



DiscipleLand

Missions Education

Level 5, Quarter A—Old Testament Heroes

Integrate these World-missions concepts into your **DiscipleLand** lesson. Introduce your children to one missions truth each lesson.

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5A—Missions Education

The Target

Teacher Intro—In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), Jesus made it clear that we are to make disciples of “all nations.” He did not call us to reach out to only the “great nations” or the “civilized nations.” Even today, there are hundreds of people groups that have never once heard the name Jesus.

Your children will examine the methodologies for reaching people groups that have never heard the Gospel. They’ll compare and contrast different approaches in regards to their importance and their impact for expanding God’s Kingdom. They’ll also see that their own efforts can have eternal consequences for people around the globe.

Lesson 1—The Target

Supplies: reproduction of an archery target with concentric circles, beanbags or Ping-Pong balls (optional)

Show the archery target to the class. **Who can tell me what this is? What is it used for?** Encourage responses. **Let’s back up a minute. Why is a target important to have?** (A target gives one something to aim for.) **What do the different rings of the target tell you?** (How close you are to hitting your goal.) **So the real goal of the target is what?** (The center, the “bull’s-eye.”) Attach your target to a wall as you continue to speak.

There are actually many different kinds of targets. How many can you name? Examples: tin can, horseshoe peg, bowling pins, basketball hoop, dartboard, baseball strike-zone, etc. **The target we will be learning about is something missiologists (those who study missions) call *unreached people groups*. Jesus gave us this target when He said to His disciples...** Have someone read Matthew 28:18-20. **We’ll learn more about unreached people groups, but for now let’s think of them as people who have never even heard of the name Jesus.**

Walk over to your target. **What would be some ways you could imagine hitting the target of an unreached people group without hitting the bull’s-eye?** Suggestions: living with the people group; telling them about Jesus; translating the Bible into their language. As kids give suggestions, ask them to determine how close to the bull’s-eye each accomplishment might be. **What about true-heart change? When the people accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior?** Encourage responses. Touch the ring nearest the center. **You might think that’s the bull’s-eye, but missiologists say there’s actually one more level to hit the center of the target. We’ll be talking about the bull’s-eye in coming weeks.**

If there is time, let kids toss a beanbag at the target. As a player hits the target, let him or her name an important job that missionaries do in other countries and among other people groups.

Pray: Thank God for giving us His Word that clearly tells us to take the Gospel to those who have not yet heard.

Lesson 2—People Groups—What Are They?

Supplies: variety of balls—as many as possible, two tables, a pitcher of water

Bring in a variety of balls—as many as possible (baseball, football, basketball, volleyball, soccer ball, Ping-Pong ball, golf ball, croquet ball, bowling ball, beach ball, etc.) **What is the one thing all these items have in common?** (They are balls.) **They are all balls, but we could group them using different criteria. Let's see how many different criteria you can name.** Examples: relative size, weight, bounce, whether they are used in team or individual sports, whether they are hit with a secondary item, whether they involve a goal, etc. **In the same way, missiologists categorize human beings differently to help with missions strategy.**

Blocs are the largest people groups—they are based on large cultural boundaries such as religion. The acronym T-H-U-M-B (Tribal, Hindu, Unreligious, Muslim, Buddhist) is an example of bloc divisions.

Some missiologists group people based on whether they share a common language, history, and culture.

A third approach to group people the smallest way possible, based on a shared interest or occupation.

The final way missiologists define people groups is the *unimax* method. Place two tables side by side with a significant gap in between. Hold a pitcher of water above one table. **If I poured out the water, it would spread over this table. What keeps the other table from getting wet?** (The gap between the tables.) **The gap (and gravity) is a barrier keeping the water from spreading to another table. Among people in the world, you also run up against barriers—language, culture, distrust, geography—that keep the Gospel from spreading.**

A unimax people is the *maximum*-sized group of people who are *unified* (have no boundaries) enough for all people in the group to move to Christ. Another definition, commonly used for “people group,” is “the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church-planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.”

Check for understanding of this difficult concept by asking follow-up questions. **Why would language be a barrier to spreading the Gospel? What about culture? When can geography be a factor?**

Next time we meet, we'll take the definition one step further and look at unreached people groups.

Pray: Ask God to help missiologists keep defining the target so that more people can move to Christ.

Lesson 3—Unreached

Supplies: target from first lesson

Remind children of the most common definition of a people group: the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church-planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.

Refer to the target on your wall. **Now that we know about people groups—our kind of target—let's look at our actual target: unreached people groups. According to missiologists, an unreached people group is a people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize their own people. Who knows what “indigenous” means?** (Native; originating in and belonging to a particular region.) Touch one of the outer rings of your target. **So does that mean a people can have a missionary and still be unreached?** Touch a ring further in. **Can a people have a few Christian believers and still be unreached?** (Yes.) **Why?** (If those believers are not trained or prepared to spread the Gospel, the group still fits the definition.)

Read Matthew 24:14. **What most Bible translations call “nations” really means “peoples.” How much of the world would hear the Gospel? How many peoples would have Christ's testimony? Jesus gave Christians a big job!**

According to the definitions we've talked about, missiologists estimate there are still 10,000 unreached people groups! That's two billion people who live beyond the reach of any native church. It may sound like an impossible task, but nothing is impossible with God. The good news is that that number is steadily decreasing, even way down from thirty years ago.

Next time we'll look at the word, “missions” to see what we really mean when dealing with unreached people.

Pray: Ask God to help your children trust in His plan to reach the whole with the Gospel of Jesus.

Lesson 4—Frontier Missions

Supplies: paper

Let's talk about the word "missions." What do you think this word means? Encourage responses. Many people have attempted to properly define this word. For our purposes, "missions" is when a person crosses cultural boundaries to tell others the Gospel message.

World missions became so big and complex, that people decided they needed to have two new definitions of missions. Close your eyes and imagine two huge gardens. In the first garden, young plants have sprouted up, and farmers are caring for the plants, watering the soil, and pulling up weeds. The second garden is just dirt. No seeds have been planted or watered.

The first garden represents people groups who have local churches. Missionaries (the farmers) spend their time helping those churches (the plants) grow and succeed. Missiologists call these missions "regular" missions.

The second garden represents unreached people groups. They have no believers ready to establish churches—that's why the seeds still need to be planted and care for. These areas are called "frontier" missions. They need missionaries desperately. No one within their own culture can tell them about Jesus.

Some frontier missions among unreached people groups can actually have churches, but the churches worship God in a different (usually Western) culture, so that the people still cannot understand the Gospel. It's like having a greenhouse in the middle of that barren garden! The plants inside may be okay, but when will the dry land bear fruit?

If there is time, assign half the class to draw a picture of the first garden, while the other half draws a picture of the empty garden. Remember this picture of the two gardens. We'll be talking about them again next time.

Pray: Thank God for the people waiting to hear about Jesus in frontier missions. Pray that they do not have to wait too long.

Lesson 5—Missions Imbalance

Ask kids if they remember the two gardens and what each garden represents. Refresh their memories as needed. I want you to imagine the two gardens again. Both gardens are very big with many garden rows. Imagine the first garden, the one with growing plants, has eighty farmers working in it. The second garden, the one that still needs soil-tilling, seed-planting, and watering, has only two farmers. What is the basic problem of this situation? Encourage responses.

For regular and frontier missions, this is the situation right now. Write the words "Frontier" and "Regular" across the top of the board. Under Frontier, write the number, "10,000." Under Regular, write the number "400,000." There are forty times the number of missionaries working in the regular missions field than there are working in frontier missions!

Regular missions are very important in God's kingdom plan. Some areas that are considered regular missions still have very small churches that need lots of help. But these numbers (point to the board) show a definite imbalance. Point to 10,000. Why does this number look familiar? (It is the approximate number of unreached people groups.) That means that right now, even if all the frontier missionaries were evenly spread, there would still be only one missionary for every unreached people group on the planet. And some people groups have millions of people in them!

What could churches do to fix this problem? Encourage responses. What barriers might exist that keep missionaries from working in frontier missions?

Jesus said that the harvest—people who are ready to hear about Him—is big, but that the workers are few. Read Matthew 9:37-38. What was Jesus' solution to this problem? (Pray for more workers.)

Pray: Ask God to send many more missionaries into the frontier missions field, so that more people may hear about Jesus.

Lesson 6—God Prepares the Unreached

Supplies: a passport

Read Acts 17:19-34. **When Paul preached in Athens, he recognized that God had prepared some of the people to hear and understand about Him. He used their statue to an unknown God as a bridge to understand about the Good News of Jesus. Today, people call this a *redemptive analogy*, and missionaries have found redemptive analogies in the cultures of unreached people. Don Richardson found one in the Sawi people—the peace child.** If you are not presenting the missionary biography of Don Richardson, briefly explain the peace child concept to the children.

Talk about some of Jesus' parables that the people of His day understood. Brainstorm with the kids some redemptive analogies that could be used for: firefighters, hockey players, cooks, judges, mountain climbers, etc.

Sometimes God sends visions and legends to a people that help them believe in Jesus. When Bruce Olson worked among the Motilones of South America, he learned of a legend about God and the Bible—presented as a banana stalk! That legend helped the Motilones understand that Bruce was sent from the one true God.

Missionaries among unreached people must be ready for these opportunities, but they must still present the Gospel in a clear, understandable manner. Not every culture has a redemptive analogy or a legend that missionaries can use. Sometimes God prepares unreached people simply by working on their hearts and convicting them of their sins.

Pray: Thank God for preparing unreached people to hear about Jesus. Ask Him to direct missionaries to communicate His message well.

Lesson 7—God Reaches the Unreached

Supplies: a young plant, target

Bring in a young plant and display it. **Here is a young plant I am growing. What three things does this plant need?** (Soil, water, and sunlight.) **I planted it in soil, but who created soil? I give it water, but who really supplies the water? I can bring the plant into the sun, but who set the sun in the sky to shine? God did, of course! So really, I am not growing this plant. God is.**

When we study missions, we must be careful not to forget that God is in control. Our discussions so far about people groups and frontier missions and other official-sounding terms can make missions seem scientific and measurable. God is the One who reaches the lost—we are just His instruments. Missionaries can plant a seed by telling people about God. They can water the plant by bringing His Word to a people. They can show them the light by reflecting Jesus' love. But only God causes the true heart-change that brings people to Him.

To reach the unreached, those called must go and do their parts. God has chosen us to fulfil the Great Commission. We can partner with missionaries through prayer, financial support, and short-term help. But when a new person, a people, a “nation” comes to Jesus, we must *never* forget to give God the glory! Walk over to the target on your wall. Our job is to *aim* for the center—but God is the one who actually *hits* the bull's-eye!

Pray: Thank God His ability to transform people's lives. Praise Him for allowing us to be a part of His wonderful kingdom plan.

Lesson 8—Missiological Breakthrough

Supplies: target

Have you ever heard the expression, “Give a man a fish, and he will eat for a day. *Teach a man to fish, and he will eat for a lifetime*”? What does this saying mean? Encourage responses. What does fishing remind you about something Jesus said to Simon Peter? (“Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” Mark 1:17.) Refer to the target on your wall. We’ve talked about the target, and how we aim for the center. When it comes to unreached people, what is the bull’s-eye? What is the goal of frontier missions?

Touch the center of your target. People who study missions call the bull’s-eye a *missiological breakthrough*. It is when a church-planting movement exists in a people group that is not seen as foreign by the people in that region and that can grow on its own, without needing a missionary. It is the establishment of the true local, cultural church. In fishing terms, it is when the missionaries have taught the unreached people to “fish for men” themselves—to bring Jesus’ message to new people.

Why is it important that the church-planting movement is *indigenous*? (If people see the movement as their own, there are no barriers to understanding or acceptance.) Why is it important that the movement grows? (These new churches also must fulfil the Great Commission.) So that means that a frontier missionary is most successful when he or she is no longer needed. That became true of Don Richardson, Bruce Olson, and countless others.

Did you know that by this definition, some missiologists argue that the entire nation of Japan is still an unreached people? Even though there are many Christian churches in Japan, some people do not consider them indigenous because they copy the style of Western churches or still rely on Western missionaries to function.

A missiological breakthrough allows the dynamic, life-changing love of Jesus to move freely throughout an entire people group. Next time we will see if we can “measure” the success of such a breakthrough.

Pray: Ask God to help missionaries break through and establish local churches among unreached people. May those churches themselves finish spreading the Gospel to every person.

Lesson 9—Verifying the Response

Supplies: variety of measuring tools, including a personal thermometer, x-ray (if possible)

Display your measuring tools—ruler, measuring cups, thermometer, etc. Who can tell me what all these items are used for? (They measure things.) But how do we measure a *missiological breakthrough*? Remind children of the meaning of this term. Hold up the personal thermometer. What does this measure? (Body temperature. It can tell if one has a fever.) Let’s say you take your temperature, and you do not have a fever. Could you still be sick? (Yes.) In the same way, statistics about people and churches might not tell us if there is a viable and indigenous church-planting movement within a people group.

Let’s imagine you hurt your leg and think you might have broken a bone. What does the doctor do? (The doctor takes an x-ray.) Show an x-ray if you have one. An x-ray looks inside you and *verifies* your condition—you either have a broken bone or you don’t. In the same way, missiologists try to *verify* that a people group has been reached, and they do it by going “inside.” They live with the people, speak with them, and use the Holy Spirit’s guidance and discernment. Are the people’s lives changed? Are they teaching God’s Word accurately? Are churches growing and planting new churches? Although these answers may measure differently from group to group, missiological breakthrough is a condition—it has either happened or it has not.

So people who study global missions try to verify a people group’s response to the Gospel. Unless they conclusively determine that the people can spread the Gospel to everyone in that people group, they consider the group unreached.

Discuss your local community and the churches in your area. How would a missiologist classify your “people group”? What needs to change in order for your church to dynamically spread the Gospel?

Pray: Thank God for the Holy Spirit’s help in verifying a people group’s response to the Gospel. Ask that more and more people groups would become part of the Church.

Lesson 10—Changed Hearts = Changed Lives

Supplies: peanut butter, jelly

One of the great debates in the study of missions is—how much does a people group need to change culturally once it has been reached for Christ? This is not a new issue—in the earliest days of the Church, believers debated this same idea. Read Acts 15:1-21. Just like the council in Jerusalem, missionaries try to “not make it difficult to turn to God.”

The pitfall that missionaries worry about is called *syncretism*. Syncretism is the unbiblical blending of true religion with false. John warned about this in one of his letters to Christians. Read 2 John 1:9-11. This can happen when people don't understand the whole of God's Word. If a man from a jungle tribe accepts Jesus but still brings an offering of fruit to the “animal spirits,” he is breaking the second commandment. He must change his life in order to reflect his changed heart. Take some peanut butter and jelly and mix them together well. The problem with syncretism is that once two religions become blended, it is very difficult to separate them. You are back to square one, sharing the true Gospel with an unreached people.

On the other hand, a church movement within a people can and must be culturally relevant, so that there are no barriers to understanding or acceptance. It is wrong for a people to continue to worship animal spirits after becoming Christian, but it is also harmful to force them to learn Western hymns that have no meaning to their minds or ears. The first undermines God's sovereignty while the second wrongfully says that God does not love them unconditionally.

Frontier missionaries walk a tightrope, highlighting the importance of the Holy Spirit's power and help. When God works in people's hearts, He will change their lives.

Pray: Praise God for being in control of all things. Ask Him to guide and direct frontier missionaries, giving them discernment on how best reach each people group.

Lesson 11—Closure—Finishing the Task

Supplies: many counters such as dried beans, beads, or pennies; five larger counters such as chess pieces or batteries

Place a handful of counters on a table. **Imagine these are the unreached people of the world. Let's say missionaries bring some people to Christ.** Count out about ten counters and remove them. **It looks like we made some progress, right? But** (add another handful of counters to your table) **thousands of new humans are born every day! How will we ever reach enough to know we've done what God has asked of us?** Take a few more counters away then add another handful to reinforce the image.

Fortunately, Jesus actually asked something slightly different. Divide your counters into about five groups. Jesus said to make disciples from all peoples. Missiologists sometimes call this “a church movement for every people.” Place a large counter in the middle of one of the five groups and explain that it represents a church movement—a missiological breakthrough. **When we look at the Great Commission this way—in people groups—the job seems much easier, doesn't it? Even as the population grows** (add a few small counters to each of the groups), **the Church is there, making disciples and spreading the Good News.** Add another large counter to another group.

Many people who study missions believe that this goal could easily be accomplished in your lifetime! Add large counters to the remaining group. **But it takes more churches to get more seriously involved in frontier missions.** Read Matthew 24:14 again. Note the second part of Jesus' statement. **Some scholars interpret Jesus' words to mean that He will not come again until we have completed this job. We should work toward finishing the task Jesus has given His Church to do—disciples from every people in the whole world!**

Pray: Thank God for a potential end in sight for the kingdom work of His Church. Ask Him to show local churches how they can be involved in frontier missions.

Lesson 12—The Target Is a Ripple

Supplies: target

When you get on a bicycle and start to pedal, are the first couple of turns easy or difficult? Is it easier to pedal once you are moving? This principle is called *momentum*. Momentum is the force of movement. Once you have force of movement, it is easier to maintain that movement. The same is true in missions. Once a missiological breakthrough occurs, it is easier to maintain a church movement and grow it quickly.

Draw attention to the target on your wall. **What other things does this image remind you of?** Encourage responses until you get “ripple rings in water.” **Ripples are a great image to think of in frontier missions.** God uses missiological breakthroughs to advance His Kingdom like ripples across the water. The Gospel spreads with face-to-face contact as changed hearts bring changed lives. Thanks to missionary efforts in the last two hundred years, there are more missionaries coming from Asia, Africa, and Latin America than are coming from America and Europe. That’s a big ripple!

It also shows us that our churches need to step up and be a part of the rippling momentum occurring all over the world. We need to help complete Jesus’ one great command to His disciples.

This is an exciting time to be part of frontier missions. It is a big, complicated job, but God is even bigger! He will reveal His kingdom’s glory among all peoples. We must be ready to answer His call and serve Him by aiming for the bull’s-eye—reaching the unreached.

Pray: Thank God for the way His love breaks down barriers and spreads to all people. Ask Him to speak to the children’s hearts if He is calling them to become a missionary for Him.