cost of passage seemed insurmountable, his father said he was “mad” for even considering it, and his wife, Dorothy, was vehemently opposed and refused to go with him. Though she relented and finally agreed to go if her sister could go with them. None of this discouraged Carey – he pressed forward and on June 13, 1793, Carey and his family boarded a boat and sailed for five months before reaching India. It was a difficult and perilous journey. However, William Carey knew that he was following God’s plan and with that assurance he never looked back.

Life was not easy for the Carey family. Yet, William Carey the plodder pressed on, studying Bengali and in a few weeks began to preach to small gatherings through a translator. He also began a rudimentary Bible translation. The work continued and so did the hardships with the family suffering severe illness. Their 5-year-old son Peter died, and his wife Dorothy suffered from debilitating depression and delusions. In it all, Carey clung to his faith, finding joy in knowing that this was God’s plan, and he wrote, “But I rejoice that I am here, notwithstanding; and God is here, Who not only can have compassion, but is able to save to the uttermost.”

In 1799 a group of eight adults and five children arrived from England to help him. Included in this group was a printer who would set up a printing press for the mission; and a teacher who would start a school. Since this mission group was no longer just Carey and his family, he made the decision to move the base of the work to Serampore, a city near Calcutta. In December 1800 after seven years of labor, Carey baptized his first Indian convert. In February 1801, the first Bengali New Testament was printed. Carey was appointed as a teacher of Bengali and Sanskrit at Fort Williams College in April of 1801. (Fort Williams College was a school for British civil servants in Calcutta.) The mission also gained prestige in the country as well as government printing contracts which provided much needed funds for the mission.

Carey’s work in India had a slow start yet he left a huge legacy all owing to the truth that God can use anything or anyone to accomplish His plans. Carey’s accomplishments for God included more than 1,407 converts baptized by him or his associates; the Bible translated into Bengali, Sanskrit and several other dialects. He and his team promoted education, founding the Serampore College which educated both believers and unbelievers, with its primary goal to train indigenous ministers.

William Carey was a missionary who did whatever it took to become a part of God’s Plan.