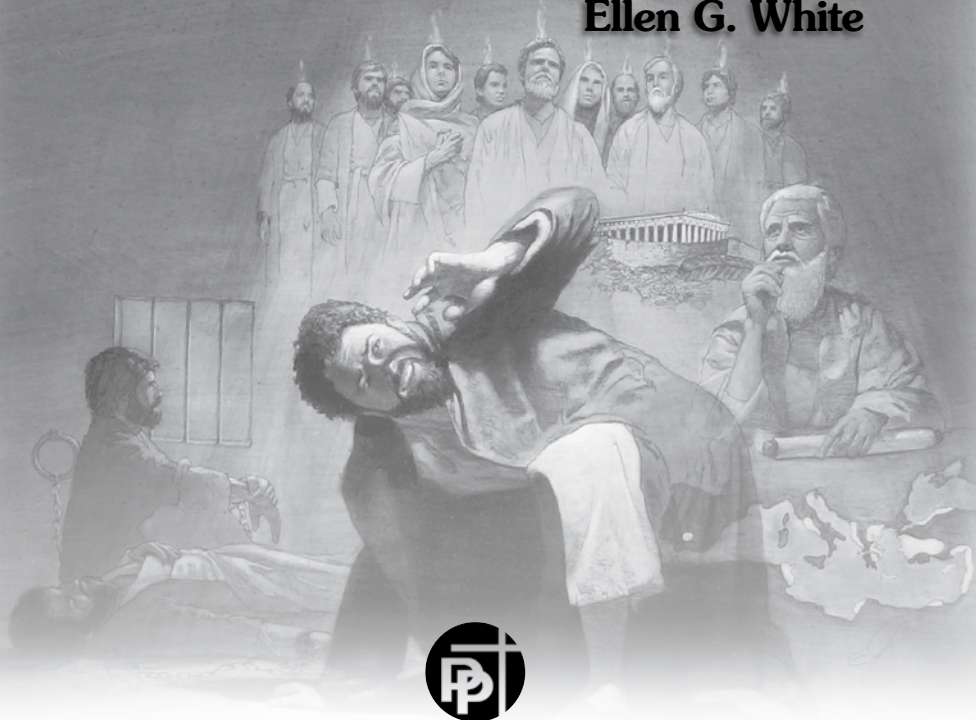


# Unlikely LEADERS

**Ellen G. White**



Pacific Press® Publishing Association  
Nampa, Idaho  
Oshawa, Ontario, Canada  
[www.pacificpress.com](http://www.pacificpress.com)

# God's Purpose for His Church

The church is God's appointed agency to save lost men and women. Its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. Through the church eventually everyone, including even "the principalities and powers in the heavenly places," will see the final and full display of God's love. (Ephesians 3:10.)

In the Scriptures are many wonderful promises about the church. "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7).

"I will preserve you and give you  
As a covenant to the people,  
To restore the earth,  
To cause them to inherit the  
desolate heritages;  
That you may say to the prisoners,  
'Go forth,'  
To those who are in darkness,  
'Show yourselves.'"

Isaiah 49:8, 9

"Can a woman forget her nursing  
child,  
And not have compassion on  
the son of her womb?  
Surely they may forget,  
Yet I will not forget you."

Isaiah 49:15

The church is God's fortress, His city of refuge, which He holds in a world in revolt. Any betrayal of the church is treason against Him who has bought mankind with the blood of His only Son. From the beginning, the church has been made up of faithful people. In every age the Lord's watchmen have faithfully given His message to their own generation. God has sent out His angels to minister to His church, and the gates of hell have not been able to prevail against His people. Not one opposing force has risen to counteract His work that God did not see ahead of time. He has not left His church forsaken, but has outlined in prophecy what would happen. All His plans will be fulfilled. God inspires and guards truth, and it will triumph over all opposition.

Feeble and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object that God regards above all others. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts.

Earthly kingdoms rule by physical power, but Christ banishes every instrument of force from His kingdom. His rule is to uplift humanity and make it more noble. God has filled His

church with various gifts and has given it the Holy Spirit.

From the beginning God has worked through His people to bring blessings to the world. God made Joseph a fountain of life to the ancient Egyptian nation. Through him God preserved that whole people. Through Daniel God saved the life of all the wise men of Babylon. These deliverances illustrate the spiritual blessings offered to the world through the God whom Joseph and Daniel worshiped. Everyone who will reveal Christ's love to the world is a worker with God for blessing humanity.

God desired Israel to be like wells of salvation in the world. The nations of the world had lost the knowledge of God. They had once known Him, but because "they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, . . . their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). Yet God did not blot them out. He decided to give them the opportunity to become acquainted with Him through His chosen people. Through the sacrificial service, Christ was to be lifted up, and all who would look to Him would live. The whole system of types and symbols was a condensed prophecy of the gospel.

But the people of Israel forgot God and failed to fulfill their holy mission. They clung to all their advantages for their own glorification. They shut themselves away from the world in order to escape temptation. They robbed God of service, and they robbed other people of a holy example.

Priests and rulers became satisfied with a legal religion. They thought

their own righteousness was more than enough. They did not accept the goodwill of God as something apart from themselves, but connected it with their own merit because of their good works. The faith that works by love could find no place in the religion of the Pharisees.

God declared about Israel:

"I had planted you a noble vine,  
a seed of highest quality.  
How then have you turned before  
Me  
Into the degenerate plant of an alien  
vine?"

Jeremiah 2:21

"For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts  
is the house of Israel,  
And the men of Judah are His  
pleasant plant.  
He looked for justice, but behold,  
oppression;  
For righteousness, but behold, a cry  
for help."

Isaiah 5:7

"The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them" (Ezekiel 34:4).

The Savior turned from the Jewish leaders to entrust others with the privileges they had abused and the work they had scorned. God's glory must be revealed; His kingdom must be established. The disciples were called to do the work that the Jewish leaders had failed to do.

# The Training of the Twelve

To carry on His work, Christ chose humble, unschooled men. Then He set about to train and educate them. They in turn were to educate others and send them out with the gospel message. They were to be given the power of the Holy Spirit so that they could proclaim the gospel by the power of God, not by human wisdom.

For three and a half years the disciples were under the instruction of the greatest Teacher the world has ever known. Day by day He taught them, sometimes sitting on the mountainside, sometimes beside the sea or walking along the road. He did not command the disciples to do this or that but said, "Follow Me." He took them with Him on His journeys through country and cities. They shared His simple food, and like Him, they were sometimes hungry and often tired. They saw Him in every phase of life.

The ordination of the Twelve was the first step in organizing the church. The record says, "He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14). By these feeble messengers, through His Word and Spirit, He planned to place salvation within the reach of all. The words the

disciples spoke as they witnessed would echo from generation to generation till the close of time.

The disciples' work was the most important that human beings had ever been given, second only to that of Christ Himself. They were workers together with God for saving men and women. As the twelve sons of Jacob stood as representatives of Israel, so the twelve apostles stand as representatives of the gospel church.

## **No "Wall" Between Jews and Gentiles**

Christ began to break down the "middle wall of separation" (Ephesians 2:14) between Jew and Gentile and to preach salvation to everyone. He mingled freely with the despised Samaritans, setting aside the customs of the Jews. He slept under their roofs, ate at their tables, and taught in their streets.

The Savior longed to unfold to His disciples the truth that "the Gentiles should be fellow heirs" with the Jews and "partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6). He rewarded the faith of the centurion at Capernaum; He preached to the people living in Sychar; and on His visit to Phoenicia, He healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman.

Among those whom many thought were unworthy of salvation, there were people hungering for truth.

In this way Christ tried to teach the disciples that in God's kingdom there are no territorial lines, no rigid social classes, no aristocracy. They must bring all nations the message of a Savior's love. But not until later did they fully realize that God "made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).

These first disciples represented a wide variety in types of character. Differing in natural characteristics, they needed to come into unity. To achieve this end, Christ tried to bring them into unity with Himself. He expressed His burden for them in His prayer to His Father, "That they all may be one, . . . that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (John 17:21-23). He knew that truth would conquer in the battle with evil, and that the blood-stained banner would someday wave triumphantly over His followers.

As Christ realized that soon He must leave His disciples to carry on the work, He tried to prepare them for the future. He knew that they would suffer persecution, be put out of the synagogues, and be thrown into prison. Some would even be killed. In speaking of their future, He was clear and definite, so that in their coming trials they would remember His words and be strengthened to believe in Him as the Redeemer.

"Let not your heart be troubled," He said. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive

you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3). When I go away I will still work earnestly for you. I go to My Father and yours to cooperate with Him for your good.

"He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father" (verse 12). Christ did not mean that the disciples would do a better or higher work than He had done, but that their work would have greater extent. He was speaking of all that would take place under the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **What the Holy Spirit Accomplished**

These words were wonderfully fulfilled. After the Spirit's arrival, the disciples were so filled with love that hearts were melted by the words they spoke and the prayers they offered. Under the influence of the Spirit, thousands were converted.

As Christ's representatives the apostles were to make a clear impression on the world. Their words of courage and trust would assure everyone that they were not working in their own power but in the power of Christ. They would declare that He whom the Jews had crucified was the Prince of life and that in His name they did the works that He had done.

On the night before the Crucifixion the Savior did not speak of the suffering He had endured and must yet endure. He tried to strengthen their faith, leading them to look forward to the joys that are in store for the overcomer. He would do more for His followers than He had promised. From Him would flow love and compassion, making people

like Him in character. Armed with the power of the Spirit, His truth would go forward conquering and to conquer.

Christ did not fail, neither was He discouraged, and the disciples were to show the same kind of faith. They were to work as He worked. By His grace they were to go forward, never despairing, and hoping for everything.

Christ had finished the work God had given Him. He had gathered out those who were to continue His work. And He said: "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one, . . . that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (John 17:20-23).

# The Good News to Go Everywhere

After the death of Christ the disciples were almost overcome by discouragement. The sun of their hope had set, and night settled down on their hearts. Lonely and sick at heart, they remembered Christ's words, "If they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:31).

Several times Jesus had tried to open the future to His disciples, but they had not wanted to think about what He said. This left them completely hopeless when He died. Their faith did not penetrate the shadow Satan threw across their horizon. If they had believed the Savior's words that He was to rise on the third day, how much sorrow they might have avoided!

Crushed by depression and despair, the disciples met together in the upper room and locked the doors, fearing that what happened to their beloved Teacher might also happen to them. After His resurrection, the Savior appeared to them there.

For forty days Christ remained on earth, preparing the disciples for the work ahead of them. He spoke of the prophecies of His rejection by the Jews and His death, showing that every detail had been fulfilled. "And He

opened their understanding," we read, "that they might comprehend the Scriptures." And He added, "You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:45, 48).

As the disciples heard their Master explaining the Scriptures in the light of all that had happened, their faith in Him was fully established. They reached the place where they could say, "I know whom I have believed" (2 Timothy 1:12). The events of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, the prophecies pointing to these events, the plan of salvation, and the power of Jesus to forgive sins—they had been witnesses to all these things, and they were to make them known to the world.

Before ascending to heaven, Christ told His disciples that they were to be the executors of the will in which He left to the world the treasures of eternal life. Although priests and rulers have rejected Me, He said, they will still have another opportunity to accept the Son of God. To you, My disciples, I commit this message of mercy, to be given to Israel first, and then to all nations. All who believe are to be gathered into one church.

The gospel commission is the great missionary blueprint of Christ's

kingdom. The disciples were to work earnestly to bring people to Jesus. They were to go to the people with their message. Their every word and act was to fasten attention on Christ's name, which alone possessed that vital power to save sinners. His name was to be their badge of distinction, the authority for their actions, and the source of their success.

### **Successful Weapons in the Great Warfare**

Christ plainly set before the disciples the need to maintain simplicity. The less pomp and show, the greater would be their influence for good. The disciples were to speak simply, the same way that Christ had spoken.

Christ did not tell His disciples that their work would be easy. They would have to fight "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). But they would not be left to fight alone. He would be with them. If they would go out in faith, One who is mightier than angels would be with them—the General of the armies of heaven. He took on Himself the responsibility for their success. As long as they worked in connection with Him, they could not fail. He told them, Go to the people at the farthest part of the globe, and be assured that My presence will be with you even there.

Christ's sacrifice was full and complete. He had fulfilled the conditions of the atonement. He had taken the kingdom back from Satan and become heir of all things. He was on His way

to the throne of God, to be honored by the heavenly host. Clothed with boundless authority, He gave His disciples their commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Just before leaving His disciples, Christ once more plainly stated that He did not intend to establish a worldly kingdom, to reign as an earthly ruler on David's throne. Their work was to proclaim the gospel message.

Christ's visible presence was about to be withdrawn, but a new infusion of power was to be theirs. The Holy Spirit was to be given to them in its fullness. "I send the Promise of My Father upon you," the Savior said, "but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8.)

The Savior knew that His disciples must receive the heavenly gift. A vigilant, determined leader was in command of the forces of darkness, and the followers of Christ could battle for the right only through the help that God would give them by His Spirit.

Christ's disciples were to begin their work at Jerusalem, the scene of His amazing sacrifice for the human race. In Jerusalem there were many



who secretly believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and many who had been deceived by priests and rulers. The disciples were to call these people to repentance. And it was while all Jerusalem was stirred by the thrilling events of the past few weeks that the preaching of the disciples would make the deepest impression.

During His ministry, Jesus had constantly reminded the disciples that they were to unite with Him in recovering the world from the slavery of sin. And the last lesson He gave His followers was that they held in trust for the world the good news of salvation.

When the time came for Christ to ascend to His Father, He led the disciples out as far as Bethany. Here He paused, and they gathered around Him. With His hands stretched out as if to assure them of His protecting care, He slowly ascended from among them. "While He blessed them, . . . He was parted from them and carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:51).

While the disciples were gazing upward to catch the last glimpse of their ascending Lord, heavenly angels received Him and escorted Him to the courts above. The disciples were still looking toward heaven when "two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:10, 11).

### **Christ's Second Coming—the Hope of the Church**

Jesus' disciples were always to keep fresh in their minds the promise of Christ's second coming. The same Jesus would come again to take to Himself those who give themselves to His service here below. His voice would welcome them to His kingdom.

As in the symbolic service the high priest laid aside his special robes and officiated in the white linen garment of an ordinary priest, so Christ laid aside His royal robes, clothed Himself with humanity, and offered sacrifice, Himself the priest, Himself the victim. As the high priest came out to the waiting congregation in his special robes after performing his service in the Most Holy Place, so Christ will come the second time, clothed in His own glory and in the glory of His Father, and all the millions of angels will escort Him on His way.

In this way Christ will fulfill His promise: "I will come again and receive you to Myself" (John 14:3). The righteous dead will come from their graves, and those who are alive will be caught up with them, "to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). They will hear the voice of Jesus, sweeter than music, saying, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

How the disciples could rejoice in the hope of their Lord's return!