

# **CHURCH MEMBERS & THE MISSION**

*A Devotional Guide for Christians  
Who Take The Great Commission Seriously*

Draft current as of July 11, 2024

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## *Every Christian, A Great Commission Christian*

We call it the Great Commission—because it is the one great, over-arching, all-encompassing, everyone-involving mission of the church.

*It is great in its origin* — it is the mission assigned to us by Jesus Christ, who said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” Those who live under Lordship of Christ accept this command. They would never declare, “That’s just not my thing.”

*It is great in its scope*, its all-encompassing scope. It involves making “disciples... baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” and “teaching them to observe everything” Jesus commanded. Each cyclic action is necessary to fulfill Jesus’ command.

*It is great in its scale*: “All nations.” That is, every people group, every ethnic group, and every language group on earth. This description includes evangelism across the street and missions across the planet. We are to be involved in this mission in ways both local and global. Together, these two aspects of the work represent world evangelization.

*It is great in its empowering presence*. Jesus himself said, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” He has not left us to do the work alone or with our own resources. Through the Holy Spirit we experience His indwelling and empowerment. Paul referred to this indwelling and empowerment when he stated, “I labor for this, striving with His strength that works powerfully in me” (Colossians 1:29).

Ultimately, world evangelization is the work of God. Those who study missions use a Latin phrase, *Missio Dei*, meaning *Mission of God*. It means the whole enterprise originates in God and represents His program on earth. World evangelization is God-centered. We are “God’s fellow-workers” (1 Cor. 3:9. ESV), joining Him in what He is already doing.

This mission did not begin with Jesus or with the journeys of Paul; it began with God, who created the universe. Throughout history, people have been called to enter God’s mission, to become participants in God’s ongoing story. God was (and is) a missionary God! <sup>1</sup>

As Jesus said, “My Father is still working, and I am working also” (John 5:17). It is impossible to conceive of a person close to God, plugged into what God is doing, who is not a “Great Commission Christian.”

World evangelization is the main work of the whole church for the whole age. It is not for a few specialists only, but is the responsibility of the whole church. This



commission puts every believer on mission and requires a great commitment on the part of every believer.

So what does this assignment mean for the average church member? *It means that every single one of us is to take the evangelization of our personal spheres of influence seriously.* It is our job to know where the people in our lives are in relation to God. It is our privilege to tell the Good News to those who don't know God.

*It means that every one of us sees the evangelization of our town as our personal responsibility.* We maintain situational awareness to know which circles of friends and which pockets of population know the Lord—and which ones do not. And where there are unreached people, we get a plan to reach them. Local churches are either trying to find ways to reach new people or take care of themselves. They think either strategically or selfishly.

*The Great Commission also means we take global missions personally.* One unreached people group or one tribe without the Scriptures in their own language is one tribe too many. It's not somebody's job; it's *our* job to do something about the lost. That means every one of us has to be open to God's call to go anywhere in the world. That means every single one of us must be a supporter of missions financially, with generous offerings. It means real Christians are interested and not bored with hearing about missions. We arrange our lives around the mission. After all, for those who walk with God, it is the cause of their lives.

### ***Thinking About Today's Passage:***

- *We refer to Matthew 28:18-20 as the Great Commission. Why is that a good name?*
- *What are the times the word "all" or "every" appears in this passage?*
- *Compare Luke 24:44-48, John 20:19-23, and Acts 1:1-8 to Matthew 28:18-20. In what specific ways are they similar? What additional information do they provide?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, please cause my unbelieving friends to want You to be at work in their lives, as well. Awaken within them deep longings for You. Make them to feel the emptiness in specific places in their lives since You are not present. Give them a whiff of the presence of Christ through their relationships with Your people.

<sup>1</sup> Van Rheenen, Gailyn (2014-07-22). *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* (p. 22). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

## *Missions is Evangelism That Crosses Cultural or Language Boundaries*

Missions is a word that had to be. It is not a biblical word, but it is a biblical concept. It describes evangelism, but a particular kind of evangelism, that which crosses cultural and/or language boundaries. It gives us a handle on the kind of ministry which goes to people unlike us and to places away from us.

“A missionary is anyone sent by the Lord to establish a new Christian witness where such a witness is yet unknown. Traditionally defined missionary activity usually involves leaving our own immediate culture for another, taking the Gospel to people who differ in at least one aspect—such as language, nationality, race or tribe—from our own ethnic group.”<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes a group will take on a "mission project" and take flowers and cards to some sweet elderly ladies at the nursing home. This is a act of kindness, and certainly, there are some lonely people there who need the love and attention, but it isn't a ministry which crosses cultural or language boundaries. That's why we have the word missions.

Sometimes people make remarks along the lines of, “Missions begins at home.” World evangelization may begin at home, but missions, by definition, cannot. If it is at home, with people like ourselves, it isn't missions. It may be evangelism. It may be ministry. It may be a wonderful thing. But it isn't missions.

Cartoonist Doug Hall in *Leadership Magazine* brings it to light: “The question is, How do we win the world to Christ... with a minimum of fuss and bother?” The word *missions* emphasizes that *extraordinary effort* is required. Crossing the street to speak with your neighbors is no great inconvenience.

Usually, when people make this comment about missions beginning at home, they are arguing for keeping the money and these resources at home instead of sending them overseas or taking them across cultural boundaries. I had a professor in seminary who commented, “Missions may begin at home, but *selfishness stays there*.” Similarly, Gordon Olson wrote:

If every Christian is already considered a missionary, then all can stay put where they are, and nobody needs to get up and go anywhere to preach the gospel. But if our only concern is to witness where we are, how will

<sup>1</sup> K.P. Yohannan, *Revolution in World Missions*, page 160. gfa Books, A Division of Gospel for Asia ©2002



people in unevangelized areas ever hear the gospel? The present uneven distribution of Christians and opportunities to hear the gospel of Christ will continue unchanged... So in reality the idea every Christian is a missionary is a “cop out.” It avoids responsibility for more than three and a half billion people who are not being effectively evangelized today. It means direct disobedience to the “Go” of the Great Commission! <sup>2</sup>

Missions is a word which had to be—because it forces us to think across the boundaries of race and culture. Missions makes us think in an unselfish mode. Our own church doesn't grow and our budget isn't directly increased by this kind of work. The concept of missions forces us to think globally and about people from a "God's eye point of view."

The word missions forces us to think in terms of eternity and not just in the here and now. What matters in the truly long term? For no other reason would people learn a new language and adapt to a new diet and live with less luxury—if not for the fact that it will matter forever.

Sometimes, missions has a halo around it which might make one think that the souls of those across the globe are somehow more precious to God than the souls of those next door. That impression is generally due to the extreme sacrifices made by those who have served cross-culturally. Those they won to Christ were won at great personal expense. This word *missions* should serve to remind us that our own people are no more precious to God than those from different cultures or in the most inaccessible places.

The word *missions* reminds us that evangelism is a *dual effort*, involving *both* Jerusalem *and* the uttermost parts of the earth. And, as stewards of the gospel, it is our responsibility to get the message to them as well as our own.

### ***Thinking About Today's Passage:***

- *In Acts 11:1-18, what is the big surprise as the gospel spreads?*
- *In verses 19-20, which group did the Christians readily share the gospel with? What happened when some believers noticed another group and witnessed to them?*
- *In verses 21-26, how significant was the impact of the gospel going to Antioch?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord God, please cause them to see the evidence for those things that are invisible and intangible, but which are eternal. Give them the faith they do not have.

<sup>2</sup> Olson, C. Gordon (2012-02-10). *What in the World is God Doing?: An Introduction to World Missions* (Kindle Locations 470-482). Kindle Edition.

## *Jesus the First Missionary*

Ralph Winter once described three classes of missionaries, which he called, M<sub>1</sub>, M<sub>2</sub>, and M<sub>3</sub> missionaries. The first group carries on intra-cultural ministry. They may have to travel a long distance, but they do not have to learn a new language or adapt to a new culture. The second group may have to learn a new language, but the culture is so similar little adjustment is required. A missionary traveling from one Hispanic country to another would be an example. The third kind of missionary, the M<sub>3</sub> missionary, works inter-culturally “in the most radical sense. He is sent to minister to people whose language and culture are entirely strange to him.”<sup>1</sup> By that definition Jesus Christ was the first—and foremost—missionary.

When Jesus came from heaven to earth, it was certainly a change of geographical locations. Heaven is a place; Jesus said so- “I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:3). The place of one’s heritage determines much about that person’s personality. For example, Southerners are not merely from the South geographically; they *are* Southerners. Jesus is not merely from heaven; He is heavenly: “‘You are from below,’ He told them, ‘I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.’” (John 8:23).

In order to carry out their work, missionaries leave one culture and adapt to another. Often, they move from a culture of relative comfort and convenience to one with less. One missionary told of going to a new village with someone from a village where he had already ministered. The people from the new village welcomed him, offering their best food. When no one was looking, his helper, seeing the look on his face, commented sympathetically, “You are right; the grub worms in our village are much better.” In another tribal group, when its members want to give their guests a grand welcome, they will carpet their huts with fresh dung. Not all missionaries have to adapt to such extreme cultural differences as this. Yet Jesus came from heaven to earth. Can one imagine a greater leap in cultures?

Imagine Jesus answering the same questions missionaries often get about the places where they serve:

Do they have electricity there? “They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light” (Revelation 22:5).

What is the principal crop? “The tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2).

What about crime? Is it safe? It's very safe, for kept, “Outside are... murderers

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Winter in “Evangelical Missions Quarterly,” 1970, 55. Cited by C. Peter Wagner in *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, Moody Press, 1971. Pages 77-78





and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie” (Revelation 22:15)

How nice is the neighborhood? Very exclusive; in fact, it's a gated community. “Each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass” (Revelation 21:21).

What about wedding customs? “They neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Mark 12:25).

What a change! From being the recipient of worship to being unrecognized. From the throne of glory to a feed trough. From streets of gold to manure on the floor. From speaking worlds into existence to making furniture by hand. From a sinless environment to a sin-filled world... and finally to being the victim of sinners' cruelty. His incarnation was culture shock of inexpressible proportions.

The whole point of this change, of course, was not to travel and see the sights. The cross lay ahead with its suffering and death and the bearing of sin. Jesus had come on history's greatest rescue mission, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). It is the message of that cross that our missionaries carry around the globe today. It was horrible treatment for the first missionary, but good news for His people. It was, as the angel said, an occasion of, "Good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 1:10).

Missionaries return on furloughs and eventually come home to retire. Jesus completed His mission. And then, as He had told those to whom He was sent, "A little while, and you will not see Me... because I go to the Father" (John 16:16).

Jesus tells us, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21, ESV). In the same way Jesus was sent, we are sent. Jesus’ incarnation is the ultimate model for our ministry as Christians. Jesus took the initiative, identified with the human race, and became one of us in order that we might be made right with God—in the same way, we are to take the initiative, enter into peoples’ lives, crossing cultural boundaries as needed, to bring the lost the Good News.

### ***Thinking About Today’s Passage:***

- *In Philippians 2, what is the motivation for Jesus’ choices?*
- *Two people who assisted Paul in his ministry are described in this chapter, Timothy and Epaphroditus (E-Paf-Roh-die-tus); how does Paul describe their work?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, please make my lost friends to feel the distance between Your glory and their condition. Make them to feel the putrid ugliness of sin and selfishness. Give them a deep awareness of the gravity of what it means to sin against a holy God, as You are.

## Think People Groups

Reaching people from every people group on earth is the reason why Jesus died on the cross. Revelation 5:9 gives the lyrics to the new praise song we will sing to Jesus in Heaven:

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals; because You were slaughtered, and You redeemed people for God by Your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

Ron Blue summarizes the inclusiveness of Heaven in this description:

- Every tribe: Ethnic representation will be complete.
- Every language: Linguistic representation will be complete.
- Every people: Cultural representation will be complete.
- Every nation: Political representation will be complete. <sup>1</sup>

One might notice that even at the end of history, even with all the increased travel and communication and the Internet and television and all that, many people groups of the world will continue to maintain their distinctiveness. Yes, we do see more multi-ethnic groupings of people than before, but even they are often becoming new distinctive subcultures of their own.

There are 196 countries in the world. However, there are far more people groups than that. For example, there are 780 different languages spoken in India.<sup>2</sup> According to Ethnologue.com, there are 7,106 living languages spoken in the world today, some of them spoken by fewer than 1,000 people. So how many people groups are there in the world? It depends on your exact definition of people groups. If one considers only language and ethnicity, there are somewhere around 13,000 people groups. If one adds religion, caste, and culture into the mix then there are around 16,600 people groups. Factor in, on top of all that, education, politics, ideology, historical enmity, and customs, you are then up to 27,700 people groups.<sup>3</sup> For their purposes, researchers from the International Mission Board (IMB) count 12,111 people groups.<sup>4</sup>

Consider our nation’s changing demographic. In the United States, 52.7% of the population under the age of 18 belongs to a minority group. According to the Pew Research Center, at least 19% of new marriages in the U.S. now involve spouses from different ethnic or racial groups, which is an increase from 11% in 2000. The United States is projected to become a “minority white” nation in 2045. During that year, whites will comprise 49.7% of the population, while Hispanics will make

<sup>1</sup> Ron Blue, *Evangelism and Missions: Strategies for Outreach in the 21st Century*. Word Publishing, ©2001. Page 94

<sup>2</sup> <http://blogs.reuters.com/india/2013/09/07/india-speaks-780-languages-220-lost-in-last-50-years-survey/> Accessed: 2015

<sup>3</sup> “How Many People Groups Are There?” <http://joshuaproject.net/assets/media/assets/articles/how-many-people-groups-are-there.pdf> Accessed: 2015 <sup>4</sup> <https://www.imb.org/research/reports/> Accessed: 2015



up 24.6%, blacks 13.1%, Asians 7.9%, and multiracial populations 3.8%.<sup>5</sup> It would be unreasonable to think we could continue without adjusting our church evangelism strategies to account for this.

In a 1982 gathering at Lausanne, Christian leaders defined a people group in this manner:

For evangelization purposes, a people group is the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.<sup>6</sup>

People are most effectively reached for Christ together with others of similar interests, speaking the same language, and having the similar customs—people whom they feel are “like” themselves. We all know from experience that “folks like us make a church like ours” and “A church like ours can best reach folks like us.” This is not an excuse for excluding people; it provides clues to how we might reach who are those different from ourselves.

Our international missionaries speak of adapting to a culture to present the message in a way to which the people from that culture can relate. This adaptation includes speaking in their “heart language,” using musical styles which the people are used to singing, worshipping in buildings constructed in styles similar to the buildings they already use, and training leaders from their own people group. This process is called “contextualization” and the principles apply in cross-cultural ministry here in North America as much as they do in international missions. Both multi-cultural and cross-cultural churches will be needed. It will take all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people.

One thing we must understand about the Great Commission is this: Jesus commanded us to make disciples among all nations—literally, “all the people groups” or “ethnic groups” of the world.

### ***Thinking About Today’s Passage:***

- *In Revelation 5, we see a central figure. Who is that central figure and what has he done to become such?*
- *In verses 9-10, a new people is created. How was this group created? Where have they come from and what are they like now?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Heavenly Father, please open their eyes to the foolishness of the thoughts of my unbelieving friends, thinking they could live without You, that they are sufficient in themselves. Cause them to see they are in over their heads and open their eyes to the wise and good plan You have for their lives.

<sup>5</sup> CoPilot in Windows, accessed 07/09/2024

<sup>6</sup> “On Track: Majority Minority,” Brookings Institution cited in OnMission Magazine, North American Mission Board, Summer, 2011, Page 7

## Unreached People Groups

Imagine going to your door to find someone from another country, wearing his traditional native dress, speaking English in a foreign accent, and telling you about a god about whom you had never heard. How open do you think you would be to his message? Wouldn't you be more open to hearing an American with a local accent whose demeanor fit the customs of our own culture? Now, imagine that no one came to your door at all, and you can picture what it is like to be part of an "unreached people group."

A 'people group' has a common self-identity seen primarily in their shared language. Additionally, there is a name by which they call themselves, a common history, and customs for marriage and other practices and other obligations.<sup>1</sup>

An "unreached people group" (UPG's) represents people groups with an evangelical population of less than 2%. By evangelical is meant "they proclaim the gospel." The Joshua Project counts 7,052 unreached people groups, representing 42.5% of the world's population.<sup>2</sup> That is, three billion, four hundred and thirty-five million people without churches from their own people group and without adequate numbers and resources to evangelize their own people.

Unreached people groups are usually Bible-less. According to Wycliffe Bible Translators, a "Bibleless people group is a language community where Bible translation has never been started, and where people are unable to clearly understand the Bible in another language"—there are around 1,255 languages awaiting their first translation of the Bible.<sup>3</sup> Cameron Townsend was asked by an Indian of Guatemala, "if your God is so smart, why can't he speak our language?"<sup>4</sup>

Unreached people groups are church-less. John D. Robb writes:

Unreached peoples are, by definition, 'churchless' peoples. However they may be delineated by ethnic, linguistic, or social features, unreached peoples are those which [sic] do not yet have a flourishing church planting movement announcing and demonstrating the gospel of the Kingdom. God intends for churches to be an open display of obedience to Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Some unreached people groups are in remote places. Some are in dangerous places. Some are predominately disinterested in the Christian message. They are referred to by those who study missions as, "hidden peoples." This is a term devised

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.peoplegroups.org/understand/313.aspx> Accessed: 07/11/2024

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/dashboard](https://www.joshuaproject.net/people_groups/dashboard) Accessed: 07/09/2024

<sup>3</sup> <https://wycliffe.org/annual-report> Accessed: 07/09/2024 (in 2015, the number was 1900)

<sup>4</sup> Four Men, "Three Eras, Two Transitions: Modern Missions" by Ralph D. Winter in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Edited by Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library © 1981,1992,1999. Page 260

<sup>5</sup> John D. Robb, "Strategic Prayer" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Edited by Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library © 1981,1992,1999. Page 150



by Ralph Winter who used it to:

Describe some of the major blocks of unreached peoples in the world, who were being bypassed by missions because of our superficial mindset. They are not necessarily geographically isolated or hidden, but were hidden to our perception. This would include most Muslims, upper-caste Hindus, nonreligious, and many others.<sup>6</sup>

What does it take to reach an unreached people group?

*First, someone has to see them.* The woman with whom Jesus spoke at the well was in a “part of town” through which the Jews did not go. She was a woman, and as such, she was a person with whom men did not converse. She had a reputation that sent her to the well at a time of day without the companionship of other women, who would have shunned her. To Jesus’ disciples, she may as well have been invisible. But Jesus saw her and initiated a conversation.

*Secondly, reaching an unreached people group takes strategic prayer.* One reason is to break down the strongholds against the gospel and another reason is to ask God to send laborers into His harvest.<sup>7</sup>

*Third, it takes someone with the gift of cross-cultural ministry to reach out to them.* Someone who will study their culture, learn it, and adapt to it.

*Finally, it takes a strategic breakthrough into that group of some sort* — the sort that can come about only by the providence and power of God.

The principles for reaching unreached people groups can give us insight into reaching people within our own communities. Of course, these wouldn’t be people with no access to the gospel, as are unreached people groups, but pockets of people who are without Christ, nonetheless. We need to see them, also... to pray for them, develop a strategies to reach them, and then take the initiative to do so.

### ***Thinking About Today’s Passage:***

- *In John 4, why was the woman surprised Jesus would speak to her? What was the reaction of Jesus’ disciples to this conversation?*
- *In verses 34 to 38, Jesus applies what broad principles to this specific situation?*
- *In verses 39-42, what was the conclusion of the men of this community?*
- *As you look around our community, how many pockets of people, circles of friends, and groups based on things held in common can you list? Make up a nice name for each.*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, please make my lost friends aware of specific ways in which their lives are out of control. Bring strong conviction when they step out of bounds. Make them see the only power for becoming the people they ought to be is found in You through the new birth.

<sup>6</sup> Olson, C. Gordon (2012-02-10). *What in the World is God Doing?: An Introduction to World Missions* (Kindle Locations 8300-8302).

<sup>7</sup> John D. Robb, *Ibid.* Page 150.

## Prayer Support

Through prayer we can join missionaries in their labors. Paul invited believers to “Join me in my struggle by praying to God for me” (Romans 15:30, NIV). Prayer is a powerful force in world missions.

“Prayer needs no passport, visa or work permit. There is no such thing as a ‘closed country’ as far as prayer is concerned... Much of the history of mission could be written in terms of God moving in response to persistent prayer.”<sup>1</sup>

Ways that prayer empowers the work of missionaries include following:

**Prayer Gets Missionaries to the Field:** “Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” (Matthew 9:38). The Greek word for “send” is the same word used when Jesus would cast demons out of people. Sometimes, the Lord has to thrust us out of our comfort zones. Not only does prayer get missionaries to the field, it also gets local people in the areas where they serve into the ministry, and prayer sends them out as church planters, as well!

**Prayer Connects Missionaries to the Person of Peace:** Usually this person finds the missionaries. “The Person of Peace is the one God has prepared to receive the Gospel into a community for the first time.”<sup>2</sup> Cornelius (Acts 10) and Lydia (Acts 16) are examples of such persons. Missionaries have learned this principle from verses in Matthew 10 and Luke 9 and 10—especially, Luke 10:6-7: “If a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you.” Some of these people will become believers and others will not. However, even those who never become Christians will show goodwill toward the missionaries. This person is always “an influential person who recognizes the great value of what believers bring and becomes their ‘protector, promoter, and pathway finder’ in his ‘area of jurisdiction.’”<sup>3</sup>

**Prayer Opens Doors:** Paul asked the believers at Colossae to pray “that God may open to us a door for the word” Colossians 4:3 (ESV). Prayer gets missionaries in touch with people they couldn’t have met, otherwise.

**Prayer Gives them the Words:** Missionaries need the right words so the people of the other culture can understand the gospel and relate to the message. Paul asked for prayer that “words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19, NIV).

<sup>1</sup> Stephan Gaukroger (n.d.) Cited in Van Rheezen, Gailyn (2014-07-22).

*Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* (p. 54). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Watson, David and Paul Watson, “Church Planting: Finding a Person of Peace,” Excerpted with permission from *Contagious Disciple Making* by David Watson and Paul Watson © Thomas Nelson, 2014. [www.faithgateway.com/church-planting/#.VN0dmdii6hl](http://www.faithgateway.com/church-planting/#.VN0dmdii6hl) December 12, 2014

<sup>3</sup> Bridges, Eric, “Friend of the gospel: the man of peace,” Baptist Press. <http://imb.org/updates/storyview.aspx?StoryID=537#.VN0cS9ii6hl> Accessed: 02/12/2015



**Prayer Empowers the Spread of the Gospel in Specific Areas:** “Brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored” (2 Thessalonians 3:1, ESV). One missionary is reported to have said that to reach Muslims “it will take targeted and specific prayer for village chiefs, sheiks and religious mullahs on a village-by-village, province-by-province basis.”<sup>4</sup>

John Robb writes of a giant tree in Ethiopia. It had stood for generations, having withstood draught and famine. The people came to believe a spirit had given the tree divine powers. They looked to the tree for help. Adults would kiss the tree as they passed by. Children would say, “This tree saved us.” Christian workers there recognized the tree as an idol and a barrier to faith in Christ. Impressed to claim Matthew 21:21, which speaks of faith and a withered fig tree and mountains being removed, the workers prayed about the tree. It became common knowledge in the community that they were praying about the tree. Within six months the tree’s leaves began to wither and it dried up. Finally, it fell into the river. The amazed people said to the workers, “Your God has done this! ...Your God has dried up the tree!” Robb reports, “Within a few weeks, about a hundred villagers received Jesus Christ because they had seen His power displayed in the spectacular answer to the Christian’s prayers.”<sup>5</sup>

**Prayer Meets People in their Thoughts and Reasons With Them:** The Holy Spirit convicts people of their sins and draws them to Jesus. As we pray for the Holy Spirit to work in hearts, He speaks in their thoughts and feelings. He reasons with them. Once the gospel is explained, the Spirit makes it stick!

Missionary James Fraser wrote home, “I am not asking you just to give ‘help’ in prayer as a sort of sideline, but I am trying to roll the main responsibility of this prayer warfare on you. I want you to take the burden of these people upon your shoulders. I want you to wrestle with God for them.”<sup>6</sup>

### *Thinking About Today’s Passage:*

- *In Ephesians 3, what missionary concepts do you see (verses 6, 7-8, & 14)? How do these connect to Paul’s prayer in verses 16-19?*
- *Why do you think Paul prayed the three specific things he did (to experience the Holy Spirit power’s, the love of God, & the fullness of God) for people coming from a non-Christian culture?*

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord, please bring change to my lost friend that will last for a lifetime. Make him feel the need for a lifetime commitment. Don’t allow his fizzled-out false-starts in religion, based entirely on human effort, cause him to dismiss eternal life.

<sup>4</sup> Bridges, Eric, “ANALYSIS: Many converted Muslims stand—or fall—alone.” Baptist Press, March 13, 1997 <http://www.bpnews.net/4243> Accessed: 02/12/2015

<sup>5</sup> John D. Robb, “Strategic Prayer” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Edited by Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library © 1981,1992,1999. Page 145

<sup>6</sup> James Fraser, quoted at <http://omf.org/us/resources/people-and-places/famous-missionaries/james-o-fraser/> Accessed: 02/12/2015

## *Financial Support*

K.P. Yohannon is the leader of a group called, *Gospel for Asia*. Its emphasis is on training nationals to plant churches. Though from India, Dr. Yohannon has frequently spoken in American churches. He writes:

Often when I spoke at a church, the people would appear moved as I told of the sufferings and needs of the native evangelists. They usually took an offering and presented me with a check for what seemed like a great amount of money. Then with their usual hospitality, they invited me to eat with the leaders following to the meeting. To my horror the food and “fellowship” frequently cost more than the money they had just given to missions. And I was amazed to find that American families routinely eat enough meat at one meal to feed an Asian family for a week.<sup>1</sup>

In our prosperous country it is simply difficult for us to conceive of the standard of living in third world nations. For example, in Ecuador, the average wage was \$525 per month in 2023. There is a vast gap between resources we take for granted and what our Christian brothers in the third world have to work with.

It’s hard to get our arms around the fact there are 8 billion people in the world and 3.4 billion of them live in a place where Christians comprise less than 2% of the population.<sup>2</sup> Our 3,532 Southern Baptist missionaries<sup>3</sup> average one missionary for every 962,627 people in these places. How would you like to be responsible for evangelizing a population larger than Charlotte, NC all by yourself?

Consider church planting here in North America. As we plant churches in towns and counties without an evangelical congregation, church planters have to secure multiple funding partners. There will be denominational assistance, of course, but that will not be enough to meet the need. This will include other congregations which support the project as well as individuals.

Rent for a meeting place is very expensive, especially in large cities. Often the cost of living is much higher. There is advertising and promotion; how could you start a new church without letting people know you are now open? One approach is for the pastor to enlist a small planting team who moved to the area and find jobs to work as “tent makers.” They take basic jobs which enough off-time to work for the church part-time.

Sometimes, our Southern Baptist methods of supporting our missionaries and church planters are perceived as an impersonal, nameless, faceless system. How-

<sup>1</sup> K.P. Yohannon, *Revolution in World Missions*, page 42. gfa Books, A Division of Gospel for Asia ©2002

<sup>2</sup> <http://public.imb.org/globalresearch/Pages/default.aspx> Accessed 01/14,/2015

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.imb.org/fast-facts/> Accessed 07/10/2024





ever, our missionaries don't have to travel from church to church raising support. Think about the missionary. Would that missionary rather be visiting churches or be on the mission field? Time is short; would you rather he invest his time in sharing the gospel and starting churches or in reminding church treasurers to send the check? If you want to see a missionary, don't pull one off the field, go on a mission trip!

One writer coaches para-church workers in raising support: "I suggest 20 percent of your time go to fundraising/donor ministry"<sup>5</sup> — that's one in five days per week! Our missionaries often share how their colleagues from other Christian groups say they wish they had the support system our missionaries have!

Many have advocated a "simplified lifestyle" where a family lives on as little as possible to free up as much money as possible to give as many people as possible an opportunity to hear the gospel. I had a seminary professor who would cut expenses every way he could and purchase his clothes from thrift stores. While I'm not trying to tell you to buy your wardrobe at the thrift store, we would all do well to take stock of our priorities. Does it really make sense to spend more on our Christmas tree — which celebrates Jesus coming into the world to save sinners— than we do on the Lottie Moon Offering which sends missionaries into the world to tell them about Jesus?

What are your plans and priorities for church planting and missions giving?

### ***Thinking About Today's Passage:***

- *Would you say you have the same enthusiasm for giving found in II Corinthians 8:2-3?*
- *How is giving an indicator of spiritual growth and maturity? Verses 5-7*
- *How does Jesus model this spirit of giving in verse 9?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

O God, there are so many Esau's around—good ole boys I know, who don't even think about You. Please meet them in their thoughts and cause them to see their obligations to You. Make them to see the great value of knowing You.

<sup>4</sup> RAISING PERSONAL SUPPORT DOESN'T WORK? By Scott Morton, May 30, 2014  
<http://supportraisingsolutions.org/raising-personal-support-doesnt-work/> Accessed 01/14/2015

## *Moral Support*

There are many reasons why our missionaries and church planters would need to be encouraged. They are often lonely, away from home and family. They don't have the familiar foods, sports, and entertainment to enjoy. The weather may be harsh and demanding. The adjustment to a foreign culture and maintaining constant situational awareness can be exhausting. Most especially, missionaries are engaged in a difficult work; one doesn't take the gospel to a new place or people group without a fight from a devil. This battle can be very draining, emotionally. To stay encouraged, these cross-cultural ministers must have as much flowing in as going out. They "re-charge their spiritual batteries," for the most part, with a strong devotional life. Also, Paul described how certain people had an uplifting role over the course of his missionary ministry. He used the word, "refreshed" to describe this fostering of his spirit by fellow Christians:

"Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus... have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore recognize such people." — 1 Corinthians 16:17-18

"We were made to rejoice even more over the joy Titus had, because his spirit was refreshed by all of you." — 2 Corinthians 7:13

"May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains." — 2 Timothy 1:16

"I have great joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother." — Philemon 1:7

What are some ways we can encourage missionaries?

First, find out about any security issues. In some countries, missionaries may be endangered by our communications. For example, there may be some things you don't need to say and some words you shouldn't use in an e-mail to them.

We need to understand that missionaries and church planters are very busy people. We don't want our communications with them to become a drain on their time. "Quick texts or emails... are much better than one long email each month. These can be a quick prayer or a quick hello."<sup>1</sup> Naturally, frequency will depend on how well you know the particular missionary.

Another form of communication along this line is to send birthday cards and Christmas cards. These do not require any kind of response on the part of the missionary, but give encouragement without the homework assignment.

We can help our missionaries feel connected to home by telling the latest updates

<sup>1</sup> [www.thevillagechurch.net/the-village-blog/how-to-care-for-our-missionaries/](http://www.thevillagechurch.net/the-village-blog/how-to-care-for-our-missionaries/) Accessed: 01/15/2015

<sup>2</sup> [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/10-ways-to-encourage-a-missionary/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/10-ways-to-encourage-a-missionary/) Accessed: 01/15/2015



on family, school, work, life, sports—whatever it is we would talk about with them at home.<sup>3</sup>

Have a plan to pray for missionaries regularly, and tell them when you have prayed for them. “It can be encouraging to hear, ‘I’ll pray for you,’ but how much more so to hear, ‘Our family prayed for you last night,’ or ‘Our Bible study group prayed for you at our last meeting.’”<sup>3</sup>

If a church planter sends out a monthly e-mail, read it carefully. Then send a quick response to say you did and to promise to pray about a specific prayer request mentioned in the newsletter.

If a newsletter mentions a need, why not take the initiative to ship the resource or to send the money so the missionaries can buy the item where they serve? Sometimes, just having the tools we need to do our jobs can be a huge blessing.

Care packages are a similar way to encourage the family of a church planter or missionary. This is part of our CARE: New York ministry at our church, where Sunday School classes adopt ministers in New York State with Alabama connections. Food items from home which one cannot find on the field, such as grits or a favorite brand of barbeque sauce, are a nice touch. Magazine subscriptions can be a good gift. Amazon gift cards anywhere. Don’t forget the children when sending care packages!

The Baptist Missionary Society was formed in the late 1700’s. One of its leaders was William Carey, today known as the father of the modern missions movement. Andrew Fuller recalled a conversation that took place in a meeting of the society:

There was a gold mine in India, but it seemed almost as deep as the center of the earth. Who will venture to explore it? ‘I will go down,’ said Mr. Carey to his brethren, ‘but remember that you must hold the ropes.’”<sup>4</sup>

“Holding the ropes” includes prayer, financial, and moral support.

### ***Thinking About Today’s Passages:***

- *In Philippians 2:25, what are the five ways Paul describes Epaphroditus?*
- *In 2:19-24, what distinguished Timothy from some others who served with Paul?*
- *In 2:29-30, how are we to regard such missionaries?*
- *In 4:10-20, what did the church do to make Paul rejoice?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Heavenly Father, please put them around some Christians who love You and love each other. Allow them to see the Holy Spirit at work when they are together. (Cause them to see believers enjoying each other and serving one another.) In all this, let them get a glimpse of what it means to be in fellowship with You.

<sup>3</sup><http://katemotaung.com/2014/03/14/12-ways-to-encourage-missionaries/>

<sup>4</sup>Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey*. Birmingham: New Hope Publishers, 1991. Page 74

## *The Value of Mission Trips*

Southern Baptists, perhaps more than any other Christian group, have found mission teams to be helpful in strengthening the mission movement. Here are some ways mission trips are good for missions and church planting:

- *Mission teams are a force multiplier.* When a medical team comes to an area lacking good health care or a construction team comes to build or a team helps a church planting team host a block party, mission teams are a force multiplier. Teams can prayerwalk communities, provide childcare for a parent's night out, and go door to door in a canned food drive and leave information about the new church. Teams can help a small congregation in many ways. Mission trips put workers in place when they are needed.
- *Mission teams, coming in to help a church plant, can be a great encouragement to the new congregation.* As they go through the long slog of trying to get a church on its feet, it helps to know they're aren't alone. A Southern Baptist church planter in Indianapolis, Tony Manning, describes how:
 

“If you've ever run in a marathon, there are water stations every so many miles,” Manning said. “They are there to help you get refreshed, get a burst of energy, get cooled down. That's how we think of partnerships. Partnerships are important because they help encourage and sustain us as we keep moving in the way God is leading so this community will have a Gospel presence.”<sup>1</sup>
- *Mission trips are visual and experiential.* They are a great a way for students to see, with their own eyes, what missions looks like and then consider if missions might be God's call for them.
- *Members of mission teams often go home with a deeper understanding of the mission work and an enhanced commitment to support the cause of world evangelization.* They go home knowing better how to pray and more sympathetic to the need for financial support. When enough members of a church have been on a mission trip, the congregation reaches “critical mass” in regard to missions and church planting.
- *As they get to know each other and work together, both mission team members and the local people develop a deeper appreciation for the “unity with the universal church.”<sup>2</sup>* We are part of something bigger than our local congregations, individually.

<sup>1</sup>“Indy Church Plant Buoyed by Partnerships,” by Tobin Perry, Baptist Press, posted Monday, December 5, 2011 [www.bpnews.net/36719/indy-church-plant-buoyed-by-partnerships](http://www.bpnews.net/36719/indy-church-plant-buoyed-by-partnerships) Accessed: 01/19/2015

<sup>2</sup> Van Rheen, Gailyn (2014-07-22). *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* (p. 434). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.



- *From mission trips, church members learn how to think more like missionaries in their own communities, more strategically and evangelistically.*

Though some of these benefits accrue more to sending churches than to the missionaries the teams are sent to assist, that's OK. Mission trips "fire vision, quicken prayer and catalyze commitment to more permanent engagement."<sup>4</sup> That's a good thing! It helps the missions movement, overall.

Several action steps by churches sending mission teams are important to a mission trip that is a great blessing to the missionary in the field.

First, a church does well to partner with a church planter or missionary who has a clear strategy for using mission teams. Not every church planter and missionary has such a strategy. I was talking with a Director of Missions in a northern state who had a comprehensive strategy for using mission teams. He had vision tours for church and associational leaders to see where they could be of help. He provided teaching plans to train teams before they came. He offered several specific ways the teams could help. I asked him how many other DOM's had a plan for using mission teams in their associations. He replied that there were two in his state, out of fifteen.

To maximize the team's helpfulness it is important to match the skills of the team members to the needs of the missionaries. Similarly, we should match the size of the team to the size of the job. We shouldn't send a mission team around the world simply to give them a meaningful experience. We should send teams to help missionaries accomplish projects missionaries don't have the manpower to accomplish on their own.

Good training is important for a mission team to learn important rules of the culture to avoid giving insult and to effectively communicate the message in positive ways. Training may also be needed for team members to master the skills needed for the specific work they will do on the field.

### ***Thinking About Today's Passage:***

- *In Acts 11:19-21, what short-term mission team do we see and what did the team do?*
- *In verses 22-24, Barnabas is sent on a short-term mission trip; how is he described?*
- *In verses 36-41, when his mission trip turns into a short-term mission commitment, who does Barnabas get to help him?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Father, please create in them a longing to experience Your love. Work in their hearts to give them insights into what it means to be loved-on by You. Especially, let those who have never been told this truth, hear from someone with credibility how much You love them.

## *Ways Mission Trips Can Go Over to the Dark Side*

Mission trips are such meaningful experiences to the mission teams that one couldn't imagine why a missionary would not equally enthused about having a team come to help him. In fact, some missionaries would prefer not to host mission teams at all. "Critics have referred to short-term mission teams as the 'amateurization of missions' or 'drive-by missions.' Some long-term missionaries despise it..."<sup>1</sup> Why would they feel this way? Because they have hosted mission teams which were a drain on their time and energy without receiving a greater, corresponding benefit. Darren Carlson offers a mental picture:

Imagine a team from France calls your church and says they want to visit. They want to put on VBS (which you have done for years), but the material is in French. They have heard about how the U.S. church has struggled and want to help you fix it. They want to send 20 people, half of them youth. Only two of them speak English. They need a place to stay for free, with cheap food and warm showers if possible. During the trip half of the group's energy will be spent on resolving tension between team members. Two people will get sick. They'd like you to arrange some sightseeing for them on their free day. Do you want them to come?<sup>2</sup>

There are several ways a mission trip can be a burden rather than a blessing to the missionary or church planter in the field. This situation can happen when one or more of the following occurs:

- *Mission team members act like rich Americans.* Shopping too much and giving gifts too freely sends this message.
- *Team members act like tourists.* They aren't there to see the world or have an adventure with their friends. They're there to do a job.
- *Team members have an attitude of superiority,* instead of coming as servants and as learners. They shouldn't think they're more spiritual than the missionary or that they could reach the region in a short time.
- *The mission team has internal strife.* This problem can happen more easily on a mission trip than one might imagine. Team members are working long hours and they get tired. They are with the group the whole time and without sufficient "alone time" to recharge their batteries. The accommodations are not what they are used to at home. It all adds up to frustration and can spill over in a toxic overflow. Such strife is a poor witness and helping to resolve conflict

<sup>1</sup> A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Crowin, & Gary B. McGhee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*. Baker Academic, 2004. Page 281

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Van Rhee, Gailyn (2014-07-22). *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* (p. 441). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.



drains the missionary.

- *Team members fail to respect the missionary on the field* as the one who understands the culture and knows the best ways to reach the people there; this lack of respect can result in offending the local people. It may take the missionary months to clean the mess up.
- *Mission team members make promises to local people which cannot be kept.* The missionary is the one who will be left to explain why the mission worker didn't keep his word.
- *Team members place the missionary in a precarious situation regarding his safety.* Security needs will vary from one country to another. Certain words and behaviors, though acceptable in one's native country, may endanger the missionary or his family. One should always trust his training and the missionary since the missionary is the one who will live with the consequences.
- *When a church sends a bigger team than is necessary for the project or is larger than the local missionary can accommodate.* Team member size should be matched to the need of the mission project. If a church sends a bigger team than necessary, for example, one that is too large for the missionary to accommodate, the team can be a burden on the hosts. A church would do well to consider what the local church could do with all the money spent on airfare, lodging, and meals for team members who weren't really needed.
- *Team members attempt to bring American culture, instead of the gospel, to the local people.*

As we think more biblically and as we learn how to ministry cross-culturally, we equip ourselves to be a blessing to our missionaries, and not burden.

### ***Thinking About Today's Passage:***

- *In Acts 15:22-31, what mission is the team of Paul and Barnabas given? How are things going?*
- *In verses 25-26, how are Paul and Barnabas described?*
- *In verses 36-41, what happened to the team?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

O God, please create situations in which my unbelieving friend is around Christians whom he can respect for the quality of their work. Empower these believers to do their best work and also to be likeable. Open the eyes of my unbelieving friend to see the connection between their competence and You.

## *Don't Say, "Where Are We Going Next Year?" Think Ongoing Partnerships*

Sometimes, a church will send a team on a mission trip where team members will have meaningful experiences and enjoy working together. Then, on the way home, someone will ask the question, "Where are we going next year?"

What's wrong with this question? It has buried in it the assumption that mission trips are a form of church recreation. The team members help the church or missionary, but their motivation centers around what they gain from the experience: variety in travel, experiencing a different culture, the adventure of seeing a different place. Instead of traveling to a new place each year for mission trips, a church should give serious consideration to on-going partnerships.

Why are ongoing partnerships important? Getting a church plant on its feet takes time. This is true whether the church is located in North Africa or North America. They are starting from scratch and need more than one week of help.

It takes time for the partner church to learn the culture of the people and needs of the church planter or missionary. As we know each other better, where each has needs and what each has to offer, we know better how to work together to reach an area with the gospel. We know better how to pray for the other.

The concept of a partnership implies that neither party is being taken over by the other; each party retains its independence. Cecil Segal, Executive Director of the Indiana Baptist Convention, says that "cooperation" can mean you coming alongside me to help me be successful, whereas "collaboration" says that we will all sit at the table with mutual respect, realizing that each has something to contribute.<sup>2</sup> Partners collaborate as they find ways to reach shared objectives.

There are different kinds of partnerships. Some churches and associations can offer more in one way while other partners can offer more in other ways. Here are some types of partnerships in church planting:

- **Prayer Partners:** One can easily imagine a church with little to offer in the way of funding. Perhaps the congregation is mainly composed of senior adults, but do they ever pray in prayer meeting! These churches should not be viewed as second class partners. When a planter starts a new church in an area where one is needed, he is invading enemy territory. That planter is going to face terrific resistance from the evil one. He is going to need all the supporting fire-power he can get!
- **Funding Partners:** These partner churches send an amount each month for the support of the church. It takes a lot of time develop leaders and givers in a new

<sup>1</sup> <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html> Accessed: 01/20/2015

<sup>2</sup> As quoted by Lamar Duke in a personal e-mail





church. So, partner churches serve as the tithers who don't yet exist. A funding partner could be that tither while people are being led to the Lord, grow spiritually, and become givers. As it is with individual families, so it is with funding partners: some can give a little and some can give a lot. But with everyone's contributions taken together, it adds up! Funding partnerships are usually for a predetermined number of years. In Southern Baptist life, funding partners receive the church planter's monthly report by e-mail. However, the funding partner church may not have a supervisory or accountability role.

- **Sending Partners:** Sometimes a church will send, not money, but people to help start a new church. The entry level would be sending a team on a mission trip to assist the church. However, sending can involve far more commitment than a week to ten days. A church could "hive off" part of its membership to start a new church locally. Several families from the church may agree to go for a specified period of time and help start a new church. Or, families may move to another part of the country, seek employment in the new location, and become part of the launch team as lay members. There are many variations of how sending partnerships might work.
- **Mother Church:** In Genesis 1, we repeatedly read how each species would reproduce "after its kind." In the same way, churches reproduce churches. The church that starts a new church is called the "mother church" and the new congregation it helps establish is called the "daughter church." The mother church is the main sponsor church, assuming a larger share of responsibility regarding funding. It keeps the books and writes the checks in the early days, until the new church has these structures in place. The church planter reports to the mother church, which provides a coach and accountability.

Ongoing partnerships allow sufficient time to know our partners and learn better how to help them and to provide the sustained assistance needed.

### ***Thinking About Today's Passage:***

- *In Colossians 4, Don't worry about how to pronounce all the names; instead, read the descriptions of each person and note what kind of partnership is being described.*
- *In verses 17, what would be the difference between a "received" ministry and an achieved ministry?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Heavenly Father, please cause believers, who at work are the whiners and slackers, to grow in this area. Empower Your people at my place of work to stand out for good work quality and a good attitude. Make my unbelieving friend take notice of those believers and to see the practical difference You make in a fellow employee.

## *Indigenous Churches*

**Indigenous: In-dij-a-nus, Growing naturally in the local region and culture**

There was a period after the Second World War when many people from the South, seeking employment in auto factories and the like, moved north. As these Southerners moved, they wanted to establish churches like those “back home.” Thus, many Southern Baptist churches were established. Some of these churches were like little Southern Heritage Preservation Societies. One of the main methods of outreach was to stand in the grocery store parking lot by a car with a license plate from a Southern state. Here church members would invite the person who had just moved from the South to their church. Another variation was when members invited someone to church they had heard in a store say, “ya’ll.” These churches were modeled on their memories from the way churches were “back home.” And, while the churches back home changed with the times, these churches were still singing blue grass style music and using only the King James Version of the Bible. Of course, what they didn’t count on was that their children wouldn’t grow up as Southerners. Nor would they understand that their churches weren’t designed to reach the people in the places in the North where they lived.

One of the early decisions in church history was the one by the church at Jerusalem not to impose the entire Jewish culture upon Gentile converts. The church has had to re-learn this principle from time to time, throughout church history. After a period of colonial thinking, the leaders and thinkers in the missions movement began to understand that churches needed to be “indigenous.” This term came to mean, that within the bounds of Scripture, church organizational structures and places of worship and ways of operating should “fit” the local culture. “The church of Jesus Christ in China, in Latin America or in Africa, is not, should not be a branch of the church in America. It should be church in its own right.”<sup>1</sup> We came to see how churches on the mission field should be established to become “self-supporting, self-governing, and self propagating” — the “three selves.”<sup>2</sup>

An indigenous church is one which “lives in the pattern of the local society... under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures... [to] meet the needs and fulfill the meanings of that society and not of any outside group.”<sup>3</sup> This is one reason why if everyone in the village lives in a grass hut, the missionaries don’t ask the local people to sing American praise songs and project the words onto the wall. Not only may the locals not have electricity, the music will be of an entirely different style. It simply wouldn't be culturally relevant.

<sup>1</sup> Hodges, Melvin L., *The Indigenous Church: A Complete Handbook on How to Grow Young Churches*. Springfield, MO.: Gospel Publishing House, © 1953, 1971, 1976. Page 20

<sup>2</sup> Wagner, Peter, *Frontiers in Mission Strategy*. Moody Press, © 1971. Page 163

<sup>3</sup> “Cultural Implications of the Indigenous Church” by William A. Smalley in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Edited by Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library © 1981,1992,1999. Pages 475-476

Indigenous church shouldn't look like our churches. It's not that they just aren't able to do the work of the church as well as we do it. It's that our approaches wouldn't fit their culture. Additionally, an outsider is not the best person to design these ministry approaches; as the local leaders develop, they will figure things out for themselves. "Indigenous churches cannot be founded. They can only be planted, and the mission is usually surprised at which seeds grow."<sup>4</sup>

In the beginning, the missionary will have to make all the decisions and do all the work. He has crossed cultures to take the gospel to a new people group; so, there aren't any Christians in that group yet. Over time, as the missionary makes disciples and develops leaders, the local believers take on leadership roles. Finally, as the local churches become strong, his role becomes more of a consultant, as they themselves plant churches and, possibly, send missionaries of their own.<sup>5</sup>

The goal of the missionary is the same as Paul's: to equip believers to stand on their own feet and carry on the work of the church without needing someone else to look over their shoulders—"Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, working side by side for the faith that comes from the gospel" (Philippians 1:27).

At the time of the Communist takeover in Mainland China in 1949, there were fewer than one million protestants in that country. But after the missionaries were forced out, and in spite of years of persecution, "Christianity has grown faster in China than any other place in the world. It's gone from approximately 1 million Christians to around 100 million."<sup>6</sup>

The same thing happened in Ethiopia. During World War II, the Italians forced the missionaries out. Among the Wallamo people there were 48 believers when the missionaries left. They would return to find 10,000 believers and 100 churches.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Thinking About Today's Passage:***

- *In Acts 15, Judaizers in the church wanted to require the Gentiles coming to Christ to follow the Old Testament Law. At a council held in Jerusalem, what position does Peter take in verse 6-11? Mark the key phrases in verse 8-11.*
- *In verses 13-21, what is James' counsel regarding this issue? (note, especially, verse 19)*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

O God, some of my lost friends think Christians are takers, people who are just out for themselves. Please allow these friends to discover otherwise. May they see or receive generosity from a believer – and may this act of kindness be given in such a pleasing way that blesses — they will be attracted to Jesus.

<sup>4</sup> William Smalley, *Ibid.*, Page 478

<sup>5</sup> Peter Wagner, *Ibid.* Page 176

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2023/why-is-christianity-growing-in-china/> 2023, Accessed: 07/10/2024

<sup>7</sup> Davis, Raymond, *Fire on the Mountains*. Zondervan © 1966, 1975. Pages 109, 146

## *There's No Substitute for a Missionary On the Field Year-Round*

Some churches are budgeting more of their missions money for their own mission projects in order to send more of their members on mission trips and, conversely, sending less funding to the mission boards that support full-time missionaries. It's likely that those who support these drastic cuts to our career missionaries are unaware of what a full-time missionary offers 52 weeks per year:

- He has training which our church members do not have. He's already spent three to four years after college earning a seminary degree and, then on top of that, if he is a Southern Baptist missionary, his family also received eight weeks of intensive training at the IMB's International Learning center. After his training, he will go to a place in the region to learn the language. Depending on the language, that will take six months to a year.
- He knows the language, including the local sayings and idioms.
- He knows how to pick up on the subtle cues that someone is open to the gospel or the message is not being well-received.
- He knows the customs of the area which could give offense and which could show respect to the local people.
- He has developed relationships in the area. He has earned credibility among the local people, who have come to know and trust him. In many cultures, trust is awarded far more slowly than in other cultures; the level of trust built up by the missionary cannot be earned in a week's time.
- He knows from experience the best ways to reach the local people—what works and what doesn't. Being on the mission field year-round, he doesn't have a new learning curve every week.
- He knows who can and can't be trusted. A partnership with a trusted missionary can help a church avoid some of the traps Darren Carlson describes:

I have seen with my own eyes or know of houses in Latin America that have been painted 20 times by 20 different short-term teams; fake orphanages in Uganda erected to get Westerners to give money; internet centers in India whose primary purpose is to ask Westerners for money; children in African countries purposefully mutilated by their parents so they would solicit sympathy while they beg; a New England-style church built by a Western team in Cameroon that is never used except when the team comes to visit. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Darren Carlson, "Why Your Should Consider Canceling Your Short-term Mission Trips" June 18, 2012 [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-you-should-consider-cancelling-your-short-term-mission-trips](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-you-should-consider-cancelling-your-short-term-mission-trips) Accessed: 01/21/2015



Consider the sustained influence of a missionary in the field. A mission team can evangelize, but the missionary is there long-term and can develop leaders. He has influence with the people week-in and week-out. He knows when people are struggling and knows when the people are growing.

Consider the stewardship of our limited resources. Do the math on the work hours gained. Think about the cost of the round-trip airfare (\$1,200 to the far east, for example). Then, add the cost of lodging and meals. Multiply this subtotal by the number of people on the mission team. One mission team could be spending enough money to keep a missionary family on the field for six months! Do we want to spend all of our missions money on airplane tickets or on missions? Mission trips are a good part of the missions mix. However, once a certain point is reached, the mission trip approach being discussed here is no longer good stewardship.

Compare what you get per man hour. Would it really be fair to say that one hour worked by a member of a mission team is equal to one hour worked by a career missionary? Of course not! The missionary has had the training, learned the language, has the experience, knows the culture, and has developed relationships in the area. We know God honors the servant's heart of each team member. However, in terms of evangelism and church planting, the missionary will be far more effective.

If we are going to send our members on mission trips, who will set up the projects for the mission teams? It's the missionary who will arrange lodging and places to eat. We need more missionaries with a strategy to use mission teams in their work; we don't need to reduce the budgets that support those missionaries.

When done right, mission trips are good and helpful. However, there is no substitute for a missionary on the field year-round.

### ***Thinking About Today's Passage:***

- *In I Thessalonians 2:1-12, in what steps does Paul say he took to earn credibility?*
- *2:8: What, in addition to the gospel, was Paul willing to share with the Thessalonians?*
- *In 3:1-10, why did Paul send his associate, Timothy, to visit the Thessalonians?*
- *In this entire passage, what reminds you of a career missionary and his work?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Father, please place in their path believers of valor. Fill those Christians around them with courage that doesn't flinch in a crisis and enables them to always come through. Show what You can do through a person who is surrendered to You.

## *The Importance of Planting New Churches*

God hard-wired us to grow up, looking forward to the day when we get married and have children of our own. If there is a medical issue preventing a couple from being able to have a baby, they will often seek help from a fertility clinic and will go to great expense and expend much time in order to give birth. Christians reproduce by leading other people to faith in Christ. Churches reproduce by giving birth to daughter churches. Unfortunately, many churches do not sense that something is wrong when they never give birth.

One reason many churches are reluctant to participate in church planting is their experiences with new churches have all been negative. These negative experiences usually come in the form of a church split, “unplanned pregnancy.” Yet, every church that ever existed had a beginning. Someone went to the community and planted that church. It is only right that that congregation should want to plan to carry on the family name and have a baby of their own, a new church.

**Why should we plant churches?** Starting new churches is a good evangelistic strategy. Peter Wagner called planting new churches, “the single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven.”<sup>1</sup> New churches are over three times more effective in evangelism; established Southern Baptist churches average 3.4 baptisms per 100 members annually while new churches average 11.7 baptisms per 100 members.<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller summarizes the importance of starting new churches as a part of an evangelistic plan to reach a city:

Nothing else—not crusades, outreach programs, para-church ministries, growing mega-churches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes—will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting.<sup>3</sup>

Ed Stetzer writes that starting new churches is essential to the future ministry of our denomination:

‘Studies show that if a denomination wishes to reach more people, the number of new churches it begins each year must equal at least 3 percent of the denomination's existing churches.’<sup>5</sup> [his footnote] Southern Baptists plant about 4 percent, but still not nearly enough if we are to reach North America. That is only 1 percent over the break-even point.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, our North American Mission Board has established the goal of in-

<sup>1</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1990), page 11. Cited in Ed Stetzer, “The Most Effective Evangelistic Strategy Under Heaven,” SBC Life, June 2003, [www.sbclife.org/articles/2003/06/sla14.asp](http://www.sbclife.org/articles/2003/06/sla14.asp)

<sup>2</sup> Carol Pipes, “Why Every Church Must Plant,” *OnMission Magazine*, North American Mission Board, Summer 2011, Page 11-13

<sup>3</sup> Handout, “Why Plant Churches” by Tim Keller [www.redeemer2.com/resources/papers/why%20plant%202%2011%20TLeaders.pdf](http://www.redeemer2.com/resources/papers/why%20plant%202%2011%20TLeaders.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ed Stetzer, “The Most Effective Evangelistic Strategy Under Heaven,” SBC Life, June 2003, [www.sbclife.org/articles/2003/06/sla14.asp](http://www.sbclife.org/articles/2003/06/sla14.asp)

<sup>5</sup> Excerpt from the “Eastland Report: Church Planting,” [www.easum.com/church.htm](http://www.easum.com/church.htm), December 11, 2002)



creasing the number of SBC churches involved in direct financial support of new church starts to 10%. If a church cannot be the sole sponsor it can participate in a “cluster” with other churches.”<sup>5</sup>

**Where should we plant churches?** The best place to start a new church is the place where there isn’t one. There are many towns — in fact, entire counties—in the western and northern parts of the United States — without a single evangelical congregation. The same is true in Canada. Again, the phrase “evangelical church” is meant to designate any denomination that actively preaches the gospel. Compare the number of churches in the zip code where your church is located to entire counties without a gospel witness. This is one reason why your church should partner with church planters in such places.

Another “place” to plant a new church is within a population that doesn’t have a disciple-making church. There may be dozens of good churches in the area, but not one which people from that people group, subculture, or ethnic group would feel comfortable attending. We all know from experience that “folks like us make a church like ours” and “a church like ours can best reach folks like us.” Ask if the existing churches are effectively reaching that population *in significant numbers*. A few exceptions here and there aren’t enough. Is it time to start a church to effectively reach that group? *It takes all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people.*

**When should we plant churches?** If a couple waits until it thinks it can afford to have children, it will never have any children. Many churches want to wait until they are a certain size to birth a daughter church. Kevin Marsico told of one church that averaged 3,500 people in attendance and thought it needed to reach 5,000 before it could plant a church, and of another church that averaged only 36 and, yet, reproduced! “Farmers who wait for perfect weather never plant” (Ecclesiastes 11:4, NLT).

The pattern of church planting found in Acts 14 is still valid today: evangelize the people, congregationalize believers into a community of faith, and train leaders for the church.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Thinking About Today’s Passage:***

- *In Acts 14:21-28, Barnabas and Paul are in the cities of southern Asia Minor. What is their message to these new converts in the new churches which they re-visit?*
- *List examples from this passage that must be done in order to establish a new church.*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Father, my unbelieving friends are in the most insecure position—and it isn’t merely a matter of *feeling insecure*. Their feet are on slippery places. Awaken them to the danger they are in: make them to feel it. Impress upon them the urgency of turning to You.

<sup>5</sup> Carol Pipes, “Why Every Church Must Plant,” *OnMission Magazine*, North American Mission Board, Summer 2011, Page 11-13

<sup>6</sup> Keller, Timothy J. (2012-09-04). *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (p. 355). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

## Reaching Cities

The North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (NAMB) has decided to prioritize 50 cities in North America. 32 cities have been designated as “Send Cities” to which the main thrust of the board’s efforts will be channeled.<sup>1</sup> Reaching the cities is a major emphasis in missions agencies and seminaries throughout evangelical Christianity right now. It is not the cities in North America only which are in view, but around the world. Roger Greenway summarizes the rationale for this emphasis:

“Cities are the new frontier of Christian missions. Because of their size, influence, diversity, and needs, cities present enormous challenges. To neglect cities would be a strategic mistake because, as cities go, the world goes.”<sup>2</sup>

**Population:** In 1950, only two cities in the world, New York and London, had a population above eight million inhabitants.<sup>3</sup> Today, Wikipedia lists 39 cities in the world with a population exceeding eight million people (in the city proper). 81 cities in the world have a population exceeding 5 million people.<sup>4</sup> We’ve had mega-cities; we now add “meta-cities” to our vocabularies, which is a city with a population of 20 million or more. Al Mohler states “This much is clear — the cities are where the people are. In the course of less than 300 years, our world will have shifted from one in which only 3 percent of people live in cities, to one in which 80 percent are resident in urban areas.”<sup>5</sup> In North America, 83 percent of the population currently lives in metropolitan areas.<sup>6</sup>

**Influence:** According to Aaron Coe, cities are “the mouthpiece of any nation and the place where culture is created.”<sup>7</sup> Cities are home base for the cultural elites, whom Tim Keller describes as having “a disproportionate influence on how human life is lived in a society because they exert power in business, publishing, the media, the academy, and the arts.”<sup>8</sup> Some cities are designated as being a “world class city,” which is a city of over one million persons and exerting international influence.<sup>9</sup> Further, cities have a strong appeal for young adults; “A whopping 88% want to be in an urban setting.”<sup>10</sup> Keller explains: “The prospects for advance-

<sup>1</sup> [www.namb.net/cities/](http://www.namb.net/cities/) Accessed: 01/22/2015

<sup>2</sup> Roger S. Greenway, “The Challenge of the Cities” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Edited by Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library © 1981,1992,1999. Page 553

<sup>3</sup> Greenway, *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_largest\\_cities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_largest_cities) Accessed July 11, 2024

<sup>5</sup> Al Mohler, “From Megacity to “Metacity” — The Shape of the Future” [www.albertmohler.com/2010/04/22/from-megacity-to-metacity-the-shape-of-the-future/](http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/04/22/from-megacity-to-metacity-the-shape-of-the-future/) Accessed: 01/26/2015

<sup>6</sup> [www.namb.net/cities/](http://www.namb.net/cities/) Accessed: 01/22/2015

<sup>7</sup> [www.namb.net/overview-why-send/](http://www.namb.net/overview-why-send/) Accessed: 01/22/2015

<sup>8</sup> Keller, Timothy J. (2012-09-04). *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (p. 162). Zondervan. Kindle Edition

<sup>9</sup> C. Peter Wagner, “On the Cutting Edge of Mission Strategy” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Edited by Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library © 1981,1992,1999. Page 535





ment, the climate of constant innovation and change, the coming together of diverse influences and people — all of these appeal to young adults.”<sup>11</sup> In addition to their population, the influence of the cities is another reason to reach them. This is why NAMB has a stated goal to “see a gospel influence radiate from the cities we reach, thus impacting the rest of the region.”<sup>12</sup>

**Diversity:** The world is coming to the cities. For example, “just 51 percent of New Yorkers speak only English at home”<sup>13</sup> The city reports “an estimated 200 languages are spoken in New York City.”<sup>14</sup> People groups are immigrating to the United States whom we could not reach in their homelands, but who will be open to the gospel as they adapt to life here. Roger Greenway explains, “New people in the cities are open to new ideas, including ideas about God and religion.”<sup>15</sup>

**Strategy:** John Stott writes, “It seems to have been Paul’s deliberate policy to move purposefully from one strategic city-centre to the next. What drew him to the cities was probably that they contained the Jewish synagogues, the larger populations, and the influential leaders.”<sup>16</sup> The word “pagan” is used to describe a person with no relationship with God, who lives an uncouth life and, perhaps, worships idols. It originates in a Latin word, meaning “country dweller.” In the early days of the church, the gospel was taken to the cities first, and those from the country were the last to respond to the gospel. Al Mohler cautions us today:

If the Christian church does not learn new modes of urban ministry, we will find ourselves on the outside looking in. The Gospel of Jesus Christ must call a new generation of committed Christians into these teeming cities. As these new numbers make clear, there really is no choice.<sup>17</sup>

### *Thinking About Today’s Passage:*

- *In Acts 17:36-34, Paul is in Athens. While Ephesus was a religious center and Corinth a center of commerce, Athens (though itself full of idols) was an intellectual center. How did Paul approach these intellectuals? (Note verses 22-23 and verses 26-28)*
- *What themes did Paul emphasize in speaking to these people without the Bible?*

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Awaken, please Lord, within my unbelieving friends, a discontent. Make the passing pleasures of sin feel fleeting and frivolous and the possessions and hobbies inadequate. And may they come to see their discontentment is the result of Your absence from the rightful place You have in their lives.

<sup>10</sup> <http://blogs.wsj.com/developments/2011/01/13/no-mcmansions-for-millennials/> Accessed: 01/26/2015

<sup>11</sup> Keller, *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> [www.namb.net/overview-why-send/](http://www.namb.net/overview-why-send/) Accessed: 01/22/2015

<sup>13</sup> [www.wnyc.org/story/255668-blog-census-languages-new-yorkers-speak/](http://www.wnyc.org/story/255668-blog-census-languages-new-yorkers-speak/) Accessed: 01/26/2015

<sup>14</sup> [www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/pop\\_facts.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/pop_facts.shtml) Accessed: 01/26/2015

<sup>15</sup> Greenway, *Ibid*, Page 553

<sup>16</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Bible Speaks Today; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1990), 293.

<sup>17</sup> Mohler, *Ibid*.

## ***Small Towns: Where You Can Have a Disproportionate Impact***

Tim Keller has written some very helpful materials on reaching cities with the gospel. Some of the material deals with the need for training Christian workers to minister in the cities since many ministers come from small towns:

A couple of years ago, I met with American missionaries who had been sent to one of the fast-growing megacities of China. They told me their mission agency had assumed that the training they needed had to do with learning the language and understanding Chinese culture. But after a while they realized they knew nothing about living in cities. Each member of their team had grown up in small towns in southern and midwestern areas of the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Not one member of this team of missionaries had grown up in a city. Well, this is revealing! A disproportionately large number of our church planters and missionaries come from small towns.

Galilee was a region of northern Israel. It was not limited to area around the sea of Galilee. Nazareth was in Galilee. It was not a region with large cities, but of villages and towns. Though not devoid of strategic significance, Galilee was somewhat isolated from the rest of Jewish life. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Tiberius would become the center of Jewish religious life. However, in Jesus' day, Galilee was far from the learning center for Bible scholarship. Galilee was populated by working class folks with a lot of "pop-theology" in their thinking. Jerusalem was the home of the religious establishment, not Galilee. Nor was Galilee the locus of political power or a cultural center.

Nevertheless, Jesus made his home in Capernaum. He was called a Galilean. It has been said that Jesus spent over 70 percent of his ministry in Galilee. Certainly, as you read the Gospels, you become aware that this is where He spent the vast majority of His time in disciple-making and in ministry. Eleven out of the twelve apostles were Galileans. The Gospel did not go from Jerusalem to Galilee; the Gospel went from Galilee to Jerusalem.

Consider how many young people move from small towns to the cities. Many of them "make good." They are bright, get admitted to leading universities, prepare for specialized professions, and end up living in large cities where they can pursue their careers. Our small town churches should take these situations into consideration as they shape their strategies. What would happen if our youth ministries were designed to teach students a biblical worldview and to equip them for Chris-

<sup>1</sup> Keller, Timothy J. (2012-09-04). *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (pp. 158-159). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.



tian service? Some small town students will go to the cities like missionaries. They will make contributing church members, not in terms of financial support only, but as pace-setters and leaders. Some will end up as part of the core group in new church plants. Some will end up in professions working with colleagues who have little knowledge of the Christian faith, some from other nations. These are terrific opportunities for Christian witnesses.

And what of those who stay and spend their entire lives in their home town? Kingdom growth, missions support, mission trips, and church planting can all happen from your world-wide headquarters in your own small town.

A church can have a disproportionately large impact in a small town evangelistically, in disciple-making, and on the moral climate in the town. Here are five ways a church in a small town can have a disproportionately large impact:

1. On a percentage basis, the church will usually see more results, a greater response rate to the gospel.
2. There is more religious freedom and more respect for the sacred in small towns. Sometimes, it is mere lip service, but even lip service gives us more access.
3. There is less to do in a small town, so there is less competition and more opportunities to connect with people.
4. Ministry in small towns is more cost effective due to the lower cost of living. The church can experience more ministry bang for the buck.
5. Cities are gumbos; small towns are melting pots. As a result, a small town church needs only one basic strategy to reach the town. It doesn't have to have a multi-pronged strategy to reach several different groups.

In a small town, you are in the kind of place Jesus chose to be His home and as His base of operations. And if you are in a small town, you can have a significant strategic impact of your own – from there. Jesus did.

### ***Thinking About Today's Passage:***

- *In Matthew 4:12-25, Matthew quotes Isaiah to describe the place where Jesus would begin his ministry. What impression does one get of Galilee from this passage?*
- *In verses 18-20, as Jesus called His disciples, what was His appeal?*
- *What was Jesus' ministry approach in verses 23 and following?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Father, I pray you will not allow discouragement in my unbelieving friends to be wasted. Use this time in their lives to help them see that Jesus is the only way up from where they're down.

## *We Adapt to Them, They Don't Adapt to Us*

I remember a missions professor in seminary telling of a missionary couple inviting a guest over for supper. He arrived later than the appointed time. When he arrived, he asked for directions to the restroom. The missionary wife was shocked to hear the shower running. What the new missionaries would learn later was that it was customary in that place for a host to offer a shower to their guests.

Our church has a saying that what you grow up with is what you think is normal. This is true in small ways as we compare how our family lives to how other families live. This fact may be seen in much larger ways when we visit another culture. We may be shocked to experience the differences in customs and lifestyle.

“Over the course of your life, you have learned literally thousands of ‘scripts’ for events in daily life. Going to the store, asking for help, dealing with a problem, proper eating habits—all these and uncounted others you learned as you grew up. One of the ways culture shock hits is when you learn your scripts no longer work.”<sup>1</sup>

Because we have gotten the idea the way we do things is normal, we may feel the ways of the other culture are *abnormal*. The term for this is ethnocentrism, considering our culture superior to the other culture and sitting in judgment on it.

There are numerous examples of cultural differences to which a missionary or members of a mission team may need to adjust:

**Concept of time:** When is a person considered late? In North America people will be excused if they are five minutes tardy. In Latin America, one-half hour, and the Yapese will excuse a person even if he is two hours late.<sup>2</sup> In Arabia, servants show up precisely at the appointed time, but equals will arrive later; if you were to show up on time, you may communicate that you are the person’s servant.<sup>3</sup>

**Politeness:** I once saw a television show about a plane crash that happened because the pilots came from a culture that was highly respectful of authority. They were too polite to tell the air traffic controllers they were nearly out of fuel and demand permission to land *right now!* In some cultures, in an attempt to please, people will tell the missionary what he wants to hear. The missionary may then feel deceived.<sup>4</sup> One can see how important communication is in evangelism in trying to determine when a person *sincerely desires* to commit his life to Christ.

<sup>1</sup> A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Crowin, & Gary B. McGhee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*. Baker Academic, 2004. Page 185

<sup>2</sup> Ligenfelter, Sherwood G. and Marvin K.; Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, 2nd ed.. Baker Academic Books, ©1986, 2003. Page 38-39

<sup>3</sup> “Cultural Differences and the Communion of the Gospel” by Paul G. Hiebert in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Edited by Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library © 1981,1992,1999. Page 378

<sup>4</sup> Hiebert, *Ibid.*, Page 377

**Non-verbal communication:** This form of communication includes eye contact and bowing (how low should one go?). In some cultures, it is important not to cross one's legs, as showing someone the sole of one's shoe is a strong insult.

**Diet and eating:** Eating guinea pig may strike us like eating the pet hamster. Going to the market and selecting your next meal, while it is still alive, may be outside your comfort zone. "Most Americans shudder when they enter an Indian restaurant and see people eating curry and rice with their fingers."<sup>5</sup>

**Differences in personal space:** In some cultures, people stand close to each other when talking; an American may feel the compulsion to back up a step. In some cultures, people give big bear-hugs to people they have just met.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, there are rules of etiquette for relating to the opposite sex and to senior adults, and much more. If we fail to adapt well, we can enter into culture shock. Peter Wagner describes four stages of culture shock:

1. *The tourist stage*... he finds his surroundings quaint and exciting.
2. *Rejecting strange values*... He reacts negatively because... The dirt in the marketplace is *wrong*... urinating in public is *wrong*...
3. *Craving familiar values*... hesitancy to leave the house, exclusive association with other missionaries or foreigners, unwillingness to hire a maid or use nationals as babysitters, obsession for washing hands, disgust for national food and drink...
4. *Depression*... the culture shocked person succumbs to defeat... people will either reject the second culture and return to the first or "go native." [This person] has proved by definition he did not have the missionary gift.<sup>7</sup>

Ron Blue writes "Every missionary needs to note the differences with a positive attitude and take the challenge to adjust as much as possible"<sup>8</sup> So, when you are on a mission trip in a northern state, don't ask for sweet tea or grits. It's not their job to adjust to us; it's our job to adjust to them!

### ***Thinking About Today's Passage:***

- *In Acts 10, Peter has a vision in which God tells him to eat non-kosher foods. In verses 9-15, how did he react—not only in terms of his word, but his emotional reaction?*
- *In this chapter, what is the end result of Peter learning the meaning of the vision?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, my unbelieving friends have shown disregard for You. They have failed to sense their dependence on You or to appreciate Your goodness to them. Wake them up to this fact. Make them to feel the selfish sinfulness of the self-sufficiency in their lives.

<sup>5</sup> Hiebert, *Ibid.*, Page 378

<sup>6</sup> Blue, Ron, *Evangelism and Missions*. Word, ©2001 Pages 208-209

<sup>7</sup> Ralph Winter in "Evangelical Missions Quarterly," 1970, 55. Cited by C. Peter Wagner in *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, Moody Press, 1971. Pages 94-95

<sup>8</sup> Ron Blue, *Ibid*, Page 209

## *Linear Thinkers and Oral Learners*

This devotional booklet is written by a linear thinker. It's easy to tell, isn't it? The numbered lists and bullet points give it away, right off. Linear thinking refers to a sequential, deductive way of thinking. The logic works this way for example: The Bible teaches all people have sinned... I am a person... Therefore, I am a sinner. How many sermons have you heard that talk about "Five Steps to..." or "Three Reasons to..."? This style of communication is often helpful in our culture. However, around 70% of the world's population<sup>1</sup> would find it difficult to relate to the gospel being explained using this approach.

There are two basic ways in which people think: there are literate/linear thinkers and there are oral learners. The problem is "an estimated 90% of the world's Christian workers work among oral peoples using literate communication styles."<sup>2</sup> As we engage in cross-cultural evangelism, this is a factor we should consider.

Zoe Allen reported on the work in Zambia of missionary Jeff Powers. She quotes him and explains the difference between these two styles of learning:

"It goes deeper than just hearing versus reading... It gets down to how people learn and how people think—how they store information. Literate people store information in books or any kind of literature. An oral person will store their information in songs, poetry, dramas or stories."

Oral learners get their information from sources close to real-life experiences. They process information by applying it to their own world or their own life—with a concrete, functional logic.

Literate learners are often from advanced and highly-educated societies. They learn well from books and can absorb continuous prose easily. They are usually separated from what they are learning and think with abstract, linear logic.<sup>3</sup>

Oral learners are not limited to members of tribal groups in the African bush or the Amazon rain forest. Many people in our own country, in our "post-literate information age," never read another book after they graduate from high school. They are able to read but do not enjoy doing so. They may look at Tweets and Facebook on their smart phone, but they don't think in sequential, deductive ways.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Steve Evans, "world\_of\_orality\_revised\_feb\_2013\_.ppt", PowerPoint presentation, Slide 43, [www.commissionstories.com/africa/?ACT=55&fid=342&d=1608&f=world\\_of\\_orality\\_revised\\_feb\\_2013\\_.ppt](http://www.commissionstories.com/africa/?ACT=55&fid=342&d=1608&f=world_of_orality_revised_feb_2013_.ppt) Accessed: January 27, 2015

<sup>2</sup> "Making Disciples Of Oral Learners," Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 54 Produced by the Issue Group on this topic at the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization hosted by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization In Pattaya, Thailand, September 29 to October 5, 2004. [www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54\\_IG25.pdf](http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54_IG25.pdf), Page 9

<sup>3</sup> Jeff Powers as quoted in Bible becomes real for non-readers in Zambia by Zoe Allen, February 6, 2013, [www.commissionstories.com/africa/stories/view/bible-becomes-real-for-non-readers-in-zambia](http://www.commissionstories.com/africa/stories/view/bible-becomes-real-for-non-readers-in-zambia) Accessed: 01/27/2015

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Orville Boyd Jenkins, "Orality and the Post-Literate West," <http://orvillejenkins.com/orality/postliterate.html> Accessed: 01/27/2015



Characteristics of Oral and Print Communicators	
Oral Communicators Learn by Hearing...	Print Communicators Learn by Seeing...
Oral Communicators Learn by Observing and Imitating...	Print Communicators Learn by Reading, Studying, Analyzing...
Oral Communicators Think and Talk About Events, not Words...	Print Communicators Talk About Words, Concepts, Principles...
Oral Communicators Use Stories to Package Information...	Print Communicators Manage Knowledge in Categories and Store It in Print...
Oral Communicators Memorize Information Handed Down from the Past...	Print Communicators Seek to Discover New Information...
Oral Communicators Value Tradition...	Print Communicators Value Novelty...

Above, Steve Evans provides a table listing the differences between oral learners and linear thinkers, referred to below as "Print Communicators"<sup>5</sup>

It's a challenge to have a men's discipleship group where the guys are supposed to read a chapter in a book and then meet to discuss it—if they won't read the book. And, it wouldn't fix the problem to give the men the audio book. "It is not enough to take materials created for literates and simply read them onto a recorded format. Making something audible does not necessarily make it an 'oral' style of communication."<sup>6</sup>

So what do we do? For years, many missionaries thought the answer was to teach people to read and train them to think in more logical ways. Over time, however, it was learned that we can start right where they are. Steve Evans gives us the answer: "The preferred method of the oral communicator for learning, remembering, conveying and receiving information is through stories."<sup>7</sup> Stories? "Approximately 75% of the Bible is story."<sup>8</sup> The Bible is God's story of the ages. The Scriptures show us what sin, obedience, atonement, forgiveness, and reconciliation all look like with stories. Yep, no problem, we've got stories!

### ***Thinking About Today's Passage:***

- *A man in high office had an affair with the wife of a loyal subordinate. She became pregnant. When various efforts failed in a cover-up, he arranged the death of his subordinate. God sent his servant to speak to this leader about what had happened. What approach did the Lord's servant use? Why do you think he used this approach?*
- *How did the leader respond?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord Jesus, please place encouraging Christians around my unbelieving friends and help these believers to know the exact part of Biblical truth to share with them. Make my unbelieving friends come to grips with the truth that there is a limit to the encouragement that is available to them. Make them see that Jesus is the Good News they need.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Evans, *Ibid.*, Slide 24

<sup>6</sup> Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 54, *Ibid.*, Page 12

<sup>7</sup> Steve Evans, *Ibid.*, Slide 38

<sup>8</sup> Tom A. Steffen, "Why Communicate the Gospel Through Stories?", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Edited by Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library © 1981,1992,1999. Page 406

## Storying

As you can guess from the word in the title, “Storying involves taking parables and stories from the Bible and retelling them orally—much like people retell events from their own lives.”<sup>1</sup> There are good reasons to use stories, especially in oral cultures. “Stories connect with the our imagination and emotions... unlike principles precepts and propositions, stories take us on an open ended journey that touches the whole person.”<sup>2</sup>

If we want to help people experience life change, we need to help them hear and absorb some new stories. Steve Evans states “Our worldview, our lives, the very core of who we are, is made up of the events that surround us and the stories that are implanted within us. Stories change worldview! (This is true for all people of all cultures, anywhere, anytime!)”<sup>3</sup>

Most church members from the western world would be surprised how simply this is done. We are used to hearing expository sermons on the narrative passages in the Bible. In these sermons we hear part of a story and then hear a principle drawn from that part of the story. Then we are told the next part of the story and the principle drawn from that. We take notes on the outline. In contrast, storying “does not interject Bible teaching, just the Bible story followed by discussion questions. It seeks to present the Bible story as accurately as it is in the Scriptures with a minimum of explanation.”<sup>4</sup> The Bible story speaks for itself.

Some of the accepted methods to use in storying include:

- Telling the story as closely as possible to the original biblical text.
- Not unduly modernizing the story.
- Developing the story as it is told... Going over the story until you can see it as a video in your mind. Then telling the story as you see it...
- Reserving implications and applications that are not stated in the text for the pre-story time and dialogue times.<sup>5</sup>

After telling the story, the storyteller may ask open-ended questions. Jackson Day suggests several generic discussion questions:

- What did you like best about the story?

<sup>1</sup> Zoe Allen, “Bible becomes real for non-readers in Zambia,” February 6, 2013.

[www.commissionstories.com/africa/stories/view/bible-becomes-real-for-non-readers-in-zambia](http://www.commissionstories.com/africa/stories/view/bible-becomes-real-for-non-readers-in-zambia) Accessed: January 27, 2015

<sup>2</sup> Tom A. Steffen, “Why Communicate the Gospel Through Stories?”, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Edited by Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library © 1981,1992,1999. Page 405

<sup>3</sup> Steve Evans, “world\_of\_orality\_revised\_feb\_2013\_.ppt”, PowerPoint presentation, Slide 29, [www.commissionstories.com/africa/?ACT=55&fid=342&d=1608&f=world\\_of\\_orality\\_revised\\_feb\\_2013\\_.ppt](http://www.commissionstories.com/africa/?ACT=55&fid=342&d=1608&f=world_of_orality_revised_feb_2013_.ppt)

<sup>4</sup> Don Fanning, “Chronological Bible Storying/Teaching”, Liberty University [http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=cgm\\_theo](http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=cgm_theo)

<sup>5</sup> Slack, James B., James O. Terry, Grant Lovejoy, *Tell The Story: A Primer on Chronological Bible Storying*. Rockville, Virginia: International Centre for Excellence in Leadership ©2003 [http://tradupedia.org/wiki/images/7/7a/ICEL\\_tell\\_the\\_history.pdf](http://tradupedia.org/wiki/images/7/7a/ICEL_tell_the_history.pdf)





- Did something about the story trouble you?
- Who are the main characters in the story?
- What problems did the characters face?
- How did the characters face their problems?
- Have you faced similar problems?
- Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or different from you?
- What does the story tell about God?
- Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
- Is there something in the story you want to talk about? <sup>6</sup>

There are several variations of storying used on the mission field. Sometimes, the missionary will tell only one story as a way to witness in a single conversation. One of the most widespread approaches is called Chronological Bible Storying (CBS). CBS “involves telling biblical stories in the order in which they happened... beginning with creation and moving sequentially through at least the resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>7</sup> Some use a “Bible Storying Cloth” with a pictures for each Bible story.

Another approach is to tell Bible stories related to specific topics to help people grow in their Christian walk and deal with specific problems.<sup>8</sup>

Believers throughout Africa, South Asia and the Middle East are combining oral Bible storytelling and “henna,” in which women draw designs on their hands and feet. “Many stories in the Bible contain visual symbols that can easily be incorporated into henna drawings.”<sup>9</sup>

Whether talking to truck drivers in West Africa or post-modern people on the streets of London, storying is a great way to “tell the old, old story.”<sup>10</sup>

### ***Thinking About Today’s Passage:***

- *In Acts 7, Stephen recounted the stories of what people group?*
- *Count them. How many different stories does Stephen tell?*
- *Do the particular stories Stephen tells have a common theme?*
- *How many verses into the chapter does one read before coming to Stephen bringing an application to the lives of his listeners?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord God, please cause my unbelieving friends to see the ugliness of their lives when they are filled with malice and are overly-aggressive in their dealings with others. Make them see that sin is defiling their humanity. Bring them to a place of appreciation of Jesus’ gentle manner with us.

<sup>6</sup> Day, Jackson, *Guidelines for Bible Storytelling: Workbook for Bible Storytelling Training*. ©2007 Permission granted for non-commercial purposes. Page 19

<sup>7</sup> <https://oralitystrategies.org/strategies.cfm?st=1> Accessed: 01/26/2015

<sup>8</sup> <https://oralitystrategies.org/strategies.cfm?st=7> Accessed: 01/26/2015

<sup>9</sup> “Bible storying: Ancient art form helps relay the Gospel,” <http://southasianpeoples.imb.org/stories/view/bible-storying> Accessed: 01/26/2015

<sup>10</sup> [www.commissionstories.com/africa/videos/view/lesson-four-serving-missions-experience-west-african-truckers](http://www.commissionstories.com/africa/videos/view/lesson-four-serving-missions-experience-west-african-truckers) and [www.commissionstories.com/eurasia/stories/view/alabama-church-takes-the-gospel-to-london](http://www.commissionstories.com/eurasia/stories/view/alabama-church-takes-the-gospel-to-london)

## *Jesus: Unique and Absolute*

In the western world, making claims of knowing absolute truth seems overly-opinionated, insensitive to others, and inappropriate. Nevertheless, Jesus makes absolute claims about Himself and demands absolute loyalty from us. Although Jesus never said the words, “I am God,” we see this claim in Scripture. The first verse in the Gospel of Mark states, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” As we follow the various encounters people have with Jesus, we are given various pieces of the puzzle to put together and come to see the big picture for ourselves.

Jesus attended synagogue and was asked to speak. “They were astonished at His teaching because, unlike the scribes, He was teaching them as one having authority” (Mark 1:21-22). Jesus didn’t sound like so many others they had heard. Their messages resembled research papers with footnotes, as they repeatedly cited other Rabbis. In contrast, Jesus’ “unfootnoted” words had such a ring of truth to them, people could sense the authority. This awareness was not merely the impression of the audience, but was what Jesus Himself claimed: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

In synagogue, a demon recognized Jesus and spoke through a demonized man in attendance. Jesus dealt with the man while the congregation watched. After the service was over, we are told that “Then they were all amazed, so they began to argue with one another, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him’” (Mark 1:27).

Jesus was teaching in a home. Some friends brought a paralyzed friend and lowered him by ropes to Jesus. He looked at the paralyzed man and told him his sins were forgiven. Immediately, cynics wondered why Jesus would say that since only God can forgive sins. The Master told the crowd He was aware what they were thinking, “But so you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10), and Jesus healed the man.

Gordon Olsen summarizes the truth claims of Jesus Christ:

The Lord Jesus claimed to be a unique person. He claimed to have come from eternal existence with God the Father in heaven. He claimed equality with God. He used titles of Himself which are appropriate only to God. He claimed to have the attributes, offices, and prerogatives of deity. He accepted worship as God. The Apostles also referred to Him in the same unique ways.<sup>2</sup>

The process of piecing the puzzle together culminated in Caesarea Philippi, a Ro-



man city, full of idols and diverse forms of worship. Jesus asked His disciples how He was being perceived by the crowds. They reported a myriad of speculations. “‘But you,’ He asked them again, ‘who do you say that I am?’ Peter spoke for the group: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!” (Matthew 16:16).

Not only are Jesus’ claims absolute, they are exclusive. He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). The Apostles would later echo this message, saying “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people, and we must be saved by it” (Acts 4:12).

Erich Sauer has summarized the confused diversity of man’s religions and described the superiority of Christ’s message:

The Grecian says: Man, know thyself.

The Roman says: Man, rule thyself.

The Chinese says: Man, improve thyself.

The Buddhist says: Man, annihilate thyself.

The Brahman says: Man, merge thyself in the universal sum of all.

The Moslem says: Man, submit thyself.

But Christ says: “Without Me ye can do nothing,”

and in HIM the Christian says: “I can do all things through Christ Who makes me mighty” (Phil.4:13).<sup>3</sup>

God’s only Son is the one and only Savior of the world! And He alone can meet the deepest needs of human hearts.

### ***Thinking About Today’s Passage:***

- *In Colossians 1:15-20, we see Jesus described. List the various ways.*
- *In verses 1-14 and 24-29, we see evidences of missionary work. What are they?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, please bring believers with a high joy level into the lives of my unbelieving friends. Let them sense the difference that having one’s sins forgiven Your presence can make.

<sup>2</sup> Olson, C. Gordon (2012-02-10). *What in the World is God Doing?: An Introduction to World Missions* (Kindle Locations 1578-1583).

<sup>3</sup> Olson, Ibid. (Kindle Locations 1639-1653).

## ***The Universal Human Condition: Needs That Transcend Cultural Background***

Why do the people groups of the world *need* to hear our message? Why would they *want* to listen? Regardless of language or culture or religious training, every person holds certain qualities and life experiences in common. So, we ask, what is the universal condition of humankind?

*All people are created in the image of God.* As such, the human race is the crown of creation. It has been suggested that if we could have seen Adam and Eve before the fall in the garden, we would be tempted to fall down in worship. Though the fall damaged us and marred God's image, in the image of God we remain.

*Because we are created in the image of God, we are able to know and understand truth.* Yet, people want to keep their sins and to "protect" themselves. They don't want to admit the true nature of sin or face the coming judgment. So, they "suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18-20). People sometimes expend great amounts of energy in suppressing the truth. This is much like holding a beach ball under the water; just as the ball eventually forces its way up, so does the truth.

*Because we are spiritual beings, we are inclined to worship.* We will inevitably worship someone or something. Yet, because we are rebels, we replace the one true God as the object of our worship (Romans 1:22-25). It may be an idol or success or pleasure that we worship, "but the insidious thing about these forms of worship is... they're unconscious. They are default settings."<sup>1</sup>

*We all have a conscience, an inner sense of right and wrong.* Now, however, after the fall, our conscience often malfunctions. We can think everything is OK when it isn't or feel obligations we shouldn't feel. Nevertheless, even people without the Bible, "who do not have the law, instinctively do what the law demands" (Romans 2:14-16). We have an intuitive awareness of impending judgment.

*We were designed with the capacity to know God.* In fact, we are not whole without a relationship with God that is real and meaningful. Augustine wrote:

"Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee."<sup>2</sup>

*Sin separates us from God.* Isaiah told us "your iniquities have built barriers between you and your God, and your sins have made Him hide His face from you so that He does not listen (Isaiah 59:2). Thus, all people in all cultures feel the alienation. We experience shame, which before the fall was not known—at that time

<sup>1</sup> David Foster Wallace cited in Keller:Keller, Timothy J. (2012-09-04). Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City (p. 34). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine of Hippo, The Confessions of Saint Augustine, Public Domain



“Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame (Genesis 2:25). After sin entered the world, when God came looking for the man, the man hid himself. He explained, “I heard You in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid” (Genesis 3:9-10). The message of forgiveness is needed everywhere.

*People everywhere are afraid of death.* This is not an irrational fear; we are, in fact, going to die. Jesus died to free people who had been “held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15). An oft-quoted historian said of the early Christians, “They out-loved, out-thought, out-lived, and out-died the pagans.” It is a defining difference of believers. Missionary Nik Ripkin writes of the death of his son and of a Somalian friend who attended the funeral service:

“There is one thing I don’t understand about that funeral” Omar admitted to his Somali friends. ‘Nik and Ruth buried Timothy—a son who they loved with all their hearts. During the service many people were talking about Tim. People were singing. People were crying. But everyone there seemed to know that Tim was in paradise! Why can’t we Muslims know that our loved ones are in paradise when they die? Why is it that only these followers of Jesus know exactly where they are going after death? We bury our people. We weep. We walk away. And we do not know where our loved ones are. Why? Why have Jesus’ followers kept these things from us?”<sup>3</sup>

To all who fear death and feel shame... to all who are falling under the weight of life’s burdens... Jesus says “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28, KJV).

*People are not so different they cannot relate to the Christian message.* God “has planted eternity in men's hearts and minds [a divinely implanted sense of a purpose working through the ages which nothing under the sun but God alone can satisfy]” (Ecclesiastes 3:11, Amp.). Don Richardson wrote a book based on this verse, telling one story after another of one people group after another who were awaiting the return of a lost book, or awaiting the arrival of white messengers prophesied long before, or who used certain terminologies—some cultural concept that served as a bridge for the gospel before missionaries even arrived!

### ***Thinking About Today’s Passage:***

- *In Romans 1:18-2:16, mark each verse that tells how we are hard-wired to know God.*
- *Now, mark the verses that speak of our exchanging or suppressing the truth.*
- *In 2:14-18, mark or list the things the Gentiles seem to know intuitively.*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Father, everything my lost friends live for and long for is down here and right now. Make them realize they are lost and, as such, are without hope and without God in the world.

<sup>3</sup> Ripkin, Nik, with Greg Lewis, *The Insanity of God*. ©2012, B&H Publishing. Pages 133-134

<sup>4</sup> Richardson, Don, *Eternity in their Hearts*, Revised. Regal Books ©1981, 1984

## *Our Motives for Missions*

Why is missions important to us? Why should we send our children and our treasure around the world? What drives people to learn a new language and culture and move away from family to tell people in another culture about a religion different from their own? Some may enjoy the adventure or have a heart for the people in a particular place. However, these factors aren't really motives; they just make the job easier. We list below some biblical motives for missions:

**To obey the plain command of Jesus Christ.** The Great Commission is not the Gentle Suggestion or the Optional Upgrade. We are under orders from the One to whom was given "all authority... in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). Jesus tells us, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21).

**To join Jesus in what He is doing in the world.** When people run for public office, their entire families will get out and campaign for them and make campaign appearances with them. Because of family love and loyalty, they will show their active support. Jesus said, "My Father is still working, and I am working also" (John 5:17). To be in fellowship with Jesus, we will have to join Him where He is.

**To be who we are.** Christ "made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (Revelation 1:5-6). God has not only forgiven us of our sins, but He has given us a new identity and role on earth. As priests, we represent the message of God in world evangelization, and we represent the world around us to God in intercessory prayer. Perhaps you have not thought of yourself in this way, but if you are saved, in Christ you are God's priest. We need to be ourselves.

**To express the love of Jesus which propels us and flows through us.** "Christ's love compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). Christ's love presses us in and makes us focused. Christ's love urges us on and pushes us. Take note, however, it is the love of Christ, not a humanitarian compassion. Gailyn Van Rheezen writes:

Westerners are frequently touched by the poverty of the world in comparison with their own wealth. Their response to this poverty is a desire to use their medical, technical, and teaching skills to upgrade the physical and socioeconomic conditions of the poor. This response may be rooted in the compassion of God and thus reflect the mind of God, becoming a primary motive for Christian mission. Sometimes, however, the impulse is no different from that of philanthropists who want to improve the world... these social ministries are no different from services performed by governments and secular organizations.<sup>1</sup>

The love of God is implanted within our hearts through the new birth: "God's love

<sup>1</sup> Van Rheezen, Gailyn (2014-07-22). *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* (p. 112-113). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.



has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). Being “loved on” by God and empowered to love by God, we want to share the love of God with others.

**People are lost and will go to hell without Christ.** Jesus referred to hell as a place of “unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43-45) and “eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:46). It is a place of “eternal destruction from the Lord’s presence” (II Thessalonians 1:9). Because the torment is constant, there is “no rest, day or night” (Revelation 14:11). Not only is hell devoid of God’s presence, it is a lonely existence altogether—“outer darkness,” Jesus called it (Matthew 8:12). Jude 13 refers to its “blackness of darkness.” It is a place of “shame and eternal contempt” (Daniel 12:2). It is a place of weeping (Matthew 25:30). This is the place where we would have gone if God had not saved us. This is the place where others will go unless they hear and respond to the good news. We know about the coming judgment and the terrors and horrors of hell. “Therefore, because we know the fear of the Lord, we seek to persuade people” (2 Corinthians 5:11).

**To spread the praise and worship of God.** Paul described his life purpose as “to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations, on behalf of His name” (Romans 1:5). Interest in the Lord’s name and His reputation on earth, is a driving motivation for world missions. The Lord deserves to receive worship and ought to be praised. A modern classic in this regard is John Piper’s statement:

“Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.”<sup>2</sup>

Piper goes on to say, “Where passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak.”<sup>3</sup> Conversely, when God is loved deeply, zeal for missions will be great!

### *Thinking About Today’s Passage:*

- *In II Corinthians 5:10-11, how does the judgment motivate us concerning our witness?*
- *In verses 12-15, how does the love of God influence our own lifestyle?*
- *In verses 17-21, what figures of speech are used to describe our role on earth?*

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord, You are reasonable and invite us to come reason with You. Make my unbelieving friends hear that invitation. Meet them in their thoughts. Ask them questions that will make them think. Reason with them in their hearts that they might see the reasonableness of turning to You for forgiveness and cleansing.

<sup>2</sup> Piper, John, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*. Baker, ©1993. Page 11

<sup>3</sup> Piper, *Ibid*. Page 12

## *The Holy Spirit and Missions*

Jesus said, “I will build *My* church” (Matthew 16:18). It is *His* church; He is its only head and owner. If He were *unable* to build it, he would have said, “I *can’t* build my church.” If He had been able but *unwilling*, He would have said, “I *won’t* build my church.” If it was a possibility, but *uncertain* He could do so, he would have said, “I will *try* to build my church.” If it was a matter about which he was *undecided*, he would have said, “I *might* build my church.” If it were a matter which he was delegating *to us* (with our feeble efforts), *but* in which he would not be personally involved, he would have said, “*You* will build my church.” But in the eternal plan of God and, due to the effectual working of His cross and resurrection, He is able to say with absolute certainty, “I *will* build My church! ...And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” That is exactly what Jesus is doing today, and He is doing so through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

**The Holy Spirit goes ahead of us:** We recall how, in Acts 10, God had worked in Cornelius to prepare him and his family to receive the gospel. By the time, Peter arrived, Cornelius had a house full of family and friends, waiting to hear the message. There’s nowhere in the world one may go that God has not already been. One will not have to start from scratch to lead people to Christ. Even in Islamic countries, so resistant to the gospel, God is working powerfully to bring people to Christ.

Muslim-background believers from many different countries and cultures have told me about being directed by dreams and visions. They have told me about finding Bibles through amazing circumstances. They have mentioned reading the Bible multiple times. In the reading, they have talked about feeling drawn to Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

One person with whom I spoke, who has extensive experience in the Muslim world, estimated that half of the people who would engage him in conversation have “had the dream”—in fact, all he had to ask was, “Have you had the dream?”

An Egyptian Muslim-background believer (called “Sameh” in the story to protect his identity) explains what is taking place:

Why are Muslims throughout the Middle East and beyond having dreams and visions about Christ? ‘Because the Lord Himself is working,’ Sameh contends. ‘Christians in Egypt have always been afraid to share their faith, so God Himself has started to move,’ revealing Himself directly to Muslims. God-sent dreams and visions typically direct the seekers who experience them toward Christ, the Word of God or a church where other believers

<sup>1</sup> Ripkin, Nik, with Greg Lewis, *The Insanity of God*. ©2012, B&H Publishing. Pages 282





can be found.<sup>2</sup>

It's not just Muslims; the Holy Spirit is moving ahead of us all over the world!

**The Holy Spirit works in us:** The first work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life was the time when we were born again, when God "saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy, through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:4-5).

Another work of the Holy Spirit is His empowerment. The Spirit doesn't "fill 'ya to thrill 'ya"; instead, it is in a way specifically connected to our Christian service. Paul wrote, "I was made a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of His power" (Ephesians 3:7). Spiritual gifts enable our service and witness. It is God's power, but that doesn't mean we are passive or inactive. As Paul said, "I labor for this, striving with His strength that works powerfully in me" (Colossians 1:29). Paul labors *and* God works powerfully.

As we go, the Holy Spirit gives us specific guidance as we carry the gospel; for example, the time "The Spirit told Philip, 'Go and join that chariot'" (Acts 8:29).

**The Holy Spirit works through us:** Peter speaks of "those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit" (1 Peter 1:12). It was not in their own power these witnesses told his readers about Jesus, but the Spirit moved in the communication process.

**The Holy Spirit works in those who hear us:** In Philippi, Paul and his traveling party found a group of God-fearers who would meet on the Sabbath. One of them was a business-woman by the name of Lydia. As they spoke, "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14). John 16 speaks of the convicting, convincing work of the Spirit concerning the seriousness of sin, God's standard of righteousness, and the certainty of the coming judgment. This is why Paul would say, "Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance" (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Christian witness, you are not alone nor do you serve in your own power. The Holy Spirit is at work!

### *Thinking About Today's Passage:*

- In 1 Corinthians 2:1-4, list some things one need not have to be an effective witness.
- Verse 5 gives us the reason those things aren't necessary; what is that reason?
- Verses 12-14 explain why unbelievers have such a hard time understanding. What is it?

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Father, everything my lost friends live for and long for is down here and right now. Make them realize they are lost and, as such, are without hope and without God in the world.

<sup>3</sup> Bridges, Erich, "Sameh: Quiet revolution" Baptist Press, June 13, 2012: [www.bpnews.net/38034/sameh-quiet-revolution](http://www.bpnews.net/38034/sameh-quiet-revolution)

## *Spiritual Warfare and Missions*

Why is it that reaching a community, a city, a culture, or a country is so very difficult? A major reason given in Scripture is that “the whole world is under the sway of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). It is explained that Satan “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). Idolatry is specifically said to result from deception by demons and to result in communion with demons (1 Corinthians 10:20). The Bible speaks of “deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1). Paul referred to Satan as “the spirit now working in the disobedient” (Ephesians 2:2). Jesus called him, “the ruler of the world” (John 14:30).

Hostile governments aren’t the biggest obstacle to evangelizing a people, because “our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens” (Ephesians 6:12). As Satan operates his shadow government, he has a highly structured organization to carry out his strategies on earth.

Though the Bible doesn’t give a definition for each term, the forces against which we do battle include demonic beings with the titles, “rulers and authorities.” This couplet is also used in the New Testament of people in positions of power in human governments and of unfallen angels. Some high ranking demons are assigned to certain geographic regions. It was because of the opposition by “the prince of Persia” that an angel was delayed in coming to explain a vision the prophet Daniel had received (Daniel 10:10-14). Additionally, some demons have been given authority to tempt, oppress, and torment people in specific ways.

In spiritual warfare, the Bible doesn’t tell us to “attack” the devil; instead, it tells us to “resist” him— “Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7; see also 1 Peter 5:8-9). “Missionaries, like all Christians are to stand their ground against the enemy. At times this will involve encounters with the demonic, but, more typically, it involves walking in the light of God’s truth and prayerfully standing firm when the enemy does attack.”<sup>1</sup>

We do not wage spiritual warfare out of our weakling human resources, “in an unspiritual way”; instead our spiritual weapons “are powerful through God” (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Peter Wagner lists several weapons of spiritual warfare:

**The name of Jesus:** This is “the name that is above every name” (Philippians 2:9). When Jesus told us to pray in His name, it was like inviting us to charge our purchases to His account (John 14:14). Demons are cast out in His name (Mark 9:38; Luke 10:17; Acts 16:18).

**The blood of Jesus:** “They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation

<sup>1</sup> A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Crowin, & Gary B. McGhee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*. Baker Academic, 2004. Page 290

12:11). It was by the cross Jesus “disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly” (Colossians 2:14-15). By the shed blood of Jesus, we stand.

**United prayer:** Jesus assured us “If two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:19). Naturally, as we pray, we agree, not only with each other, but with the truth in God’s Word and with the definite leading of the Holy Spirit.

No amount of human persuasion can liberate an entire people from such darkness. Prayer is utterly essential. Only God can move by His mercy to open such society-wide blindness to the light of Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

**Fasting:** The entire missionary movement began when Christians in Antioch were fasting and the Spirit spoke to them about sending out Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:2-3). Though it’s a variant reading, Matthew 17:21 quotes Jesus as telling us that some types of demons won’t “come out except by prayer and fasting.”

**Praise:** We see an example of the power of praise in 2 Chronicles 20: “The moment they began their shouts and praises, the LORD set an ambush against the [large multi-national coalition of enemies] who came to fight against Judah, and they were defeated” (verse 22). Praise is a high expression of the faith God honors. “This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith” (1 John 5:4).

**The Word of God:** The only offensive weapon listed in the armor of God in Ephesians 6 is “the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word.” Claiming God’s promises in prayer, quoting relevant verses in temptation and in witnessing, applying specific Scriptures to specific objections to the gospel—are all very powerful actions.

There is a final weapon, martyrdom: “They conquered him... by the word of their testimony, for they did not love their lives in the face of death” (Revelation 12:11). Josef Tson writes, “When the ambassador of Christ speaks the truth in love, and meets death with joy, a strange miracle occurs: the eyes of the unbelievers are opened, they are enabled to see the truth of God.”<sup>4</sup>

### *Thinking About Today’s Passage:*

- *In Acts 19, we see occult practices and demonic encounters. What principles does the encounter in verses 13-16 tell us about rushing into such situations?*
- *In verses 17-20, what steps did those involved in the occult take to break away?*

### *Praying for the Lost:*

Lord, the devil has made sure so many of my lost friends have seen every scorekeeping legalist he could find. Please bring into their paths, authentic Christians to show them the real deal and to give them a true picture of what it means to know You.

<sup>2</sup> Wagner, Peter, ed., *Engaging the Enemy: How to Fight and Defeat Territorial Spirits*. Regal Books © 1991. Pages 7-14

<sup>3</sup> John D. Robb, “Strategic Prayer” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Edited by Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library © 1981,1992,1999. Page 150

<sup>4</sup> Josef Tson, “Suffering and Martyrdom: God’s Strategy in the World in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Edited by Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library © 1981,1992,1999. Page 183

## *Missions is Making Disciples*

Dr. Cal Guy used to say that missions is winning people to Jesus, that if you can take a picture of it, it isn't missions. The missions professor was obviously right. One can take a photograph of a missions compound and post it to Facebook, but the United Nations and national consulates have compounds; there's nothing missionary about them. Giving a thirsty village a well in Jesus' name is a generous thing to do and may open some doors to share the gospel, but wells won't be in Heaven... people will! There are many tools God's people may use in the process of missionary work, but if you can take a picture of it, it isn't missions!

Evangelism has often been described in terms of the "three P's" — Presence, Presentation, and Persuasion.

**Presence:** Logically, evangelism has to start with presence. In His incarnation, Christ came to be with us, as one of us. If no one is there to win people to Christ, clearly they will never come to saving faith.

There are some who describe evangelism as if presence is all there is to it. Their view is we should be present with the world's needy and stand in solidarity with them. This is a salvation for society and not the individual. It is salvation without sin or deliverance from sin. This is evangelism as an empty message, evangelism without a Bible. According to this view, suburbia ought to be heaven on earth, and the Christian message is similar in its objectives to communism.<sup>1</sup> Which is more important: to put a new suit on the man or to put a new man in the suit?

Chapter 12 of K. P. Yohannan's book is entitled, "A Bowl of Rice is no substitute for the Holy Spirit." In this chapter, Yohannan addresses the question: "How can we preach the Gospel to a man with an empty stomach?"

"A man's stomach has nothing to do with his heart's condition of being a rebel against a holy God. A rich American on Fifth Avenue in New York City or poor beggar on the streets of Bombay are both rebels against God."<sup>2</sup>

**Presentation:** Presence is not enough. Neither is good examples or practical forms of assistance. As important as it is to be a good example and to demonstrate the love of Christ, people need to be told the Good News of Jesus and how to respond. "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14, NASB) As we present the gospel, we do not merely transfer the facts of the gospel to others with complete indifference to how they respond. This question leads us to the third "P," persuasion.

<sup>1</sup> Class Notes, Church Evangelism, Roy Fish, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, circa 1981

<sup>2</sup> K.P. Yohannan, *Revolution in World Missions*, gfa Books, A Division of Gospel for Asia ©2002. Page 160.



**Persuasion:** Many Christians are uneasy about persuading people to become believers. Persuasion is associated in many people's minds with high pressure sales, deceitfulness, and manipulation. Such approaches *should* make us uneasy. However, properly understood, persuasion is giving people good reasons to make the right choice. Persuasion is being willing to reason and to see that all questions asked have been answered. Persuasion is biblical: "Therefore, because we know the fear of the Lord, we seek to persuade people" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

This approach leads us to the question, what are we trying to persuade people to do? Make decisions? The Great Commission tells us our mission is to make disciples. Discipleship starts as people accept the multifaceted gift of salvation. Salvation includes forgiveness of sins, a right standing with God, and a home in Heaven. There is new life and a new power, as the person has been born again. In becoming His disciples, worshippers of false gods and completely irreligious people are transformed into deeply devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

**Multiplication:** Winning the world to Christ will require more than adding a few people here and there. World evangelization calls for more than addition; it calls for multiplication. That is, we must do more than make disciples; we must make disciple-makers. Roy Fish taught his classes that evangelism possesses these characteristics:

The compassionate sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, with lost people, for the purpose of winning them to Christ as Savior and Lord, that they may, in turn, share Him with others.<sup>3</sup>

Included in this definition is "the perpetuation of evangelism: that they may share him with others."<sup>4</sup> Paul instructed, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). The process of evangelism is complete when the evangelized becomes an evangelist.

### ***Thinking About Today's Passage:***

- *In 1 Thessalonians 1, which verse mentions Paul's presence in the evangelistic process?*
- *Which verse alludes to the gospel presentation?*
- *Which verses describe their being persuaded and the Holy Spirit's role in that?*
- *Which phrases in this chapter describe them becoming devoted followers of Christ?*
- *Which verses describe the evangelized becoming evangelists?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, please work in the hearts of my unbelieving friends to see the truthfulness of the truth and the goodness of the Good News that they may be persuaded by the Holy Spirit to throw themselves upon Your mercy and come to Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Class Notes, Church Evangelism, Roy Fish, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, circa 1981

<sup>4</sup> Roy Fish, *Ibid.*

## *The Value of the Association*

No man is an island unto himself. Most people instinctively know that trying to live as if we were wouldn't be healthy. However, many people think that a church's being an island unto itself is wonderful! "Our church is non-denominational!" they gush. Thus the eye tells the hand "I have no need of thee."

In Southern Baptist life, each autonomous local church relates to three distinct, autonomous bodies: the association, the state convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention. Southern Baptists work together in voluntary cooperation, believing we can do more together than we can apart. Our two mission boards and six seminaries are two excellent examples of this truth.

Though a local church *relates* to all three of these bodies, it *joins* only one, the association. Each association has a "petitionary letters committee" which guides prospective churches through a process to test and affirm the congregation's soundness in doctrine and practice.

The churches of an association will be located in fairly close proximity to one another—in the same county, metropolitan area, or in the same part of a state. There are seven systems of the Baptist Association. These include the following:

### **1. The Strengthening Churches System**

The association provides training events on Christian living and Christian service. Many associations have a lending library of training videos for smaller churches with limited budgets. The association will offer consulting to churches and church committees. It will also provide resources for stewardship promotion. Obviously, smaller, single-staff churches will benefit the most from these services. Seventy percent of Southern Baptist Churches have 100 or less in attendance each week.<sup>1</sup>

### **2. The Crisis Intervention System**

Sometimes, congregations experience conflict and need an objective outsider to assist them in resolving the problem. The Director of Missions (DOM) can meet with church committees or the deacons to help bring healing and reconciliation. DOM's sometimes serve as the impartial moderator for church business meetings. There are other kinds of crises churches may experience: a scandal, an accidental death on a church trip, embezzlement, etc.. The experience of the Director of Missions, coming alongside the pastor, can be a big help in such times.

### **3. The Church Planting System**

Churches plant churches, not associations. However, the association does study the area considered to be its field and networks with its member churches to offer a strategic plan for planting new churches in the area. The association will be a

<sup>1</sup> [www.nobts.edu/publications/News/TolbertCaskey.html](http://www.nobts.edu/publications/News/TolbertCaskey.html) Accessed: 01/31/2015



funding partner and offer its expertise. The association can be a big help in planting new churches to reach language or ethnic groups not heavily represented in its member churches.

#### **4. The Missions Support System**

Associations often partner with others to fund the planting of new churches outside the South in “new work areas.” Similarly, many Southern Baptists have been on a mission trip sponsored by their associations which their local churches could not have organized or funded. The member churches, working together through the association, pool their resources to send mission teams out.

#### **5. The Minister Support System**

The ministry is stressful and emotionally draining. The association tries to provide the nurturing support to help keep more flowing into these men of God than is flowing out. The weekly or monthly Pastor’s Conference is a time of fellowship and an opportunity for inspiration and learning. Further, the Director of Missions is available to function as a sounding board and to offer an objective perspective.

#### **6. Shared Ministry System**

The association exists to enable member churches to do together what they cannot do apart. Such efforts may include benevolence ministries such as a clothes closet or pregnancy center. Other shared ministries could be a counseling center, a shared prayer strategy, or a joint evangelistic emphasis with a shared strategy.

#### **7. Interim Support System**

When a church loses its pastor, the association is there to provide training and orientation for the search committee. The association may also refer the church to possible interim pastors.

Of course, needs will vary from one part of a state to another. How many of the systems in which a given association can excel will be determined by the size of its staff and by the leadership from its member churches. While not every function of an association meets our definition of missions, it’s all kingdom work.

### ***Thinking About Today’s Passage:***

- *Last time we read this passage, we considered the financial support of missions. Please re-read II Corinthians 8, underlining the word “churches” (plural) each time it appears.*
- *How much communication do the churches seem to have with each other?*
- *How are they working together? Voluntarily? How organized are they?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, my lost friends need to receive forgiveness. Make them to sense this greatness of their need. Work in their hearts to see that the penalty has been paid at the cross and to see the graciousness of Your free offer in Christ.

## *A Sending Church*

Every local church is a missionary enterprise. Though most members will never serve on the mission field, they support and send missionaries. It's not the denominational mission board that's the primary sender of missionaries, it's the local church.

**Calling Out the Called:** "Calling out the called" is an old term. It starts with the premise that God calls some in our churches to serve cross-culturally and reach people of other languages and in other countries. Our task as a church is to help these people recognize that call and feel encouraged to respond obediently. In a book chapter with that title, "Calling Out the Called," L. R. Scarborough writes:

There is a human side to a divine call. God calls and man calls out. It is doubted whether there is a preacher or missionary in all the world who was not influenced by some word of some wise friend or loved one at the time of his surrender to God's will.<sup>2</sup>

Calling out the called is more than the pastor saying something in the conclusion of his sermon along the lines of, "God may be calling you to missions..." There is a climate in the sending church, where missionaries are loved and supported. People will more readily respond to the missionary call in a church whose members consider missions a priority, give sacrificially to its support, and participate personally by going on mission trips. As a church family affirms the spiritual gifts in members God has equipped for missionary service, many of those people will come to understand missions to be God's will for their lives.

**Being open to the missionary call:** One should not assume the call to missions is for someone else. It has often been stated that, with the need being so great in other parts of the world, the real question is not "Should I go?" but rather, "Can I stay?" Steven Hawthorne writes it shouldn't be "as if the missionaries were heroes for hire, the few and the true who were willing to do whatever God wanted, so the rest of the church could slide by doing whatever they wanted."<sup>2</sup>

The experience of being called to missions is sometimes mistakenly assumed to be a dramatic, overpowering, almost magical experience. While some may be guided into missions in dramatic ways, for most the experience will seem more natural, with the call being quietly confirmed by the Holy Spirit in less sensational ways. Some who would enjoy serving cross-culturally may not realize this desire is God-given and is part of God's way of extending the call.

**Sending:** Not only are some people called to go, but others are called to send.

<sup>1</sup> Scarborough, L.R.; White, Thomas; Patterson, Paige (2011-06-03). *Calling Out the Called*. Seminary Hill Press. (Kindle Locations 722-724).

<sup>2</sup> Hawthorne, Steven C., "Senders" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Edited by Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library © 1981,1992,1999. Page 708





“How can they preach unless they are sent?” (Romans 10:15). There should be a willingness on the part of believers to release their children from the expectation of staying close to home, in order that they may serve where God sends them. Many a parent’s child has been called to missions and the parent “fought” the call. These same parents presented those children to the Lord in a “parent-child” dedication service at church. They prayed for their salvation. Yet now, they try to hold them back from doing God’s will.

**Nurturing:** A sending church is a supportive church. From the time people are called to ministry, the congregation should nurture them. Dr. Scarborough writes:

Look after those who surrender [to God’s call to ministry]... encourage them. Put them in school, the denominational colleges, send them to theological seminaries for training. Help those with financial aid who need it. Put your church behind them. See them through college and seminary training. Encourage them. Pray with them. Stand by them.<sup>3</sup>

Like everyone else, missionaries have health crises, accidents, and family deaths. Ron Blue advises, “Every missionary should have strong ties with a home church... If the tie is strong to this home church, in times of crisis the missionary will undoubtedly be the beneficiary of loving pastoral care.”<sup>4</sup>

Blue also suggests a plan for Christian families to adopt missionary families and encourage them in their work: To pray for them daily; to give to their financial support weekly; to write them a brief letter or email monthly; quarterly, to send them a care package with items not available in their place of service; and, annually, to send birthday and anniversary cards.<sup>5</sup>

Coming home on furlough or in retirement involves readjusting to the American culture (reverse culture shock) and practical concerns such as a place to live. Thus, a sending church should be ready to provide “re-entry support.”<sup>6</sup>

Most of these same principles apply to sponsoring church planters and those serving in new work area as they do to missionaries overseas.

### ***Thinking About Today’s Passage:***

- *In Romans 10:8-11 and 17-18, describe the relationship between faith and hearing.*
- *In verses 13-15, there is a missionary chain of events; what is it?*
- *In verse 15, how does God feel about those who carry the gospel to new places?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, please show my unbelieving friends there is something outside of themselves, higher than themselves. Make them realize You are worthy of their submission.

<sup>3</sup> Scarborough, *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 780-782

<sup>4</sup> Ron Blue, *Evangelism and Missions: Strategies for Outreach in the 21st Century*. Word Publishing, ©2001. Page 181

<sup>5</sup> Blue, *Ibid.*, Pages 177-181

<sup>6</sup> Hawthorne, *Ibid.*, Page 709

## *Thinking Like a Missionary in the Local Church*

Just as a missionary or church planter goes to a new place with the responsibility of reaching the people who live there, our local church is responsible to reach our community. Our congregation may not personally reach every pocket of people in every socio-economic, ethnic, and language group that lives here, but it is our assignment to see that it gets done.

Thinking like a missionary means we think evangelistically and strategically. So many congregations think along these lines: “We’ve got our group of friends, we have wonderful Bible study and fellowship together, we are able to worship with each other, listening to our kind of music in a comfortable setting.” Taken all together, this is an inward, not an outward, focus. It’s a self-centered, consumer mentality. There is another way to approach our existence as the body of Christ. Below are some ways a congregation can think like a missionary:

**Study the community:** Just like a church planter studies a community to know how to start a new church designed to effectively reach that community, we should study our own communities to see who’s there. Are there unreached people groups in our community? The world is coming to our communities; are there people moving in who speak other languages, or of other ethnic groups, or from other socio-economic groups who are not being reached? Ron Blue defines missions in this way:

“World missions is a sending process in which trained individuals penetrate those places that are otherwise unreached in the normal flow of evangelism.”<sup>1</sup>

If we think like missionaries, we won’t ignore those who are going unreached in the normal course of evangelism in our communities; instead, we will form plans to reach them.

**Study the church:** Sometimes, church members wonder why we distribute surveys with questions about their income or about their education. The answer is, we need to understand ourselves to better know whom we can best reach. A church like ours’ can reach folks like us.

Studying our church also involves knowing our strengths. What is our church’s niche in the Kingdom and in our community? A church should play to its strengths, not spin its wheels in repairing its weaknesses only.

**Develop a strategy:** Once we’ve answered the questions about who lives in our community and who needs to be reached, we can develop a plan to reach them.

<sup>1</sup> Ron Blue, *Evangelism and Missions: Strategies for Outreach in the 21st Century*. Word Publishing, ©2001. Page 6



This is done prayerfully! We could brainstorm and come up with all kinds of ideas, but it is very important to determine how the Lord want us to reach them. What kind of church does the Lord want us to be? As we pray, we need to carefully consider we are learning as we study our community and our church. The Holy Spirit will bring to mind our observations as He guides us.

Here are some questions church members should ask themselves as they pray for a God-given strategy to reach their community:

- What new skills do our members need to learn in order to reach the people we are supposed to reach?
- What new ministries do we need to begin in order to reach them? Is there a felt-need ministry we need to add? If so, how will we make that ministry evangelistic?
- How will we reach the men? As the men go, so go the families.
- What changes are taking place in the population we reach best? How do we need to adjust to this fluid situation?

At First Baptist Church, Tallassee, one of their church principles states, “Because people are most effectively reached for Christ together with others of like interests, we shall identify and concentrate on reaching out to ‘people groups’ within our community.” Sometimes, we can start a new Sunday School class to reach a new people group. That will work if there are no language barriers and everyone can agree on the style of worship in the worship services. Sometimes, the most effective way to have a lasting, widespread impact among a new people group is to start a new church designed to reach them.

It is important that this strategic approach to ministry is understood and embraced by the congregation as a whole. To have lasting results that outlive any one generation of leaders, the church must make disciples and reproduce disciplinarians. There must be a shared vision to have a lasting impact.

### ***Thinking About Today’s Passage:***

- *In 1 Corinthians 3:5-7, what comparisons does Paul make to agriculture and how do these apply to church planting? How do these verses compare to John 4:38-38.*
- *In verse 10, what figure of speech does Paul use to describe his work in establishing the church at Corinth?*
- *In verses 10-15, we see the responsibility of continuing the work of the church once it is started. What guidance do we receive about how we should go about that?*

### ***Praying for the Lost:***

Lord, my lost friends do not have the ears to hear what you are saying. Awaken them and give them the ears to hear.

