

MISSIONNEWS



THE MASTER'S MISSION

A MISSIONS JOURNAL FOR PASTORS AND ELDERS

JULY, 1998

Focusing on a Biblical Philosophy of Missions



**DETRIMENTAL
TRENDS AND
BIBLICAL
SOLUTIONS**

SCANNING THE HORIZON OF MISSIONS MINISTRIES



Focusing on a Biblical Philosophy of Missions

As one involved in the training of cross-cultural missionaries, I have been reading several missions publications and handbooks that find their way into my mailbox this time of the year. They are published by well-known organizations that are regarded as authoritative in the field of world missions. These publications seek to serve the churches by identifying current mission trends and by presenting opportunities of service throughout the world.

However, a detrimental trend is developing in the churches today as a result of the influence of these “authoritative” publications—a trend that is both unbiblical and counter productive to the very churches who desire to be obedient to our Lord’s command in fulfilling the Great Commission.

At issue is our understanding of the biblical role of a missionary. A review of these publications and handbooks leaves one thinking that any unqualified, inexperienced, and ill-equipped believer that is sent to another culture for more than a week is fulfilling the church’s obedience to our Lord’s command.

One article was bold enough to boast that

“Over the last few years I have seen people *who can not preach, or even share a testimony*, but they travel to different countries just to pray and intercede for the lands and the people. I have personally coordinated several outreach programs in India when teams of young people come from the U.S.”¹

Is this the type of individual that Christ intended the church to send to fulfill the Great Commission? We must ask ourselves if sending this type of individual is really helping us be obedient to Christ and His command to His church. Is the money being expended for this type of experience advancing the kingdom of God? Are these types of short term experiences resulting in more career missionaries going to the fields of the world

or are they simply resulting in more short term experiences and diverting needed resources?

The following chart shows where the trend is going:

WHO IS GOING?

	1992	1996	% change
Long Term Service (> 4 years)	32,634	33,074	+1.4%
Short Term (< 4 years)	5,115	6,562	+28.3%
Very Short Term (< 2 weeks–1 year)	38,968	63,995	+64.2%

(SOURCE: 1998-2000 MISSION HANDBOOK, JOHN A. SIEWERT AND EDNA G. VALDEZ, EDITORS, PUBLISHED BY MARC A DIVISION OF WORLD VISION, PAGE 74.)

Not all Short Term Missions are the same

At the outset we want to emphasize that we are not lumping all short term missions together as being detrimental. There is much that would not be accomplished without the sacrificial giving of dedicated laymen who give of their time and energy to visit and encourage their career missionaries on the field. This is the type of partnership in missions that is invaluable. But much, indeed most, of what is being done today under the label of ‘short term missions’ is very detrimental both to those going and to the missionaries who must take time away from their ministries to host the continuing flow of groups coming through their areas. Resources are wasted and relationships are damaged that have been years in the development, because of well meaning, but ill-prepared short term ‘missionaries’ lacking in spiritual and cultural sensitivities.

A Biblical Response

To address this negative trend and answer the questions we have raised, we must turn and embrace the Scriptural definitions of missions ministries. What is the character and quality of a Biblical missionary? What identifies a person as a missionary? The Word of God defines the role of a missionary. Implementing these principles will enable us to be more fruitful in our mission endeavors.

What is a Missionary?

A missionary is a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is called by God to a lifetime of service outside of the immediate vicinity of his local church, and who is com-





mitted to making disciples, baptizing converts, and teaching them all of the revealed Word of God.

First, an individual must demonstrate his ability to be faithful within his local church body before being considered as a missionary. It is within the context of the local church that the missionary should be proven faithful in ministry and proven faithful in his handling of God's Word. It is in the context of the local church that the elders observe and determine if the missionary meets the criteria established by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2,

"Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of Christ. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."

What assurance do we have that an individual will serve the Lord faithfully and diligently overseas if this has not been demonstrated in his own church at home? **He must first be found faithful as a servant of Christ and steward of God's Word, to be considered as a missionary candidate.**

In contrast, today, the norm seems to be to encourage new and young believers to "experience a cross cultural ministry" which will create a life changing experience for them. One pastor advertising for a short term mission adventure described it this way: "Short term missions experiences shape the world view and form the character of young men and women more than any other single experience."² Similarly, as cited earlier, the church is encouraged to send everyone, even those who cannot preach or even share a testimony.

Certainly all believers, young and old, should be encouraged to witness to the grace of God. Some would argue that this is just semantics, but when the church makes no distinction in terms between youth group members on a summer trip and church leaders serving in cross-cultural ministries, our young people are sent the wrong message about missions. In addition the life changing experience they encounter may not always be positive. What is not always understood is that these well intentioned young people may not be adequately prepared for the stresses of the mission field. The living conditions, cultural barriers, violence, occult practices, may turn them away from seriously considering God's call to missions. At worst this lack of preparation and maturity can lead to their spiritual, emotional, or physical breakdown while others come away perceiving missions to be an easy career, accessible to anyone, which requires minimal qualifications and little preparation and training.

While all believers are called to ministry, ministers of the Gospel must be proven in ministry. Those sent out should have a track record of faithful stewardship and service. Then the church can send them out with confidence that having demonstrated their faithfulness, they will adequately represent the Lord and the gospel no matter where they may serve.

Second, a missionary must have a desire to serve the Lord out of gratitude and obedience to the Savior. They must not be motivated by a sense of guilt because of their personal opportunities, or by a desire for personal prestige and position within the church body. The Apostle Paul framed our motivation for ministry in his letter to the church at Corinth:

"Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart... for it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:1,6)

Our motivation to serve comes from a heart overflowing with gratitude because of the mercy God granted to us. Rather than receiving the due punishment for our sin, God, in His mercy and for His own pleasure, granted to us repentance and an eternal inheritance. What is our reasonable sacrifice in response? That we serve Christ from a heart of gratitude.

Unfortunately, the common motivation given today for missions service is self-centered and self-serving. Individuals are sent to foreign lands *to gain a life changing experience or to build unity within their youth group.* All in the name of missions. An example of this is the following excerpt from a short term missions promotional brochure and application:

"On XXXX you will enter into a discipleship program designed to help you grow... On XXXX you'll establish values and disciplines that will change you for the rest of your life... On XXXX you'll make new friends around the world... XXXX helps the short-termer gain a new perspective of missions as a possible career option... XXXX prepares and equips short-termers to return to their local church with a new vision ready and able to serve... XXXX offers a carefully balanced ministry for each short-term missionary. We emphasize the building of relationships above the building of bricks. By providing what we call a 'mini-

Don't Send Tourists!

"Send people who know Jesus Christ. Not just people who desire to visit a new area. Because if they don't go there on the basis of their salvation then they are not missionaries to begin with. Secondly, these people must have a definite call to the ministry and must respond to this ministry wholeheartedly... Not tourists. They should be people burdened with the lostness of mankind... They should have a sense of sharing (as) servant leaders leading the people to the truth. They should stand firm on what they preach. They should preach the gospel without compromise. They should not be sympathizers of peoples lives. That is they should not seek to sympathize with some of the traditions and customs of tribal people which are not in accordance with the Word of God."

Dr. Titus Kivunsi

Bishop of the Africa Inland Church, Kenya



missionary experience' each [short term] will see missionaries and pastors in the normal context of their own ministry and have the chance to actually experience the incredible variety of responsibilities found in missions! XXXX provides a unique opportunity to EXPLORE missions and EXPLORE the world."³

The brochure illustrates another common mistake of the short term mindset:

"Being firmly convinced short-term ministries accomplish the work of missions, ... [and] is a catalyst for lifechange in the short term."⁴

While a "mini-missionary experience" may serve some purpose in the lives of the people sent, it certainly should not be sold to the church as a fulfillment of the church's responsibility to obey our Lord's command. *Any reference to these activities as missions only confuses and misleads the church to believe, incorrectly, that they are faithfully fulfilling the Great Commission.*

Third, missionaries must, without compromise, be committed to the authority of the infallible, inerrant Word of God. They must demonstrate an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures. Furthermore they must not be weak in their understanding of the whole counsel of God so that they can effectively communicate it to those to whom they are sent. Paul's pattern in Acts emphasizes this:

"For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27)

When going to a foreign land, the missionary has nothing of spiritual value to offer the people other than God's Word. It is the Gospel of Christ which the people must believe to be saved. It is all of God's revealed Word which they must be taught to grow as disciples and establish new churches. How can one teach all that Christ commanded without first knowing what God's Word says for himself? It stands to reason, therefore, that to effectively carry out our Lord's command, it is necessary to have demonstrated the ability to accurately handle God's Word.

Is a church that is sending untested and immature believers overseas carrying out a Biblical model of missions? Is a church that is sending people who cannot preach or even share a testimony, sending people that are biblically prepared to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ? *Yet this is the style of missions that many are embracing today.*

Fourth, missionaries must meet the biblical qualifications for leadership in the church.

"This is a faithful saying: if a man desires the position of an overseer, he desires a good work. An overseer must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a

novice, lest being puffed up with pride He fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—

if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For an overseer must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self willed, not quick tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober minded, just, holy, self controlled, *holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.*"

(Titus 1:5-9)

The goal of a missionary should be the establishment of a local church with elders that are qualified to lead and protect that congregation of new believers as they seek to accomplish God's plan for them in that place. How then can any missionary who intends to establish a local church do this without himself being biblically qualified to oversee the church?

There are many biblical qualifiers that the Lord demands in the leadership of His church, the Body of Christ. Some only reinforce what has already been discussed, i.e. holding fast the faithful word, not being a new convert, being able to teach, being able to exhort. But one cannot ignore the multiple references to the family that are contained within the qualifications for church leadership. If a missionary is to be effective, his family relationships must be strong, stable, and biblical. Why is this? "For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?" (1 Timothy 3:5) Can it be any clearer?

But again the detrimental trend observed in the popular mission guides of today is a complete absence of or a noticeable downplaying of biblical standards in the requirements of their missionaries, while extra-biblical requirements are offered or emphasized instead. A recent publication listing career missions opportunities identi-

A review of these publications leaves one thinking that any unqualified, inexperienced, and ill-equipped believer that is sent to another culture for more than a week is fulfilling the Lord's command in the Great Commission... Now while these may be beneficial experiences for those involved, it is not the same thing as doing the missionary task.

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fied 43 organizations and their requirements for service:⁵

In addition to being:

Born again, able to share faith, not inhibited by hard work and long hours, and recommended by church, team players, good Bible background.

They must:

- Be 19 years old*
- Be acceptable to the team leader*
- Have been a Christian 2 years*
- Have a 4 year college degree + 30 hours Bible, or a Bible school diploma*
- Have cross cultural experience*
- Have small group experience*
- Have a commitment to spend one hour a day in private devotions*

While some of these are honorable and noteworthy, are these the requirements mandated by Scripture? And while these standards seek to produce or at least screen out those without Biblical Qualifications—or may serve as arbitrary filters for agencies with more applicants than positions—attaining these ages, experiences, or academic degrees by themselves should not be substituted for the Scriptural qualities of sound doctrine, fidelity in family relationships, and the observation of an authentic witness and life style before a lost world. The local church is in the position to recognize these qualities or the absence of them, but too many times a church will endorse candidates without much scrutiny and will confirm them on the basis of the individual testimony alone and/or upon their volunteering.

At The Master's Mission we are seeking biblically qualified individuals committed to serving our Lord Jesus Christ cross-culturally for a lifetime. We are seeking individuals and families that have demonstrated faithfulness to our Lord Jesus Christ in their local church ministry and whom the Lord is calling to full time missionary service.

We have mission-minded supporters that are willing to help sending churches by providing scholarships for most of their training expenses. The key is finding the right candidates and the right churches that have a vision for doing missions God's way. **Opportunities abound, but qualified candidates and churches willing to pay the price are few.** We believe missions ministry should be content centered—2 Timothy 2:2— and that it matters what we believe and teach.

If this describes your church's vision for missions or you are moving in this direction, we encourage you to contact The Master's Mission at 1-800-419-8618 for more information on developing a partnership in missions that can reverse ineffective modern trends and help your church get on with the task of global evangelism. **With God's grace we can move to faithful service.**

1. P.J. Honoch, *Great Commission Opportunities Guide* 1998, published by Real Media Group. Page 68.
2. Ted Haggard, *ibid.* Page 59.
3. DELTA Ministries International, *Short Term Missions* 1997. Page 2.
4. *Ibid.* Page 15
5. Career Missions Opportunities Chart, *ibid.* Page 78-87.

DO THE MATH! Cost and Effectiveness in Missions

The Cost of an Average Short Term Missions Crusade for two weeks

Round Trip Air fare and expenses per individual	\$3200	
For 30 individuals		\$96,000
Two Weeks		\$96,000

The Cost of an Average Long Term Career Missionary Presence for two families

Average Annual Support per Family	\$35,000	
For 2 families		\$70,000
Average Costs for building and maintaining bases of outreach that include churches, pastors' schools, medical clinics, schools, homes for children, etc. per month	\$1000	
For 2 families for one year		\$24,000
Two Families for one year		\$94,000

Short term or Career Missions?

Each has a proper role, but research indicates that in recent years we are barely replacing the veteran missionaries who are retiring let alone opening new fields of ministry. The churches need the lifetime commitment of new Career Missionaries and the will to provide adequate support if they are to go forward in fulfilling their Great Commission responsibilities.

The vacuum left by veteran missionaries cannot be filled with short-term volunteers.

Let's do the math and reverse the trend!



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