

INTRODUCTION TO MISSIONS

Missions: From God, to the World, through the Church



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*INTRODUCTION
TO MISSIONS*

MISSIONS:

FROM GOD

TO THE WORLD

THROUGH THE CHURCH

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Missions in the church and to the world

Dr. Perry J. Hubbard

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Introduction

Since 1889 the Wesleyan Church has been involved in missions. At that time work was begun in Sierra Leone, West Africa. Work has now been initiated in over 70 countries world wide. In this book the focus will be on what is happening in Latin America and the Caribbean. The first works in the area were started by the Pilgrim Holiness Church. Work began in Peru in 1904 and in Guyana in 1902. The Wesleyan Methodist Church opened work in Colombia in 1941 and Haiti in 1942. In 1920 Francisco Soltero began the work in Mexico. From these beginnings the mission work of the North American Church has spread to Brazil, the Caribbean Provisional Conference, Mexico, Suriname, Puerto Rico, Honduras and Costa Rica. In our North American Journal we will find a list of these countries, the number of missionaries, churches and church membership. Several other countries are listed as well that do not have a North American missionary. In fact these works were not started by North American missionaries but were the result of a desire on the part of the leaders of the churches in Latin America and the Caribbean to be involved in missions themselves. There are also a number of countries, missionaries, church members and churches that are not listed.

We have many exciting events happening as a result of the national churches getting involved in missions. Suriname has opened a church in French Guiana. The Caribbean Conference has works in Curacao and Belize. Colombia has sent a missionary couple to Venezuela. Costa Rica, Panama, Peru and Colombia have started works with indigenous Indian tribes. Chile is now planning on sending workers to help start a new church work in Uruguay. Colombia and Costa Rica have sent several pastors to the USA to help start Hispanic congregations. Through various contacts we now have churches in Guatemala,

El Salvador, Nicaragua and Argentina. Evangelistic crusades have been held in Cuba with Luis Martinez (Latin American evangelist). Several countries have sent out ministry teams to other countries to help in various ways.

The most exciting development is the start of work in Equatorial Guinea. Through the organization called Jibacam, teams have been sent to help establish a Wesleyan church in this country. Even more exciting is the fact that one man from this new church has been sent to Gabon and started two churches, and they are dreaming of sending someone to Paris, France to help open a church there among the French speaking West Africans in that city. There are also doors opening up to make contacts in Spain through this organization.

The center of all this movement of missions is the organization called Jibacam (Junta Iberoamericana y del Caribe de Misiones). Translated that stands for the missions board of Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a fellowship of leaders from the churches of the area whose key focus is to promote missions and to help the countries of the region become a mission force.

It all began in Puerto Rico in January 1996 where three national leaders and one missionary had a vision of what God could do if the people of the region were challenged to respond to the call of missions. From that vision the first conference on missions was held in Puerto Rico. Since that time there have been five more conferences held in Costa Rica, California, Colombia, Brazil and most recently Chile. In 2002 the leaders of the countries officially recognized Jibacam and appointed the first board. Equatorial Guinea was named their first official field for missions.

The purpose of Jibacam is to help the churches of this region to become a missionary sending force capable of taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations of the world. A key objective is to glorify God by strengthening the national churches through providing basic service needed for the development of missions in the church. The result of such development would be that each church could contribute to the evangelization of their people and to be able to reach out to the world beyond in fulfillment of the Great Commission.

The key principle guiding the work of Jibacam is that each local church is responsible to be actively involved in missions. The local church is the primary agency for the preparation, sending and supporting of missionaries and missions. The strategy to make this possible involves five key steps.

Step one – Building awareness about missions

Step two – Raising funds for missions

Step three – Recruiting for missions

Step four – Equipping for missions

Step five – Mobilizing for missions

At a special session in Costa Rica in 2002 it was realized that there was a critical need to carry this information to the churches of each country. Further they saw the need to provide training in the area of missions in the colleges of the area and to provide specialized training for those who would be called into missions. As a result of that decision the Jibacam board decided to create a structure to provide for these areas of training - the Wesleyan Center for World Missions in Latin America and the Caribbean. The first step would be to prepare a seminar specifically aimed at building awareness of what missions is, what each church's responsibility is, and how each church can be involved in the five steps listed. The following material is the result of that decision.

Chapter One – **The need for training in missions**

A key focus of most church organizations today is to provide for training for the pastors, leaders and lay members of the local church. We have established seminaries and colleges to provide for training of those called into fulltime pastoral ministry. To supplement this training there are correspondence programs, seminars and many other materials designed to help the pastor be effective in his ministry. There are also specific programs designed for the lay leaders of the church specifically for effective church ministry.

We also provide more specific training in key areas that relate to the work of the church. There are numerous programs and seminars that focus on evangelism and how to reach the lost. In recent years there has been a growing emphasis on church growth. Out of that has grown a focus on church planting. In the Wesleyan church we saw the development and impact of the metro move seminars which were designed to help our national churches move into the urban centers and establish churches. A key focus of ministry today is planting churches as a key way to reach the lost. Supporting all of these is training in the area of Christian Education. Programs on effective Sunday school ministry, youth ministry and discipleship are abundant.

All of the above are essential if one is to have a healthy mature church. One area though is lacking. There is no provision for training in missions. We tell them a little of the history of missions but there is so much more. They need to understand how to pray, how to plan, how to give and how to train those who will actually go. It is interesting how much effort we put into training people on how to reach their neighbor. We need to

do the same kind of training to help our churches and their members know how to reach those who are not their neighbors.

Romans 10:14-15 gives us a good idea of the kinds of issues involved in reaching those who are not our neighbor.

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” NIV

Here we see four key resources needed that there are not enough of. These four resources are critical to carrying out the mission of God.

1. Not everyone knows the Gospel is available. In spite of all our technical advances in the area of communications. In spite of the bible being translated into more languages than any other book. In spite of a history that covers 2000 years; more people know what Coca Cola is than who Jesus is. Coca Cola has a clear mission and message and people know what it is and where to get the product. They will spend a great deal of money purchasing something that will only last for a few minutes and then need to purchase another one and another one. The key is, people know it is available and what the cost will be.

On the other hand we have something much more important and yet so many in the world do not even know what the gospel is or who Jesus is much less the cost and availability. Missions is about making

the gospel available and helping everyone to get involved in making it available.

2. Not everyone has the ability to go to a place where it is available. Access is everything when it comes to marketing a product. Waiting for a potential customer to come to you is not the best way to sell your product. Coca Cola knows this and spends a great deal of money letting people know where to get the product. They have set up factories all over the world to produce the drink so that it is available. Instead of waiting for people to come to them they go to them first. They try by all possible means to make it available. They spend incredible amounts of money to tell you what the product is and where to get it. All this effort for something that really won't last. How much more critical is the message of the gospel! Sad to say our distribution system is not very efficient. There are many areas of this world that have no access to the gospel. It is just not available.
3. Not enough people are involved in making it available. This concept builds on the previous. The reason they can get to a place where it is available is no one is going to them to bridge the gap. Again let us use Coca Cola as an example. I have been in some very remote places. Places where you would not expect to have a bottle or can of Coca Cola. But there it is. Someone has gone to the trouble to carry it in, by plane, by truck, by mule and even in a pack. Why? Because they know there are people who will pay for the product. As a result they are willing to go to the trouble of making it available. In fact many companies encourage those who sell the product through awards and prizes. They find ways to get

more people involved in making it available. We have a message that will last for eternity. We have a vast network of churches and people and yet so few are involved. Even when someone is willing to go we make it difficult for them to do so. Instead of bonuses for selling the product we seem to find ways to punish and discourage the process and those who are involved.

4. Not enough people are ready and or able to go. Companies like Coca Cola spend a great deal of time training its people in how to market the product and creating incentives to get people into their programs and sell the product. They recruit and prepare their management and teach them how to market and get others involved. They have sales departments and training programs to support all of this effort at selling the product and delivering it. How do we compare in our efforts to recruit, train and send?

This is not a good or acceptable situation. We need a new vision of missions. We need a more comprehensive plan for carrying the gospel to the world. We need to provide for training at key areas.

We need to give the people information. We need to begin training and teaching at the local church level. People will not be involved if they don't know what the need is and what it will take to present the gospel to the world. We need to be sure that everyone in our local churches knows the need for missions. They need to know what is involved in reaching people with the gospel. They need to know what it will take to reach them at home, in their country, to the outsiders and to those in the whole world.

We need to give the local church members knowledge. Information is nice but not enough. Once I have learned the information I need to know what to do with it. They need training in intercultural skills. Wherever we are in the world we need this kind of knowledge to be able to effectively use the information we receive. If people know what to do with the information then it is easy to maintain the vision of reaching a lost world. It is easy to evaluate and plan for ministry.

We need to give the people preachers who will present the challenge of missions. People who will lead us in moving out into the world with the gospel. People who have been trained and can clearly state the purpose of the church and move them out into the world. People who will challenge them and call them to faith in God. People who will move our hearts to see the world the way God does - and go. People who understand clearly what God is calling us to do and can equip us to do the work before us.

We need to do this in every local church. We need to reach out to the people where we are. We need to do this in each region. Wherever we live there are people who are different from us culturally and linguistically. We need to train our people how to reach out to them. We need to see the world. We are responsible to go to every tribe and tongue and share the gospel. The training for each level will be different. Some will require more training and support. But we have not been given an option. The command is to go to the world. (Mk 16:15).

When we begin to understand our responsibility then we will receive the blessing implied by Paul when he said “how lovely are the feet of those who bring good news.” God is ready to call people to carry the good news. We need to do our part to train and teach and prepare the people so they will be able to go and be effective when they go.

This training can begin now and at several levels as we prepare to send those God will call. And He will call them. In fact he is calling them now.

Here are some areas in which we need to focus on to prepare to send those God is calling.

- Level One – Local churches – They need to learn how to promote missions. They need to learn what missions is and how to teach the members how to be involved. This can be done by holding a conference on missions or providing Sunday school classes that focus on key aspects of missions and what the bible teaches. The pastor can begin a series of messages on missions in the local church.
- Level Two – Leadership training – The leaders need training in key areas to help the local churches in their task of teaching and promoting missions. They need training in how to conduct a mission’s conference in the local church. They need a clear understanding of the theology behind missions and how to teach the people this information. They need help in developing a clear vision of missions and what the local church can do. They need help in being a source of unity and encouragement so that the local church can be a mission’s church.
- Level Three – Missionary Training – We need key programs designed to provide training in missiology for those called to missions and to support those already active in mission service. There is a need for seminars and training programs in cross-cultural ministry for those who are currently active or appointed to go. We

also need courses and seminars in our schools to teach pastors, church leaders and others who are key to the development of missions.

To accomplish this we need to prepare materials and training in four areas:

1. Missions minors/majors in our training facilities
2. Correspondence courses in areas of need
3. Seminars for training in specific types of ministry
4. Training institutes for those in service and those called to go.

By understanding our responsibility to go to the world and uniting our resources and abilities in a unique partnership we can accomplish together what cannot be done alone. We can begin now to train and become involved in many ways in missions.

Paul's discussion of various aspects of mission in 1 Corinthians 9:1-27 is helpful in understanding what is involved. He focuses on three needs and gives examples of what we need to be doing. The first area of need is to recognize that God is calling people to missions. He called Paul and is still calling us to be involved in reaching the world. The second area of need relates to supporting those who go. We need to provide for the care of the family, for their food, clothes and shelter and we need to be sure they have the finances necessary to carry out the work assigned to them. Paul spends a great deal of time explaining the seriousness of this need. The point he makes is that we need to understand we are responsible to care for those we send. Not just in the first few days, weeks or months but until the Lord returns or the work can take responsibility for itself. This means we need to be ready to make a long term commitment to missions and to those we send.

The third area of need relates to training as well as support. There are different types of ministry and thus different types of needs and responsibilities. He uses three types of people as examples. Each of these has a different role as relates to missions and a different need for training.

1. The first group he talks about is the vineyard keepers and goat headers. These are people who could represent the people of the local church. They provide for themselves and out of what they have, they provide for the support of those who are chosen to lead or to go. They have a special type of ministry. They are the people who stay where they are and serve. But to be effective in a vineyard or goatherd requires knowledge and skill related to those activities. In the same way those who are involved in local church ministries need to be trained to be effective. If the work of the local church is not effective then they will not be able to send or support those who work outside of the local church.
2. The second group mentioned is athletes. They could represent our leaders both local, district and national. Unlike the first group, which is generally restricted in the scope of its ministry and remain in a specific place to serve, this group is more mobile and impacts the lives of others. They are in the public eye and we look to them for leadership and guidance. They help us see how to run the race and provide vision and encouragement to us. They need to be trained so that they will be effective in their role as leader.
3. The third group described is soldiers. Every group has those who are selected for both the protection of the group and its promotion to others. They go out from us and enter into the enemy's territory. The Roman soldier

was trained more for the purpose of entering and defeating the enemy and less for defense. He required a very specific type of training and since the time involved prevented him from caring for his own needs, he required outside support so that all his time could be devoted to the task at hand. The missionary is our soldier taking the Gospel into the enemy's territory. They need specialized training for that task and freedom to do the work.

To accomplish the goal of reaching the world we need to be training at several levels. If we take serious this need for training we will be able to send and support missionaries. We will be involved in missions not just in our own countries but around the world. The key to this is two fold. The first part is to accept in obedience God's call and becoming part of his vision of reaching a lost world. The second part is to accept the responsibility to teach everyone what missions is and what they can do.

We can begin now. Within a week of receiving the challenge to promote missions you can share what you have learned with someone in your church and before the year is out you can have a conference or meeting in your church to promote missions. Within a year each district or national church can schedule a meeting to train leaders and pastors in promoting and being involved in missions. Within a year or two we can have training programs, seminars and correspondences courses available to help prepare and train those whom God has and is calling to go.

The one thing we need to avoid is the mistake the church in Jerusalem made. They always seemed to be catching up with God's plans and missing out on the blessing of sending and supporting the work of missions.

Peter was not thinking about reaching people of another culture when God gave him a vision. Three times God presented the challenge to eat things that were not part of his culture and background and each time Peter balked, but he did go. Even with that encouragement the first thing Peter said to Cornelius was that he shouldn't be there because Cornelius was a Gentile. Not a good way to open the door. Peter apparently was taking too long to present the truth and so God interrupted and the Spirit came on them in the same way as he had the Jews at Pentecost. When the Jerusalem church heard about this event they were not to happy with Peter and called him in to report and explain himself and his actions. Can you imagine Peter trying to explain the vision and God's challenge and then how God interrupted his sermon to Cornelius? Peter had a great message to present. The first time he spoke over 5000 responded and this time he didn't even get to finish his message. The church in Jerusalem was forced to admit that what had happened was from God and lost out on the blessing.

Consider Phillip's ministry. He was appointed as a deacon but every time we hear about him he is being sent somewhere to witness. He is not sent by the church but led by God. The first time it was to Samaria and a great revival broke out. The church responded by sending Peter and John to check it out. They discovered that God was at work and got involved. The other event finds Phillip on the road to nowhere, well not quite nowhere, but on a dusty road heading to Ethiopia, to meet a single man. He is to share the good news and then leave. The rest is in God's hand and the church can only listen to the report and wonder.

Antioch is a thriving and growing group of believers. Some of the people who heard Peter at Pentecost have responded and returned home to share with fellow Jews the good news. They notice the Gentiles are interested and decide to start a new work

among them which proves to be very fruitful. The Jerusalem church learns what is happening and sends Barnabas and another person to check it out. Barnabas gets so excited that he doesn't go back to Jerusalem but heads for Tarsus to get Saul, all without consulting Jerusalem. The Lord blesses and the church in Antioch grows and begins to sense that God wants to do something special and so begins a vigil of prayer that results in them sending out the first official missionaries, Saul and Barnabas. Then they send out Barnabas and John Mark as well as Paul and Silas. It will be fifteen years before Jerusalem gets an official report from Barnabas or Paul. By then the mission has spread far and wide and Jerusalem is left behind. They only have one response and that is to praise God for what has been done. They only ask that the Christians of these many cultures be sensitive about several key Jewish rules.

In each instance the church in Jerusalem in not taking the lead but always seems to be playing catch-up. They are not planning for outreach. Instead of sending and training they only hear about what God is doing and must admit that God has been working and so must bless the work.

Let us not make those mistakes.

- Let us be the ones to train, prepare and send. We should not wait for someone else to do it.
- Let us be the ones to bring the vision to the people. If we do God will bless us and the work.
- Let us be the ones who let the whole world know that Jesus saves and let them hear that we are carrying the message to the world in obedience to the vision and call given by God.

Part One –

Biblical Studies on Missions

In this section we study what the scriptures has to say about missions.

The first area will be gaining an understanding of missions and how it is presented and done in the Old Testament.

The second area looks into how Jesus continued the work of missions and the response of the church to that work.

The third area involves and overviews of scriptures that help us define missions as part of the church's life and ministry.

Chapter Two – Old Testament Missions – God Creating a Witness

As one studies the Old Testament one will soon learn that God himself is actively involved in a mission. That mission involves personally reaching out to man and in the process creating a witness to Him and his mission. We see that God has many ways of reaching out to us. He has used many avenues to reveal His presence and His desire for us to know and understand Him.

He works directly and indirectly in the lives of people. He uses personal contact either by himself or a representative which is often an angel sent by him. He called Abraham (Ge 12) to follow him and be used to bless others. He walked and talked with Enoch (Ge 5:24). He spoke face to face with Moses (Ex 33:11). These are just a few of the instance where God chose to communicate directly. Some people meet him through the lives and actions of people who serve him. The young Hebrew boys' refusal to bow to the golden image was used by God to reveal truth to Nebuchadnezzar (Da 3). Events like Daniels refusal to pray to the king of Persia was used by God to reveal truth to Darius (Dan 6) and Elijah's willingness to challenge the servants of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Ki 18). The most common method of communication used by God is to communicate through the prophets. He gave them a message which they were to carry to the people. They used many methods to communicate what God had spoken to them. They clearly understood that they were expected to inform and warn the people (Ez 33:1-7; Jer 1:5).

When necessary he will directly challenge the things we worship in place of him. In Dt 4:19 he warns the people of Israel not to worship the sun, moon and stars. To prove that point he makes the sun stand still in Joshua 10:13 and even causes it to go backwards for Hezekiah (Is 38:7-8). He refuses

to share his place with the gods and repeatedly reveals his power over them. This is especially true of the gods of Egypt who were belittled by God through the plagues in Exodus and later the gods of Canaan, God told the people of Israel to destroy them (Dt 7:5-6). David reviews this history and the attitude of God in a prayer in 2 Samuel 7:23 where he reminds the people of how God has destroyed the gods. God denies that man through wisdom can understand him and his ways. God stands above all the wisdom of man, which cannot save. Solomon reminds the people that there is one thing greater than wisdom and that is the fear of God (Eccl 12:13). Isaiah warns that in the end the wisdom of man will perish and vanish and what will be left is God (Is 29:14, 23). When it comes to trust in material goods, David, a man who had great wealth made the following comment, “Do not be overawed when a man becomes rich... he will take nothing with him when he dies.” God warns people not to rely on their wealth. As great as Israel was in the days of Solomon it did not save them from God's judgment when they refused to follow him.

God has intervened directly in history to reveal his presence and purpose. One of the more dramatic events outside of the plagues of Egypt was the destruction of the Assyrian army, in 2 Ki 19 by God, to reveal his power over history and the nations. One of the most powerful statements in history God has made regarding his mission was the formation of the tribe of Israel. At one point in time he created a nation for the specific purpose of revealing himself and his power to the world. He took a nation of slaves and created a mighty nation. They were to be a nation of priests (Ex 19:6). The key function of priests is to represent God to the people and to bring the people before God. God wanted Israel to draw the world to him.

As a result of God's activity we learn that God is reaching out which makes it possible to have contact with him. The fact that

it is God reaching to us reveals his desire to have contact with those he has created. In the process of reaching out to man he has left a witness to both his presence and his love for us.

The word witness appears in many places throughout scripture and so it would be good for us to understand what a witness is. The most basic definition is one who reports on what they have seen and heard. A further definition would be anything that reveals to us what has happened at a given place in a given time. A witness relates to evidence to prove or disprove a claim by someone or whether an event did or did not occur. In scripture there are a number of things that are used as witnesses to the presence and activity of God.

The most basic type of witness is an object and the most common object used as a witness are stones. Jacob set up some stones as a witness or reminder that he had met God when he was running away from his brother. When the people of Israel crossed the Jordon river God had them collect stones and pile them near the bank of the river as a witness to them and their offspring of what he had done that day (Jo 4:9). A short while later God required the people to destroy the sin in their midst, which was embodied in the family of Achan and his theft. The report is that stones used to destroy and bury them were still there as a witness (Jos 6:4-6). There are several other such uses of stones and other objects which were used to remind the people of the presence of God.

Events were often referred to, to remind people that God was in control and had a purpose for them. Gideon a man from the least tribe was called on to lead Israel in a most unique battle plan. A plan designed by God to reveal his presence and power (Jud 6). God used a drought in the time of Elijah to state that only he was the one true God and not Baal who was believed to be the God of the weather and provide rain (I Ki 17). Daniel

and the lions den, his friend and the fiery furnace were events used to make a clear statement of who the one true God is.

The bible is filled with symbols used to declare the presence of God. The pillar of cloud and fire that traveled before the people of Israel represented God leading the people (Ex 13:21). The Ark of the Testimony represented God's presence among the people (Ex 25:22). The brazen serpent represented both judgment and healing (Nu 21:8-9). Manna represented God's ability to provide (Ex 16:32). The most impressive symbol was actually a structure. It was the temple built by Solomon. One of its key purposes was to draw people to the worship of the one true God (1 Ki 8:41-43).

God worked in some people's lives and brought about significant change which became a testimony to his presence and power to save. Rahab was a prostitute and yet she believed in God and her name appears in the genealogy of Jesus (Jos 6, Mt 1:5). This fact is a testimony to God's love and forgiveness. The same is true of Ruth, who worshipped false gods until she found the one true God (Ruth 1:16, Mt 1:5). Her name also appears in the genealogy of Jesus. Naaman because of the testimony of a child finds healing and the true God as a result of the healing (2 Ki 5).

The nation of Israel was to be a witness of God's power and presence. They were to tell the world of the one true God. Their existence as a nation was testimony to that fact. When they failed to obey God stated that their destruction would serve the same purpose, a testimony of his power and presence (1 Ki 8:59-60). When they obeyed the nations around them were impacted and learned of God. Even when they disobeyed nations and leaders learned of the one true God.

God has used all these and more as witnesses to his presence and his desire for us to know him. In this case the key function of the witness is to reveal the truth. The truth that is being revealed is God himself. The result of the witness is that we learn of God's activity and the key activity that God is involved in is bringing man back into relationship with Himself.

It is profitable to review some of these items again so that we clearly understand what has just been stated. God is interested in a personal relationship with us. God at the point of creation walks and talks with Adam in the garden (Ge 2-3). Even after his fall this desire to have close communion remains. So much so that when there is a threat of a breakdown as is seen in the attitude of Cain. God makes a special effort to warn Cain of what could happen and of his interest to help restore Cain (Ge 4). We have not done well at listen but God does not give up and so comes to Abraham to try again to restore the relationship (Ge 14). From what we hear of this meeting it is clear that God is interested in all of mankind and not just one individual but at the same time has time to meet with one individual. Moses meets God because God wants him to lead the people of the promise given to Abraham (Ex 3). They will become a kingdom of priest to the nations. Moses life will be the focal point and that relationship the example of what God wants our relationship with him to be like, face to face.

God makes use of our lives and events to further communicate what he expects and his offer of hope. He calls on Noah to build an ark (Ge 6). It and the building of it are both a warning and an offer of hope and salvation. God sends plagues on Egypt to reveal his power and his ability to save (Ex 7-12). Those who refuse to believe are judged and destroyed. Those who believe are saved. The building of the temple was to call people to God (2 Chr 6). Solomon expressed this attitude in his prayer of dedication. Elijah was involved in several events that were to

proclaim the truth that there is only one true God worthy of our worship. From the drought that lasted three years, through the trial by fire on Mount Carmel to the end of his life where he was taken into heaven by a chariot of fire and not allowed to die. Remember Jezebel had promised she would kill him and to prove the point of who is really in control prevented the death of his prophet as a final statement. Hosea is asked to marry a prostitute (Hosea). His entire marriage becomes a statement of God's frustration with Israel and of the extent of his love.

To add to all of the above are the writings of the historians and the prophets. The historical books contain a special record of God's specific dealings with a group of people. They record the process by which God brought the nation into being and why he did this. They show us the nature of his concern through a series of judgments on their misbehavior and his response to save them when they chose to listen to him during the era of the judges. They let us see and understand how much God loves us and desires to be a part of our lives as we witness the glory of the kingdom during the time of David and Solomon and during the reigns of the kings who chose to follow the path of David. Finally as we read the words from the time of decline and destruction we hear the words of Moses in Dt 28:24-25 that even in their destruction the truth about God will be revealed. Jeremiah contains much insight into what God was doing even as he brought about the destruction and exile of his chosen people.

That leaves us with the other collection of writings collectively called the prophets. They are chosen to communicate the specifics about God's love and judgment. They reveal God's desire for people to come to him and his distaste for sin. Finally we begin to see the depth of God's love as they report to us God's promises regarding the coming of a messiah and God's plan to live among us. He will send his spirit not on just one or

a few but on all who come to him and follow his truth. He will provide salvation to all who will believe and come to him in faith. God is not leaving us with a gap in our knowledge about him but is filling it with wonderful revelations. He is leaving a clear witness to what his mission is.

From all of this it is clear that God is actively creating a witness for us about himself and his plans. He reveals that he is concerned that all nations have access to the truth, to the witness about himself. Even as we listen to these words we begin to learn more about God himself and in learning about God we begin to learn the answers to a number of critical questions. His character and attributes define the plan and tell us what about his mission. In God we will find the answers to these questions:

1. Why he seeks to save man
2. What is involved in saving man
3. How he interacts with man
4. What makes it possible for this mission to succeed

As we study the attributes of God we can learn much about why it is possible for God to reach out to us and why he is able to provide for our salvation and reestablishing a relationship with us.

- God is omnipotent (Job 9:4-13). This means he is all powerful and is able to do whatever is needed to save and restore us.
- God is omniscient (Ps 139). He has all knowledge and so knows the best and therefore the only way to save us.
- God is omnipresent (Jer 23:23-24). He is able to be everywhere at every moment and so can provide salvation to all mankind wherever we may be. No one

will be excluded because they cannot find God. He is already there.

- God is eternal(Ps 90:1-2). There is no point in time where God does not exist and so there is no point in time when His salvation is not available.
- God is infinite (Is 44:6). God has no limit which also means there is nothing that can limit his activity. When God has decided to act there is nothing to prevent him from carrying out that decisions.
- God is immense (2 Chr 2:6). There is no obstacle great enough to interfere with God's choices and activities. Nothing is greater than God.

The key idea that is gained from a study of the attributes of God is that God is fully able to save and does so in the best, in fact the only possible way. As we understand God we can more fully understand and appreciated what he is doing as he creates a witness of his love and concern for our restoration and of the extent of his love for us.

Now let us look at the character of God. They are different in the same way that a physical description of us is different from a study of our personality. Physical strength and skills can be used in many different ways. They can be used for personal gain or to help others. They can be used to destroy as well as create. When we look at the character of God we see how he has applied his attributes to our need. The character of God defines the basis of the plan, how he responds to us and reveals why he desires to reveal himself.

The basis of the plan is found in the following aspects of God's character.

- God is holy (Lec 21:8). This defines the heart of the problem and reveals the depth of our need. Only that which is pure may come into God's presence. That

means that God must provide for our cleansing, the removal of the stain that sin causes which prevents us from entering his presence.

- God is just (Ex 18:29-30). The impact of sin must be dealt with. We have not just merely failed because of some inherent flaw. That could be overlooked. We have chosen to ignore even defy God and His laws and requirements for relationship with him. As a result there is a penalty or debt that must be dealt with in order for us to come before him.
- God is truth (Nu 23:19). This covers two critical areas that are vital in our understanding the scope of God's plan and our ability to trust him. The fact that God is truth means the issues involved are clearly defined. There is no hidden agenda. There will be no surprise twists or changes. It also means that God will not, cannot deceive us. We can fully trust what he reveals about himself and our need.
- God is wisdom (Da 2:20-22). It is not just that he has knowledge he also understands. He knows and understands our needs. He knows and understands how to guide us to Him. He knows and clearly understands the cost involved both for him and for us.

That leads us to look at how he responds.

- God is righteous (Is 56:1). He must deal with our disobedience. He cannot ignore what we have done to him and to his creation.
- God is grace (Is 54:5). The simplest thing would be for God to simply judge and destroy but his grace allows him to provide for our salvation. He does not have to do so but he can.
- God is mercy (Is 57:15-19). He can do for us the very thing we do not deserve. He can offer to forgive and restore. We have done nothing that deserves such a

response but he in his mercy can choose to do so. He is kind (Joel 2:13). Without this we would still find our selves in a difficult position. He could choose to require from us a payment for what he is offering. Instead in kindness he offers it to us freely. This grows out of his mercy. Mercy makes it possible, kindness makes it available.

- God is longsuffering (Eccl 3:14; Nu 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29). He not only can offer this incredible gift to us without charge he now is patient with us. He is not in a hurry. This is not a limited time offer. As long as the final day of judgment has not arrived there is still time. As long as we have one more breath in our lungs there is still time. God is waiting for us, we are not waiting for him. He will be patient in the hope that we will respond.
- God is immutable (Jer 31:3). This is by far the most critical item in this list. Simply stated it means no change or unchangeable. God does not change and so his offer will not change. His plan to save us is eternal like him. Since it is his plan and he does not change the plan cannot change. Included in that is the concept of reliability. The offer is absolutely reliable. We do not need an extended warranty or guarantee. We can absolutely trust God to do what he has promised when we respond to his offer.

That leaves the key character that ties both the attributes of God and his character together. This quality of God explains why he is revealing himself and even interested in our salvation.

- God is love (1 Jn 4:16). His love requires him to take an appropriate action on behalf of his creation, us. It permeates all that he does and is reflected in all of his decisions and actions related to man. Even in judgment God reveals his love and desire to draw us back to him. In love he will do whatever is necessary to make it

possible for us to return. Even to the point of coming and dying to pay the penalty so that we can be cleansed and free to stand before him again.

The plan has been part of His thinking from the beginning. Even in the garden when Adam and Eve failed and opened the door to sin God was at work and let them know there was hope in as the impact of sin began to take affect (Ge 3). He comes to Abraham to reveal the scope of the plan. His desire to reach out to every nation through Abraham and his seed (Ge 14). Through Moses he reveals the need each of us has by giving the law (Ex 20). The law defines the issue clearly. We will not be able to keep the law and must pay for our failure. The law was a constant reminder of the need and the sacrifices were a constant reminder of the debt being incurred by our failure our sin.

In David we begin to learn the extent of God's love. David was not a shining example of purity and faithfulness. We would better look at Moses or Elijah for that and even they failed in key areas. No the key to David being called a man after God's own heart was David's clear understanding of the depth of God's love and his need for forgiveness (Ps 32). David failed miserably on several occasions. What made him special was his awareness of his responsibility and his dependence on God to forgive and restore him. David shows how great the love of God is to those who honestly seek God and see their need for forgiveness.

The prophets give us the details of what God wants to do. They reveal the details of the mission of God (He 1:1). They show us the plan bit by bit as God opens their eyes. We learn through the prophets about the incarnation, God's birth as a man (Is 7:14). We learn how this incarnate God will suffer for us and even die for our sin (Is 53). We are able to rejoice as we learn that the death is not the end but the beginning of a great victory as God

as man is resurrected and conquers death for us (Ps 16:10) and so reveals that there is hope for man. We learn that God is seeking to establish a new kingdom based on a new hope centered in his love for us (Is 9:7). Through the prophets we learn who will be the key to this mission of God. We learn of the messiah who is coming to seek and save we who are lost and desire to return to the one who created us, the one who loves us (Is 53).

In the Old Testament we learn of the purpose of this mission of God's, this desire to create a witness for us. God desires to reveal himself to a world that has been blinded by its own sin. God desires to reveal to us the depth of his desire to save us and return us to fellowship with him. God desires to reveal to us the one who would make all of this possible. The messiah, God incarnate is coming and we will be able to see God revealed and his plan fulfilled.

Chapter Three – New Testament - Missions in the Age of Fulfillment

As we have seen in the Old Testament, God has been actively involved in communicating with man His love and desire to restore the broken relationship between us. This mission is an integral part of the Old Testament and forms the basis for all of God's activity. We must also remember that when the early Christians began to share the truth of the gospel it was the Old Testament they used to proclaim the message of forgiveness. Jesus words and teachings were based on the Old Testament.

As we open the New Testament we discover that God has not finished speaking. Even before Jesus begins His ministry His father has more to say. In the opening chapters of the gospels we find God speaking, using key events, a prophet, and His written word and at one point all of heaven gets involved.

The opening events involved two individuals, Mary and Joseph. God speaks through a messenger to let these two people understand that the time of fulfillment of all His promises has come. God comes to Mary and informs her that she is to be the mother of the Messiah (Lk 1:28-33). Every woman of that era had heard of the coming Messiah and wondered if she might be the one chosen. Joseph's response is not very encouraging. Can you imagine your response to your future wife's declaration that God had made her pregnant? Would you believe her or react like Joseph? His response was to end the engagement without trying to shame her. Imagine Joseph's reaction when God comes to talk to him about Mary. When God says, "it's My fault. I am the father of the child." God comes to help Joseph understand and accept what is happening (Mt 1:18-23), to

accept the fact that God is carrying out His promise to save us from our sin.

Zechariah, the husband of Elizabeth, has an encounter with God as well (Lk 1:11-17). This time it is the husband who is informed that his wife is going to have a child. Zechariah's response is not one filled with faith. Can you hear him? Maybe he in a very polite and loving way reminded the Lord that his wife was very old. It is almost like asking the Lord if He really knows what He is doing. It is apparent that Zechariah has forgotten his bible history. He has forgotten about Sarah and Hannah and how God gave them children. He forgets that Elizabeth and Sarah have the same problem; they are beyond the age of bearing children. But God has spoken and then informs Zechariah that he will not speak again until the child is born. Further that the child to be born will be the one who prepares the way for the promised one. When, the child, is born, God, through Zechariah, lets everyone know why John has come and what the people should expect (Lk 1:67-80).

One of the more interesting stories related to God's ongoing mission relates to the coming of the wise men of the east (Mt 2:1-6). Where did they find the information that made it possible to pick this moment in time to begin a very long and dangerous journey, one that would allow them to see and honor the coming king? If you think about it, they will begin to realize that the place they come from was at one time the home of Daniel. There is no proof, but it is easy to believe that Daniel took the time to gather copies of the words of the prophets, historians and of the Pentateuch. He also was a witness to the leaders and educated people of that country of the presence and power of God. So much so that over four centuries later they still had copies of those materials and were still influenced by the testimony of God found in the life of Daniel. God's witness through His word was there for them to see and they believed.

So strong was their belief they set out on a journey to honor the King of God's word.

On the day of the birth of Jesus God releases heaven to participate in the great event (Lk 2:33-38). They proclaim the key to what God has been doing. The message is one of peace to all because of God's favor. God is seeking to restore peace to our relationship and it is by His choice that this is happening. God is definitely not sitting on the sidelines. He is actively participating in letting people know what He is doing and why. This is clearly revealed in the responses of Anna and Simeon when they see the new born Messiah in the temple (Lk 2:33-38). They know that the promised salvation of God has now come and they are privileged to see Him. Anna even goes from person to person telling them all about the child and what God is doing.

Except for a brief encounter with Jesus at the age of twelve, He remains silent until He is around thirty years old. Even then it is another person who receives a message of God and begins proclaiming the presence of the Messiah. John the Baptist tells everyone that he has come to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah as foretold by Isaiah (Is 40:3-5). He tells everyone that he has come to preach repentance so that the people will understand how they are to respond (Lk 3:3). John also indicates that part of his role is to physically identify the Messiah for the people (Jn 1:29-34). As part of his preaching John makes a number of key statements that show us the difference between his ministry and the ministry of the Messiah. John says he is baptizing only with water; the Messiah will baptize with the Holy Spirit. John sees himself as a prophet, but the one who is coming is greater than him because He existed before John did. John preaches a message of repentance; the Messiah, or Lamb of God, would be able to forgive them. John clearly knew he was not the Messiah, but one who would point

the way to the Son of God. Believing in the words of John was not enough; John said that believing in the Messiah would bring eternal life (Jn 1-2).

As we can see God has not been silent about His plan, His mission. In fact He has been very active in communicating what He intends to do and why He has sent the Messiah. As we look at the life and teachings of Jesus we will learn even more from Jesus about the activity and desire of God.

Let us treat the rest of the New Testament as if it were a play, with acts and scenes that are played out on a stage. In this case the stage is the world. We are the audience. It is a unique play because we are getting a chance to hear and understand the intent and desire of the author. We are more than just an audience, we are the target group and we are expected to respond to what is presented to us.

The main act focuses on the life and teachings of Jesus. It is broken down into four key scenes: 1) What Jesus believes His Father's purpose is; 2) What Jesus Himself thinks of His ministry; 3) The life and activity of Jesus; 4) the teachings of Jesus. The second act relates to the events after Jesus ascension. It is broken down into two scenes; 1) the impact of the Gospel; 2) the content of the message. The final act relates to what is happening today in relation to the gospel. There is an epilogue or summary statement as well that reflects on key concepts, that are still true today, regarding this message from God - the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sit back and enjoy the play as we raise the curtain on the mission of God as seen through the life of Jesus and played out in the life of the church.

Act One – Jesus

Scene One – Focus on the Father’s View

When we look at the life of Jesus it will be helpful if we understand the links between Jesus’ ministry and the mission of God. The key question is, “is there a link or connection between what God has been doing and the ministry of Jesus?” From the beginning we discover that even as a child Jesus understood that what His father wanted was to be the key focus of His ministry. At age twelve when His parents question Him about His activity and explain their search for Him, He tells them they should not have worried and should have known they where they would find Him. He states that He needed to be in His Father’s house (Lk 2:49). In the book of John we find a number of discussions related to the ministry of Jesus, His relationship to the Father and the focus of His work. He states that the work He is doing is a mirror of the Father’s work. He states He is doing what He saw His Father doing (Jn 5:19). More to the point even the words He speaks are not His own but the words the Father has told Him to speak (Jn 12:50). In Jn 14:31 Jesus sums up all of His activity by stating that in everything He says and does He is obeying what His Father told Him to do. Jesus clearly shows us that God is behind His entire ministry. In fact the basis of Jesus ministry is to be found in what God himself is and has been doing all along and thus is an extension of that activity in a way that we can more clearly observe.

Scene Two – Focus on Jesus View

It is clear that God is the source of Jesus ministry. But what does Jesus think of this ministry and His purpose? Does He accept this assignment from His Father’s? There are many statements from Jesus that indicate that He is doing more than imitating His Father, more than carrying out orders. He

understands the purpose of His coming and accepted it as His own. He states that He came because He was sent (Mt 15:34, Jn 4:31, Jn 5:37). The importance of this fact is reflected in several statements that He makes. He says, “I am here to be the Savior of the world” (Jn 4:42), “I am here to seek and save the lost” (Lk 19:10), and “I am here to die for the sins of man” (Jn 10:11). The clearest statement that He understands and accepts His role is found in the fact that He knows that He will die and rise again and that this event will reveal two key truths: 1) That He is God (Jn 10:11) and 2) That He can forgive sins (Mt 16:21). Jesus knows why He had come and the importance that people believe in Him (Jn 3:16). His Father’s love is the driving force and in obeying and accepting His role, Jesus makes it possible for people to find eternal life by believing this truth as represented by Jesus. Jesus states clearly that it is for this purpose that He came (Jn 12:27). God responds verbally to this statement so that the disciples will understand the connection between God’s mission and Jesus actions (Jn 12:28).

Scene Three – Jesus Life

We have seen the connection between God’s purpose and Jesus’ understanding about that purpose. Like most things it is easy to state something but another thing to actually live out the words we speak. In Jesus’ life we discover that the words He spoke were more than words. He lived out the words He heard from His Father and took seriously what He understood as His purpose. In His baptism He sought to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15). He sought to be fully obedient at every point, willing to submit so that people would understand clearly what was involved in hearing God’s word. It was said by the people that His teaching had an authority unlike that of the other teachers (Mk 1:22). He spoke the truth because He was the truth. His ministry was filled with the power of God and of the Holy Spirit (Lk 19:10). While there had been times of miracles before, and

the Holy Spirit had dwelt with men in the past, this was something much more. It was a clear picture of what it would like to have God dwelling among man. His death would reveal the extent of God's and Jesus' love for the lost (Jn 3:16). The resurrection would serve to clearly reveal the depth of the truth of God's promises (Jn 10:15-18). Each step Jesus took, each day He lived became a testimony of the presence of God. Each action, each moment a chance to see God's love visibly expressed to us.

Scene Four – Jesus Teaching

Here we see all of the above explained for us. While Jesus taught on many topics one of the key topics He spoke on related to the purpose of His coming. In His first sermon given while visiting His home in Nazareth, He explains why He has come. He uses a prophetic passage from Isaiah 61:1, 2 to give the background. He has been anointed to preach good news, release for the captive, sight for the blind and the year of the Lord's favor. Further He states that His coming is a fulfillment of these promises (Lk 4:20-21). In relation to the law He states that the law's purpose is to point one to God, and that in Him, Jesus, the law is fulfilled (Mt 6). He has many discussions relating to the source of life. He uses different symbols, bread (Jn 6:35) and water (Jn 4:14) to indicate that He is the source of true life and that only in Him can we truly be alive.

In His discussion regarding salvation He makes several comments. The focal point of each of them is that only by believing in Him, Jesus, can a person be saved (Jn 11:25). He broadens the focus of this offer of salvation by stating that it is for the entire world (Jn 1:19). To further strengthen this position we that He prays for and encourages others to pray for the salvation of those who will hear the message and believe in Him

(Jn 17:20-21, Mt 9:38). We have seen earlier that He understood this as a primary reason for His coming to earth.

He also takes time to explain how His life is linked to God's mission or God's witness to us. He tells us that this message, the good news of God's kingdom must be preached to all nations (Mt 28:19-20). He states that we are the salt and the light of the world (Mt 5:13). We are expected to carry the message He has given to those who have not heard it. We are to be witnesses to the world of all that Jesus has said and done (Ac 1:8). In effect we are to proclaim the love of God to the world as revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus.

We have not exhausted all that could be said regarding the life and teachings of Jesus. There is so much more and all of it is worth studying so that we can gain a complete understanding of God's mission and how it is revealed in Jesus. These were chosen to help you get started on further study of God's missions. It will be that study that will help us become part of the next act and help us to understand why the early church responded so powerfully to Jesus words to preach the gospel to all the world.

Act Two - Acts A to Z

Scene One – The Gospel Impact

If Jesus was truly sent from God then we would expect people to respond. We would expect to see evidence beyond the words, beyond the miracles, beyond the death and resurrection. Truth changes people and as a result changes the world. Truth brings us to the point where we must choose to change the basis of our life, and in doing so, choose to let others know what has happened. If the mission of God's is true therefore it must become our mission as well.

In Jerusalem we see just that. A group of people who have heard the message and have seen the mission take the time to pray and ask God to show them what to do. What happens next is further proof that all that has been shared is true, not just for those who actually heard the message first hand but for everyone who comes after that moment. We can understand the commitment of a group of people who lived with a great person and their fire to share the teachings they have received. That is to be expected. What happens now is beyond that. In Jerusalem, people from all over the world gather for a religious festival. So many have heard about the man but never seen Him. So many are wondering what it all means. On this day Peter, a man who is not noted for His ability to speak, gets up and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaims the message. On this day people of many nations hear the message of God's love. On this day we see the extent of God's desire to fulfill His promises. On this day salvation is offered to all who believe and repent (Acts 2). Forget the wonder of the gift of tongues, the incredible impact of the tongues of fire and the wind. Those are really minor events. The main event is that people from many backgrounds, many social environments, people of many languages hear the truth. They hear that God loves them. They hear the change that God has made in the lives of those who know this truth. They hear the first generation of believers speak and know that what they are hearing is truth. They hear and they believe.

More exciting than that first day is what follows. People who were not there for the life of Jesus, who did not see the death on the cross or see the resurrected Christ began to carry the message to others. Stephen, a Hellenist Jew, in every sense a foreigner to this area draws the lines clearly and people respond. Many believe and many are filled with hate toward those who believe. The response is so great that they kill Stephen but the result is not what they expected. Instead of bringing an end to

the message they only cause people to carry it to people in other parts of Judean and even to Samaria.

Phillip, another Hellenist Jew and a deacon, goes to Samaria and the people believe (Act 8:5). The Samaritans are considered to be outcasts and the enemies of the Jews and yet when they hear the message, they know it is true. A group of believers return home to Antioch and begin to share with those who will listen. The Gentiles are interested in what they are telling others and eventually the believers in Antioch decide that the Gentiles should be included in hearing the message (Ac 11:20). The Gentiles respond and the new church is blessed. God is at work. This group in Antioch takes the next step and at the insistence of the Lord send out missionaries. Paul, Barnabas, John Mark, Silas are sent to places that have little knowledge of the events that occurred in Jerusalem (Ac 13). They have heard about Jesus but not much more. They too respond to the message of God.

How this group learned about what God was doing is not clear but over in Macedonia people are seeking (Ac 16:9). Paul is directed by God to go to them. They respond and the message of God's mission, the gospel, continues to spread until it reaches Rome. Paul's letters state that he is looking forward to visiting Rome as a final step in going to places that have never heard (Ro 15:20). In each step you will note God is moving and directing people to go. Sometimes it is to an individual like Peter going to Cornelius or Philip meeting the Ethiopian. Sometimes to whole groups of people they are sent, like the Gentiles in Antioch or the Samaritans. In each and every setting God is carrying out His mission of reaching the world with an offer of hope, an offer of forgiveness and the offer of restoration of the broken relationship with Him.

Scene Two – Content of the Gospel Message

What makes this message so effective? Why are people willing to respond to what is being proclaimed. As we study the records we will see six key things that help us in understanding the answers to those questions and more importantly why we should be involved in proclaiming the message.

1. Message of Power – God’s power is behind the message and its proclamation. The words contain in them the presence of God and thus connect us with God. Since they are from God then what is proclaimed is possible. It is possible to be saved. It is possible to be forgiven. It is possible to have peace. It is possible to know God.
2. Message of Provision – God will provide what has been promised. We will once again be His children and share in His kingdom. He has provided all that is needed to restore and forgive.
3. Message of Salvation – God can save us. He has shown us this fact through the death and resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus was not raised from the dead then how could God save us from anything much less our sin?
4. Message of Grace and Mercy – Our debt is so great we cannot pay. God knows this and has provided for the payment. That is grace. Still we do not deserve even that offer. God knows that without His intervention, we cannot even get to the point where we can accept the payment. We are so blind we cannot see without His help. He has chosen to help us see so that we can understand what He has done and accept the payment.
5. Message for all nations – God has included everyone. We are all created by God. No one exists outside of that fact. God created everything. We are all important to God. He is above culture and nationality and race in His

desire to redeem us. What a wonderful God we have who loves us all with such intensity and desire.

6. Message of missions – It is not a limited time offer. Since it is a part of God it is eternal in its scope and is renewed for every era, every people, and every location. If we receive from God His forgiveness and His Spirit then we also receive His mission. We too must see the need as God sees it.

The world needs the message. Even as God sent himself to the world we also need to send ourselves. Even as God was His own messenger in the person of Jesus, we too need to be messengers of the message of God. We too must own the mission as our own.

Act Three – Final Act – Continuing Log, Today

As we look at today what do we see. What do we understand about our role in relation to the mission of God? Is there still a need for people to carry the message to others? Is there still a need to send those willing to go? Is the message still important?

Please remember the words of Paul from Romans 10:14-15 that were referred to in the first chapter when the needs of proclaiming the gospel were discussed. Remember also that in Romans 14 Paul talks about going to places that had not heard. If there are still places and people that have not heard then the following statements of Paul are still true.

- a. People need to hear
- b. People need to preach
- c. People need to send

We are still living in the age of mission. God has not changed anything or given new commands.

The reminders to us from the scriptures are still true. The field is ready, people want to hear the truth, we only lack the workers to go to the field (Mt 9:37-38). We must see ourselves as those workers. Paul stated in Ro 10:17 that faith comes by hearing. Unless they hear they will not believe. Today is the day of salvation and we are the workers that God seeks to send.

What then should our goal be? Peter makes that very clear as the Sanhedrin challenged them. He queried them about who they should obey, God or man (Act 5). Who will we obey today? We should also be involved in making sure that those who hear can in turn teach others their responsibility. This is what Paul told Timothy should be a key focus of his ministry, to find those who would accept being taught and in turn be able to teach others (2 Ti 2). The purpose of obedience and teaching should always be to preach the gospel where Christ is not known (Ro 15:20). We need to see our world even as Paul saw his world as a people in need of the gospel.

Epilogue – Remember

As we move forward what should we remember that will help us maintain our focus, help us keep our eyes on God even as Jesus did. What can we learn from the New Testament church and it's involvement in missions. There are five key statements that will help us today to have the same kind of desire to reach the world that so powerfully changed the world then and can do so again today.

1. The day of salvation is **NOW** (2 Cor 6:2) – We are to look at this time and this place and see the need is now for people to hear the gospel.
2. The command is to **GO** (Mk 16:15) - There has been no change in this command. We are to go. Each of us who has heard must go to those who have not heard.

3. The **MESSAGE** is still, Jesus Christ, Born, Crucified, Risen and Coming again (1 Cor 2:2). To add to or remove from this message means to tell them something that is not the gospel. We are warned that this is what false prophets do. We cannot and must not proclaim another gospel (Ga 1).
4. The field is the **WORLD** (Mt 28:19). Our goal is to be reaching people of every tribe, tongue and nation so that we will all be able to join in praise of God.
5. The goal is belief in **JESUS** (Jn 3:16). According to Peter there is no other name that can save us (Ac 4:12).

We are not here to proclaim the name of a specific church, doctrine or belief. We are here to proclaim the name of Jesus. Only Jesus can save, only Jesus can forgive. God has been talking to us and telling us what He wants and how He has provided for us. It is in His Son Jesus that we can be saved. That is our mission because it is God's mission. We are to tell people the way to true life and that can only be found in Jesus. The New Testament church knew all of the above. They knew it and believed it and God empowered them to change their world. Today we have the same mission and the same opportunity, to proclaim the message of God and change our world.

Chapter Four – The Mature Church and Missions

All of the material studied so far could be treated as directions for individuals. What is my personal responsibility for carrying the gospel to the world? It is true that some of the material does relate to key people and what they were asked by God to do. Still there are some references to the responsibilities of churches, the most prominent being the words from God regarding sending the first missionaries. How do we move from individual responsibility for the mission to the responsibility of a group of people, more specifically a local church? Is there some guideline that tells us about the church and the work of missions?

The truth is there is no list of expectations and guidelines for a church. While we have a list of characteristics for a pastor and for several other categories of leaders and workers there is no similar list that gives us what a church should look like or be involved in. What we do have is a collection of letters written to various churches and what the writer feels should be happening in that church. We will find information on what these churches are doing, areas where they need to improve and prayers for their on-going growth and development. Most of these letters are written by Paul. There is also a collection of short notes in the book of Revelation written to seven churches. In these letters are evaluations of their life and ministry. From these we can get an idea of what God is looking for in a church that is mature.

Before we proceed with looking at the various letters we need to understand what we mean by mature. There are two ways to look at the concept of maturity.

1. The first relates to our existence. We are mature. We have arrived at a point in our development which we call mature. Much like a piece of fruit is described as mature. We possess all the qualities and characteristics that are part of being mature.
2. The second way to view the idea is as a process. To be mature is to be in the process of gaining those qualities that will make us mature. We are learning and growing toward a goal. Both concepts are important if we want to truly understand all that it means when we use the term “mature.” It is both the goal we are seeking and the process we go through in reaching our goal. Paul in Philippians 3:12-14 discusses his life and states that though he has learned much he has not yet arrived at maturity, or in his words, been made perfect.

As we look at what Paul and the letters of Revelation have to say to these churches we need some idea of the characteristics we need some way to determine what it means to be mature. There a number of key areas we can look at, knowledge, communication, life, relations, and spirit. Understanding each of these will help us gain a better understanding of what is needed in order to be mature.

When we look at the concept of knowledge the idea is not what we know or how much we know, but rather of how we gain and use knowledge. Also the type of knowledge is a key focus. The most important think we need to gain is an awareness of who I am. When I understand that, then I will know how to grow and what I need to grow. This will allow me to gain knowledge in how to make choices. Learning what my skills and abilities are will help me in making good choices. The most important piece of knowledge I needs is how to know MY limits and where a I need others to help M3.

That leads us into the area of communications. Maturity means being able to share what I have learned, being able to explain the choices I have made, which allows me to tell others what my needs are. Out of this grows an ability to tell others how I have grown and in what areas.

Communication that is effective will affect my life and interaction with others. It involves the ability to make commitments and accept responsibility for my actions. This will help me develop our ability to care for my needs and seek help in dealing with them when necessary. Finally as I develop in my interaction with others I will learn to help others based on what I have that can be shared.

The ability to share with others depends on our learning to share in the blessings and sufferings of others. As we learn about another person we should begin to share our gifts and talents with them and be involved in providing for others even as we have sought them out to help us in our areas of need. The result of the development of the ability to share is the development of community. We will learn how to be a part of a group and understand our place in that group.

Over all of the above there is one area that must be maintained as a priority area for maturity. That is the area of our spiritual development. It means that we are providing for growth in three key ways. We are providing ourselves with opportunities to know God, to learn how to hear what God is saying to us, and finally how to make decisions that will help us obey God in every aspect of our lives.

With this information we have a brief overview of key areas which we can use to evaluate how we are maturing. This

information can also be applied to groups of people and will help us as we evaluate what is said in scripture to the churches.

Let us look at the letters of Paul. In these letters we will find comments about what is happening and what needs to be happening in the church. This part of the study is not intended to be comprehensive but a suggestion of how we can seek out information about what a mature church is and how missions fits in that picture. Remember one of the key areas above relates to communicating what I have learned with others. We are also to be involved in caring for others and providing for people to know God.

In writing his letters Paul has no specific pattern that he follows. There is not agenda or list of key areas to be discussed. Each letter reflects a personal interaction with a church and contains comments on how they are doing and where he thinks they need to do more work. It also contains reminders and words of encouragement to each group based on how they are doing in the development of their life and relationship with the Lord. This part of the presentation will take the form of a series of lists related to key areas being presented and commented on. Please remember this is a sample. It would be good to take the time and do your own review of the key issues that are being focused on using the material presented earlier on key areas of maturity as a guide.

1 Corinthians

1:2 - Called to be holy – We are to understand our purpose and how we are to live.

1:7 – Spiritual gifts – They are seeking the Lord and the evidence is revealed in the gifts that they have received.

1:8 – Relationship with God – They are to seek a relationship that will result in their being blameless before God.

2:2 – Gospel message – Paul reminds them of what he shared with them as an example of what they should be doing when presenting the gospel.

2:4 – Reliance on Spirit – Our message depends on the Spirit's power in us and not our skill

12:27 – Role of members – We understand the role of each person in the body of Christ, the church.

13 – We understand the focus of the gifts is to express the love of God.

2 Corinthians

1:3-7 – Comfort of God – Have experienced God's comfort and know how to share in the sufferings of others.

1:8-11 – Prayers for others – Know and pray for the needs of others

1:12 – Holy conduct – Relations in the world are based on the holiness of God

2:14 – Spreads knowledge of God – God is allowed to work through their lives to let others know of His presence

5:11-21 – Ministry of Reconciliation – Actively involved in leading the lost back to God.

8-9 – Value of Giving – Understands and is actively involved in giving in order to help those in need.

Galatians – This church's behavior is not what Paul thinks it should be

1:6-9 – True Gospel – Expects the church to have a clear understanding of the gospel and not alter it as it is presented to others.

1:10 – God's Approval – We are to seek the approval of God above all else.

3:26-28 – Goal of mission – The message is for everyone not matter what their nationality is or their social status.

5:22 – Fruit of the Spirit – Paul provides a picture of the qualities we should focus on in our lives as we live in the Spirit.

6:9-10 – Good work – Focus is on the need to be consistent if we are to bear fruit. We are to do good to all.

Ephesians

2:10 – Redeemed – Knows clearly the source of their salvation.

4:3 – Unity – Encouraged to maintain unity of the Spirit through peace.

4:12 – Service – Understands the function of the gifts and relationship to service.

4:23-24 – New Self – They are seeking to be like God.

6:10-20 – Armor of God – Knows how to take a stand for God and share the gospel.

Philippians

1:5 – Partnership – Actively involved in supporting those who proclaim the gospel.

1:11 – Growing – Paul's desire is for them to mature in Christ so they will honor God

1:19 – Prayer – They are active in prayer for others.

2:4 – Unity – Focus is on being united and not on self.

2, 4 – Support – They are aware of the needs of others who are in ministry and actively involved in supporting them by various means through letters, personal visits and giving.

3:4-11 – Reliance – Challenged to rely on God and not themselves and so become like Christ.

Colossians – Paul has high praise for this church which he has never visited.

1:4-8 – Encouragement – Their life and faith are an encouragement to others

1:10 – Goal – To live a life worthy of the Lord by bearing fruit and growing in their knowledge of God

2:6-8 – Truth – They are not confused by false teaching and human tradition.

3:1-4 – Focus – They are encouraged to set their eyes on the things of God.

3:12-13 – Lifestyle – They are encouraged to live in a way that results in love and unity.

4:3 – Communication – Pray for the effective communication of the gospel.

1 Thessalonians

1:4 – Call of God – They know they have been chosen by God.

1:6 – Imitators of Christ – This should be our goal and our life should reflect Christ.

1:8 – Proclamation – Their faith has resulted in the proclamation of the gospel.

3:6-8 – Encouragement – Their life is an encouragement to others.

4:1-2 – Pleasing to God – They are challenged to continue to live in a way that is pleasing to God.

5:4-6 – Ready – They live a life that is alert and are ready for the Lord's return.

2 Thessalonians

1:3 – Love – Their love for others is growing.

2:15 – Teaching – Challenged to remain in the teachings they have received.

3:6-14 – Productive living – They are encouraged to deal with the needs of life and be involved in providing

for their needs and the needs of others. They are to be an example of how to live.

1&2 Timothy, Titus – Letters to pastors with some important reminders.

1 Tim 3 – Leaders – Gives guidelines on what to expect from our leaders.

1 Tim 4 – Training – Guidelines on key areas to focus on when training leaders.

2 Tim 2:2 – Selection – Choose and train those who will be able to train others.

Tit 1 – Leaders – Review of the qualities of a leader.

Tit 2 – Ministry – Each group of people has responsibilities and should be trained accordingly.

It is interesting to note how often Paul refers to the need to be actively involved in communicating the gospel, through prayer, through holy living, through active witness. It is clear that proclaiming the message of the gospel is a critical part of a church fulfilling its responsibility and thus becoming mature.

Now we come to the letters in Revelations 2-3. These letters contain the evaluations for seven churches. There is praise and judgment in them and there is much that can help us understand what God expects of us as a church today.

- Ephesus is told that they have been faithful in their work and clear in their understanding of truth (Rev 2:2-3). Yet God has one thing that he is not happy about. They have lost their first love (Rev 2:4-5). This is important. They are no longer excited and focused. It is much like what happens in marriage. When we are dating or engaged we are excited about our future spouse. We are glad to tell others we are getting married to, who we are marrying and why. Over time some of that excitement fades and

unless we take special time to focus on our marriage partner we easily take them for granted. In the process we lose the joy of the relationship and make it tedious and empty. We need to remember those days and why we married that person. Even so, we need to be like a new Christian who is excited because God has forgiven them. A new believer does not have much knowledge but they do know that God loves them and they are not afraid to tell others this fact. The church at Ephesus was encouraged to refocus and remember their purpose. They were to seek out the enthusiasm and joy that comes from a relationship built on love.

- Smyrna as well is praised. They are a church that has had to deal with afflictions and poverty. Yet they are praised because they have not allowed this to dim their vision. They have learned where to find true wealth (Rev 2:9). They are told they will face further trials but encouraged to remain faithful. The cost may be high but the reward will be greater than what is sacrificed (Rev 2:10).
- Pergamamum has in the past been faithful in the face of persecution and proclaimed the truth (Rev 2:13). There is a problem that has developed. They have allowed false teaching to enter at several levels. They do so at great risk and are warned that this needs to stop and they need to repent (Rev 2:16). God will not tolerate His truth to be altered and will punish them if necessary.
- Thyatira is praised for their love, faith, service and perseverance (Rev 2:19). There is evidence of growth in their ministry. It has expanded as a result of their faithful service. There is a problem though that must be dealt with. They are allowing a person to influence them and

they are becoming lax in their morals and bringing in false worship (Rev 2:20f). They are challenged to remove that person and hold on to what they have been doing (Rev 2:25).

- Sardis receives no praise. They look alive. They are doing things that look good to those on the outside but they are dead inside (Rev 3:1). They are challenged to wake up and regain what has been lost, to remember what they have received from the Lord, before someone comes and takes that as well (Rev 3:3). Still there are some who have been faithful and they will not be forgotten Rev (3:4).
- Philadelphia is the church that has the least and yet receives the highest praise. Their work has been pure and so they will be given a special opportunity to serve. God sees that they have little strength and resources but promises to be with them Rev 3:8). They are encouraged to rely on God. All of this is offered because their deeds are true and they have not denied the name of Jesus but have kept the command to endure patiently (Rev 3:10). As a result they will be protected, preserved and honored.
- Laodicia is the final church in the list. It is not a pleasant evaluation. The review is that they are neither cold nor hot. They have no position that clearly defines their loyalties. It is so bad that they are about to be rejected entirely (Rev 3:15). They seemed to be focused only on self and gaining what they want. All this effort has revealed that their total focus is on themselves and the world. They are a selfish, self-centered group who need to completely change their attitude and focus. In gaining

things for self they are risking losing it all and much more.

So here we have is a focus on how the churches reveal the presence of God. They have been evaluated on the nature of their work, their love for God and what they have done with the message of God. God is very concerned about what is being communicated to the world by his church. It should makes us stop and review our lives and the life of our churches and how the world sees us.

Out of this material we can create key areas that will help us evaluate how we are doing in relation to presenting the message of salvation to the world around us.

1. Are we seeking to live a holy life which is worthy of God?
2. Are we committed to teaching the whole word of God only?
3. Are we living in love and unity so that we show others that God is present with us?
4. Are we proclaiming the message of Christ to all mankind?
5. Are we praying for and supporting those involved in proclaiming the gospel message?
6. Are we encouraging and teaching our members to be involved in ministry?

As we review these questions and the materials that presented on maturity at the beginning of the chapter we should be able to evaluate how we are doing as a church and as individuals. We can see the place missions has been given and how we are doing in proclaiming the gospel to all people.

Part 2 – Understanding Missions

In this section we will try to defined key areas related to communicating the gospel to the nations of the world.

The first area deals with defining the terms evangelism and missions.

The second area deals with defining what a worldview is, how it affects the presentation of the gospel and understanding what God’s worldview is. The interaction of God with our worldviews is also discussed.

The third area deals with understanding the concepts behind the term Pluralism and how we are to respond to this philosophy.

Chapter Five – Evangelism, World Missions, or What?

This material is based on an outline developed for this series by Dr. Marcus Dean, which he adapted from J. Lewis.

As we move on in our discussion of missions it time to look at the relationship between missions and evangelism. These two terms are used to describe our activity in proclaiming the gospel message to those who have not heard. God has a plan to reach the nations of the world (Ge 12:3). He desires that all nations will be blessed. But what does that mean and how does that relate to the terms missions and evangelism?

Let us first look at the concept of nations. When using this term we often think of what more correctly would be called political entities, nations of the world. They are defined by artificial borders which are maintained by political and or military power. These borders not only define the territory of the nation but often reflect the make up of the people of the region and their history as relates to those boundaries. Many, if not most nations today are made up of multiple groups, each with different languages and cultures. One will also discover that many political boundaries have divided a group into multiple parts, with some of a particular people living in two different nations. Though they have one common origin they now exist in two political nations.

As we look at the current political situation we will also discover that political nations are not permanent in their existence. They can change, and sometimes do so with a great deal of upheaval. The Soviet Union has been replaced with over a dozen smaller nations. Yugoslavia has split into several small

countries. Nations that existed at the time of the Bible no longer exist - Persia, Babylonia, and Rome. Others have changed drastically in size or prominence such as Egypt, Syria and Palestine. Finally there are many nations that did not exist at that time. The countries of North and South America, England, and France and many more did not exist. In fact, at the time of Abraham, most of nations we know of did not exist.

So who are the nations that God is referring to when he talks to Abraham? What are we talking about when we use the term “nations” in the context of the Bible?

As one looks around the world and into Scripture there is another category of people that are referred to as nations. They are also referred to as a tribe or a people. These terms refer to groups of people with a common language, culture, or religion. Their boundaries are much more fluid and are established by them and the groups around them. They are far more numerous than the political nations which currently number over 200. They number in the thousands. For example in Guyana there are nine language groups called tribes, as well as three groups of people who have been brought to the country. In Sierra Leone there are nineteen tribes and a group called the Krio people which represent blacks from many nations who were rescued from slave ships and freed in Sierra Leone. In Papua New Guinea there are over 700 tribes each with a different language. Every country will have a similar mix. There is no country that is built strictly around one tribe or people.

God’s desire is to do more than impact the political structure of this world. He desires to reach the people of the world everywhere and in every setting. In a political world some people are left out. In God’s view of the nations, no one is excluded. Our goal is to make disciples of every tribe, every

nation (Mt 28:19, Mk 16:15). We are called to proclaim the gospel to all.

In the Bible we find one term to describe this activity and that is the work evangelism. We are to be involved in evangelizing the world with the gospel. The focus of evangelism is the “evangel” or good news. In reading materials on evangelism, this activity is divided into three levels. This relates to the type of people giving and receiving the gospel and the difference that exists between the two, the ones presenting and the ones receiving.

1. Level one evangelism involves people who have the same or very similar culture and background. Those presenting the gospel speak the same language and have the same culture and background. When a term or gesture is used by one it is understood by the other person. We share in the same history and in many other areas that identify us as being part of the same nation. This makes it easy to state something and be understood.
2. Level two evangelism means there are some differences. While we may share the same language there are differences in culture. Even the language may pose a problem because we may use the same terms but have different meanings attached to them or our pronunciation may vary enough to make comprehension difficult. An example of this in English would be the term boot. In North America it can have two meanings. One refers to a type of shoe that is worn, the other refers to forcing someone to leave or firing someone from a job. In England it may have those meanings as well, but a third one is added which is used to refer to the storage area at the rear of a car, the boot. In North America this would be referred to as “trunk.” More interesting are the terms used for the metal piece used to control the flow

of water from a water pipe. Various terms used are pump, valve, tap, faucet, spigot or pipe. Each term helps to define where you are from and what type of English you use. If you don't know the differences you may confuse somebody enough so they don't know what you want. There will also be differences in meaning where religious knowledge is affected and so communication becomes more difficult, for example when we talk about what is truth and the related concept of honesty.

The most common situation where this kind of difference occurs involves immigrant groups in a country. These people exist in two cultures and to communicate with them requires us to learn some more than what our culture has taught us. Some examples of this are people who have come from a rural setting to an urban setting or people from one region of a country who relocate to another. These are easier to overcome. More difficult settings involve people of one tribal group moving into the area of another group. In Sierra Leone there were people from the Loko area who moved to Freetown, which is a large city with a very mixed ethnic structure. The most difficult would be that of people of one country immigrating to another. This can be a forced immigration such as slavery, or economically driven as in the case of indenture workers. It can also occur for a number of other reasons such as a war, famine, and drought. These events force large groups of people to relocate. Each of these groups requires time to understand the differences even as they learn the new language and culture they have entered and as those who seek to evangelize learn about the culture and show God's love and care for them.

3. Level three evangelism involves communicating with people who are clearly different from us. They speak another language and have a totally different culture. Simple things like gestures can cause misunderstanding. Raising one's eyebrow in the Philippines indicates that I am listening to and agreeing with your statements. In Suriname this action means I am homosexual and interested in a relationship. In another country a man uses this action to attract a girl's attention. For some it indicates surprise or shock at what is being said. To share the gospel involves learning a new language and culture to be effective.

Communicating the gospel in all of these settings is technically evangelism. Generally we use the term "evangelism" when discussing Level one, and we use the term "missions" when discussing Level two and three. We do this to identify the different issues involved in evangelism.

We do this because of the different types of barriers that are faced. Mission focuses on overcoming barriers that are not part of evangelism at level one. In missions we are dealing with linguistic barriers. The best way to illustrate this concept would be that unless you know English (for those translating substitute name for your language here ie Espanol) you cannot read this material. In the same way unless we learn another language there are many people who will not understand what we are saying and will remain lost.

There are social barriers to overcome that may not exist in our culture. In India the class system presents a unique social barrier to communication. Becoming identified with one class can prevent you from being able to communicate with any other class. Your status as male or female can create social barriers not part of your own culture. Being a foreigner to a culture

creates a category for you socially and then creates barriers depending on how that category is perceived socially.

There are all kinds of cultural barriers to deal with. What type of food commonly eaten has often created more barriers than we realize. In the Philippines there is a tribe that has prepares a special food for honored guests. They fry dog meat and serve it. Until you have eaten from this plate, which is the only one on the table, no other food is served. How the guest responds will affect how the host responds. In Kenya one group prepares a special drink called mursik. Cow's milk, is put it in a gourde and left in the sun for at least three days. When a guest comes to visit a home the first thing the guest is served is a glass of mursik. Being able to show respect for cultural foods and customs is important. Appropriate dress communicates acceptance or rejection. Gestures can offend if we are not careful. In our own culture we know these things. In another culture we are like small children who know nothing.

With all of the barriers and potential problems why do we bother with the effort to understand another language and another culture? We do this so we can be accepted. In gaining acceptance we open the door for them to accept the message we bring. We do this so we can communicate accurately. Without this background we may send conflicting and confusing messages. We may be speaking the truth and saying we love our hosts, but our actions are denying it through lack of respect and understanding for the people we are speaking to. We say we love them but constantly say otherwise by not caring enough to learn the language and the culture.

To be effective in communicating we need to understand that culture has several layers of meaning. Each of these layers of meaning affects the message and indicates what kind of change is occurring. Effective communication requires us to understand

the more then what level of evangelism we are working in. We must understand the meaning attached to each piece of culture and how they are linked. In each of the three levels of evangelism we are also dealing with four layers of cultural meaning. They are behaviors, values, beliefs, and worldviews. The most significant of these is worldview. To communicate at the deepest level is the goal and this is only possible if done within the language of the people and within the context of their culture. In order to understand this fully we need to understand what is involved in each of these layers of culture.

1. Behaviors

Behaviors are the actions that we see. These are the gestures, activities and patterns of life. These are easy to see and to compare. How we greet is a good example. Some people shake hands with only the right hand, others will use either hand. The closer a relationship is will define the nature of the greeting - hand shake, hug, kiss on the cheek, or holding hands. These gestures can be used to easily identify heritage and origin, as in the clothes worn, food eaten, bathing patterns, and housing materials. These are outward behaviors and are the easiest to change or assign a new meaning to. Change at this layer is not necessarily permanent nor does it reveal real commitment to a new way of living.

2. Values

Values are the definitions of what is good and bad. Values help define why we do what we do, what is important and what our priorities are. They help define what behaviors are acceptable and which are not. Eating dog is a sign of respect in one country but not in another. The value behind the food is the key, the goal to show and receive respect. Value defines what we look for in a marriage and what we are willing to give, or pay

for our mate. Physical attractiveness in some cultures is the key value, in another the ability to raise pigs and tend a garden is the greater value in choosing a mate. These values define who, how, when and why we marry. Values explain or actions. Altering a value is more significant and takes more effort. If we truly change our actions then our value must change to make those changes more permanent. Still we can reject the new value if the total risk to us or potential loss of acceptance is too high.

3. Beliefs

For a value to truly change we need to deal with the next layer which is our beliefs. These explain why we have values. They give us the foundation for them.

Discussing the issue of honesty and why we feel people of another culture appear to be lying can be understood only if we move into their area of belief for that culture. There are two values involved here, that of honesty and that of shame. If telling the facts or truth (as we see it) will bring shame to another person then a problem arises. Their belief may state that relationships are the basis of what is valuable and mine may be that honesty has more value. Therefore, a way must be found to communicate the information without shaming a person publicly. The relationship must be maintained even if on the surface it appears someone is not being factual. Beliefs are built on sound logic within the culture. There are explanations and reasons for why this belief is true. When we change at the layer of belief then we are deciding to change what we have believed to be true. It is more difficult to change at this level. Again this change is not enough. For if someone has a better argument or times their activity properly then I can be convinced to change again or revert. This is why the

cults are growing. People are living at the level of belief and someone with a stronger belief convinces them to change.

4. Worldview

Beneath all of the above and controlling all of them is what we call a worldview. It is what we accept as real. Our worldview is the source of our beliefs, values and behaviors. It is the base on which we build our world. If my worldview includes the existence of a spiritual realm, then my beliefs, values and actions will reflect that reality. If it doesn't include such a reality then I will not accept any statement about the existence of God or demons. I will seek every means possible to prove your idea to be false.

There is a story in John 9 about a blind man that Jesus healed that helps us understand these different layers. At the temple there was a blind man begging for money to care for his needs. Jesus saw him and asked if he wanted to be healed. Now if you were blind your response would be the same as this mans. The next part is a bit different from many of the stories about Jesus and his healing of others. Instead of just touching him and healing him, Jesus spits on the ground and makes some mud which he smears on the man's eyes and then tells him to go to the pool and wash.

At this point we are dealing with behaviors. He has to alter his behavior and possibly go to an unfamiliar location. He chooses to clean himself and goes. His behavior is further altered. Instead of stumbling and walking very carefully, he comes back seeing. His outward behaviors have changed. So much so that everyone notices and begins to ask what has happened to him. They want to know if he really is the blind man. He insists that he is. He is asked how his eyes were opened. He explains how

Jesus made the mud, put it on his eyes and sent him to the pool of Siloam to wash. He then tells how after he washed he could see. He gives credit to Jesus, but when asked where Jesus, is, he says he doesn't know. At this point we are only dealing with behaviors.

The man is now brought to the Pharisees. They too ask the same questions. When he tells the story they respond by saying Jesus is not from God. Some are not so sure because they have never seen such an event. They turn to the blind man and ask him what he thinks. This forces the man to evaluate his behaviors and what has happened. He must now consider the value behind the event. In this case what value does he link with what has happened. His answer reflects a shift. He sees Jesus as a prophet. As a prophet Jesus would have the ability to heal him. He has changed a value and that allows for an explanation of the events and the behaviors linked with the event.

The Pharisees don't like this shift in value and so challenge it. They call in the parents to be sure the man is not lying about his blindness. They learn that the facts are clear and cannot be altered. The man was blind, was born blind, and now he sees. They are also asked about how he was healed. At this point they are unwilling to respond. They are not willing to make the changes needed to give this answer and so they tell the Pharisees to ask the son for he is old enough to answer for himself. They were afraid of what might happen if they let the events change them and their status.

So for a second time the Pharisees come to the former blind man. This time they make things difficult. They state their belief that Jesus is a sinner and then ask him again about his healing. They have created a context where the man must evaluate what he believes. He must choose between adhering to the belief of the Pharisees or another. He responds by saying he

does not know about the presence or lack of sin in Jesus. What he does know is he was blind and now he can see. They force the issue with questions about behaviors. He responds with a question regarding belief. “Why do you want to hear? Do you want to become his disciples, too?” (Jn 9:27) His comment brings everything into focus. The issue is now more than about values, it is about beliefs.

The Pharisees are upset and angry. They state their belief. “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for the fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from (Jn 9:29).” The blind man is seeing far beyond his physical sight, for he knows that his healing is not from man. He knows that God doesn’t listen to sinners. He knows that there has never been a man, born blind, who has been healed of his blindness. He now knows that Jesus is from God and he believes. He has had to choose between the belief of the Pharisees, which excluded Jesus from the realm of truth. He has to risk being rejected by the existing religious structure to believe that Jesus has come from God. His beliefs are changing.

It is at this point that Jesus returns to the story. He asks the man directly if he believes in Him. The man indicates that he does but needs help in knowing how to proceed. Jesus makes it clear. I am the one to believe in. The issue now is more than what he believes but what he sees as the source of his belief. Is the source found in the structure of the Pharisees and their worldview or is it in Jesus? He chooses to follow Jesus and worships Him. This act of worship reveals the profound shift that has occurred. He has replaced the religious structure of the Pharisees and all that that means with the truth of Jesus. He is not only healed of his physical blindness but of spiritual blindness as well. God has been placed at the source. Jesus states that it is for this very reason He has come. He has come so that all will look to God through Him to see the truth.

How do these layers impact our ability to do evangelization and missions? What happens if the change stops at one stage and doesn't go deeper?

1. Behavior

At the level of behaviors we have several things that can happen.

- a. The first response is no change, which causes one to become even more focused on their ways as the best ways. We call this ethnocentrism. Our way is the only way. We either try to make everyone like us or reject everyone because they are not like us. The other two responses grow out of this.
- b. The second response involves new sets of behaviors. If we accept a new way then we create a set of behaviors to determine when we are doing what is right. We become dependent on rules to guide us and tell us how we are doing. This leads us into legalism. At this level everything focuses on our behaviors.
- c. The third type of response is syncretism. We mix the behaviors of both groups. The thinking is that we will include the best of both hoping to allow for deeper change. The reality is there is no deeper change only exchanging of symbols and behaviors so that each group will be more accepting of the other.

2. Value

What happens if we get past the behavior level and start dealing with values? If we do not deal with the values behind the behaviors we have a superficiality that develops. As long as we have no conflict then

everything is alright. But communication is a problem since we do not understand each others values. Motives are questioned. We interpret each others actions from our values and that leads to either greater conflict or isolation. We just don't understand each other. If the conflict is severe enough we separate and go our own ways.

3. Belief

When we move to the level of beliefs we begin to deal with the source of our values and behaviors. Now we are dealing with the explanations behind the scene. For some the strain of letting go of their belief and accepting another person at this level is too much. The result is culture shock. This shock can go both ways. It leaves both with a sense of being lost and confused. At this level we are questioning why things are they way they are. Are we willing to risk what we know to try and understand what we don't know? The danger is ending up with nothing. No longer fitting in either culture and becoming and outcast or creating a cult like structure so we will have a place to belong. We create compartments in our life so that in this setting we do this and in this setting we do that even though the results cause internal conflict.

4. Worldview

If we can get to the level of worldview change then a new dynamic takes place. There is a level of communication and understanding that develops allowing for meaningful change to occur. The change is able to impact all aspects of life and the desire is to restructure the beliefs, values and behaviors so that they reflect this change. Change at this level becomes permanent. When there is conflict the goal is to seek

resolution and not rejection. Then we have reached the goal of effective communication. This means we will be able to communicate the gospel in the context of the hearer, so that our word have meaning, the life offered has meaning, and the changes to be made will have meaning.

For change to occur at the deepest layer of meaning we will need to have a better understanding of what this term means. This should always be our goal, to understand why a person believes what they believe and help them see why we believe what we believe so they can make a choice that has the power to change their worldview.

Chapter Six – Missions and Worldview

Working in missions means understanding a person's worldview and communicating at that level. To do so means understanding what a worldview is and how it affects a person's life. A basic definition involves three concepts.

1. First, a worldview is the way we see reality.
2. Second, a worldview is then the way we structure life to deal with the reality we see.
3. Third, a worldview is how we define everything else in relation to the reality we see.

There are two basic groups of worldview.

1. The first is the materialist view. They see things in physical and social terms. Everything is explained from the perspective of man. That means life is under the control of man and everything is defined from that concept. This view portrays man as the highest form of reality and everything is structured and defined from that perspective.

There are many philosophies and systems based on this viewpoint. Evolution is a materialist position and man is at the top of the system. Marxism, Socialism, Communism, and even western capitalism would fit into this structure. Modern science for the most part operates from this premise as well. The key is that man is in control.

2. The second basic structure for worldview is that of supernaturalism. In this view we add the realm of the spiritual. This includes spirits, powers and the physical realm. Man is no longer at the top but part of a complex system of beings and realities. We are not the final

authority and cannot always explain what is happening with simple physical rules.

There are thousands of variations within this group. Still they fit into some basic categories –

- Those that have a high god - Christianity, Islam and Judaism focus on a high god.
- Those with multiple gods - Groups like Hinduism, Shintoism and many of the religious structures of the Old Testament as represented by Egypt have multiple gods.
- Those with spirits - The number and types of groups with various spirit structures is extensive and are covered in the term animism or traditional religion.
- Those that focus on spiritual powers - Shamanism focuses heavily on accessing the power that is inherent in all of life and the current interest in crystals and pyramids to focus energy are part of that understanding of reality.

No matter which structure you man is a part of, both do the same things. They affect us and teach us about the world around us and how it is structured. They provide us with the source of our belief systems by giving us key definitions and structures. They help us define what we should know and how we have gained that information. All of this can be divided into three key groups of knowledge, knowing what is real, knowing what we need and knowing how we know.

When we talk about knowing what is real we are actually defining how we see reality. In reality there are four types of material that we deal with.

1. The first is the actual reality around us which deals with physical reality and physical experience. These are things that everyone can see and describe. There may be additional meaning attached to these objects but they exist primarily as physical objects. It also can describe the general rules we live by that are standards and guide our expectations. Rules like gravity help us understand that when I pick up a stone and let it go it will fall. It always does this. That is part of the actual reality.
2. The second level of how we see reality is when we define things as probable. This is the normal way things work. There are exceptions and we know what they are and are not surprised by them. Generally though when we look at objects and events we know what to expect. Much like using a bow and arrow. When we put an arrow in the bow, pull back the bow and let go, the arrow flies in the direction we have pointed it. Still the bow or the string could break, someone could bump us, or the wind could alter the path of the arrow. When these things happen we are not surprised. It does not change our expectation of what is probable.
3. The third level of how we see reality deals with what is possible. These are the things that can happen sometimes, but not always. These things are in the realm of hope and faith. We believe that if we are in the right place, do the right things and have faith then certain events or results are possible. If we make the right sacrifice the gods will listen and answer our request. If we believe, then maybe we can be healed or gain what we desire. It is not guaranteed that it will happen but we know it is possible. It has happened before.

4. The fourth level of how we see reality deals with what is impossible. It can never happen. People have used this idea to avoid, as well as control, what they don't understand. At one time it was said it was impossible for man to fly, and then it was impossible for man to leave the planet. Man still can't fly but he has found a way to create a vehicle to make it possible for him to join the birds in the air. In the same way we have found a way to leave the planet. We would all believe that it is impossible for the sun to stand still. Or for an iron axe head to float on water. That would remain true unless there were a power great enough to overcome what we believe is impossible.

The next group of knowledge relates to knowing what we need. This does not relate to physical objects but to things we need to understand and know in order to be able to function in the world we live in. Knowledge that helps us understand what we see and put it in its proper place. Knowledge links all the pieces together. It explains our existence, it evaluates what we perceive, it reinforces our belief, it integrates all of the pieces and it provides us with the means of adaptation.

- We all need explanations. We need to know the why and how of what we see and experience. A worldview does just that. It explains how things came to be, how they work as well as answering the why questions. We not only want to know how but why life exists in this structure. We often use the term mythology as the aspect of culture that contains this information. All mythology is not about gods and spirits. It includes records of events as well that define the hows and whys of the world we live in. For the shark callers of Papua New Guinea it explains how they received the ability to call sharks. For some of the tribes of West Africa it tells

them why they believe God has left them. In many settings it explains how certain groups came to be living in a given place.

- We all evaluate the world, the people and the activities that occur around us. Worldview gives us a set of guidelines to direct us in the process of evaluation. It gives us a standard so we can answer the questions about actual, probable, possible and impossible. It gives us categories to help us sort our experiences and activities. It helps define levels of importance for objects, activities and relationships. We then know how to respond at each moment and each setting. Is the person a chief or a common worker? Is this object valuable or common? Is that a friend or an enemy? The list goes on and on.
- We all want reinforcement for what we believe and what we see. A worldview does that for us when someone challenges our belief or something in the structure changes. It will tell us how to respond to those changes and challenges that come from outside of the structure and how strong our response should be. When a child asks the wrong question, a visitor tells us something we believe isn't true, an individual violate our beliefs or suggests we are wrong, it defines how we respond. Some responses are destructive. Many a person has lost their life because that was the defined response. People who violate taboos are quickly punished. Children who ask inappropriate questions are given appropriate instruction or discipline to reinforce what is expected of them.
- Linkage is critical to life. We want things to fit together and so make sense. Worldviews help us integrate all the

pieces. It tells us when to do act and how that action relates to other aspects of our life. It provides connections between general life, religion and the physical world around us. We may wear a charm to protect us from a spirit because we want to have healthy children. To make this charm we grow or gather a plant or object which represents the power needed and provides strength. We plant at a certain time because this is when the rain falls. The rain falls because of the story in our mythology which comes as a blessing from a being or event to us.

In every setting there exists the possibility of change. A worldview provides us with guidelines on how to adapt when something contradicts what we believe to be true. Worldviews are not rigid. If they were most would not survive. They adjust and adapt because the world changes around us. We encounter new information or a new event occurs that needs to be explained. A long period of drought must be explained and dealt with. The result is that in one area people began to burn the forest because their worldview says the way to deal with it is to create clouds of smoke by burning large areas of the forest, which will somehow bring rain. When a large tidal wave destroys a village the worldview response is to rebuild the village, but not on the beach. The same type of structures are erected but in a new more secure location. For Hindus who hear the gospel and are told the name of a new god the resulting adaptation is to add this god to the existing list. Their worldview says that another new god is not a problem.

Worldview provides the structures which allow people to organize their life. These structures are part of what we call culture. They are the visible ways in which our worldview is expressed. Besides giving us knowledge to work with a worldview helps us define the pieces used to represent who we

are. It defines our relations, the regulations and the resources that identify who we are and what we believe.

In the area of relations it deals with defining how we relate to several levels of existence. If we believe in a spiritual realm then it defines the manner in which we interact with the beings and powers that exist in that realm. It defines our relations to people at all levels, telling who we belong to as a people, tribe and family. It defines our enemies, and friends. It also defines types of people within our system, how they are to be treated and why they are important or not important. Finally it defines how we are to relate to the world around us, what is and isn't part of our world.

This leads to defining what our resources are. What is ours and what is not ours. A particular forest may belong to the spirit and we cannot take anything in. This land is mine and others are not allowed on it. It defines our resources. What we can use - what we cannot use. If I live in the arctic I build my house with ice blocks. Living in the desert requires making tents with animal hides. In the jungle I would use sticks and leaves, and so on.

It also helps me see what I can use as food. One place allows me to eat dogs, monkeys and wild rats while in another that is unacceptable. Now we see that there is a purpose assigned to each resource. Some are for everyday use and others only for special occasions. In many tribes in Papua New Guinea the daily meal is sweet potato. On special occasions a pig is eaten. Killing a pig for food is significant and is not done just to have food, it has a special meaning and purpose. The use of various types of seashells is also significant. A specific shell used for money is called the kina shell. This resource is reserved for purchasing a wife, buying land or other significant trade arrangements. It represent significant wealth and power.

That leads us into a discussion of regulations. The worldview provides us with regulations that guide us each day and in every aspect of life. Regulations regarding the spirit realm and how to show respect, gain control, protect one's self from spirits and what the hierarchy is in that realm. How to prepare and place a sacrifice is one type of regulation. In many villages in Sierra Leone prior to the dry season the village must perform a specific ritual to protect itself from brush fires. They make a sacrifice to a demon and seek to draw its power into special sticks which are tied into bundles and placed at the entrances of the village.

Our relations with people are governed by regulations. How to show respect, how to do business, how to find a mate are a few examples. The regulations tell us what to expect from the various people we encounter. What a good spouse is, what a good leader does, how children should behave and even what our enemy is expected to be like. A good wife in Papua New Guinea is one who is good at raising pigs and able to maintain a garden. So if you want a good husband then you must learn these skills as well as others that are defined by the regulations for that type of person.

Animals are often included in the system of regulations. Most commonly what types of animals can and cannot be eaten. The most common example of this is found in the Hebrew regulations about clean and unclean food. It also is reflected in rules about what animals are to be prepared to show honor to a guest. One country prepares a goat, another a sheep and another a dog to honor the visitor. What animals are for work and what are used for food. Horses in many countries are strictly used for work. Cows are used for both in many societies but in a Hindu society they are treated much differently. They are treated with honor and to kill a cow for food is a serious offence against their religion. In many Indian tribes some animals are given a

special place as sources of power and protection for their tribe or clan. This belief is part a religious structure called totemism. Honoring the animal brings strength to a tribe. To kill that animal except in special circumstances will result in shame and cause trouble for that group of people.

Even physical inanimate objects have regulations to control their use and place in a society. Plants are the most common object which are regulated. Some are approved for use as food, some as medicine and others are identified for use as poison. There are often a group of plants that relate to worship and regulations exist to control how they are harvested and prepared. The one most people would be familiar with would be the use of incense. It represents prayers being given to the spirits in many cases. In scripture it is used to remind people of the presence of God. Rocks and trees are often identified as the home of spirits. Special objects are set aside for use in specific rituals and their use is regulated.

This is only a brief look at the role and place that a worldview has in each person's life and how it impacts that person and the group he or she is a part of. To ignore or reject the existence of a person's worldview will make it hard to communicate effectively with them. They can help us see the places where we have common ground and where we are different. This knowledge will be crucial to our ability to communicate the gospel wherever we are.

There is one other aspect of how worldviews work and impact on our lives. In most settings worldviews exist in layers much like the layers of an onion or like many layers of paint on a wall. When you peel away one you find another below it. If you peel away enough layers away you get the core. Each of us lives this way, moving between the various layers that make up who we are.

The outermost layer would be the broad categories of how we group people and where we fit. They are the categories defining us in terms of the region we come from. Categories like Western, African, Latin American and Caribbean. There are similar categories that relate to religious identity like Christian, Moslem, Hindu or Animist. They are broad in their scope and provide a place of beginning.

From there we can pick a broad category and break it down to more specific expressions. When we look at Latin America we can think of Brazilian, Colombian, or Dominican. Western people are Scandinavian, Russian, or Italian. Each of the broad categories can be subdivided into more specific geographic areas. The same can be done with the religious categories. Moslems can be Sunni, Shiite, or Amadiyyan. Christians are Catholic, Lutheran, or Evangelical.

Within each of these there are further ways to break the group down. If we look at the African and then pick Sierra Leone we would speak of Lokko, Temne, Limba or one of the other 16 groups that exist in that country. In Papua New Guinea it is more involved. Wiru, Poloba, Huli are only a few of the over 700 groups in that country and are part of the larger geographic group called Oceania. We call these tribal groups.

Each time we go to a deeper layer the information becomes more specific. What can be said about someone in one of the broad categories is very general and often tells us very little about what they really believe. It relates more to general practice and appearance and the like. At the next level we learn more, but that information often relates more to political divisions than real beliefs and values. At the tribal level we begin to move into greater detail about individuals and their beliefs about key issues of life and reality.

There are two more levels to include in this picture of how we see the world and how the world sees us. The first involves how the local group views the members within its group. Social categories like family, clan, and class tell us how our group defines itself and its members. The last category is that of the individual. Each person has a worldview that relates to how they see themselves within the whole structure. How Latin or Western am I? How much do I accept and follow the religion that I am a part of? What does it mean to me to be called Ecuadorian or Egyptian? How does the fact that I am a Patamuna or Yanomano impact my life? What is expected of me as a member of a group within the tribe and how do I react to that expectation? Finally, do I like who I see myself as within the whole structure?

In many cases a person is not consciously considering all of the above. Sometimes they don't know they are part of some of the broader categories. Yet all of the categories impact them and how they live out their lives. Understanding all of this will help us to be more effective in communicating and to be prepared for the types of questions that will be asked as an individual becomes aware of their worldview.

Some might wonder how we got to this place. How did we get so many worldviews and a structure with such variety? There are only two possible sources, man and God. God is seen as the source because He created us with the ability to adapt and be creative. Man is the source because that is who man is. He has the ability to adapt and exist in a wide spectrum of environments.

Now that we understand that all people have a worldview and that a worldview is a complex understanding of the world and its reality, the next issue to consider is where does God stand in

relation to all of this variety. Even more important – does God have a worldview that we should be aware of? We cannot go into great detail at this point but we can make some statements that will give us the means to evaluate how God responds to the worldviews of man, and the cultures that grow out of those worldviews.

Let us make some statements about how God views the world. First we need to understand that God is more real than anything else. God existed before and will exist after all that we see and know as reality comes to an end. His love is true (1 Jn 4:7, 16), He alone can be truly personal (Col 1:15-17), He is the source of all existence (Jn 1:1-3), and has revealed His reality by becoming a man named Jesus Christ (Jn 17:6).

The visible reality that God created is orderly. The material universe is governed by a set of rules that we can know and test (Jn 14:9, Eccl 1:3-4). Alongside of that, the spiritual realm also has a structure (Eph 6:12). Each of these structures can be perceived and tested according to Scripture (Ps 144:3, 139, Ge 1:26).

In the midst of creation, God created man as a unique creature in His image. Man was created for relationship with God (Ge 5:22), and given unique knowledge and abilities in order for this relationship to exist (Ps 8:6). As a result God has a special interest in who we are and what happens in our life. God allowed us to have a free will and man chose to disobey (Ro 3:23, Ge 2). As a result, there exists a need for us to be restored in that relationship (Is 53) and our response to God and the process of restoration will affect our eternal existence (Jn 1:12).

God sees that man is in need of help to restore that relationship and has chosen to respond. He has chosen to reveal Himself at various times and in a variety of ways (Heb 1:1-2). The focus of

His revelation is to provide us with the guidelines we need in order to reestablish the relationship (Ex 20, Jn 14). God has even offered Himself in the person of His Son Jesus to restore us and the broken relationship (Ro 3:25).

God has created a place for all of this to occur. We call it the universe and it is the background for all that God is doing. He has further defined the events by the use of time so that we can experience what He is doing and have a record of His activity. History becomes a record of God's work within our reality (Mt 1:1). Since God created both the universe, and time, which determines our boundaries, then He has ultimate control of all reality as we know it (Job 12:10, 42:2). The universe then serves as a stage for our interaction with God (Ac 17:24-28). There is the promise that at some point this universe, which is temporary, will be replaced by something that is eternal in nature (Rev 21:1).

God has used a number of means to help us understand at least some of what He is doing, who He is, and how to interact with Him. He has revealed Himself through direct involvement in the history of man. When necessary He communicates directly with key people and has them share that information with others (Ex 33:11). He chose to come to live among us and speak to us about His plans (He 1-3) and in that process reveal how He expects us to respond (Jo 1:12).

God chooses to explain what He expects from us. He explains to us the basis of right and wrong (Ro 2:14-15) and out of that comes the basis of His judgment of our lives (Ro 6:23). He explains what will happen as a result of the choices we make in light of His judgment (Ro 3:23). In order to be sure we understand these guidelines He sent His Son Jesus Christ to explain them so we would not misunderstand the information He has for us (He 1:2).

This is a very basic look at God's worldview and some aspects of how He interacts with mankind. It reveals that God understands us and our worldviews. It also shows us that God is aware of our culture and how we think and live.

It will be helpful to remember that culture is from, and yet comes out of, a worldview. Culture is a mixture of responses to the physical world in which a person lives and how he sees reality in the physical context in which he lives. Because there are many types of environments there are many cultural forms. Further since there are many ways to view reality then there can also be variations of culture in a given environment. It helps define how we will live, how we will relate to other people, what materials are available, and how they can be used, and how we will relate to our view of the spiritual realm.

God has used the cultures of man to communicate His view and expectations. The Bible contains the records of many of these encounters and how God used aspects of them to communicate. One of these is God's encounter with Abraham and telling Abraham of His desire to bless all nations through Abraham. God uses a covenant ritual from Abraham's culture (Ge 15) to help Abraham understand the nature of the promise being made. With Israel God uses rituals and sacrifices to help the people of Israel understand the nature of His relationship with them (Ex, Lev). The words of the Bible are given to us in many cultural contexts, the patriarchal setting of Genesis, the life of a nomadic people in Numbers, the perspective of a kingdom at the time of David and Solomon, and from the setting of the exile in many of the prophets. The languages of these groups are also different – as different as the language of Egypt, Palestine, Babylon and Persia in the Old Testament and Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew in the New Testament.

He enters into a culture to communicate. He becomes a Jew of the first century. He speaks their language, dresses like them and learns their customs. He even learns a trade, He is a carpenter. His illustrations are drawn from the life and culture of the time. He knows the social structures and uses the role of teacher or rabbi to help the people hear His words. He looks and acts like one of them in order to communicate His truth.

Further He accepts people of other cultures. He heals the servant of the Roman centurion. He enters the world of the Samaritan woman to let her see she is accepted. He talks about other sheep not of Israel (Jn 10:16) and in John 17 prays for those who will hear. Most important, He tells his followers to carry the message He has given them to the people of every tribe and nation throughout the world (Mk 16:15).

One other item must be made clear. While God is willing to enter a culture and use aspects of that culture to communicate His truth, we must remember that His presence will alter the culture. It will change our understanding of the spiritual realm as we learn that God loves us. It will change our understanding of our relations with others as we learn to see them as God does, as neighbors and children of God who are not our enemies. It will change our values in the area of what is materially important. Life is not about bread but about relationship with God. It will change how we make our choices, we will learn to ask what God wants and not what we want.

God enters into cultures so that He can clearly proclaim His message of salvation and so we can understand His mission. He used Israel in many ways to reveal Himself and His supremacy over all other gods. He became a man in a specific culture to further explain His plan. Paul sees this and follows this example when says, "I will become all things to all men so that I may win some (1 Cor 9:22)."

There are some critical facts to remember. While the location and setting God uses to communicate may change, God's worldview does not change. While the specific language used to communicate may change, God's message does not change. God does all of this to communicate His worldview and His message of salvation.

Our responsibility begins with the need to clearly understand God's worldview. We also need to become aware of our culture and worldview, and where necessary, the culture and worldview of others. The purpose of this understanding being to continue doing what God has begun – communicating who God is, His plan, and His love within man's culture so they will understand the truth.

Chapter Seven – Pluralism and our right to speak the truth.

With so many worldviews it is likely that they will come into contact with each other. As that contact increases so do the challenges of maintaining one's view of reality as it conflicts with others. When one remains in isolation there are few challenges. As contact increases the dynamics change. Each person believes their worldview to be true and wants others who they meet to accept that fact. There are several possible responses to encouraging someone to change. Some people simply ignore the challenge and cling to their way of view. Others react strongly and seek to make the other person change through pressure, argument and even force. There is a middle road which suggests there are many truths and we must accept them all if we truly want to find core truth that exists in them. This last approach is the basis of pluralism.

From a Christian perspective pluralism is unacceptable. In order to understand why it is unacceptable we need to have a clear understanding of what it is. Pluralism is built on the key premise that all worldviews are valid. This validity is based on four concepts.

1. Denial of Exclusiveness – Pluralism denies a Supreme God. It believes that no religion or philosophy contains all truth. That means that each belief contains a piece of knowledge and we need to include all the pieces to find the real truth. Instead of one road to God there are many.
2. Philosophy – Pluralism says that in order to find truth we need to rely on man. Man has the ability to perceive the truth. This puts man and his perception of reality at the center of the search for truth.

3. Reality – The basis of reality is linked to finding consensus. Since religion tends to relate to personal or private views of truth and reality it cannot be accepted as containing real truth. Pluralism says that reality and truth must exist in the public domain and is discovered through the process of building consensus based on shared value.
4. Pragmatism – Function becomes the key issue in this process. The central question becomes, “does it work?” Does it provide the structure needed to exist and deal with all of reality as it is being defined. A pluralist would agree that your religion works for you and links you to the search for truth then that is what is most important.

As we come into greater contact with the worldviews of others we must learn a new set of values to help guide us in the process. We now exist in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society. The very nature of this situation provides the definitions of this new set of values. These values may appear good but often result in a loss of identity and require people to give up what makes them unique to become part of the whole.

1. Value of Relations – We now must focus on building understanding. As we learn to understand each other we will be able to accept each others truth and learn how to live together.
2. Value of Knowledge – We must realize that no one knows everything. We must see the value of the knowledge others possess. That knowledge contains information that we need.
3. Value of Religious Life – While religions life relates to personal truth there is truth contained in that experience. We must realize that not all of the claims of religion are false. That leads us to realize that not all religion is

without value. That opens up the door to the idea that each religion may have something to teach us.

4. Value of Cultural Life – Cultures contain information that is useful. In the study of culture we can learn about moral codes and how they provide a basis for interacting with all of reality. We will also learn that cultures provide guides on how to live peacefully with others. We will also learn there are many ways to structure society which will help us value the truth in that structure.

These approaches to finding and truth and discovering where value lies are designed to encourage three pluralistic attitudes in all who are involved in the process of finding truth.

1. Universalism – Man is to learn to accept and allow for the existence of many ways to find _____. The statement ends in a blank because to fill it would be to prevent the process from occurring. Each person is to put in a list of possibilities and not only one option. Some examples of what one is going to find are suggested by the terms god, ultimate reality, nirvana and spiritual oneness.
2. Inclusivism – As man searches for truth he starts from his own understanding. It may remain central but must allow for finding and believing that other truth exists which can be included into his belief.
3. Exclusivism – These two attitudes lead to the idea no one can state that their belief, culture, or religion contains all truth. This implies arrogance and intolerance of other's beliefs and culture. To make the claim that one's belief is exclusive is somehow incompatible with reality. A key credo of pluralism is "Intolerance of others is a criminal act."

Today we are experiencing what is called globalization. The world, in a manner of speaking, is shrinking because of the ability to travel easily and quickly, and because of the changes in communication being brought about by various forms of electronic media. It is no longer possible to live in isolation. Nor is it possible to be totally self-sufficient if one wants to be part of the global economy and its politics. This reality is changing our world in three key areas.

- New Consciousness of the world – The world is not as remote as we once thought. With the breaking down of isolation we now have several issues to deal with.
 1. Increased awareness of others – We are aware of how other people live. We see how they dress, what they eat and learn what is important to them. Cameras take us to every corner and into every setting to tell us about others.
 2. Increased desire to find common ground – With awareness comes two levels of exposure. One relates to exposing our differences and the other our similarities. Differences cause strife and so we focus on how we are the same in order to co-exist in peace.
 3. Increased contact ethnically – We are more and more conscious of the existence of other ethnic groups, especially in urban settings. This results in greater contact with other ways of living and approaches to truth. In the work place, at school and in many other areas of everyday life we are in close contact.

- Appreciation of religion – The more we learn of others the more we see the panorama of religions expression. This highlights a number of areas that are the focus of pluralism.

1. Richness of faith – We are becoming aware of how widespread is the desire to know the truth. Man is seeking and his efforts reveal the depth of his desire to know the truth.
 2. Emphasis on freedom – As we begin to understand the scope of man's search it increases the desire to allow for the freedom to search. We are being encouraged to make it possible to explore all avenues without fear of oppressions.
 3. Ethical crisis – The great variation of religion and faith brings into focus the need man has for structures which allow for dealing with issue of morality and ethics.
- Restructuring of power – In the past each country saw itself as a unique sovereign state which had absolute control. That has now changed and is causing a number of shifts in how power is viewed and handled. Each of these shifts adds to the need to understand pluralism and its impact.
 1. Human rights – More and more the world is becoming concerned about the rights of all people. There is an increased focus on protecting the rights of everyone, even if that requires force in some situations. Defining what rights need to be protected is a central issue in who to protect, what to protect and when to protect.
 2. Economics – The ability to remain isolated is dependent on being self-sufficient. That would allow a group to protect itself from the intrusion of other views and ways of life. This is no longer a reality and the need for materials and goods is causing shifts in many areas. Negotiations often involve foreigners entering one's society and that presence

will change how people see themselves and the world around them.

3. **Worldview shift** – Economic realities are causing groups to shift in their thinking. Materialism and other economic based views of government and business are causing major shifts in worldview. Clashes between traditional and modern are common and sometimes violent.
4. **Interdependence** – No country or group can in truth stand alone. This results in creating alliances politically and economically and further increases the contact between groups with different faiths, worldviews and culture.
5. **Religious position** – A new approach to dealing with conflicts that come out of religious heritage is to have no position. Many groups are declaring themselves areligious in order to avoid conflicts arising over matters of truth and belief. They seek to be strictly political or economic in their approach to solving differences or finding common ground.

With this information in mind it is time to consider the relationships of Christianity and pluralism. We are taught by God that our faith is by nature exclusive, when God states that He alone is God and He alone is to be worshipped (Ex 20). This exclusive approach to truth is continued in the life of Jesus when He states He is the only way, the only truth and the only source of life and as a result the only way to reach God (Jn 14:6).

This position is criticized and attacked by pluralists. They use six approaches to try and defend their position and show that Christianity cannot be exclusive or claim to possess the only source of truth.

1. Issue of truth – The challenge made is to the idea that there can only be one real truth. The approach is to review all of the different philosophies and religious structures as support for the idea of many types of truth. The fact is that these “many truths” may only represent “many attempts” at finding truth. Each then is a failure in the process of finding the one truth.
2. Issue of difference – The challenge here is why are there such vast differences in religious beliefs and philosophies. How can only one belief about God be true with such a wide spectrum of ideas? Difference does not always indicate value. If you are shooting at a target you either hit the center or miss. Whether you miss by little or much you still missed. The amount you miss by only determines how bad your aim was. The difference can also mean you started at the wrong place. The greater the difference the bigger your error in choosing your starting place.
3. Issue of belief – The challenge made here is this, if you have the truth why is it that so many people do not believe your truth? In fact many people hear and refuse to believe. That is not such a strange idea. Parents know how this works. They tell their children the truth and provide warnings about what will happen if they disobey and still many children refuse to listen and make mistakes they could have avoided if they had believed their parents. If one chooses not to believe that does not make their choice right, and the truth negated.
4. Issue of morality – The challenge here is this. Is it moral to condemn others based on my belief? Pluralism says that no one has the right to force another to change. If all truth exists on an equal basis as coming from man’s

search for truth then maybe this would be true. But if the source of what we believe comes from outside we have another issue. If the source is, truly God, then we are dealing with the source of truth, not our interpretation. It would be immoral not to tell them. If you knew there was a trap ahead and did not warn others about that trap, you would be responsible for what happened to them. If you tell them and they choose to proceed anyway then they are at fault.

5. Issue of culture – The challenge here is that many link Christianity with western culture. They ask us why we think our culture is any better than theirs. In the same way they feel that our religion is no better than theirs so why should they accept it. The truth is western culture may not be a better way of living, but the problem is that so many have linked western culture and Christianity and see them as the same thing. Christianity and western culture are not one and the same. Belief in God is not the property of a single culture nor does a single culture provide the only or best means to knowing God.
6. Issue of authority – The challenge here comes in the form of asking the Christian, “who put you in charge and what gives you the right to tell others they are wrong?” The real issue is not whether our authority is appropriate. The real issue is that man does not want anyone to be in authority over him. Man wants complete control of his destiny. Any suggestion that this is not possible is unacceptable. The religions and philosophies of the world focus on what an individual must do to find truth. Christianity focuses on the fact that we cannot do anything and must rely on God to provide the answers and the means.

Man has been trying throughout his history to avoid submitting to God and has created many religious structures and philosophies to support his effort. Man wants to be in control of his destiny.

1. Cain – He represents the individual approach to truth. I will do it my way and will be in control (Ge 4).
2. Babel – Man often puts himself and his skill at the center. It is believed that knowledge and wisdom and skill are all that it takes to find the truth and gain control. Often in this mode the existence of a spiritual realm is excluded (Ge 11_1-4).
3. Egypt – In this country and time the people elevated a group of beings called the gods. The gods had control of everything and all the answers that were needed. Proper worship to the correct god would provide for life and answers to the search for truth (Ex 7:10-13).
4. Israel – Even though they knew there was one God who created everything they lost the personal relationship with God that was to be the focus of their existence. Instead they substituted belief in their history and existence as a country. Being an Israelite was the key to finding truth. It was more important to be a son of Abraham than to pursue knowing God personally (Je 28, Lk 3:8, Jn 8:29,33).
5. Greco-Roman – At this point in history the focus is on the philosophy that truth can be had if we formulate the correct interpretation of how things exist and how they interrelate to each other (Ac 17, 1 Co 2).

In each case God has responded to the challenge represented by these various approaches to truth.

1. Cain – God personally came to Cain to warn him that his approach to worship was not acceptable. God saw that the problem was in the heart of Cain not in the actual activity. When we want to be in control we will

- create structures or beliefs that allow us to control how we worship which means we begin to worship what we do and not God. God rejected this approach (Ge 4:6-7).
2. Babel – If man is truly in control then he should be able to create what is needed to solve everything. If there is no God then man is supreme. God revealed clearly that man is not supreme and is not in control by confusing the language of man and scattering man around the world (Ge 11:7-9).
 3. Egypt – If the highest level of truth is found in the gods then worshipping them will provide all man needs. In freeing the Israelites from Egypt God reveals that this is not true. The gods are not the source of ultimate power or truth. Many of the plagues were directed at the gods of Egypt revealing their weakness. Pharaoh was considered to be a living god but could not protect his own son from death. The gods are not to be relied on (Ex 11:9, 12).
 4. Israel – The Pharisees relied on their status as a guarantee that they possessed the truth. John the Baptist was not impressed and stated that God could raise up sons of Abraham from the stones (Mt 3:9). God warned Israel that their special status could be lost and in losing it He would reveal Himself to the nations (Je 24:8-10). The Israelites were sent into exile and after the time of Jesus were once again destroyed as a nation.
 5. Greco-Roman – This era passed by, as have many cultures and systems. At one point the destruction of the church was attempted by their leaders. Man's philosophies appear and are replaced by another system. God does not change and cannot be replaced.

In contrast to these attempts by man to discover truth Jesus made a series of claims. These truths lead us directly back to God.

- Jesus said I am Truth. Believe in Me, My actions and My words are all one needs to know the truth (Jn 14:6).
- Jesus said I am the Way. In me one will find the only way to the truth (Jn 10:7).
- Jesus said I am the Life. If you follow Me and understand the truth as found in Me then you will find life (Jn 6:35, 11:25).
- Jesus said I am God. The creator of the universe and I are one and the same (Jn 10:30). In effect, He is stating that He is both the source and the means to the source of truth.

Jesus goes further and gives a series of instructions regarding what is to be done with this knowledge (Mt 28:19-20).

- Go-Preach the Gospel – The essence of this is to tell others what you have learned about how to find the truth and inform others of how to gain the truth.
- Go-Teach My words – This relates to the content of what is to be told to others. We are not to bring in our interpretations or other options. Only the words of God are acceptable to be taught.
- Go-Baptize in My Name – The focus of preaching and teaching is to help others accept the truth and make a public statement regarding what has been discovered.
- Go-Make disciples – This reveals the fact that it all must come full circle so that there will be another generation of people to tell others where to find the truth.

The problem of pluralism is not a new one. In the period of history when the New Testament was written they were dealing with similar issues. Rome had brought together people of many countries and tribes under one government. Rome made it possible for the people of these many countries to travel freely and established cities for business and trade where many of

them relocated. This meant that the beliefs and cultures of many lands came into contact with each other. People spent time listening to and discussing these differences.

In Acts 17 we find a record of this reality and the response of one Christian to the pluralism of the time. Paul travels to Athens and begins to talk to the people he meets. As he walks through the city he notes that it is filled with idols and this troubles him. He talks with Jews, Gentiles, traders and philosophers. Some of these people began to debate with him regarding his understanding of truth and his presentation regarding God. It is a hobby for them to listen to and discuss the latest ideas. They had never heard about Jesus and the resurrection and wanted to hear more about it. Paul agreed to present this information and so found himself in the Areopagus, a place where they met for presentations and debate.

Paul notes that they are very religious. They have many idols and even one for the unknown god. He states that he can explain to them what they have not known and what is represented by this idol. He starts by explaining to them the nature of God. God is the creator of everything and so His existence is greater than anything man has made (Ac 17:24-25). Therefore He has no need that man can fill and thus is the source of all that exists. He has created all things for a purpose. Even nations and geography serve a key purpose. He made them and set times and places for their existence.

The purposes of God's activities are such that man would seek God and perhaps find Him. History has a purpose and direction. It is established by God to direct men to Him and bring mankind to a final point where all will meet and be judged. Paul explains what God has been doing and what we must do. Much of what we do is out of ignorance and God has overlooked much of that ignorance. That time of ignorance is past and now

man is required to set aside his idols and repent of his attempts to control God (Ac 17:30-31).

To prove that all God says is true He has provided proof. God has come, He dwelt among man in the form of the man Jesus. He was killed and God has raised Him from the dead (Ac 17:31). This resurrection is the proof that God is the source of all that man needs to believe. This is the key. Without the evidence of the resurrection, all the teachings about God are just another type of philosophy or religion. If God did live on earth, die and was raised to life then we have something more than another manmade attempt to find truth. We have in fact discovered the source of truth - and that is God.

The Bible has many statements that focus on this truth. God is the creator, God has given us the truth, and God requires us to tell others.

Colossians 1 – This passage focuses on the Supremacy of Christ

John 3, 9, 10, 14 – These contain many comments that clearly state there is only one truth and only one way to find that truth.

Ephesians 4 – This discusses the singular nature of the way to God. It is the only way.

Romans 1-3 – These chapters contain a clear discussion of God's attitude towards mans behavior and attempt to go his own way.

Peter and the disciples were arrested for preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus Christ. They were teaching that Jesus is the only way to be saved and the only way to know God. They were threatened with punishment and even death if they continued to preach the name of Jesus. Peter's response makes it clear that we have the truth and we are expected to tell others this truth so that they will be saved.

“There is salvation in no one else. There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them (Ac 4:12, New Living Translation).”

The world may think that its goal is a pluralistic society where everyone finds their own truth. But what the world thinks will result in its destruction in the end. God makes it very clear that He is the source of truth and that we are to proclaim this truth to the world.

Part 3 – Missions in the Church

In this section we will be looking at various areas related to the church and how it can promote, teach and be involved in missions.

The first area would be to understand the call of God and who God is calling.

The second area relates to giving and what God is looking for that will allow Him to use us to support the work of missions.

The third area is divided into two parts and covers issues related to becoming a missions minded church and promoting missions.

The fourth and final area looks at communicating with God regarding the work of missions.

Chapter Eight

God's Call – Who is called and what is involved.

By now it should be clear that God has a message He wants the world to hear. We have seen how He has been involved in proclaiming this message. Now we need to begin to understand how that message relates to us in more specific areas. As we move into understanding how this call relates to us we need some background into what is involved in this process of God specifically calling us to be involved in missions. This can be broken down into four key areas.

1. **Key area one:** This relates to understanding the process of communication. Communication requires three pieces to be effective. There needs to be (1) a source. In this case the source is God, and what He is revealing about His plan and the part He wants you/I to play. There needs to be (2) a receiver, one who gets the message. In this setting, the church and those who are members of the church are the expected receivers of the message. In between the source and the receiver is (3) the medium. This relates to how the message is given to the receiver. There are many possible mediums that can and have been used. God has spoken through prophets, the written word, events and other means. He has chosen mediums that we can comprehend. Remove anyone of the three parts of communication and the process has failed.
2. **Key area two:** This area relates to the need for the message. For a message to have meaning and purpose it must relate to or fulfill a need. If the sender gives us information we do not need then we will not receive the message.

- The message can deal with a lack of resources and provide us with key information on how to get those resources. We can receive direction as to who can provide leadership in obtaining the resource, or help in planning and financing the process of getting the resource that is needed.
 - The message can provide needed information. Since we are talking about the gospel, the focus would be on understanding what salvation is and how it works. We would need information on how to disciple people so they will be effective in receiving and providing information. We would also need information on how to plan and carry out the mission given to us.
 - The message also can fill a need in the area of contact. Communication helps connect us with someone who can tell us what is needed and provide leadership. If we have no contact with God then we will not understand the need for others to hear or our need to be involved.
3. Key Area Three: For a message to be truly effective it must result in a response. If there is no response then the communication was ineffective. Even a negative response is better than no response. It means we heard the message and chose not to respond. Further, the message should inform us as to how we could or should respond and in what form the response can take.
- We can learn about what we are expected to give. Giving can involve time, use of personal resources and use of talents, skills or gifts. In each of these the focus is on the response of a person.
 - We can learn what we are expected to say. We are to be involved in telling others the gospel message. We

are to commit ourselves to becoming disciples. We are to be involved in ministry to others.

- We learn about what we can do. We can pray for ourselves, those involved in telling others the gospel and those being reached with the gospel. We can give from the resources we have, in the form of money, time, material goods and many other ways. We also learn how we can go. We learn where the need is, who should be involved and how to get there.

4. Key Area Four: Once we understand the communication process, the need and the expected response, then we are required to take action. The decision to take action occurs at a number of levels. Individuals, families, groups and churches all can respond to the message God is giving us regarding His mission. Each level has a part to play in the overall call of God to reaching the world with the gospel.

Now we need to get a clearer understanding about what God's message is and what He is calling us to do. There are a number of scriptures that will help us in learning what is needed.

Mathew 9:34-35

Jesus looks at the crowd and sees them and the need to reach them with the gospel. He says they are like a crop ready to harvest, but there are not enough workers to get the work done. Jesus challenges us to pray to the Lord of the harvest that He will send out workers.

We tend to focus on a couple of ideas when looking at this passage. We think mainly of those who are actually in the field doing the work or we think of someone else and so pray that

God will call another person to the work. Both of these ideas are short sighted.

1. First, if I am praying for God to send others and everyone is doing what I am doing then someone is praying that God will send me. We tend to exclude ourselves from this prayer. Instead we should focus first on asking God to call us to the work and then on others. I should not ask God to send someone else if I am not willing to go myself.
2. Second, there are many more workers involved than those actually cutting the grain. In Sierra Leone rice is a main crop and staple food. When the harvest comes there are many people involved besides those in the field cutting the grain. There are people who make and sharpen the knives used to cut the grain. There are a group of people involved in cooking and caring for the needs of the harvesters. Those who cut the grain do not gather it. Others pick it up and bring it to a central location for processing. Another group then takes sticks and thrashes or beats the bundles to release the seed from the stalk. Another group then goes through the process of separating the seed from the chaff. Finally there are those who take the grain and put it into storage. Over all of the workers is a group of people that coordinates the various jobs. As you can see there are a lot of people using many skills to bring in the harvest. And then, we could think of all the people that were involved months before – those that prepared the ground, planted, weeded, and cared for the plants. It becomes clear that everyone must be involved for the harvest to be accomplished successfully and in a timely manner.

That appears to be the focus of this prayer. Pray to the Lord that He will send the workers to the field. Pray that all of us will be involved in bringing people into the kingdom.

Mathew 28:19-20

Here we see Jesus just before His ascension. He states that He has all authority and then gives a series of commands to the group present. He commands them to go into all of the world and to do three key things, baptize, teach and disciple. He then promises that no matter what happens He will be with them.

This passage is quite clear. The eleven are to make disciples of all the nations. They are to go everywhere sharing the teaching they have received. They are to seek a clear commitment from those taught to become part of the kingdom of God. Jesus also makes it clear that they are to teach all of His words to these new disciples. In each country and in each time we are to repeat this process again and again. We are to receive the teaching of Jesus, go to those who have not heard, give them the message so they can become disciples and call them to become members of the kingdom of God through a visible action in the form of baptism. This is to continue throughout the age until its very end because Jesus said that is how long He would be present. We are part of that age and the work continues on today.

Acts 1:8

Jesus has one last meeting with a group of people before His ascension. He calls those present “His witnesses” and then tells them to carry the message to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the world.

Let us consider who is present at this meeting. In Act 1:15 we read that about 120 gathered together. There may have been many more people on the mountain. Paul in 1 Cor 15:6 talks about a group of 500 who saw Jesus. This suggests the

possibility that many people saw Jesus and not just the known leaders. Thus the statements of Jesus are not just for a select few who we see as the called of God but for all of us - for all of us are called by God to share the gospel.

Look now at what Jesus says. He tells them they are His witnesses. This is interesting. He does not ask them if they want to be a witness, He tells them they are. He does not ask their permission or give multiple choices or options. Because they had been with Him, heard His teaching and known Him, they have become witnesses. Once we know Jesus we are automatically witnesses. There is no further choice to be made. We only have two options in this area. We can either be good witnesses or bad witnesses.

Then Jesus gives them directions as to where they are to go and be witnesses. Jesus lists off four geographic areas which have been commonly understood as to go to our family and neighbors, to go to those of our area or culture, to go to those we don't like and even are seen as enemies and then to go to those we do not know who are far from us in language and culture. What is interesting is that the list is not set up as a set of options. We are not asked to choose one group or another to be our area of concern. We are told that we are to go to all of them. It is an inclusive list. When moving to another country we discovered that our neighbor followed us, only his named changed. In one country it was Baba, the next, Daniel and now is Peter. Everywhere we go we have a neighbor.

The same became true of the area we lived in. In Sierra Leone we were part of a community called Gbendembu which was part of a group called the Lokko tribe. In Papua New Guinea we were part of the community called Mt. Hagen and it was part of a group of people called the Hagens. In Guyana we live in the

city of Georgetown which is part an area called the coastal area. We have found that Judea moves along with us.

In each country there were those who were not accepted, even rejected as the Samaritans were. Finally we discovered that once you are living in a country there are always other tribes and other countries that you can reach with the gospel. You cannot escape Jesus directives in Acts 1:8.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

In this passage Paul helps to focus the issues involved in carrying the gospel to the world. He talks about going to whoever will listen, wherever he can find them. In order to do this he will live like those people, as long as he does not violate God's law. Why does he do all of this? So that some might hear, believe, and be saved.

We are to be aware that people live in many places and that we need to go where they are. We are to speak until we find people who will listen. Critical to this process is to speak and live in such a way that they will be willing to listen. Paul says that for him, the best way to do that was to leave his culture behind and adopt the culture of the people so as to be more effective in his communication. The gospel is not about transplanting our culture. It is about communicating God's message. Only where the culture conflicts with the law of God are we not to yield. We are to speak until those who are willing respond.

It becomes very clear that no matter who I am or where I am I must be a witness and I must be a witness to everyone. I have a part to play in reaching the world whether it is close by or far away. My responsibility is to discover how to share in reaching all of the world. There are at least seven groups that are a critical part of helping to reach the world with the gospel.

1. Group One – People who see the need. We need people who have the ability to see the need for proclaiming the gospel and can tell us clearly what that need is at this point in time. We need people today who have the eyes of Jesus when He looked at the people and saw their need (Mt 9:36-38). They were people without a shepherd and there was a need for workers to guide them. People who, like Paul, who are not afraid to tell others the need even though there may be suffering involved (2 Ti 1, 1 Co 3:6-10). We need these people to open our eyes and hearts to the need.

2. Group Two – People who issue the challenge. Sometimes we can see the need but don't know what to do. We need people who can challenge us and get us moving. Barnabas was such a person. He saw the need and then challenged Paul to get involved. Paul could have said no. He could have reminded Barnabas of how the people in Damascus tried to kill him and how poorly he was received in Jerusalem after his conversion. Barnabas issued the challenge in such a way that Paul could not refuse and so Paul joined Barnabas in Antioch. Paul did the same with Silas and Timothy and many others. We need these people who see the need and issue the challenge so that people respond and go.

3. Group Three – People who teach the Word. We need to know what we are proclaiming, why we are proclaiming it and what God has said about this proclamation. We need people who will teach us so when we share the gospel it will be clear and easy to understand. Paul spent a great deal of time in teaching. He wrote a number of letters with the key purpose of teaching people and churches about the Christian life and about sharing the

gospel. He taught individuals as well. We have three letters that contain this information written to Timothy and Titus. In these letters we read of a call to be a good teacher so that others may continue the work and the gospel will continue to spread. Aquilla and Priscilla were teachers. They taught Apollos. He knew a great deal but was lacking in key areas. They took him and taught him so that his ministry became even more effective (Ac 18:24-26).

4. Group Four – People who pray. Jesus tells us to pray and gives us an example of how He prayed for the work of spreading the gospel in John 17. He encourages us to ask Him and promises to answer (Jn 14:13-14). The centurion prayed seeking a response from God and God heard his prayer and sent Peter (Ac 10:2). The best example of prayer for missions is found in Act 13 where the church in Antioch began to pray seeking God for His direction. God responded and told them to select the first missionaries and send them. Paul, in many of his letters, includes encouragement to pray for the work of spreading the gospel.
5. Group Five – People who respond. People who have heard the teaching, heard the need, and respond. They make a commitment to give themselves, their time and their resources. They hear and they go. Timothy is challenged by Paul to go and responds. He goes with Paul and is involved in missions (2 Ti 1:6) using his gifts as Paul has encouraged him to. Philip hears the words of God and goes to an isolated location on the road to Ethiopia (Ac 8:26). There he meets the Ethiopian eunuch and shares the gospel with him. That meeting is significant, for this one man is likely the person who began the Coptic church in Ethiopia, which still exists

today. Silas hears Paul and joins him on the next missionary journey (Ac 15:40). Paul, who is at the center of missions in the book of Acts, responded when Barnabas came and invited him to come to Antioch (Ac 11:25). We need people who will go.

6. Group Six – People who will send. We need the people who will respond by sending those called to go. Antioch prayed and God responded. When they heard God’s instruction they sent out the first missionaries, Saul and Barnabas (Ac 13:1-3). They responded again and sent out two sets of missionaries, Barnabas and John Mark and Paul and Silas (Ac 15:40). Early on the group in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria. They were to check out what Philip was doing and found themselves involved in the work of missions there as well (Ac 8:14). In the book of Philippians we find the record of this church sending one of their own, Epaphroditus, to help Paul in his situation (Ph 2:25).
7. Group Seven – People who support the work. When we send people to do missions we need those who will give and pray to support the work they are being asked to do. The Philippi church was involved in supporting Paul in his work (Ph 4:18). Paul in writing about missions indicates that Peter and his wife are being supported by others as they travel (1 Co 9:3-6). In 2 Co 8-9 there is a long discussion about raising funds to help support the work and care for the church in Jerusalem.

It should be clear by now that there is a place for everyone in the work of missions. We need many kinds of people doing a number of critical jobs in order to carry the gospel to the nations. It is much like the work of the harvest which involves many skills and people to get the work done. We all have a part

to play and no one is excluded. It does not matter what your age is, what your gender is or what your skill may be, you can help carry the gospel to the world. The Bible is filled with examples of people called into ministry. It may be helpful to look at some of these to encourage us as we try to understand what God wants us to do.

Individuals - God has a place for individuals and groups of individuals in the work of missions. Let's begin by looking at individuals and how God has used them.

Children – Scripture encourages us to be like children in our faith and our life. Many children and young people have had opportunities to minister.

- Samuel was the youngest person to serve in the temple. It was because of his mother that this was made possible. She made a promise (which God honored) and brought her son Samuel to the temple at the age of three. Around the age of seven Samuel received his first message from God. From that time on it says he was a servant of God and taught the people. (1 Sam 1).
- David was a teenager when he was anointed to be king (1 Sa 16-17). As a teenager he killed the giant Goliath and soon after was appointed a captain in the king's army. He learned early to depend on God and his faith became an example to the people of how they could trust God.
- Naaman's servant girl maintained her faith in a very difficult situation (2 Ki 5). Her country had just been defeated by Naaman and his army. It is possible her parents were dead and now she was a servant in the enemy's house. Yet she maintained her faith and when she told Naaman of the one true God, he listens. Her faith reaches the heart of her enemy.

- Daniel and his friends are teenagers when they are taken captive to Babylon (Da 1). They maintain their faith in God and defy the king's orders deciding to follow God's laws instead. This decision as teenagers sets the stage for several key events which convince the king that the God of Israel is the one true God. The key event being the fiery furnace and their refusal to bow to the king's image.
- The children on Palm Sunday are shouting that the messiah has come (Mt 21:15-17). This activity upsets the Pharisees and they tell Jesus to make the children stop. Jesus challenges them with the fact that out of the mouths of children come truth. Besides that if the children were forced to be silent the stones would become quite upset and take up the message and began to speak. What an interesting setting and problem. Which would the Pharisees prefer - the children speaking the truth or having to listen to the stones cry out? What an embarrassment it would have been if the stones were to begin speaking. It was good that there were children there who saw the truth and spoke it.

Women – They see and understand things many others miss and are willing to share what they have learned with others.

- Hannah – What a commitment she made to give her child up to the work of the Lord. What an example to us and what a challenge (1 Sa 1)! Would we be so willing to send our sons and daughters out into the service of God? My mother did. She knew I had been called into missions and when I was 19 she filled out an application for a summer missions program and sent it in on my behalf. The end result was I spent ten weeks in Kenya. While there God reminded me of His call and I accepted that call to be one of those who goes to other nations to preach the gospel.

- Esther – She put her life on the line for her people (Es 1). She risked death to let the king know that she was an Israelite and in that act would also declare her faith in God. She was willing to let God use her and her position for His purposes.
- Priscilla – A tentmaker by trade but also a teacher of the word of God (Ac 18:24-26). She was involved in teaching others about the gospel and involved in discipling them. She helped teach Apollos along with her husband so that Apollos became a more effective preacher. We need women who are willing to teach, so that those God desires to call and use will be anchored in the Word and ready to go.
- Dorcas – She did not have much but what she had she used for God’s work (Ac 9:36). She sewed clothes to meet the needs of others. Around the world there are many babies who have benefited from women who share their skills in this way. They sew clothes and blankets for newborns. These are given to the mothers and become a witness to these mothers of the love of God. This is only one example of how a practical skill can be used to share the gospel around the world.
- Anna – Anna was old and yet she served (Lk 2:38). She came to the temple everyday to serve in what ever way she could. She spent her time fasting and praying. God honored her service by allowing her to be among the first to see and recognize the Messiah. Age is not a barrier to service but often a door to special service in the kingdom.

Men – Now we come to the men. We all know the stories about the men God has called. But here are highlighted a few and the work they were called to do, given as examples of what we could be involved in as men.

- Abraham – He was called to leave his home and family to follow God (Ge 12). It was not easy but it was necessary for God to work in and through the life of Abraham. In Argentina there are families that are moving so they can help start new churches. Sometimes we need to be able to risk giving up what we have so that God can use us in another place to share the gospel.
- Noah – We all know the story of Noah, but let us consider what he was being asked to do (Ge 6). How would you respond if God called your name and then asked you to build a boat? Maybe you had to ask what a boat was? You asked because you lived at the foot of the mountains and there was very little water and so no need for a boat. Imagine how you would respond when you heard how big the boat would be, and then realized how long it would take to build, and how people would respond to your activity. Noah probably had the same response as you, and yet he obeyed. It took 100 years to build and probably was not easy. We are told that during that time Noah preached to the people (2 Pe 2:5) and only seven responded, his wife, three sons and their wives. That must have been very difficult. Noah's faith reminds us that our job is to obey and proclaim the truth. It is not our job to save them. Will we make the same kind of commitments today to be sure the message is proclaimed?
- Bezalel – This man represents all of us who don't believe we have much to contribute. He was not a leader or a teacher. He was a builder (Ex 31:2, 6). He was given the task of building the tabernacle. God blessed Bezalel with skills in various crafts. Bezalel helped to provide the facilities where God could be worshipped and the law of God would be taught.
- Amos – Amos has even less to offer. We think of Amos as a prophet of God. Amos thought of himself as the

shepherd of Tekoa (Amos 1). He had a job that had no real future and was low on the social ladder. That didn't matter to God. God called and this lowly man was used by God to proclaim a message to the people.

- Peter – Peter was the man who could do nothing right, or at best, could not follow through on anything. He made great statements and promises and then failed. He saw that Jesus was the messiah and then got in the way. Jesus had to rebuke Peter with very strong words, “get behind me Satan.” He decided to walk on the water but only managed a few steps when his faith failed and he sank. He promises to follow to the death, yet ended up denying he ever knew Jesus. Yet Jesus sees the potential in Peter and calls him to be a shepherd (Jn 21:15-18). Peter responds and he is chosen to give the first sermon at Pentecost. He is like all of us, imperfect. The key though, is letting God have our life and allowing God to work through us.
- Gadarene – This man was the outcast. He was unwanted and feared by all. His life was a disaster and he had nothing in him of any value to anyone. Jesus came and freed him from Satan's control and from his past. He was so thankful that he said he would follow Jesus anywhere. Jesus said “no” and gave the Gadarene a more difficult assignment. He was sent home to his family and neighbors to tell them what God had done (Mt 5:19). God has a place for all of us in the work of sharing the gospel.

Groups - Now let us look at a few examples of groups of people that were used by God.

Couples – Husbands and wives working together.

- Aquila and Priscila – This couple appeared several times in the records and are called tentmakers. They worked

together with Paul in spreading the gospel. They also were involved in teaching and discipling (Ac 18:2-3, 24-26). They were a team working together, using their skills to share the gospel.

- Peter and his wife – Paul records for us the fact that they are involved in ministry and are being supported by the church in that work (1 Co 9:5). We don't know what their ministry was but it is clear that it was accepted as proper for husbands and wives to be together in ministry.

Churches – Groups of Christians working together to carry the gospel to those who have not heard.

- Antioch – This is the church we often refer to when we want an example of a mission-minded church (Ac 13). The record is clear about how they sought the direction of the Lord and responded by sending their best to carry the message of the gospel to other people.
- Philippi – On several occasions this group of people sent funds to aid in Paul's work and even sent one of their own as an encouragement and helper in that work (Ph 4:14-19). They are an example of the role of a church in sending and supporting missions. Paul calls them his partners in the work in chapter 1.
- Philadelphia – One of the seven churches listed in Revelation who receives a letter of evaluation. They are called to trust God (Rev 3:7-14). God speaks to them about what they have and what He wants to do through them.

Often we think we have nothing and so can do nothing. That is a mistake. The letter to the church in Philadelphia contains information that will help us understand that it is not what we have in the way of material possessions that matters. It is the fact that we have God and are obedient to Him that matters.

In the letter to the church in Philadelphia God states clearly that they have little strength. This would suggest they have limited resources and abilities. The one thing they do have is God and they understand what that means. God sees this when He says He sees their deeds and the fact that they have been faithful and kept His commands to endure (Rev 3:8, 10).

God presents them with a challenge which is represented by door (Rev 3:8). God says he is going to place before them an open door. The door represents a task they are going to be asked to perform. Further, that God will make possible the ministry He is asking them to do.

God makes a series of promises to encourage them to go forward with the task and enter the open door. God states He will open the door, no one will be able to shut the door, promises that He will be with them, and that He will protect them. Finally He promises to give them a crown and a place in the temple. He will honor them for their faithfulness and give them His name.

The challenge is not to look at what we have but to trust God for what He will provide. God is not calling us to attempt something in our own strength. He is calling us to be involved in His work, with His resources and in His strength. We all are given the opportunity to respond. The call is to those who have an ear to listen and respond.

When we look at what God is calling us to do we will see four parts that make up the call of God.

1. Need for workers – We are challenged to pray to God to call out the workers and send them into the harvest
2. Need for support – We are challenged to send and support those who God is calling into the work.

3. Need for prayer – We are challenged to pray for the work. We are to ask God for what is needed. A key area of prayer is for those who are carrying out the work given them by the Lord of the harvest.
4. Need for encouragement – We are challenged to be an encouragement to others by our life. Our commitment to living a life like that of Jesus will be an encouragement to those who are sent. Paul reflects this truth in his letter to the church at Philippi. Their commitment was a source of joy to him.

If we will hear the call of God and respond then, the nations will hear. We will be involved and accomplish the proclamation of the gospel to all nations everywhere.

Chapter 9 – Principles of Giving Living and giving with God’s resources.

In 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9 Paul presents a discussion on key principles related to giving. The Jerusalem church is experiencing a difficult time and is in need of assistance. Churches in Asia and Macedonia have been challenged by Paul to send finances to assist them. Paul reflects on what the Macedonia church is learning about giving in order to encourage the church in Corinth to do likewise and not miss out on the blessing.

Among the churches in Macedonia we have record of several that Paul had visited on one of the missionary journeys. He went to Philippi, Berea and Thessalonica. It was not an easy time for Paul. In Philippi he was beaten and jailed for driving a demon out of a young girl. In Thessalonica the opposition was so strong Paul had to flee in the night. In Berea the Jews from Thessalonica came and stirred up trouble as well; so much so that Paul had to leave the region and goes to Athens to wait for the others and reports on progress in the churches.

From the letter to the Philippians we learn that they are a giving church. On several occasions they have sent funds to support Paul in his ministry. In the book of Acts we learn that the church in Berea were students of the word of God. In Thessalonica Paul talks of how there was strong opposition and yet the people who responded have remained faithful. It is this group of churches that Paul is referring to when he talks of the churches of Macedonia.

As we look at this passage we will consider what Paul has to say about the process of giving, what results come from the

knowledge gained and key principles that can help us understand how to give.

Section 1 – 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Paul explains the conditions that existed in Macedonia for the Christians. He mentions that they were facing extreme trials and were very poor. In each of the cities Paul had visited he faced great opposition. It is quite likely that this opposition continued even after he left.

Paul states that our condition or the resources we have is not the issue when we are asked to give. The key to giving relates to the presence of God and His work in our lives. God was present in Macedonia, He gave them grace, and they were able to leave behind the trials and the poverty they were experiencing. With the grace of God they found they could face the trials that came their way. In facing the trials and trusting God, their joy became an overflowing joy affecting themselves and allowing them to overcome their poverty and see the needs of others. They learned to trust God.

1. The result of the presence of God's grace allowed them to look beyond their condition and they were richly generous. Paul's report says they learned to give at three levels. They gave what they were able. We all do this. When we are asked to give we look at our resources and give what we feel can be given with out causing us any hardship.
2. They gave beyond their ability. They were learning to trust God to provide for their needs. They looked at their resources, considered the need, and then in faith gave more than they could afford to give. They begin to sacrifice so that God would be honored.

3. They took the giving one more step. They begged Paul to allow them the privilege of sharing in giving. They considered it a service, a blessing to help and wanted to be sure Paul would present any further needs to them so they would be able to continue to help.

Paul explains two key decisions the people made that allowed them to become so generous, enabling them to move beyond their trials and poverty and give. Paul says they gave themselves first to the Lord. They truly became the children of God and allowed God to have control of their lives and their resources. Secondly they gave themselves to their leaders. They trusted the ones God had appointed to lead them in the work of the kingdom. This trust helped unite them in purpose and in their faith. Such a level of submission to God and those appointed to lead them resulted in their being able to do what could not have been done by any other means.

Section 2 – 2 Corinthians 8:8-15

In this section the focus is on giving and receiving advice. Paul now gives advice to the church in Corinth about following the example of the churches of Macedonia. In hearing his advice they will gain wisdom and encouragement in their plan to give. Receiving advice is not an easy process for most of us. We become defensive, resistant and proud. It will test the sincerity of our love and commitment to the one giving the advice. Paul also says it will test our willingness to be like Christ who gave all so that we might be rich. Advice will test the truth of our desire to give. Jesus advised a rich young ruler to give up everything to follow Him. That advice became the real test of the young man's desire to be part of the kingdom of God. Zacchaeus did give up everything and Jesus called him a true son of Abraham.

When we are willing to receive advice the work is often easier to complete. Starting a project is often easier than finishing it. It takes encouragement and advice to help get the job done. Being willing to ask for help can mean the difference between success and failure. We are encouraged to seek advice regarding giving, encouraged to be like Christ who gave up everything at the direction of His Father, and encouraged to use the advice received as a means of evaluating how we are doing in our giving. A word of advice can be very useful in measuring how we are doing and how others see and evaluate what we are doing when we give.

Paul then shows the outcome of asking for and receiving advice. We will learn what an acceptable gift is. We will learn that giving is more about being willing to do so than the amount of funds we give. If we give because we want to give, then the gift becomes acceptable. God expects us to give according to what He has provided us. When we are willing to give then there will be enough. There will be enough for us who are giving and there will be enough for those who receive. While this may not seem possible humanly, God has a way of multiplying and providing what we give so that there is always enough.

Section 3 – 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5

Paul now looks at the impact of giving on others. When we give how does that affect those around us. Corinth was the first to ask to give and this desire encouraged the Macedonian churches to respond. The Macedonian churches surprised Paul by the level of their giving this challenged the church in Corinth to complete the goal they set for giving. Giving that is based on obedience and a desire to hear God's words brings us into relationship with others. It will encourage others to join with us. It will encourage others to open their hearts and give. It will encourage us to be ready to give when there is need.

When we learn to give, our actions will encourage others to give. Our desire to give will be reported to others and challenge them. If we truly desire to give out of a willing heart it will unite us with others. It will help us see ourselves as part of something much bigger than who we are. It will unite us with the family of God in other places. Giving helps us to look beyond ourselves.

We now see two more keys to giving. Giving brings unity to the fellowship of churches. It causes us to work together and encourages us to trust God in new ways. Giving also allows us to evaluate our motives. Why are we giving - to impress others, to gain blessing, or we are under pressure to give? When we are asked to let go of money we will have the opportunity to evaluate many things about our relationship with God and our attitudes toward others.

Section 4 – 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Paul explains here what happens when we learn to give, especially if we learn to give generously and cheerfully. We become connected to the heart of God. We begin to understand how God provides and cares for us. We become connected with the needs of others. If I desire to give then the door is open to seeing others and their needs. This desire to see others and help will bring us to a new level of joy in our lives. We will experience the joy that comes from seeing others receive God's help and helping them to praise God with us.

The result of true giving is that God will be honored. When we give out of love and concern then God is praised. When this happens Paul says that the grace of God abounds, both to the giver and the receiver. Others will experience a new understanding of how God loves them and provides and they

will praise Him. Likewise, God will provide grace in the lives of those who give so that they will have what is needed, and they will be able to give again. They will also receive the prayers of their benefactors. Our obedience in giving, our trust in God that He will provide will result in a greater level of praise to God from both the giver and the receiver.

The key principles here are:

1. God responds with greater blessing as we give.
2. Obedience is the key to greater blessing.

When we obey God blesses. It is part of a true expression of love for God. Jesus said that those who love God will obey His words. Those who obey God are those who have learned to love God (Jn 14:15-31). True love is expressed in obedience to the one who is loved. Giving ourselves freely and completely is an expression of obedience and love.

The Macedonian churches learned to give. This gave Paul an opportunity to help us learn about giving. They gave what they could, gave beyond their ability and pleaded for the privilege of giving. Their obedience resulted in a challenge to others and an encouragement that when we trust and obey God, He will provide what is needed for all who are involved, the giver and the receiver. It is not based on what we have but on what God wants to do.

Section 5 – Philippians 2:25-30

In this passage we have an example of one who gave more than money and was part of a church that had learned to give. Epaphroditus was sent by his church to bring a gift to Paul. He brought much more than a gift. He brought an example of what our attitudes and goals should be when we are giving.

Paul first calls Epaphroditus a fellow soldier. As a fellow soldier he would be trained in the work. In order to be effective in giving we need to take time to prepare and study so that we will be able to do the work God has for us. As a fellow soldier he would understand the issues in the battle or the work. We are not asked to give blindly. We need to understand why there is a need and what the goals are. As a fellow soldier he would understand the risk. Giving means taking risk. It means letting go of what we have and risking it to help others. Epaphroditus risked more than money - he risked his life to help Paul.

Paul then calls Epaphroditus a fellow worker. As a fellow worker he would have the same concern for the work. When we give we need to go the next step and learn what the work is and understand the needs. As a fellow worker he would have the same desire to pray for the work being done. Giving does not end our obligation; we need to pray over the gift and the work that will be done. As a fellow worker he would share in communicating the work to others. We need to tell others what is happening and challenge them to get involved as well, through giving and praying. The more people involved the easier the work becomes.

Paul closes by calling Epaphroditus a brother. As a brother he knows that the needs of a brother are his concern. He is his brother's keeper and has a responsibility to care for his brother. As a brother he is a source of joy. When we see giving as a personal response to the needs of a member of the family we will become a source of joy. As a brother he will help where he can. When we understand our relationship to each other then we will learn how to help each other. We will become a team working together, combining resources and skills to be more effective in the work.

Section 6 – Ph 2:1-4, 4:10-20

The church in Philippi has a special place in the heart of Paul. On several occasions they have responded to his needs by sending gifts and helpers. His comments help us understand how giving that comes from the heart of God unites us in the work of carrying the gospel to the world.

1. Paul reflects on how they are concerned for missions and the missionary. They pray for him and provide for him.
2. Paul senses that they share in his troubles and in the struggles of his work. They send a person to help.
3. Paul shares how they are a source of joy and encouragement to him. He also desires to be a joy and encouragement to them.
4. Paul states that they are partners with God in spreading the gospel. His work is their work and they are involved.
5. Paul blesses them. He says they will receive a special blessing from God for their obedience in helping to carry the gospel to others and caring for him in this work.

There is much more in the book of Philippians about the blessings of such a relationship. It is about a partnership in ministry that begins with giving and goes beyond that. Giving involves much more than money. It involves a desire for a relationship and sharing in the work of God with others.

Section 7 – 1 Corinthians 9:3-18

Paul discusses some of the issues related to supporting those who carry the gospel to others.

1. Recognize the needs of those being sent. Like everyone else they need food, clothing and shelter. Some who are sent have a wife and family and they need to be cared

for. Wherever they go they will need finances to care for many of these needs.

2. Recognize the need to free the missionary for the work. If a worker has to spend their time earning a living then it will be more difficult to have sufficient time for preaching and teaching the truth to those they have been sent to. Ministry often requires funds to buy supplies, rent facilities, and other expenses. In Corinth Paul rented a hall to teach in. If the worker struggles to cover these costs there will be a limit on what can be done. When the focus of life is on raising money and caring for personal needs then it is hard to find time and energy for the work as well.
3. Recognize the rights of the worker. They need to be free to do the work they have been sent to do. When we provide for their support then they will be more effective. They will be free to commit the time needed to effectively plan, prepare and preach. This will result in God blessing the worker and those who support him.
4. Recognize that God will bless. God will be present in the work. God will be present in the lives of those who support the work. God will be present in every aspect of what is happening and He will bring His joy and presence to us. We will be blessed.

Section 8 – Giving above and beyond

The goal of giving is not to focus on our resources. The goal of giving is to focus on God's resources and allow Him to use us as a channel to make those resources available. God wants to use us and has the means to provide if we will only let Him.

There is a record of a time when a group of people gave so much they were asked to stop giving. The Israelites were in the wilderness and it was time to build the tabernacle. Moses

presented to them the need for materials and resources. The people began to give and continued giving until the person in charge of the work complained that there was too much. He asked Moses to tell the people to stop giving (Ex 36:2-7). Would you have asked the people to stop giving? That would be an amazing event. The bigger question is - where did they get the resources so they could give? You must remember that they had been slaves all their lives. They had received no pay and owned nothing of consequence. Also remember they are in the wilderness where there is also a lot of nothing. Still they were able to give. Where did they get the resources? The Scripture records that as they left Egypt, God put it in the heart of the Egyptians to give the Israelites a great quantity of wealth (Ex 11:2-3, 12:35-36). God provided so that they could give far beyond their means as former slaves.

In building the temple there is a record of the gifts given by David and his men. David's first gift was 3750 tons of gold, 37,500 tons of silver and other items too great to measure (1 Chr 22:14). Later David and his leaders give another gift of 300 tons of gold, 635 tons of silver, as well as other materials. The gold alone would be worth over 38 billion dollars at today's prices. Now we need to remember who David was and then consider how he could give such a gift. David was a shepherd. This was not a high paying job. David was the last of seven sons. He was at the bottom of the list as far as inheritance goes. So where did all of this wealth come from? David had been faithful to God and had won many victories, defeating all of the enemies of Israel. As part of each victory there was the spoils of war. God had given David access to incredible wealth and now David used what God has given him to give it to God.

In the New Testament we have the stories of two wealthy men. One is simply called the rich young ruler, who when challenged to give all he had to receive the kingdom of God was unable to

do so. The other is the story of Zaccheus. He was a tax collector. As a result he was quite wealthy. One day he met Jesus and something happened. Jesus did not ask Zaccheus to give up his wealth. Zaccheus made that decision on his own (Lk 19:8-9). The interesting part is how much he gave. He starts out saying he will give half of his wealth to the poor. That is great. Even so he will have enough to live comfortably. He then goes one step further and states that he will repay anyone he has cheated four times what he stole from them. As a tax collector it is likely that he stole from everyone. He will have nothing left. That does not seem to matter. Jesus honors him and states that “on this day salvation has come to a lost son of Israel (Lk 19:9).” Zaccheus became more interested in the needs of others than his personal comfort and is blessed.

Jesus ministered and traveled for about three years before his death. He stated that he had no home and no pillow to sleep on. At times there was a large group traveling with him. At one point it would have exceeded seventy people. That was a lot of people to feed and care for. We do not read that Jesus took up offerings although it is likely that people provided for Him and those with Him. Mary and Martha did so and the mother of Peter did on one occasion. Those would be only occasional. So how did the needs of such a group get met? It is recorded that a group of wealthy women (Lk 8:2-3) responded to the need and provided for this group. That represents a large and constant level of giving. It is not explained how they could do so, just that they took their resources to support Jesus’ ministry.

We have already looked at the passage that describes the churches of Macedonia and their commitment to give. They gave beyond their ability. We have no explanation of where the resources came from or how much was involved. We only know that God blessed and they gave. They trusted God and He responded by providing what was needed.

We could also talk about the widow and her two mites, the boy and his loaves and fish, or how the early church responded to care for others. People sold homes and property to provide for the needs of that early church. In each case God was at work and those who gave were blessed. What a challenge these groups represent. What an encouragement to learn to give and trust God. We need to learn this type of giving and allow God access to our lives so that He can provide above and beyond our resources so that His work will be done.

Chapter 10 – Faith Promise Giving

“Giving above and beyond our ability”

God wants us to give. God wants us to trust Him and use us to release the resources needed for the work of missions. We call this process **faith promise giving**. It is not based on what we have but on what God can provide through us. It does not depend on what we can earn but on what God can provide. Faith promise giving involves a covenant between God and the believer that allows God to channel unexpected funds to His work through the believer.

This is how it works.

1. Through waiting on God in prayer the believer is impressed to promise to give an amount that he or she does not possess.
2. The believer promises in faith to give that sum, writes down the amount and turns in the record for the church to see.
3. Faith promises are usually made for a year but it can be for a shorter or longer period of time.
4. In the period of the faith promise, the believer waits expectantly for God to supply that amount in unforeseen ways. This further develops an attitude of faith and expectation.
5. When funds come to the believer over and above what is expected, these are brought to the Lord to satisfy the Faith Promise.

Faith promise is not a contract or a pledge. A church may issue gentle reminders about how the church is doing and that they are praying for those who made faith promises. There will be no forced collection of the promised amount. However, it is always

good to have people share testimonies about how God is providing funds to fulfill their faith promise.

So if the church is not to collect the money then what happens if God doesn't supply?

1. The believer is not obligated to make up or pay the faith promise out of their regular income. This is not a pledge to raise money or give from our regular income.
2. If the believer heard God accurately when making the promise and has faithfully given what God has provided, then they have done their part in satisfying the true faith promise.
3. A faith promise may break down at the following points.
 - a. One promised an amount that God did not prompt.
 - b. One diverted the funds that God provided.
 - c. One did not receive the funds needed to fulfill a genuinely God-prompted faith promise.
4. If a faith promise fails then one should go through the process again and carefully seek God's leadership at each step.

We have seen in the previous chapter how God has supplied and people have responded by giving. Faith promise is a love offering to God. It is like the thank offerings of the Old Testament (Ex 35:20, Dt 16:17, 2 Ch 29:6,9,14) which focus on a spirit of giving and thankfulness for God's provisions. It is looking at God and trusting God to provide and then expressing that trust through faith by promising to give as God provides. It takes us beyond our ability as the churches in Macedonia learned, to a new level of joy and blessing. It brings us into a special partnership with God to accomplish His work.

Faith promise is not based on a percentage like the tithe. If so it would depend on how much we could earn. Rather, it allows a

total amount to be given. God gets 100% of what He provides for the work. It does not mean we stop tithing but allows us to do more than we could do if we depended solely on the tithe.

Faith promise allows us to experience God's joy. In giving we can see the needs of God's work being supplied, and realize we are partners with God. We as individuals, no matter what our age, can be involved in what God desires to do through us, over and above our available funds. It allows us the joy of experiencing how God provides as we step out in faith.

Faith promise allows everyone to be involved, since it is not about how much we earn or have but about what God will provide. Children can learn to trust God to provide them with funds to give, those who work can see how God can provide, and those who are retired can also be involved since it does not depend on strength but God's provision.

Faith promise is a unique way of involving everyone in a walk of faith that promotes the work of God. It also allows the church to increase its giving to missions faster than the church budget could grow and provide finances for missions.

As we learn to give through faith promise we will learn more about our priorities and how they relate to missions. It can help us make missions our passion. George Beals tells this story about the Central Wesleyan Church in Holland, Michigan. This church has been practicing faith promise giving for over two decades. At one point the church needed to build a new facility. Faith promise and missions impacted that decision such that the people trusted that God would provide more than they needed for the new building. They decided that 5% of all the money that came in for the building project should go towards helping to build churches in other countries. As a result all areas of the

church increased and the attendance has grew. They trusted God to provide and made a faith promise as a church.

Are we ready to trust God and let Him use us to channel funds through us? Remember God has unlimited resources. The only limit on His ability to give is finding people who, in faith, will trust Him to provide.

Chapter 11 – Missions in the Local Church

The Essentials for an effective Missions Program

In chapter three we examined what makes a mature church. We saw that one quality of a mature church is missions. We now need to look at how we can be effective in missions and promoting missions within the local church. There are five key areas to consider in seeing where we are and what we need to do to effectively involve the individuals of the church, and the church as a whole, in missions.

Area One – The local church

The nature of the church and its growth are the place where we need to begin. A healthy church is critical to the development of any program in the church. This would be especially true as relates to evangelism and missions. There are five focuses we need to maintain as a church that will help us see beyond ourselves and reach out to others.

Focus number 1 - Worship

We need to focus on the nature and purpose of our worship so that it reflects God's presence and mission. Worship is built on three concepts - a command, a purpose and a witness.

The Command – Love God

We are commanded to love God with our heart. Loving God involves making commitments. Commitments start in the heart. It starts with setting priorities. Our worship needs to reflect that our priorities are set by God out of love for Him.

We are commanded to love God with all our mind. Commitments need to be confirmed and so involve our mind. Our worship needs to be based on the study and application of God's word. Worship opens the door to hearing and obeying and will require that both those who lead and those who follow give adequate time for their own study. As all who participate prepare for worship we will be able to make stronger, clearer commitments to our relationship with God.

We are commanded to love God with our body. We are to be aware of our need for forgiveness and how to live a pure and holy life. In worship we have the opportunity to come before God for confession and forgiveness, which will help us understand the nature of God's love for us and others. In that event we will understand how to give ourselves to God and His work.

We are commanded to love God with all our soul. Worship is not meant to be a momentary experience for now. It is meant to connect us with the one who created us. It is meant to draw us into eternity, into the life of God in us. It is not an external trapping we put on that will make us feel good, but the expression of our personal relationship with God. This relationship changes our focus from this world to that of eternity.

The Purpose – to know God

We are to learn who God is as the Father. He is the one who created us and loves us beyond our ability to understand love. In knowing the Father we will begin to understand our responsibility.

We are to learn who God is as the Son. Jesus is the Son of God and has a special relationship with God, as Father. When we

come into God's presence it is in that same type of relationship. Our relationship is to be the same as that of Jesus. We are to come into worship as children of God with all the rights and privileges that go with that relationship.

We are to learn who God is as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the active presence of God, working and moving on the earth. He is working in our lives to guide us and teach us and provide gifts and skills. We too have been given the ability to be active in serving God and others. We have gifts and abilities that have been given for the purpose of serving God.

The Witness – to reveal God

In worship we have the opportunity to reveal the presence of God. Through our words we can share our love for God and how we know Him. Through our deeds people can experience God through us as we live out our relationship for them to see. Through our presence we reveal our realization that we have met God. When God is truly in our lives people will know.

Focus Number Two - Fellowship

True worship becomes the basis for fellowship. As we worship God we will become aware of those who share in that worship, our brothers and sisters in Christ. In this place of fellowship we will learn to love each other and it will be the place where four activities essential to life and growth can occur.

Activity one – A place to begin

In fellowship we open the door for people to experience two crucial processes.

Forgiveness – In fellowship we experience forgiveness in the lives of others. Being accepted into the fellowship of the church helps us understand that we are forgiven of our past. We will also find strength to deal with how the past has affected our lives.

Forgiveness allows us to enter into the present. While in sin we were dead, a past with no present. In effect our life was over before it began because sin made a final judgment and treated all of our life as if it were a page in history, over. Forgiveness removes the judgment and gives us a present where we can live and walk with God and others who are part of the family of God.

Forgiveness also prepares for the future. What we learn now will prepare us for the day when we gather in heaven. What we have received will open the door on eternity and show us a glimpse of what that could be.

Restoration – In fellowship we can learn to be whole again, to have that which was broken by sin and pride restored. We will learn how to become all that God intended us to be. In fellowship we will become family. We will learn how to care for, instruct and encourage each other. It will be better than when the prodigal returned home (Lk 15:22-32). Even the elder brother will learn to rejoice as the family becomes restored one person at a time.

Activity two – A place to grow

We learn how to grow in our relationship with each other and with God. We learn once again to understand what hope is. We will learn how to have peace, how to have God in us. We will learn the blessing of joy. We will grow as we share together what God has for us.

Activity three – A place to Share

It is a place to learn about my needs and the needs of others. In learning this we will learn to share in each other's needs. We will learn how to give and encourage. We will learn how to receive and be thankful. We will learn to share who we are with others.

Activity four – A place to train

We need to learn about who we are as the creation of God and what that means. We need to learn about the work of God and our place in that work. We need to learn how to serve in the kingdom of God. Fellowship provides the place to receive the training in these and many other areas.

Focus Number Three – Discipleship

We need a place where there is support and encouragement. When we have this we will be able to take the next step. We will begin to commit ourselves to being like Christ in every way. We will desire to be His disciple. We will gain three characteristics that are critical to being a disciple.

- We will gain understanding and insight. We will be able to understand the cost of being a disciple and the commitment involved. We will be able to understand the responsibility that comes with this commitment. We will also understand the blessing that is part of being a disciple of Christ.
- We will gain maturity. Maturity is the ability to see not only the need but to see the source that will supply the need. This means being able to look beyond myself and

see the place of others in my life. It also means looking beyond the moment and seeing God's plan. Maturity helps us see our place in what God is doing and trust Him to provide.

- We will gain the image of Christ. Discipleship helps us learn what it means to run the race because we have a clear understanding of the prize, which is Jesus in us. It helps us learn to share in the sufferings of Christ, to have the same burden for others that He had. It will allow us to pray for the ability to obey when we are faced with struggles and trials.

Focus Number Four – Ministry

As we become more like Christ we will be better able to help others who need to hear the gospel, to help draw them back into the family of God. We will find our place in work of the church. We see the task, our role and our gifts and how they fit in the work before us. It also means we will trust God to provide the gift, and then allow Him to use it and us as He desires. This focuses on what our responsibility is to others. We have a ministry and it is to those who are lost. Paul calls this the ministry of reconciliation.

Focus Number Five – Evangelism

- Ministry by its very nature will seek out others wherever they are. It will open our eyes to the world around us.
- We will learn to look beyond our door. So that we can see our neighbor. So that we can see the community in which we live. So that we can see the tribe, nation or country that we are part of.

- We will learn to look beyond the horizon. So that we can see people of another race. So that we can see people of another country. So we can see others as a creation of God.
- We will learn to look beyond our life. So that we can see what is eternal in value and purpose. So that we can see all the tribes and nations gathering to praise God.
- We will learn to focus on the goal given to us by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to carry His message to the world. The result of this mission will bring us back to where we started, the worship of God. Worship will take us to the world, and the result will be worship.

“All of history is moving toward one great goal, the worship of God and His Son among all the peoples of the earth. Missions is the means to this goal. Thus it is the second greatest human activity in the world. Missions begins and ends in worship.”

John Piper, LET THE NATIONS REJOICE

Area Two – Pastor

One of the key people in the life of a church is its pastor. He has been called to be the shepherd and leader of a local church and has a great deal of input into what its vision and ministry will be. His passion and focus will be a factor in how the church is involved in missions. We need pastors whose focus is on becoming a servant, not a master, and helping others to learn this attitude. As the pastor lives out the role of a servant, the church will become more aware of its role and ministry.

In this way we will learn what the central goal of the pastor’s ministry will be. What is the purpose that defines the vision and passion? The pastor needs to focus on being a guide for others.

Not one who merely points the way, but one who gives direction by leading the people in the way they should go. His life becomes an example to others. He becomes an equipper who provides training by living a life like Christ's; and he also becomes a supplier, by providing both the knowledge and the tools to make use of the knowledge.

As a servant the pastor will work to strengthen others so they will be able to take up the work they are given. When needed he will be there to assist and even help carry the work until others are ready to join and share in that work. His preaching will proclaim three things to us. It will 1) present the truth regarding missions, 2) the challenge that faces each church in carrying out the call to missions and most importantly 3) will present the Master of the work, Jesus, who provides the example of what is expected of those who seek to love and obey Him.

If the pastor does not have a heart for missions it will make it difficult for the church to be involved in missions.

Area Three – Committee on (missions)

This refers to the group of people who sense that their role is to specifically to help the church understand and get involved in missions. The committee's name can use terms like evangelism, world outreach, missions, global ministry and others. The name will help both the members of the committee and the church to understand what their role and function is. It will give them direction and purpose as they carry out their work. The name should reflect the attitude of the church towards missions and help them focus on making commitments to evangelism throughout the world.

The committee has specific responsibilities to care for. Their key role will be to promote missions in the local church. This

can be done by planning conferences and meetings which inform and instruct the people in missions and what is happening in the church and in missions. They will be the ones to organize a prayer ministry for missions, helping people to understand how to pray and what to pray for. They will provide information that will help people understand the need for finances and set up a budget and plan for raising funds for the work of missions. They will also provide other structures that will assist the church in carrying out the work of missions.

In presenting missions to the church they will need to keep several things in mind. They will need to explain the needs related to missions and how the church can participate in meeting those needs. They must find ways to introduce people to missionaries, mission works, countries and the people of those countries. They need to communicate the call of God as it relates to each person and the place they have in carrying the gospel to the whole world.

A key factor in this work will be the preparation they do. Preparation in knowing and understanding what the Scriptures tell us about God's mission to the world. Preparation in understanding the issues that are involved in carrying the gospel to other cultures and countries. Learning to understand what their responsibility is in preaching the gospel and supporting those who are going where they cannot. They need to be involved in preparing the people not just to learn about missions but to help the church go to the world.

As we look at the committee on missions we need to deal with what will be required in order for this committee to function effectively.

- Membership – This committee should represent the church. The number of people is not the issue but

whether it relates to all the groups in the church - men, women, youth, children etc.

- Mandate – The church needs to give the committee the necessary authority to carry out the task it is given. They need the encouragement and support of the pastor and the leaders of the church.
- Motive – It will be important that the church write a mission statement or purpose statement. This should reflect the command of God to go and the desire of the church to obey. A simple statement would be, “Seeing that God has commanded us to go to the world with the gospel it is our desire to obey this command and be involved in the work of proclaiming the gospel to the world.”
- Material – It is also important to provide resources so the work can be done. Leaders need to support the work with their time and energy. The church needs to allocate funds to start the work and allow the committee to establish a budget and then raise the funds if that is needed. They need access to communications and other resources to inform and involve the people in the work of missions.

In reviewing the information regarding the role of the church, the pastor and the mission’s committee it would be good to have some way to evaluate the attitude of the leaders and the church towards missions. Here are six attitudes that churches can have on the place and importance of missions in the local church. These can help you understand where you are and set goals about what you want to do in promoting missions in your church.

1. Possibility – We have to get established first. We are too small but when we get a little bigger and stronger then

we hope to do something in missions. We just don't have enough funds or time right now.

2. Project – Each year we take up an offering for a project or the visiting missionary.
3. Program – Missions has a regular program like Easter and Christmas. At that time we raise money for our mission's budget and share information about missions and the missionaries we know.
4. Priority – We are making missions one of our priorities. Each year we seek to increase our mission's budget. Our leaders see missions as important and are helping us find ways to reach the lost. Missions have a significant place in the activities of the church.
5. Purpose – World evangelism is a key element in the ministry of the church. We have a strategy for promoting and supporting missions. People from our church are being sent to help in the work of missions. The missions committee is one of the key committees in our church. We have a plan for informing and promoting missions throughout the year.
6. Passion – The church exists for the purpose of reaching the world. The key decisions in the church revolve around how they will impact our ability to proclaim the gospel. We have people actively involved in reaching across cultural barriers to proclaim the gospel.

Results

We always want to know the results. What will happen if we start to focus on missions and help the people of the church understand the part they can have in carrying the gospel to the world? If we are effective in teaching missions the people will be able to do four things.

1. People will understand missions. They will know what the message is. They will know who needs to hear the message. They will know how they can go and who can be sent. That means they will know what they can do and how to be a part of missions.
2. People will respond to God's call. They will agree that God is calling and sending people to the world to preach the gospel. They will agree that all of us are to be witnesses, no one is excluded. They will agree that there is a need and that they can be part of meeting that need.
3. People will give of themselves and their resources. They will commit their lives, making evangelism and missions a priority. They will commit their time, to do what is needed. They will commit their finances, learning to give and trust God to care for their needs so that others can hear. They will give their permission, enabling themselves and others to do the work.
4. People will pray for missions. They will understand the heart of God and pray to the Lord of the harvest for the work and the workers. They will see not just the world, but the people in need, and learn to pray for them. They will understand the need and come before God seeking His resources and direction to carry out the work.

A church committed to missions will become a healthy growing church, able to reach out to others with the message of God's love and salvation.

Chapter Twelve – Church Missions Conference

Part two – Program

Now that we have an idea of what should be happening in the church as a whole let us take time to focus on the program aspect of promoting missions. This involves the planning of the activities that will inform the people and get them involved in missions.

The beginning point for any plan or program or activity is to have a goal. Goals help us to answer the questions about what we need to do. Goals help define our activity. We need to know how many people we want involved, what we want them to learn and do, how much money we want to raise, and what we will do with the results - then we can move forward in planning activities that will help us meet our goals as well as help us understand why we are doing missions.

As we look at setting goals we need to deal with three key questions.

Question One – Where we are now? It asked the question what are our priorities? When we ask these questions we will be evaluate where we are and where we want to be.

Question Two –What are we trying to promote? Is our program about raising money, praying for missions, learning about missions, getting people involved, a combination of these or all of them? These questions deal with understanding what the focus of our activity is.

Question Three –How will this activity help our church grow and mature? We don't plan an event just to do something. It is

done with a purpose that deals with understanding what and why we are planning the activity. In the church the purpose needs to include helping the people grow and mature. Missions is about Christians growing and becoming like Christ. As a result we will reach out to the lost.

Setting goals will also allow us to focus on having a vision. Vision is choosing to see what God can see. A clear vision that all can participate in is a process that involves four steps.

Step One – The first step is to go back to God and His word for clarity in our thinking. Our vision must fit with God’s vision. This will require us to spend time in prayer seeking God and learning to obey what He has taught in His word.

Step Two – The second step involves understanding our purpose as Christians and as a church. Who are we as a church? Are we here to satisfy ourselves or to serve God? It involves understanding the work we are expected to do, which arises from understanding our purpose. We begin to understand what can be done when God is part of the process of setting a vision.

Step Three – The third step is about making choices. We can study God’s word all we want and we can know our purpose and the work that comes from that purpose. But we need to choose to do what God is calling us to do. It involves more than just believing, it is choosing to do something about what we believe.

Step Four – The fourth step is about setting up a strategy. We have defined the program now we need to organize the work. We need to set up structures that will help people get involved. We need to set policies that will help guide us and keep us on track. We need a procedure that let us know how to do the work we have chosen to do.

Goals and vision are partners that support each other. With a vision it is easy to set goals and define them. With goals it is easy to help people get involved in the vision and evaluate how they are doing.

Once our vision is clear and we have goals to guide us we need to begin to plan the activities that will inform all of the church where we are going and what we hope to do. There are several types of activities that can be used to promote and involve people in missions. The main one is a missions conference which is scheduled once a year. There can also be monthly and weekly activities.

Let us look at the yearly conference. It is at this time that the plans, goals and vision for each year are made and presented. There are six areas to deal with in the planning of the missions conference that the missions committee needs to be aware of.

- Schedule – The schedule for the year will need to be set up. This will involve choosing when the missions conference will be in the church calendar. Generally it should be at the same time each year so that people will be ready for the conference and begin to expect it just like we expect a Christmas and Easter program at certain times each year. Another concern is the length of the conference. Will this cover several days and have a number of events or will it occur only one day on a Sunday morning? Once the yearly conference is set up then plans for monthly and weekly activities can be established.

- Theme – Each year there should be a key theme that will be focused on. This will help in preparing for the conference. Themes are short statements of purpose that help us focus on missions. Examples might be “Going to the world,” “Preaching to the nations,” “Till the whole world knows,” or “Seeing with God’s eyes.” There should also be a scripture that goes with the theme to help people understand the importance of the conference. The theme will help in knowing how to decorate and what materials may be needed to help prepare for the conference.
- Program – The schedule of activities and events that will take place helps us understand our theme and our mission. It gives us the chance to provide information on how we will raise funds, lets us know who will preach, what will be taught and what opportunities there are to be involved. It tells us when the activities will occur. It lists the places where we will meet - in the church, in a home, or some other location. It gives us a plan so we will see how things will be accomplished.
- Finance – The committee needs to set a budget for the fundraising. This would include the costs of conducting the conference and the goals for supporting missionaries, evangelism and other projects by the local church. Once we have a budget then plans can be made on how to raise the funds. Charts and graphs can be prepared so people can see the goal and how they are doing at reaching that goal.
- Report – At every point the committee needs to report. A report should be made to the church board, to the people so that everyone knows exactly what is happening. Report on how finances are doing, how

much is being given, how it is being spent and what is still needed. Report on what the missionaries are doing. The committee needs to be sure there is a plan to hear from missionaries and projects and share that information with the church.

- Groups – A good plan for a missions conference and other activities is to be aware of the various groups in the church and involve them. Involve the church board, the pastor, and the key leaders of the church, i.e. treasurer, worship leaders, Sunday School superintendent, Youth Leader and others. Be aware of the different types of groups in the church and the different needs they have when it comes to learning about and becoming involved in missions. There are children's ministries, like Vacation Bible School and Sunday School. There are youth, men's, women's and senior adult ministries. Any group that meets in the church needs to have a part in the mission's conference. The more we plan for the needs of the different groups in the church the more effective we will be in reaching the goals we have set.

Rev. David Vardaman has put together a very good outline on determining the purpose for holding a missions conference. It can be a useful guide in dealing with these areas of planning.

How to determine the purpose for the conference

1. Pray and listen to God.
 - a. Evaluate your congregation
 - b. What do they need to mature in missions?
 - c. Where are they strong in missions?
 - d. Where do they need to grow?
 - e. What would bring fresh energy to the missions effort in our local church?

- f. What would involve new people?
- 2. Consider the need.
 - a. What is going on in the world that impacts missions?
 - b. What has changed since the last conference?
 - c. What needs to be changed?
 - d. What has God laid on our heart?

Possible purpose for the church conference can be:

- 1. Informational:
 - a. To meet your missionaries
 - b. To create an awareness of a particular need.
- 2. Inspirational:
 - a. To create an atmosphere that invites God to speak to children, youth and adults.
 - b. To create a missionary spirit, “If its to be, it’s up to me.”
- 3. Motivational:
 - a. To call people to deeper stewardship through sacrificial giving.
 - b. To call Believers to deeper trust through Faith Promise giving.
 - c. To raise up workers.
- 4. Evangelical:
 - a. To invite people to accept Christ during the conference.
 - b. To focus prayer, finances and effort on distant peoples and places for the purpose of bringing them to Jesus.

Now let us look at specific types of events that can be used to help involve people and groups in missions and the vision of the church as it becomes involved in missions.

Youth Rally – This is a special meeting that focuses on sharing missions with the youth. Youth love a party and chance to get together. Build it around the mission’s theme and get them involved.

Concert – This could be a local church talent night event. People would prepare songs, readings, dramas and dances that present the missions theme for that year. This is a great way for people to share their talents and present missions.

Prayer Meeting – Organize a special prayer meeting that focuses wholly on missions. Prepare a list of missionaries, projects and key needs that relate to missions and how the local church can support that work. It can be a prayer vigil where people sign up to help pray around the clock for missions. It can be a specific time where we gather to hear short reports on the areas of missions we are involved in and pray for that area.

Meals – Preparing meals that feature the foods of other cultures and countries can help us focus on some of the issues missionaries face as they travel.

Presentations – Prepare a presentation that gives information on the background of a country and the work being done in that country.

Seminars – Pick key areas of missions such as faith promise giving, cross cultural ministry, theology of missions, or prayer and missions, and present them in seminars or Sunday School classes. These can be useful in helping people gain a deeper understanding of specific mission related topics and deepen their vision of missions.

Flag Ceremony – Gather the flags of countries that you are supporting in missions and display them in some way in the church.

Men – Gather the men and let them talk with a missionary or discuss the role they can play in the churches' vision for missions.

Women – Gather the women and do the same. Build these meetings around a meal or a theme. One group used it as an opportunity to do ministry in the community to help people see they could be involved. They helped elderly people do work around their homes, specifically people not from the church.

Worship – This is the focal point of most conferences. A specific service whose entire purpose is to promote missions.

Children – Children love a challenge. Have a memory verse competition and have the Scriptures chosen all relate to missions. Have a fundraiser designed just for children. One children's group raised money to help build a playground for the children of another country.

Letter Writing – Involve people in writing letters to missionaries and people of the church in another country. Ask questions about their life and ministry where they are.

These are just a few ideas of what can be done. At the end of the chapter will be a longer list of suggested activities that can be done by the church or various groups in the church.

Each month there can be a reminder of what the church is doing for missions. It could be a report on how much has been raised and what has been done with the money. It could be a short presentation, drama, song, or reading that relates to missions

during the worship service. Some churches and groups prepare monthly prayer calendars with a specific prayer request for each day of the month. Anything that will help keep people thinking about the missions program of the local church.

Each week, during the worship service, there needs to be a specific request or answer to prayer presented to the church related to missions. As part of the weekly prayer meeting there should be information on the prayer needs of missions.

The goal is to make it possible for people to know what is happening and how they can be involved. And once they are involved, they must be kept informed, so they can know how they as individuals and the church body are making a difference.

Another important area that needs to be covered is helping the church understand who the missionaries are. When the church becomes involved in missions it usually means supporting specific people who are called to specific countries and ministry. They need the opportunity to learn about these people. To learn about the life they are living, about their family and about the work they are doing. The church needs to have a way of communicating with them so that they can be more effective in praying for them and supporting the work they are doing. This information can be presented in many creative ways as missions is promoted in the church.

Promoting missions effectively in the church means giving the members of the church the opportunity to be involved. They will have a chance to make a commitment to the support of missions in several ways. They will have the chance to give financially to the work. They will have the chance to pray for missions and for those who are being sent. They will have an opportunity to choose to go. In a church that is promoting

missions the people will hear the call and be given the chance to respond. They will have the chance to send those who are called. They will become involved in making the gospel available to others around the world.

Along with the planning we will be faced with various objections. Rev. David Vardaman made the following list of some of those objections.

1. “Missions” is boring.
2. “Missions” is for women and old people.
3. We can’t raise much money.
4. We can’t really make a difference.
5. We can’t go; it’s too dangerous.
6. We can’t speak the language.
7. There are so many needs here at home.

Good planning and preparation will take into account the objections of the people of our church and help them understand the importance of missions and that by being involved we will make a difference. As we plan, prepare and present missions in our local churches, the church will grow in its awareness of what missions is and how they can be a part of God’s mission to reach the world with the gospel message.

Program Ideas – Here are just a few ideas of what you can do to inform and involve people in missions. Feel free to add your own ideas.

Media

Video
Film
Biographies of
missionaries

Books on missions
Brochures/Bulletins
Calendars
Letter Writing
Presentations

	Dramas	Games of another
	Songs	country
	Puppets	
	Concert	
Decoration		
	Banners	
	Bulletin Board	
	Displays	
Scripture		
	Memory Program	
	Reading Program	
Finance		
	Faith Promise	
	Fundraisers	
	Penny drive	
	Fasting a	
meal		
	Work	
projects		
Projects		
	Relief boxes	
	Work Teams	
	Ministry Teams	
	Newborn packets	
Prayer		
	Calendar	
	Prayer Teams	
	Prayer letters	
	Vigils	
Music		
	Theme Song	
	Specials	
Cultural Activities		
	Meals	
	Clothing	

Chapter Thirteen – Prayer: Communicating Missions

Our effectiveness in carrying out the mission of God is dependent on our ability and commitment to communication with God. We call this communication prayer. Jesus calls on us to pray and to pray specifically that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers (Mt 9:38). From Jesus' words in this short passage it is clear that there is a need because there are people who both need and want to hear the message. It is also painfully clear there are not enough workers and so direction is needed both in how to proceed with the work and how to enlist more workers. We are to pray for this harvest and that God will impress on us to become involved in the work.

Jesus talks with His Father about the work that the Father gave him to do in John 17. It is a useful prayer in giving us guidance about how to pray and what to pray about. This prayer covers six points that are important to carrying out missions and in focusing our prayers on critical areas.

Point one – Authorization (Jn 17:1-5)

Jesus reflects on the reason for the work He has been doing. His Father has authorized Him for the work of providing salvation to those who choose to believe. He is further authorized to provide them with knowledge about who God is and who God has sent, Jesus. He takes time to thank God for the work and for the authority to do the work. We do not have to come to God to ask permission to carry the gospel to the world. We do need to be aware of the authority that has been given and seek strength from God to do what we have been authorized to do.

Point Two – Revelation (vs. 6-9)

Jesus reflects on the connection between what has been revealed and His obedience in giving that revelation to others. He prays that the revelation that has come will be clearly understood and result in obedience to God's word. In that acceptance is the belief that Jesus is sent from God. We have been given a revelation of God's truth. We need to pray that we will effectively communicate that revelation so that others will understand it and choose to obey.

Point Three – Protection (vs. 10-19)

Jesus discusses the protection that has been provided through Him for those who have believed His words. The purpose of His presence and protection has been to open the doors so they will receive the full measure of His joy. To understand how He is with them. He talks about how the world will hate them and seek to destroy them even as they are trying to destroy Him. He prays for their ongoing safety. The safety He prays about is not to remove them from the trouble but to protect them from the evil one and the loss of their faith. He asks the Father to sanctify them, to make them His so that they will be set apart, having God's word in them so that they will have the truth. The truth of God will protect them. The purpose of this protection is seen in Jesus' prayer that they will not be taken out of the world but sent into the world, that they will be sent even as He was sent by God. We need to pray that we will be set apart for God, that we will understand the truth, that we will be protected from the attacks of Satan and have the strength to deal with the hatred of the world. We need to pray that God will choose to send us into the world and that we will be given the work of Jesus. Let us be sanctified so we can help each other carry out the task that is given to us.

Point Four – Inclusion (vs. 20-21)

Jesus follows His own directions from Matthew 9:38 and prays for the harvest and the future workers. He has done His work and raised up a group of people who He is praying for. They will take up His work and spread the message. He prays for that work and those who will hear the message through them. The goal is clear that through this process the world will hear the message and have the chance to believe in the one sent by God. We need to pray for all who are involved in the work: those who carry the message and those who receive the message. We need to pray for those who hear, that they will grow and carry the message to the next group, until the whole world hears that Jesus was sent by God to save us.

Point Five – Provisions (vs. 22-23)

Jesus prays about the provisions that will make this work possible. He prays that they will be given an understanding of the unity that He and the Father have and that it will become part of their lives. He prays that they will experience the glory that His Father has given to him. The glory of knowing we are sent by God, that we are set apart by God for the work, and that we have God's authority and protection to carry out the work. Jesus further asks that they receive this unity for one key purpose - so that the world will know that God sent Jesus and that God loves the world even as He loves Jesus. We need to pray more for the unity that comes from knowing God and fully accepting His work as our own. We need to understand that as we experience this unity with God and pray for it in our lives we will be empowered to carry the message of the gospel to the world. The world will know the truth of our message by our relationship to God.

Point Six – Blessing (vs. 24-26)

Jesus looks to the future and prays about the outcome of His mission. He asks that those who are His, those who believe, will

be with Him and see His glory. His glory as it has been since before creation. He prays that the love He has received will be given to them and that He Himself will be in them. We need to open our eyes and pray that we will be able to carry this message so that all will receive the blessing of being with Jesus and seeing Him in His glory. We need to pray that even now we will understand clearly God's love for us and for everyone, so that we will communicate Jesus' desire to be in us so that God will be revealed.

Jesus was given a mission and He carried out that mission. His prayer helps us see how important that mission still is and what our part should be today. Jesus spent time talking with His Father about all that was involved and about how important this work continues to be. We were part of that prayer and need to be praying in the same way for the mission to continue as it was begun by Jesus.

In the book of Acts we have two prayer meetings that are recorded. They both focus on calling on God for direction to carry the message to the world. Both are followed by the evidence of the power of prayer that focuses on accomplishing God's mission.

Acts 1:12-14, 2:1-4

Jesus commanded them to return to the city and wait. This was not merely to sit around doing nothing. They understood what he meant and they gathered for prayer. It says they were constantly in prayer, not just the disciples but at times 120 gathered for these sessions of prayer. They were faithful and patient, waiting for the Lord of the harvest to act, ready to do what would be needed, even though they had no idea what that would be. While in prayer God moved and sent His Spirit on them. All were filled, not just the disciples, all who had faithfully waited in prayer seeking out God.

God responded even as Jesus had prayed and promised He would. The record states that all were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues. This made it possible for the visitors from many countries to hear clearly the message. The record shows that 3000 responded. They responded by being baptized and accepting the message which is what Jesus' had prayed would happen. In Act 2:42-47 a further answer to Jesus prayer is recorded. They were united in caring for each other and as a result more were added each day by the Lord.

Acts 4:23-31

Not everyone was happy about this response. The Pharisees and Sanhedrin were not happy and they arrested and imprisoned the disciples. They threatened them and ordered them to no longer preach in the name of Jesus. The record says that as soon as they were released they rejoined the others and the next event was a prayer meeting. That prayer meeting focused on three requests. Rather than be silent, they prayed that they would be given power to speak, that they would be bold, and that they would have the power to heal and perform signs and miracles in the name of Jesus.

God was so pleased with their prayer that He shook the building. He filled them with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God boldly. It is not long before the writer of Acts gives the report that a large number of the priests decide to obey (Ac 6:7). It says the people who believed and prayed never stopped proclaiming the good news.

Remember this powerful response of God to send out workers began with prayer. As the believers prayed the church grew in numbers and in respect. As they prayed the message of the gospel spread. As they prayed people began to preach and carry

the message with them as they moved about the world. As they prayed and obeyed, God was honored. Prayer is powerful.

Prayer is not just what we say to God. It also involves hearing what God has to say to us. On several occasions we have a record of a specific message from God to a person that carries out the work of missions.

Acts 9:4-6ff

Saul was an enemy of the new faith. He was doing all he could to stop those who followed Jesus and sought to proclaim their faith to others. He is on his way to Damascus to arrest the followers of Jesus. In Damascus is a disciple named Ananias. God is going to speak to both of them.

God comes to Saul in a blinding light. Saul learns that he has been badly mistaken in his understanding of what is true and is told to go and wait. He will be told what he will be expected to do. In Damascus Saul is waiting and God is speaking to him in a vision about a man who will come to restore his sight. God comes to Ananias in a vision and gives him a message to take to Saul. It is a message about what God expects Saul to do in carrying the gospel to the world. He will carry the message to the Gentiles, to kings, and to the people of Israel. It tells how he will be faced with suffering because of what he is called to do. Here we have two men seeking God and waiting to hear. God speaks and they listen. Ananias does his part and goes to Saul and gives him God's message which is a call to missions. He heals Saul of his blindness. Saul's focus of his life is changed. In the rest of the book of Acts we learn how this time of prayer and listening to God changed his life and the lives of many others.

Acts 10

Peter is about to receive a message that is unexpected and a challenge to obey. A man named Cornelius has been diligently praying to God. It is not stated what he is praying about but God knows and sends a response. Cornelius hears the message brought to him by an angel and sends people to bring Peter back to his house. God is pleased with the prayer of Ananias and responds.

Peter is not expecting a message from God, especially this message, which involves going to the house of a Gentile which is forbidden for a Jew. His vision he receives of the sheet of animals, some of which are forbidden to a Jew, and the command to kill and eat, focus on the desire of God that all should hear the gospel. Peter is not happy about what God is asking him to do but agrees to go when the messengers sent by Cornelius arrive. When Peter arrives at Cornelius' house he expresses his discomfort by telling them as a Jew he should not be there but God has told him that no one is unclean in the eyes of God. Peter begins to share the gospel and before he can finish, God fills all those present with His Spirit. God is speaking in a clear and powerful way and the message is that the gospel is for everyone.

The council in Jerusalem was not too pleased by the events, but when Peter tells them everything that led up to the meeting and what happened, they too must hear God's message that the gospel is for everyone.

Today we must continue to be in prayer. We must come before God and seek out His direction for the mission He has invited us to be a part of. As we pray we must focus on four areas. We must first of all focus on God and on His message, then we can focus on those who send and finally on the worker.

Focus on God

As we focus on God we must be listening clearly. God has always been speaking to us but we do not always take the time to listen. There are four types of messages that God has provided for those willing to come to Him and listen.

- Message of the Universe (Ps 19) – Scripture reminds us in many ways that the universe was created to be a witness to us of the presence and power of God. It is a testimony that all can see. It challenges us to look beyond ourselves to seek out the one who brought everything into existence.
- Message of History (Ga 4:4) – Scripture tells us in many places that history is controlled by God. He enters into our history to use it to reveal His presence and that He is directing in ways that will help us know Him. He controls the nations using them to reveal His power. He chooses the time and place of His activity as is seen in the coming of the Messiah. In the Old Testament we have a historical record of how God has been present and interacting with us.
- Message of Man - the image of God (Ps 8, 139) – God created man in His image. That leaves an indelible mark in our being. It gives us a connection with God. It is what makes God so interested in us and what happens to our lives. We are unique in all of creation. We can seek to understand why we exist and can know the one who created us.
- Message of Incarnation (Jn 3:16-21, Ph 2:4-11) – God has revealed Himself in a personal and intimate way. We now can see and experience God as one who has experienced our life and truly understands us. We also can see the extent of His love as He willingly dies to pay our debt of sin.

God is also concerned about who is listening to these messages. The messages are not restricted. People at all levels of life have access to them. It is not restricted to the rich, the wise or the powerful. The poor and outcast are free to come and listen to what God has to say. The message is not the property of one group of people. God has always been concerned about letting everyone here. He told Abraham that all people would be blessed. Solomon prayed that all the nations would look at the temple and see God. Peter was reminded of God's desire to reach the nations when he was sent to Cornelius. It is also a message to people of all ages, from the children to the elderly. Jesus told the disciples not to exclude the children for they are our best examples of faith. The elderly have a need to listen as well. It is never too late to hear what God has to say.

As we listen we must understand the content of what God is saying to us. He is telling us that the message is one of justice. God will judge us for what we do with His message. It is a message of love. God did not have to find a way to forgive our sin. He did not have to take the time to care about what happens to us, but He did. He loves us. This is a message of salvation. God tells how to come back and how to escape the judgment that lies ahead for those who do not listen. This is a message of resurrection. God says all things can be made new again. That which was dead and lost can be made alive and found in Jesus Christ.

Focus on Message

In focusing on the message we are not relearning its content but learning how the message needs to be a part of our lives. There are seven elements to making the message a part of our lives and sharing it with others.

1. Learning what we have been told – We often hear something but do not always listen. Listening takes us to

the place where we know the message because it now becomes part of us and not just the words of another person.

2. Learning how to apply it to our life – Just because we know something does not always result in change. We need to learn until it changes our life. Learn about the truth until others can see the evidence as it changes us.
3. Learning how to lead others – As we spend time listening and applying the truth of the message to our life, we will begin to learn how to lead others in the process of hearing what God is saying.
4. Learning how to speak clearly – The more we listen, the better we will do at telling others clearly what we have heard. People know who has been listening by how well they communicate what they have heard.
5. Learning to see in faith – Listening will help us see beyond the moment. It will help us learn the truth that God’s message of love will prevail.
6. Learning to be faithful – If we do not take the time to listen to all that God is saying we will not have all that is needed to complete the task. Sometimes we listen to only part of a message and then find ourselves in difficulty when we do not have all the information needed to complete a task. Faithfulness requires that we listen carefully to the complete message of God.
7. Learning to let God speak – When we truly listen people will know. They will hear God speaking and not us. When we don’t listen we tend to fill in the gaps from our limited knowledge and understanding. The world needs to hear God, not us.

Focus on the Sender

As we look at the work before us we must realize that we are involved in sending the workers into the harvest. God is calling,

and in truth, He is calling all of us to the work. The first step in that process is sending. When we pray we need to focus on the issues involved in getting people to the work. Each of us becomes a sender, one who helps a worker enter the work. Sometimes we may be sending our self. Sometimes we will be involved in sending others. As a sender what should we focus on as we come to God in prayer? Let us consider seven areas of need when looking at sending the workers into the work.

1. Calling the workers – We need to be talking to God about the need for workers. Pray that God will speak to us about the work and what our part is in that work. Pray that we will be listening and ready to hear when we are called.
2. Training the workers – We need to be talking to God about the need for training. Pray that people with key skills will be available to train others. Pray for the time and resources to do this training. Pray for the facilities to do the training. When harvesting you don't want to send inexperienced people out to do the work. Those with experience and the needed skills are needed to train and watch over those learning to do the work.
3. Sending the workers – We need to be talking to God about how we are going to get the workers to the work. This means raising the funds and providing the means to move from this location to the next. This means commissioning them for the work. It doesn't matter if the work is across the street or around the world. We need to pray about the issues involved in sending out workers.
4. Supporting the workers – We need to be talking to God about what is involved in supporting those who do the work. We must ask God to supply what is needed and how He wants to use us to provide that need. We must consider not just financial needs, but spiritual, social,

cultural, and family concerns. How are we to be involved in their support in all aspects of the work?

5. Praying for the workers – We need to be talking to God about the ones that are sent. We should be aware of the work and what is being done so we can effectively pray for both.
6. Encouraging the workers – We need to be talking to God about our relationship and ministry. Those who are sent need to see that we are faithful and committed to the work that is being done. Our prayer should be that we will be an encouragement to them.

Focus on the worker

God is calling workers into the harvest. We must be praying for them.

1. Pray they will see lost souls – Many people are called to the work but not all see the needs. Not all have their eyes and ears open to what God is saying. We must pray that God will help them see the need of those who are lost clearly so they will respond.
2. Pray that they will call on God – This work is not about what we can do, but about what God wants to do through us. We must pray that as people respond to missions they will seek out God and allow Him to use them for the work. It is as we learn to yield to God that we can truly do the work we are called to do.
3. Pray they will prepare for the work – Being ready also means being properly prepared. As we pray we must ask God to prepare us for the work we are being called to do. Sometimes we rush ahead of God and do not wait for Him to prepare us. We need to pray that the workers who are called will also allow God to work in their lives so they will be properly prepared for the work. Jesus told the disciples to go and wait on God. When they

were ready God would provide. Paul tried to start preaching as soon as he was saved. It didn't work because he was not ready. Thirteen years later when Barnabas came to get him to help with the work in Antioch he was ready.

4. Pray they will understand their responsibilities – We can easily get loaded down with too much work. There is always more work to do than we can do. We need to pray that the worker will see what needs to be done. Pray that they will be able to spend time in prayer talking with God about the work they are to do. Pray that they will have time to study, so they will hear God's words and sense God's presence and support in the work. Pray that they will learn how to share the work with others and let God have control of the results.

One of the key aspects of prayer is listening. We spend a lot of time talking to God but so little time listening. We need to remember that God has said much to us. As we come to Him in prayer we need to spend time listening and remembering what He has said. We do not do enough listening. God is speaking to us about:

Himself

- I love the world though it is lost (Jn 3:16)
- I have revealed to you My plan for saving My lost children (Lk 10:21)
- I have explained the road home through the prophets and now my Son (Lk 24:25-27)
- Now I have chosen to communicate through those who believe (Ac 1:8)

Jesus

- I am doing what My Father does (Jn 5:19)

- I am telling you what My Father told me (Jn 8:26)
- I am providing My life to save man (Mt 20:28, Jn 10:15)
- I am giving you the work of proclaiming this message (Mk 16:15, Mt 28:19-20, Ac 1:8)
- I am with you to make this possible (Mt 28:20)
- I am praying for you and all those who will hear (Jn 17:20-21)
- He is My Son and in Him I am pleased (Mk 9:7, Mt 17:5)

Church

- Has been given the work of communicating the message (Ac 1:8, He 3:1)
- Has been given the work of training workers (1 Ti 2:2)
- Has been given the work of praying for the ministry (Eph 6:19, 2 Th 3:1, Mt 9:38)
- Has been given the work of watching over the workers (1 Th 5:12-13, 1 Co 9)

Worker

- Called to represent (carry) the message (Ac 8, 9, 10)
- Called to translate the message (1 Co 9:19-23)
- Called to live within the message (Ac 26:19-20)
- Called to respond to those who hear the message (Jn 21:15-17, Ac 20:28-31, 1 Pe 1:12-15)
- Called to report the results of the message (Ac 11, 14, 15)

When we listen to God, when we take the time to consider what He has said and is still saying to us, then:

- The church will be encouraged in ministering to the world. We will look beyond ourselves and see the need of others to hear the gospel - to have the opportunity to become the children of God, part of the family of God.
- The name of Jesus will be proclaimed throughout the world. So that at the name of Jesus people from every tongue and tribe will gather in worship before our Lord and Savior.
- God will be able to communicate to those He loves. Others from all the tribes and peoples of the world will share in the blessing of being able to hear their creator speak and learn to call Him Father.

When we learn to listen we will be able to communicate with God.

As we consider the role of prayer in missions we need to consider how we pray and what we pray for. When we gather for prayer and make our lists what is on the list? It is all to true that the majority, if not all, of the items on our prayer lists are about our needs and the needs of our friends. We focus on our comfort and convenience. We pray for health, we pray for finance, we pray for peace in our little world.

We need to change that focus. It is not wrong to pray for our needs. We are told to do so, but our needs should take a lesser place in our times of prayer. We need to evaluate our priorities and start listening to what God considers to be of the greatest importance.

- We need to pray for our brother, sister or family member who does not know the Lord.
- We need to pray for our neighbor, coworker or employee who does not know the Lord.

- We need to pray for those around us who hate us and do not know the Lord.
- We need to pray for the stranger, the person of another language, tribe and culture who does not know the Lord.

We need to pray for them by name. We need to learn to know who they are, even as our Father knows them, and begin to pray for them. We need to listen until we learn the heart of God and then pray for what burns in His heart. We need to pray that we will have the heart of God, the love of God and that we will leave all behind, as His Son Jesus did, so that the one lost sheep could be brought home. We need to pray and listen until our eyes are open to the need, our ears are open to the cry, and our lives are filled with the desire to live the life of Jesus in obedience to the Father.

We need to pray until the world knows that Jesus saves.

This is the heart of what missions is.