



Becoming

A WORLD CLASS CHRISTIAN

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Missional Thinking Series

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Prologue

One of the key discussions today relates to becoming a world-class Christian. It focuses on the issue of what it means to be involved in and connected to the world around us as a Christian. A key part of this discussion includes a second thought which has two aspects: a discussion on what is a Christian Worldview, and what is a Biblical Worldview.

At first glance one might think these three – World-Class Christian, Christian Worldview and Biblical Worldview - are just three ways to define the same thing. Yet they are not.

If we start with the middle phrase, then we open the door to many problems. The reason is because there are many differences among the people who call themselves Christians; differences in attire, lifestyle, priorities and an infinite number of other categories of how life is lived and perceived. This can lead to one group of Christians using their culture to define what a Christian Worldview consists of. This is, in fact, what has happened on many occasions in the past. People of the western world used their culture to determine what a Christian should be and look like. This became the basis of defining a Christian Worldview using western values.

This practice usually had one of two possible results. One result was that those desiring to become Christians had to abandon much of their cultural values and lifestyle and become like those who brought the message. This caused division, strife and rejection among the people who

refused to change. The second result was a rejection of the western system and the message that it was bringing.

Initially the rejection was fairly complete. The gospel was viewed as “western” and it did not belong in the new setting. It was seen as destructive to their values and way of life. Over time this was modified. Some decided that the message was desirable, but that the package it came in was not. They sought to establish a new approach, a new definition of a Christian Worldview - one that respected the people and the values that were good, and allowed the gospel access to their lives and freedom to bring about changes from within, instead of being forced from outside.

Often this decision was not accepted by the established churches. This resulted in churches splitting and founding new independent churches. It also resulted in the formation of large numbers of syncretistic structures, which mixed spirit worship and magic overlaid with a good helping of Christian practices. They borrowed practices from all in order to cover all possible options in dealing with the realities and necessities of life. The end result was a growing number of definitions of a Christian Worldview.

As you can see, the process of defining a Christian Worldview can lead to many problems, most of them centered around the issues of ethnocentrism. This results in everyone thinking that they are the ones who should define what a Christian Worldview should be based on their concepts and ideas.

However, if we decide to start from the perspective of defining a world-class Christian we will have many of the same problems. To make my point clear we need to have an idea of what is meant by the phrase a “world-class Christian”. Paul Bothwick (How to be a World Class Christian - 2005) makes the following statement, “A world-class Christian is one whose lifestyle and obedience are compatible with what God is doing and wants to be doing in the world.”

This statement left by itself will create a number of problems. Whose lifestyle is to be the example. Who defines what God is doing and how does one defines what I should be doing? One group could focus on compassionate ministries because they are important. Another group focuses on education and development. Another on evangelism. Another on church planting. This will result in different approaches to describing a world-class Christian.

The concern I have is with the term ‘class.’ What does this mean? Are we looking at a class such as in a type of social system? Is this based on a system of values that defines what it means to have class or worth as a Christian, to be identified as a person of value? Are we opening the door to set up an evaluation system to determine what constitutes acceptable action and activity? And don’t assume that because we are attaching it to the word ‘Christian’ that somehow that prevents us from creating a structure that can then be used to determine who is valuable and what actions are to be valued. The phrase “Christians don’t do that” should be a reminder of

the problems and conflicts that come from such an approach.

You might think that I am being rather petty in my comments on Bothwick's statement. And you would be right, to some extent, for I am clearly focusing on only one statement that he has made. We do need to keep in mind that he states that our actions should be compatible with what God wants to be doing in the world. This is a good concept to always keep in focus. But what does that really mean? How do we know what it is God really wants us to be doing? How do we know what it means to have a lifestyle that is compatible with what God wants? How do we know what it is to be obedient, and for that matter, what we are suppose to be obeying?

It is not just about getting involved. It is not just about responding and doing something. No, that is not enough. We have seen what happens in our churches when people try to be good members and do good. All too often it ends up in conflict. Why? Because they were trying to be good members, good Christians. But they did not have a clear idea of what that meant. They only had their idea of being a productive member of the community or church. Being productive is not what defines being a Christian, much less being a world class Christian. Too much emphasis is placed on the doing and not on the being.

What we really need to do is go back and find out what it means to have a Biblical Worldview. To discover what God wants us to be. The quote above is correct in that it states that a world-class Christian is one whose life is compatible with what God wants and so does what God

does. It is about seeing the world the way God does. It is about entering the world the way God does.

The best way to define a Biblical Worldview is to go back to the bible and see what it has to say.

There are many ways to do this. We could do a systematic theological study of the Bible. That would be a great way to learn what God has to say about Himself and all that He created. This is a useful way to organize the information of the Bible but would probably be too general for what we are trying to do. Keep in mind that understanding who God is, and what He has done are critical to building a solid definition of a Biblical Worldview.

We could do a word study. These are often fruitful ways to learn what the Bible has to say about a specific topic. Unfortunately for us the term 'worldview' is not used in the Bible. Nor are phrases like 'Christian perspective' 'Christian lifestyle' or similar phrases.

So how do we find out what it means to have a Biblical worldview? How do we then define what it means to have a Christian view of the world and so be able to be a world-class Christian?

For me, the best way would be to study the letters of the early church. Searching through the letters of Paul, Peter, James, John, Jude and the author of Hebrews. These individuals had to wrestle with this very issue. They then had to communicate with the churches what they were learning about God, the gospel, and how to live as Christians in many different environments. They had to

take the knowledge they had of God from the Old Testament and apply it to the current setting. They had to define for themselves and others how God saw the world - a Biblical worldview. Then they had to define what it meant to be a Christian living in the world - a Christian Worldview. Finally they had to wrestle through what it meant to live a life compatible with what they had learned with what God wanted and was doing - to become a World-Class Christian.

That is the focus of this book and the studies it contains. It searches through the lives and experiences of those God called to serve in a new and dynamic way. Hopefully as we proceed we will be able to understand God's view of the world (a Biblical Worldview) and through that define what a Christian's view of the world should be (a Christian Worldview). This will allow us to know how to live a life compatible with what God is doing and wants us to do (be a world-class Christian).

Inquiry 31

Faith or Form

Ephesians 1:15-19

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may *give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation*, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your *heart may be enlightened in order that you may know* the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

In the 1600's the Catholic Church, at the council of Trent, made a critical decision that would impact the development of the church in the new world for the next couple hundred years. They decided that all sermons and key activities of the mass would be done in the Latin language. It was also decided that all the traditional attire and music of the church in Rome would be required. Nothing of the local culture would be accepted. They also limited who could enter into the training programs to become a priest.

Unfortunately this error would be repeated by others in the years to come. Those who sought to incorporate local music and culture into the worship were criticized. This further impacted the training of leaders and created a

system of dependency on those who taught them how to study God's word and how it would be interpreted for the people of each culture. There was no encouragement to study local wisdom and insight. All were treated as inferior and of no use in gaining insight into Scripture and its application into the lives of those being evangelized.

This is so different from the content of Paul's prayer and what he desires for the church in Ephesus. First, Paul prays that they will receive the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation. This is significant. Paul is aware that they have received clear teaching regarding God's word. He spent at least two years in Ephesus teaching daily in the Hall of Tyrannus. As a result of this process they had received thorough instruction in the word of God and the gospel. If that was all that was necessary, why pray for more wisdom and revelation?

The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 9 and Paul's explanation of how he approached his work and ministry. He sought to become all things to all people in order to gain an audience for the Word. To a certain extent this was possible and Paul was quite effective. At another level he was still limited in what he could accomplish. He was not born and raised in the culture. He had not been taught the local thought system and how people applied that to their lives. But he knew from personal experience that God did and could help them interpret the Word within their context. He prayed that they would have wisdom from God to understand clearly within their context how to know God better. He was confident that God's word and the Holy Spirit were sufficient to help them in this process and so he prayed for them.

My experiences in other cultures have added new richness and meaning to the teachings found in the Word of God. I have learned so much from my friends of other cultures who have sought out God's wisdom and revelation. Their cultures have provided a perspective and an insight that I don't have. Culture can open up new levels of understanding if we are willing to pray like Paul. Pray that God will give them wisdom. Pray that they will do the work to study and allow God to reveal himself to them.

The second aspect of Paul's pray is that their hearts would be enlightened. The goal here is that they would see God in their world through their eyes. That they would have a personal knowledge of God, not one transferred from another person's perspective. If the only vision people have of God is the one we teach them, then it will be an inadequate vision. It will relate to a world that is unknown and strange to them. It will be second-hand. They need to see God in their world. They need to know God by experiencing his presence in their daily lives.

Paul suggests three key areas that help explain the focus of this aspect of his prayer:

1. The hope he has called you to – The question for each of us here is understanding the nature of our hope in God. At one level, this hope is clearly defined and unchanging. It is the hope that through Christ and the salvation provided through him we will experience God's presence now and one day be granted entrance into his presence and eternity. At another level hope is not as clearly

defined. Each of us lives in worlds that can be vastly different and face issues that are worlds apart. One person lives in a country where it is a crime to tell others about Jesus, punishable by imprisonment and even death. Another person lives in a country that provides religious freedom. What does hope mean in these two very different contexts? We need to be enlightened in our hearts and our thinking so that we can apply the eternal unchanging nature of our hope to the context in which we live. Think about a person who has just been freed from a life of addiction and the life of a person who has never faced such temptations. What does hope mean for each of these people? Each requires a unique understanding and application of the hope we all have access to in God.

2. The riches of your inheritance – The question here is understanding the nature of our inheritance. Everyone has the same inheritance. We all have been promised a home especially prepared for us. We all have the possibility of experiencing the richness of Christ's presence. Yet many of Paul's comments suggest we may experience these riches in different ways. Each of us receives different gifts, different ministries, and are asked to serve in different locations and with different groups. In any given time and place we will need access to different types of resources, all of which are part of our inheritance and God's promise to us to provide what we need. A simple example would be the land given to each of the tribes in the

Promised Land. Each received a share in the promise but for each it was different. Each portion provided resources unique to that area. We don't all need the same access to every resource, every aspect of the inheritance. Are we willing to learn what is needed and then understand what God is providing for us both now and in eternity? Don't ask for a book when what you really need is a hammer. Both are available. Now stop and think about how both represent the riches of our inheritance in God.

3. The incomparable nature of his power – The question is this: what does it mean to know the power of God? As usual we all have access to this power and all of us experience its power to save us, change us, and equip us. We all need to learn to depend on God's power working through us. Yet what that means may be quite different in each setting and place of service. Here are a few thoughts and examples to reflect on. Noah needed the strength to keep building the ark even when the people thought he was a fool (remember it took 100 years to build). Elijah needed to believe that God could send fire to destroy a very wet offering and later to make the oil and flour in two small jars last for three years. Daniel needed to believe God had the power to close the lion's mouth and his friends believed they could survive a fire. For a moment Peter believed he could walk on water. Paul had no trouble believing he could cast out demons in Christ's name. All of these are expressions of God's power, and each was unique

to a given setting and need. We don't all need to see God's power displayed in the same way. But we need to understand that there is no other power compared to God's and we have been given permission to call on God and do mighty wonders in his name.

So what is your goal? What is the focus of your training? What are you praying for others to see and understand? Is it being limited by how God has revealed himself to you and what you know? Is it being limited by your understanding of how God uses his power, by the nature of the resources available, and by your experience of God's truth?

Forcing people to see things your way, do it your way, and follow your pattern may become a great barrier to them in learning how to apply God's word in the world they live in. It may prevent them from experiencing the hope that is in God, the riches available to every child of God, and of having access to the incredible power that exists in our relationship with God.

How we pray for others and what we pray for them reveals much about who we are and what God can really accomplish through us. Think about it and then consider making some changes. Learn to pray, not for what you think should happen, but for what God wants to accomplish in their lives.

BS – Read Ephesians 3:18-19. Define for yourself the width, height, and depth of God's love, of his wisdom, and his capacity to include people of every tribe, nation,

and tongue. Don't allow yourself to say you can't do it. Don't use cliché phrases. Give yourself a clear definition so you will know what God is teaching you and expanding the boundaries of your understanding.

PR – Reflect on an event when your life or someone else's life became a door to greater understanding of God. How did that help you in understanding God and your relationship to him and others?

BWV – Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 12 that there was no end to the accumulation of wisdom. He had spent his life gathering wisdom and understanding it in the attempt to help others. In the end he discovered the one thing that was central to all knowledge and all wisdom: to know and fear God. How are you allowing God to be revealed to you today? A true seeker of God and wisdom seeks the truth in everyone and every situation. You are not the source. God is and there is no limit to the avenues he can use to reveal himself to us. Be ready to hear God speak.

Inquiry 32

Final Authority

Eph 1:19-23

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all

things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Don't you like to have the last word when making a decision? When you are single, that can be a simple process. (I say it can be, because this statement assumes that you have complete control of all the factors affecting a decision.) Once others are involved in the process it is no longer simple. The more people who are part of the process the more complicated it becomes. Then we need to decide 'how' and 'who' will decide and have the final say. It also means who will have responsibility for the results, good and bad, of the decision.

This question is central point of discussion in many aspects of life. Parents believe they have the final authority over all things related to their children. Men believe they must have the last word in the marriage. Many pastors believe the members of the church must listen to them. The owner of a business feels he has absolute control. Of course I am talking about what happens when we take the issue of authority to the extreme. In government we call this type of person a dictator. In the school we call a teacher authoritarian. Children call such parents tyrants.

In each of the above cases we are dealing with people who believe they know what is best and allow no freedom of choice; no possibility of change and absolutely no room to challenge their decision, their authority. At some point this kind of authority causes problems. People do

not like submitting to such systems, especially when they have no say, or no right to disagree and have their voice recognized. Why? Because these leaders can make mistakes, they clearly don't have all of the information needed to make the correct decision every time, and they most certainly can't know what is best for everybody. Besides all of that, we just don't like it when someone else is in control. We will resist and find some area in which we have control, even if it is in secret.

But in this passage we are told there is one who has absolute authority and has been given this position by God. Not only in the past, but in the present and forever. So what does it mean to have someone who has absolute authority who never makes a mistake in the use of that authority? Someone who knows everything, knows exactly how everyone feels, knows what is best for everyone. And to have such authority over something as diverse and extensive as the church, the reign of God on earth.

What is interesting is that authority structures have many variables. Some allow for discussion and debate (a school system), others allow for suggestions and input (businesses) and some don't allow any room for any input. The person who is wise and in authority listens to those they are responsible for before making decisions and using their authority. But is this how the church works? When we deal with the authority of Jesus, as given by God, is there room for adapting and recognizing the needs of the many groups that are a part of a structure that is made up of people from every tribe and every tongue?

If we look at Jesus' life we quickly see that he was clearly opposed to legalism, a strict adherence to a set of rules regarding behavior defined by a specific culture and interpretation of truth. He openly met with outcasts, rejects and pariahs. When talking with the woman at the well he told her the issue was not the form of worship but the purpose of worship.

Paul would follow this, as we have seen with his declaration, by adapting to any group or setting in any way needed to present the gospel. He was willing to do this as long it did not result in a violation of the heart of God's law which is to love him above everything and to love others as Jesus had loved them. This allows room for a lot of variety and many different structures in the church.

It means that we too need to be ready to adapt and realize that we are not the final authority. We need to be conscience of others peoples cultures and see the possibility of different ways of accomplishing a given task or, in this case, carrying out the mission God has given us. We need to keep in mind that there is one person who has final authority over everything and knows all that we know and much more. In this context we have a great deal of liberty in carrying out the work but absolutely no freedom to change the content of the message.

This means that, in reality, we are not the final authority. We are the ones to help others understand how to bring their lives under the authority of Jesus. We are the ones to help them learn to submit all things to Christ, not to us.

This means learning to trust the Holy Spirit and his ability to guide them in bringing all things under the authority of Christ who is the true head of the church.

BS – Read John 13:2-5. How did the authority of Jesus affect his behavior?

PR – Think about a time when you were the person in charge. What did that mean? Did you use your authority to control or to empower others?

BWV – Why is it possible for the church to function in so many different cultures? How can you be a part of making this happen where you are?

Inquiry 33

The call of God

Ephesians 3:1-9

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given

me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

A number of years ago an executive of a mission and I had an interesting discussion about God's call to missions. He was searching for a clearer understanding of what that meant and how it impacted the longevity of people in cross-cultural ministry. He shared that they were having problems with people only serving one term as missionaries and then leaving. There were even a number that didn't finish even one term of service before quitting and returning home. This was very frustrating because of the cost involved in training a person and the impact it was having on the people of the countries where they had been sent.

His concern was understandable. The cost of preparation is measured in years. There are many steps involved in such preparation - training in the bible, cross-cultural training, and language studies. It is a reality of missions that usually the real ministry does not begin until the second term, after a person has gained a basic understanding of the culture and ministry, and has gained more than a rudimentary understanding of the language. The fact that people weren't returning to the mission field meant that every 2-3 years the work was in a sense having to start fresh. That meant that the process of finding a qualified person to go, and then raising the funds needed to go had to be repeated. This could result in a gap of 2-3 years between the departure of one missionary and the arrival of the next.

Not only was the mission leadership getting frustrated but the people in those countries being affected were also struggling to understand what was happening. The

message that “we care about you” was being damaged by the fact that no one cared enough to stay. Also, there was the fact that to fill these gaps meant accepting people who met only the minimal requirements for personal experience and had hardly any practical service before there were sent. Some were going straight from college to the country of service with only the 2-3 years of preparation and fundraising. This meant they had very little experience in leadership and ministry. This further impacted the mission work and may easily have created an environment that contributed to their choosing to leave instead of dealing with the struggles and issues being confronted.

The mission executive then asked me about my call to missions and how I felt it had affected my life.

I shared that I felt called to missions at a children’s camp when I was 11. My parents were very excited about this and at critical points in my life helped me keep that call in focus. My calling was critical to my choices of education and training. Those decisions were made based on the need to do all I could to be fully prepared when the time came to go. This call helped me decide to apply for and serve in two different countries as a short-term volunteer. During each of these trips God used key events and situations to reinforce his call to missions for my life.

This sense of call helped me keep moving forward at key points in my life. One of which was the choice of who I would marry. I broke up with a couple of young ladies because they were not interested in missions. Then I met my wife and when I shared my call to missions she agreed that she wanted to be a part of that ministry. Before our missionary service began, we pastored a church, but we made sure that they understood that our long-range plans were to serve as missionaries. While it was hard to wait to

go to the mission field, we clearly saw that God was using this time to further prepare us.

The call to missions has been a crucial part of our lives and how we make decisions. When we were evacuated from Sierra Leone because of civil war, the call was the basis of our decision to return. Later, when Sierra Leone was closed to missionaries, because of the war, that call was the basis of our decision to go to Papua New Guinea. The clarity of our call has helped us many times in dealing with, and gaining victory over difficult situations.

In this passage Paul highlights a number of crucial indicators regarding understanding God's call:

1. Awareness – Those who have received a call to ministry or missions have a clear understanding that He has called them and what God wants them to do. It also includes a confidence in the importance of what they are being called to do which makes it possible to make critical decisions about education, marriage and ministry.
2. Revelation – The person knows that God has spoken to them. There is no question of who is calling. They may have heard a sermon, read a scripture, attended a seminar or been in a time of personal devotion. It does not matter what media was used, in every situation the person knows that God has spoken to them and they must respond.
3. Clarity – There is a clarity involved that keeps life in focus. There is a clear vision of the need for others to hear the gospel and the person being called can see clearly what God wants them to do.
4. Privilege – The call brings with it an awareness of the privilege that has been given to them. God has called them to share the gospel with people who have not heard and He will provide the resources

and skills needed for the task. God has given a gift and provided the opportunity to use this gift to help others receive the gospel

5. Humility – The true call of God brings a sense of humility, recognition that there is nothing he has done to earn God's call. I was 11 when God spoke to me. I had done nothing to deserve this call and even today it is clear that there is nothing in my life that would qualify me to receive such a privilege.
6. Chosen – God chooses. It is that simple. My choice is simply to obey or reject that call. A person who is chosen by God should not consider whether it will be simple or complicated, easy or difficult. God has called and I must go. God has chosen.
7. Cost – A call from God is costly, but the cost matters little to those who respond to it. When God called Paul, He sent Ananias to meet with him. God told Ananias that Paul was learning how much he would suffer to carry out God's call, and he did. But that did not alter Paul's decision to obey God's call. Every situation, good or bad, was another opportunity to fulfill that call and serve by sharing the gospel with those who needed to hear.

At one level, every Christian is called by God. Jesus tells us that every one of us is a witness. Do we really believe that? Until each of us does, we will not be ready if God should choose us to be part of a specific ministry. Every Christian is called to love others as Christ loves them. If we can't do that then how can we expect to be called by God for any other ministry? Every Christian is to care about the needs of others. If we can't take care of those right next to us, then how can God call us to those far away?

So many see missions and God's call as a career move. Serving in missions will look good on a resume. Living and working in another country will be a good experience and give me the opportunity to travel. But, missions is not a just career. It is not just an experience. Missions is not just a good thing we should do to gain favor. Missions is life and sacrifice. Anything less and the message may not be heard correctly.

Do you understand what every Christian is called to do? Are you doing that? If God has called you are you letting that call guide you in every aspect of your life? Or are you thinking more about what you want to do today and not about what you need to do for tomorrow?

Read again the passage above. Are you as convinced as Paul about God's call, God's right to speak through you and send you wherever he wants? The fields are ripe but where are the workers? God is calling but so many are not listening.

BS – Read the following passages, Matthew 4:19-22; Luke 5:27-28

PR – Read Matthew 16:24. Make a list of things that God has the right to ask you to give up to follow him. Now consider whether you would be willing to count the cost if God called you.

BWV – In Matthew 19 we have the story of the rich young ruler who was more concerned about his treasure on earth than the one he could have in heaven. This is a key point in understanding God's call. Where is your treasure? What price will you pay here and now to have what will last for eternity? What do you think of the following statement? "Too few are ready to give up their

personal comfort to risk being uncomfortable so others will hear.”

Inquiry 34

Heirs together

Ephesians 3:4-6

In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Do you have an inheritance? Do you know what will be yours when your parents die? Do you have a plan that would inform others how to divide your estate and who would get what?

I remember when we were preparing to leave for our first term in Sierra Leone as missionaries. We did not have much but were concerned about what would happen if we should die. If only one of us died the directions were simple. The surviving spouse would receive everything as well as the responsibility to care for our two children. But what would happen if both of us died? This question caused us to spend a fair amount of time considering what we had in the way of insurance policies and property and how it would be used to care for our children.

A second part of this question was who would be responsible to care for them? Would we ask our parents to

do so? Or would we consider one of our brothers or sisters for this? It was not a simple decision. It was not just about finding a place for them to live but also the best situation where they would receive the support and encouragement they needed as well as a place where they would learn about God's love. Did we have enough finances to ease the burden of their care on those we would ask to be their guardians? Would there be adequate space if two children were added to their existing family? These were but a sample of the questions we asked ourselves and had to consider.

The last question was, would the guardians include our children in their family in such a way that they felt totally accepted and that they belonged? After much thought and discussion we made our decision, we talked with those we had chosen, and were pleased by the positive nature of their response. What has confirmed our decision is how this couple has treated our children over the years. They have taken the time to be part of each of our children's lives. They have spent time with them and made special trips to visit them. They keep track of birthdays and, now of wedding anniversaries. They did not wait until we died to begin to include them as part of their lives but began to treat them in special ways immediately.

We chose well. We found a couple who began the process of adopting our kids from the day we asked them if they would be willing to accept responsibility for our children if we died. This has had many positive results over the years. Our kids often call them and talk with them. Our family has grown close to them and they to us over the years. Even though our children are now adults and no longer need them as potential guardians, the close relationship continues.

In Ephesians 3, Paul is talking about an inheritance that God has been holding in reserve. The inheritance was made available to a specific group or family. Unlike human inheritances this one provided benefits from the moment it was established. It also had an addendum that when the Messiah came all those who received the gospel would be included in the will. There would be no distinction between those of the original family and those adopted into the family. All who accepted the gospel would be included and made equal. The great mystery of God's plan was revealed. Even more important is that the inheritance is never diminished or adjusted as more join the family of God. The resources are unlimited and capable of providing all that was promised to all who respond and are entered in the registry of the inheritance - the book of life.

Our legal will for our children had limits and time frames. The first copy was for two children. Then a third was born and we had to change it. Over the years the will has been revised as our lives changed and our children grew. Now they are all adults and the will has changed again. God's will does not need to go through this revision process. It was prepared to cover all contingencies and all possibilities.

This is part of the mystery. There is no limit to the number of people who can benefit and become equal partners in receiving the blessings of God's inheritance, of God's will. The point of Paul's comments here are that we are tasked with informing all mankind of this possibility. We have the privilege of inviting others to share in the inheritance.

One of the key issues is how we treat those we invite. For Paul all were equal heirs. In his day the key distinction was between Jews and Gentiles. Jews had a huge problem

treating others as equals. For Paul this was a constant challenge to help the Jews accept the Gentiles as equals and for the Gentiles to understand what they were receiving and how to live as coheirs.

Paul often used the idea that before God there is neither Jew nor Gentile, all are equal. As a world class Christian we have the same privilege of revealing this mystery; that all who come, all who believe are heirs and are equal. Paul says he has been especially tasked to help all understand this truth and help them learn how to accept and treat one another as equals in the kingdom.

In another passage Paul states that there is no difference between Greek and Jew, male and female, slave and free (Galatians 3:28). These were the categories that defined status and acceptability in Paul's day. Today we deal with categories on other levels but the concept remains the same. It is our task, our mission to proclaim to all that in God, through the gospel, all have equal access to the inheritance God has made available to us.

Can we say as Paul that we have come to reveal the mystery? Are we working to make sure that people not only hear the revelation of this mystery, but are treated as equals in the kingdom of God? It is our responsibility not simply to inform them, but also to work to make it possible for everyone to be treated as equals. That does not mean the task will be easy. Paul worked hard at teaching others the truth and making it possible for them to become all that they were meant to be as heirs of the inheritance of God.

Take time to consider this! Do you treat Christians of other cultures and countries as equals in the family of God? Do you believe they have the same access to God's

word, God's wisdom, God's direction, and God's resources as you do? Do you believe they can do great things without you?

BS – Read Ephesians 2:12-21. There are many interesting words in this scripture that related to the change every person experiences in becoming a member of God's family. Write a definition for each of the following: formally, separate, excluded, foreigners, barrier, reconcile, access, fellow citizen.

PR – Part of our task as Christians is to help each person understand the process of becoming a member of the family. Compare how you treat your brothers, sisters, parents and others of your physical family with how you treat members of your spiritual family.

BWV – If possible investigate the process of becoming a citizen of your country. Compare that with the process laid out for us to become a citizen of heaven. How is the process the same and different? What part do you as an individual play in both processes? Now write a simple description of why you should be involved in the process of helping a person become a citizen of heaven.

Inquiry 35

Worthy to be selected

Ephesians 4:1-4

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

I could not build, if God did not supply

I could not teach, if God had not taught

I could not love, if God had not loved

I am not perfect, God perfects me to serve

they are not perfect, God perfects them to serve

we are all different, God unites us perfectly

I have a difficult question to ask. How each of us answers it could affect whether we will be called to serve and what happens if and when we are called.

When is a person worthy of the call of God? Is it based on what they have already done or in anticipation of what will be done? Actually that looks more like two questions but they are really the same. They both relate to how we view God's call and how we should live.

For me the answer is both and more. To be honest, all Christians are called by God to be valued citizens of the kingdom and available to serve. The level of that service will be impacted by the nature of the life we choose to live.

Out of the large group of believers there are people called to specific areas of ministry. The call may come long before they are ready to go or after many years of service. Each must go through a process of growth and development. Each must be approved for the service they are actually called to do.

Those, like Samuel, pass through a time of preparation and training. At some point there will be a need to make critical decisions that will impact their continued development and preparation to fulfill their call. Others will be involved in serving and developing their skills, sometimes unaware of what the future holds, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, who were called on to prepare their son John for ministry.

Whether you are preparing to fulfill a call you have received, or you are in God's service and about to receive a call from God, or you are busy fulfilling your call, Paul mentions several key areas that must always be kept in focus.

Humility – this is the uncomfortable realization that who we are and what we can accomplish has nothing to do with our skills and resources. We don't like this kind of revelation. It is not how we are taught. We are taught that we have value. That value may be based on personal skills or on our membership as part of a family, or our ability to contribute to the life and welfare of others. But the idea is that we have value because we can act in ways that are seen as valuable.

In God's eyes, what we can do and who we are related to has no value. All of these were made possible by God who created us and all the resources that we use. Our only value is based on our relationship to him. Even that would not have been possible without direct action on the part of God. God acted to restore our relationship to him. More than that, he is actively working to make us aware of our need to be restored. Our ability to respond is dependent on the fact that God desires to communicate with us.

This humility must be learned as part of our preparation to serve. It must be a key element in any service we perform. It must be continually nurtured and explored. It is far too easy to lose sight of the truth and become focused on who we are and what we do; to become proud. Paul felt that this point was so important that he included a description of humility based on the life of Christ, in his letter to the Philippians. It is so important that he, even as an apostle, was expected to keep on learning, keep on developing this area of his personality. God gave him a thorn to help keep his focus clear, that he must always depend on God.

The declaration is be humble. It is how we live and not what we do. You cannot 'do' humble. That concept is a trap that leads to pride. Our actions reveal whether we are humble. True humility turns our life into a window that allows people to see God.

Gentleness – We need to be kind, caring people. We need to speak softly, with understanding in our voice. President Theodore Roosevelt had a special quote, “walk softly and carry a big stick.” His intent was to negotiate peacefully but from a position of power. In his mind it was about winning at any cost. If his kind words didn't work he was ready to use force - as much force as necessary to gain his objective.

This is a long way from Jesus' instructions to turn the other cheek, to go the extra mile, and to give the shirt off your back if necessary to help someone understand God's love. This is not about judging sin as sin. It is not about people suffering for their sin. It is about understanding and being ready with a kind word to help people find their way back to God. Sometimes we will need to take a strong stand and show what is called 'tough love.' But it is not done as an attack or to punish, instead it reveals something deeper.

Gentleness is about understanding the people around us and responding to them the way we would want them to respond to us. It means being able to receive criticism because we know the source and that their intention is our growth and maturity. In the same way, we must know how to help people see themselves honestly and gently provide the encouragement needed to move forward. Even strong words can reveal our gentleness to others.

Patience – Are we ready to do anything for as long as is necessary to reach the goal? For those who receive the call when they are young, do they have the patience to keep moving forward, to make the decisions needed to keep the call in focus? For those who are currently involved in the work of the kingdom – do they have the ability to keep serving and keep on growing, so that when they are needed they will be ready to serve?

For those actively involved in fulfilling God's call to missions –do they have the patience and focus to help others see the need and hear God's call? Do they have the ability to keep the goal in focus and keep working until they obtain that goal? Sometimes this means being faithful in the work so that the next person will be able to finish the work. It is about doing all of the little things over and over so that all will be ready when God leads us into the next stage of our development and the next area of ministry.

Peace – Do we really know what it means to be content where we are? Are we so settled in our relationship with God that we are able to let go of our concerns and worries and completely let God have total control?

Peace is about knowing that we are doing exactly what we should be doing. It is about having an unshaken

confidence in God, his call, and his plan for us. It is not about the state of the world around us but about the state of the world within us. We have ended the struggle for control. We have ended the struggle for recognition. We have ended the struggle to have. We are able to do the 'one more thing' that Jesus asked of the rich young ruler. We have let go of whatever has bound us and turned it all over to God. We have peace. We have God's presence.

Are we being worthy of the call? That is what we need to seek; before we are called, when we are called, and as we fulfill the call. The call prepares us to be worthy and allows to understand what makes us worthy. Our life is found completely in our relationship to God and the desire to serve in the best and only way possible; with all our heart, mind, body and soul.

BS – Read the following scriptures: Genesis 5:24; Genesis 17:1; Ephesians 4:17. Write a definition of what it means to walk worthy in the eyes of the Lord. (Search out other scriptures if needed.)

PR – In applying for college, a job, even finding a wife, one of the tasks is to show that you are qualified and worthy of being accepted. What is there about your life that makes you worthy to serve in the kingdom of God?

BWV - A key struggle when entering a new culture is to understand what the people view as valuable. The hope is that they see the missionary as a person of value, worthy of their trust. How does the scripture above help us deal with identifying what is of value and how to be worthy of someone's trust?

Inquiry 36

The Partnership

Phil 1:3-11

I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God

Missions is a partnership. In general, most of us understand what this means. First, there is a unique group of people who have been called by God to leave their home culture and travel to people of other cultures to share the gospel. These people need help to go. Usually they will not be able to find jobs to support their ministry and so financial help is needed. They also need support in the spiritual battle they will be engaged in so people are needed who will pray for them. Besides these areas of assistance there may be other needs related to training, materials, transportation and so on.

The supporting groups and individuals expect to receive reports on what the missionary is doing and how the work is going. Periodically the missionary is expected to return to his home culture to report and renew his partnerships. During these visits the missionary shares what God has done and presents his future goals to encourage his partners to continue supporting the work being done.

Paul begins where we would expect him to begin. He thanks God for their partnership in the work he has been called to do. He has just received financial support from them and here and elsewhere thanks them and God for their faithful support of the work. This is a basic expectation and action for the missionary. But there is so much more.

Paul prays for God's blessing on the work his partners are doing in their community. He knows in specific ways the nature of their ministry. He has an awareness of the culture, the people, and what will be involved in sharing the gospel in that location. He knows the opposition they are dealing with. Satan is active and they need to be strong. He knows their resources and the level of their faith in God.

He prays that they will experience all the joy that God has to offer as they see God working in them and through them. While this may look like a general prayer, it is probably much more. Epaphroditus has just arrived with current information about what is happening in Philippi. Besides that there are suggestions that Paul was proactive about keeping in touch with each of the churches where he had been. In Corinthians he talks about the churches in Macedonia. The letter to Colossi is based on information that Paul has received about what is happening there. Each of Paul's letters contains indications that Paul is always seeking and receiving information about the state

of each church and their ministry. The information may be slow in coming but Paul is praying in specific ways for them.

He tells the Philippians that he longs for their presence. His letter reveals the depth of his relationship with them. This leads to specific prayers for them; for their growth and relationship to God. He prays that their love will abound, that they will grow in the depth of their insight, that they will have great discernment in the work and they will be filled with the presence of God. It is not out of the ordinary that a missionary should pray in this way for his partners, but he takes this to another level. He not only prays for them he then takes the time to share with them key lessons that relate to what he is praying about from his own life.

Chapter three is a simple and clear guide to follow with key steps to help them accomplish what he seeks for them in prayer.

As he finishes this prayer, he prays that they will be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes from Christ. He is keenly aware that the success of his ministry and theirs are intimately related. Their ability to support him is tied to how they live and the fruit they bear. This becomes a key source of encouragement and joy for those serving far from home. It is a key theme of this letter. Equally important is the fruit of Paul's ministry. He takes time to let them know that, while on the surface things may seem wrong (Paul is in chains), in fact the situation is opening many doors to share the truth and reach a whole new group of people. Their ministry becomes an encouragement to him, and his to them.

For Paul, the partnership is so much more than their ability to support and pray for the work he is doing. It is also what he can do to help them mature and be able to serve. When Paul wrote this letter he was not thinking that someday it would become part of the sacred scripture. He was writing to his supporters, those partnering with him in God's mission. This is a letter home to his friends and coworkers in the mission.

So the question is, do we see the truth in this? Do we see that we actually have two tasks as missionaries, as servants in the kingdom, who have been sent out to proclaim the good news to the ends of the earth?

When we were living in Sierra Leone we prepared a special prayer folder. In this prayer folder we had a page for each church and person that supported us. If possible, it included a picture of the building or a group from the church. We did this to help our children understand who our partners were. Each night we would open the folder and pray for the church or person on that page. Whenever we received a letter from them we would update the information. To this day, I still maintain a list of our supporters and pray for at least one of them every day.

The question is: what are you doing to keep up-to-date on what is happening with your partners? The word partnership is so much more than receiving and sharing a report. In the work of God it is about relationship and knowing how to lift each other up and encourage one another. In the second chapter of Philippians, Paul talks about this. He talks about fellowship and unity and encouraging one another. He talks about building a unity that produces joy for them and for him.

This is not an easy task. It can be easy to complain about how much time is required to communicate; even more so in today's world of instantaneous communication. People expect an immediate response. Our lives are much more public and we need to be careful in how we respond. But respond we must and not in ambiguous and general ways. We must be like Paul who knew his supporters and could write a letter that revealed this truth.

We are in a partnership and we have a responsibility to care for those who are caring for us.

BS – Read Acts 14:27; 15:3-4; 12; 20:22-37; 21:17-19. Here you will find various situations where a report was given about mission activity. What are the key areas that they reported about? Read at least one of Paul's letters and see if he takes time to report about his work.

PR – How do you respond to the question, what have you been doing? I know that as a child this question made me defensive, especially if I was doing something questionable. Do people have a right to ask you what you have been doing? Think about who can ask this question, the reasons we will permit this question, how we are willing to respond.

BWV – The bible tells that all of us will give an account of our lives and activities before God. We are warned that everything done in private will be revealed. Before God our life is an open book, and in many ways, it is the same to those around us. The question is, how do people interpret what we say, and more often, what we don't say. Silence communicates and usually in a negative manner. Sharing what God is doing and our joys and struggles, in doing so helps us evaluate what we are doing and allows others to share in the work. Think about how your reports

and your testimony can encourage another person in their faith and walk with God.

Inquiry 37

Making Bad Good

Phil 1:12-14

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

Sickness, attacks, setbacks, criticism: Doors to great opportunities that can be seen through eyes of faith and commitment.

Paul was attacked. A group took an oath to kill him or die themselves. He spent 2 years in prison in Caesarea because the procurator was hoping for a bribe to release him (Acts 24:26). Then he was sent to Rome only to be shipwrecked on the way. Once in Rome he was chained and placed under guard. And Paul called all of this a great opportunity to advance the gospel.

What would you do, as a missionary, if you experienced even one of these events in your life?

Now consider how you would react to one of these after sacrificing everything to travel to another country and another people to share the gospel. Would you crumble in defeat? Would you suffer in silence? Would you criticize

and complain that it is not fair? Or would you even begin to consider that maybe these events were the beginning of something incredible and that God was waiting for you to see the light and follow him?

There is no such thing as the perfect missionary life. There will always be threats, physical, emotional and spiritual. There will always be obstacles as a result of one's limited faith; obstacles created by governments, cultures and individuals who don't want missionaries in their country. Their reasons may range from political, social and religious principles to personal anger and hate for what you, the missionary, have to share.

There will always be dangers along the way. The ecology is different. The food may cause problems. (I say 'may' because a person's attitude is a big factor in this area.) The biology may bring discomfort. The germs and diseases of a place can wreak havoc with the body until it finally adjusts, if it ever adjusts. The climate may be oppressive. The heat can be overwhelming, the cold inescapable, the rain unending and as relentless as the dryness of the desert in its impact on the body.

Do I dare mention the isolation? You are alone, separated from all that is familiar. You may have access to skype, facebook and other media but those are only momentary escapes and can multiply the reality that you are far from home and feel lost.

There will always be abuse and inequity. You are a foreigner. Some may treat you with respect but most wonder why you are there. Why did you give up family and home and a good life to move to a foreign place? Some will always be suspicious of you and your motives.

This is only the tip of the iceberg of possibilities. Missionaries have been attacked and killed. Missionaries have suffered in prison for their faith. Missionaries have been abused by the people they came to serve. Missionaries have suffered sickness and disease as a result of moving to another country. Missionaries have become isolated and discouraged because they are strangers in a foreign land.

I have experienced many of these events in my life as a missionary. Some are easier to deal with than others. Some are clearly related to Satan trying to destroy any possibility of ministry. Others are more difficult because they are not as clearly related to ministry activity but relate more to the ability to live in a new culture. They become a source of doubt and fear. These events make us wonder if we made the right decision. They make us wonder if we truly have the right to tell others what they believe is a lie and they need to receive the gospel if they want to be saved and know God. They make us wonder if we have any value and ability or if we are just getting in the way.

The ability to avoid being destroyed by any one or all of the above is a matter of perspective and of confidence in God's call to mission.

Paul moves quickly to this point in his letter. He has just finished praying God's best for them. He is aware that as he prays for God's best they are going to ask about his current situation. They are wondering if it is worth serving God if it will result in all that Paul has experienced and suffered.

Before we look at Paul's response we need to understand a couple of things about being placed in prison. It was

very different in Paul's day. Most of the time the government did not provide any services to care for the prisoner. In some situations that also meant no food. To survive the prisoner needed to have someone to care for him or they needed to be someone the prison authorities felt needed to be cared for and protected.

So now we see Paul's words to his friends in Philippi. They have already done much to provide for Paul over the years. They even sent a person to help care for him while he was in prison in Rome. He looks back over the time in prison in Caesarea, the trip to Rome and now the prison in Rome and states that it has not been what many would have expected.

In the prison in Caesarea, Paul was treated well. It has been suggested the authorities were hoping for a bribe. So Paul probably received better care and his friends and family were allowed to visit and provide for him. As a result of this, Paul had many opportunities to share his faith with Felix, then with Festus, and with King Herod. Being in prison also helped to protect him from the attacks of his enemies in Jerusalem. Each time they tried to murder Paul God used his prison keepers to provide protection. Finally he used his status as a roman citizen to appeal to Caesar to avoid being taken back to Jerusalem and the risk of being attacked. This added another layer of protection, another layer of care. The laws were very clear about how to treat a prisoner who was a citizen.

So the procurator accepts Paul's appeal and he is sent to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. The trip to Rome started out well but turned into a disaster, they were shipwrecked. But Paul's faith and obedience resulted in everyone surviving. Paul was able to preach to the leaders of the island where they were stranded and many more

believed. The shipwreck opened the door to planting a church.

Now Paul is in Rome. Every day, every night a new set of soldiers is brought to him to guard him. The story suggests that they were chained to him and so, though he was their captive, they were his captives as well. As he talked with those who came to visit him the guards had no choice but to hear his words. Day after day more soldiers came and more heard. This continued until Paul could state that the gospel had reached even to the palace guard. This would have been difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish through other methods.

Not only that, as other Christians came and visited with Paul they observed what was happening. It became clear to them that God was using Paul's situation to advance the gospel. The prison had become a pulpit. It was not hard to move from this to the realization that if God could use Paul, chained and imprisoned, then God could do even greater things through them and their freedom. Paul's chains opened doors for him to proclaim the gospel and broke the chains that bound others in fear of proclaiming the gospel.

How many stories have you heard or read of people, of missionaries, who have suffered greatly and God has used those events to open doors that would have otherwise remained sealed. A couple of examples may help us understand this truth. Five missionaries went to contact a tribe that no one had reached before and all five were killed. Their families chose not to live in hate but in hope, and so continued to work at reaching this tribe. Finally the children of the men who were killed gained entrance to the tribe. Today this tribe has received the gospel.

A young lady dove into a lake and broke her back. She became a quadriplegic. Instead of giving up she chose to look for the doors of opportunity her injury might provide. This lady has had an incredible ministry and has been able to talk to people many of us would never have the opportunity to reach. All because of a life threatening injury.

Does this mean it will be easy to see the door? Will it be easy to carry out the work involved in following God in these difficult situations? No, absolutely not. The ability to see the possibility will come at a cost. Paul's time in prison came at a price. He was no longer free to visit and teach. He was no longer in control of his life and activity. His life was in danger. Prison was not a safe place, even when he was treated well.

So what about you?

Are you looking for a smooth road to success? Are you expecting your willingness to obey to make everything simple and clear? Are you expecting others to provide everything you need to be safe and fulfilled? If this is your concept of mission, of being a world-class Christian, then it would be better for you to stay at home and spend the rest of your life in a bubble. Life is not, and even less so, when we choose to follow God where he leads.

When we choose to follow the path God reveals to us there will be the potential of danger and risk. If we accept the direction of the Holy Spirit and go, God will use every situation to bring honor to his name. If we are willing; that is the key. Paul was willing to go to Jerusalem even though he knew it would be dangerous. But, as a result, a unique group of people were able to hear the gospel and see it lived out in front of them.

There are two types of prison. The first is one we create which prevents us from sharing the gospel. It happens when we try to protect ourselves and avoid risk. We are safe but the gospel becomes imprisoned by that action. The other prison is one that the world creates. Whether it is a real structure or one that exists as a result of culture and politics, the goal is the same - to restrict the proclamation of the gospel. The first prison will prevent the gospel from being proclaimed. However, the second may actually become a door to proclaiming the gospel. God is more than able to use those who are willing to risk being imprisoned because they are ready to escape the first prison and accept the challenges of the second.

BS – Read Acts 8:4; 11:19-21; Romans 8:28; 31-38. What is the benefit of accepting the risk of proclaiming to all your relationship to God?

PR – What prison are you dealing with today? Most Christians are trapped in the first because of their fear of the second. Why are you afraid? Who will suffer today because of your fear?

BWV – History is clear. The church grows faster and stronger during times of persecution and trial. Why? Your answer to why this happens will be the difference between hiding and serving.

Inquiry 38

Motivated

Phil 1:15-18

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love,

knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

So, what motivates you to serve?

In today's world there are a myriad of people producing motivational materials, organizing motivational conferences and hiring motivational speakers. All for one key reason when people are motivated the work gets done and usually it is done better. Companies have learned that there are key factors that keep people focused and willing to do the work. These factors create positive motivation that builds cooperation and relationship. When people feel good about themselves, good about their relationships with their employer and their coworkers they are more productive.

This is even true in the church and it occurs at many levels. The pastor has the task of motivating his members each week. He encourages them and provides them with key tools to be successful in their Christian life and as members of the kingdom of God. The local church also organizes various group ministries and special events to further motivate its members.

In my home district the pastors used to meet together twice a year. The first meeting was in a retreat setting, a time to get away and recharge as we shared with each other our challenges and victories. The second meeting was more formal. It was a time of teaching and challenge, a time of renovation and encouragement.

On a larger scale, denominations organize large events: youth conventions, women's conferences, seminars on key areas of ministry, and training programs. The key goals were to bring us together, motivate and challenge us, and provide another level of awareness and reinforce the ideas that we are not alone and that great things are possible as we work together.

Besides all of this there are independent organizations working in special areas to motivate men, women, youth, ministers, teachers, and on and on the list goes. They are working hard to raise awareness and motivate people to be involved in key types of ministry, such as FCA, prison ministry, human trafficking, leadership development, and other areas of activity.

Missions conferences are another example of this. We have participated in this motivational process for many years. Meeting people, teaching them about missions, motivating them to be involved, to give and to go as God calls, are all parts of a missions conference. Sometimes these conferences involve traveling to other countries to help churches understand and become involved in missions. They, too, need to be taught about missions and the work God has called every individual to be involved in.

Over the years we have participated in a variety of activities and approaches to motivating people in their missions involvement. Usually the focus is on positive reasons for getting involved; the needs of others, the condition of the lost, sharing the blessings received with others, the joy of helping others meet Jesus, and so on. The goal is to avoid using negative motivation, such as guilt, fear, and judgment, which are used with the intent to force people to be involved, force people to accept their responsibility. Always the goal is to help people see the

positive reasons to choose to be involved and the blessing they can be to others.

This is not a new situation and Paul was aware of the need to motivate others. Paul's letters are filled with a clear awareness of how to motivate people and how to help them choose the right reasons for their service. Paul was also aware of people whose motivation was based on selfish reasons. Here Paul comments on the work of others who clearly are thinking about themselves more than about the work and the mission. Paul makes a sudden shift, from how his imprisonment has become a source of positive motivation, to those who are happy he is suffering and are doing their best to benefit from his struggle to promote themselves as a better preacher, better evangelist.

Paul's response is a bit of a surprise. He is glad that through them people are hearing the good news. And yet to be honest, it is not an easy topic to deal with. First, we don't want to believe people would behave this way. Second, we struggle to believe that good can come from such behavior and the work done as a result of such selfish and self-serving attitudes. Still it is important that we be aware of what motivates people and be prepared for what can happen when we encounter these people, as well as be able to avoid such thinking in our own lives and ministry. So let us consider some of the reasons Paul mentions and a few other possibilities: a list of bad motivation for serving.

1. Personal Recognition – People like to be recognized for doing something good. Many people respond and go forward at crusades so their friends will think they are doing what is right and so receive the recognition of others. Many serve in the church for the same reason. They work

because of the recognition they receive from others.

2. Competition – one person declares that they led four people to the Lord. Another decides they can do better and lead five people to the Lord. Two pastors compete over the number of people who attend their church. Missionaries compete over how many churches they planted this past year. The competition has little to do with quality, only numbers. It is about being bigger, having more and the false perception that this results in being better.
3. Guilt – There are people who are motivated by guilt. They think many will be condemned to hell because “I didn’t go, didn’t give, or didn’t pray.” They fear the consequences of not serving more than the blessing of serving.
4. Jealousy – There are those who want what others have and are willing to damage another person so they can replace them or gain a better standing. It is all about getting without regard for the consequences of one’s actions.
5. Benefits – There are people who only serve because of the perks and benefits; the respect one gets as a missionary, the chance to travel and live in other countries, and so on. Their ministry has very little to do with the work to be done and is all about what can be gained by doing the work.
6. Test – These are people who volunteer and work just to prove to others they can do the work, they can make the sacrifices, and they can be as good as the next person. This is about making a point, proving to others that I can do this and once their ego has been satisfied and the person looks good to others, they move on.
7. Expectations – How many people do you know that attend church, take care of their family and

are good citizens because that is what their friends and family expect them to do? This is not a bad way to live, especially when we believe their expectations to be reasonable. But at times people go into ministry and missions because that is what people expect them to do, not because they have the gifts or calling to do so. A parent dreams of have a child as a pastor or in “Christian ministry,” but if done for the wrong reasons the end results can lead to damaged lives and relationships.

8. Credentials – This idea is about what one has accomplished in his life. It is the list of titles and accomplishments that a person keeps a record of for others to see. Call it a spiritual resume; a collection of qualifications for the next job, the next area of ministry, the next step in moving up the ladder in ministry and life. It is like the student who served 3 months on a short-term mission assignment and then wrote on his resume that he had been a missionary. This looks good on paper but if the only focus was to add an impressive point to his resume then perhaps his motivation was self-serving.

Paul was not surprised by the existence of such people in the ministry. And he clearly indicated he was not pleased with their reason for preaching and serving and that the motivation being used was negative and sinful. Still, he rejoiced in the fact that the good news was being proclaimed. He accepted the fact that people serve for the wrong motives. But, right or wrong, there was one result that was positive, people were hearing the truth and receiving the chance to repent and be forgiven.

There are two things to keep in mind as we reflect on this situation. The first is that every one of us will need to review our reasons for serving. At some point in time, we

will be impacted by the bad motives, listed above, to serve. We will be tempted by some, attracted by others, and tested by the rest. This means we will need to do a regular motivational check-up to see how we are doing. We will need to seek the advice and counsel of others to gain a more neutral perspective on how others perceive what is motivating us to serve.

The second is that we need to learn to trust God. The gospel is so much more than a person, or a particular ministry. There will always be people who serve for what they can gain. There will always be those who, in their presentation of the gospel, will cause problems with mixed communication, always creating questions about their real intent and purpose. But the gospel is so much more and it, and not the person proclaiming it, is what saves. Remember in Romans 1:19 Paul proclaimed that the gospel is the power of salvation.

Each of us needs to take the time and review our motivation for serving and remember that the true power behind our activity is not our ability, our desire, or our reasons, but the power of the gospel to save and change others even as it changed us.

What motivates you to do your devotions? What motivates you to talk to God? What motivates you to go to church? What motivates you to care about others? These and many other similar questions can help us evaluate our motivation and our need to be motivated. For Paul the key was that the gospel of God's love was being proclaimed, from the prison cell and through those who were jealous and envious; in every situation the power of God's love was being released to work in the lives of the lost.

Finally. It is always better and more effective when our motivation for service is based on our relationship to God. So review your motivation and then spend more time building that relationship so that everyone will see the message clearly.

BS – Read Acts 8:9-24; Matthew 23:2-7; Romans 16:17-18. These scriptures are about people who serve for the wrong motives. What are the dangers involved? How should you respond to those who serve for the wrong reasons?

PR – Have you ever done something to gain the honor, approval, and respect of others? Have you ever tried to prove your ability and value to others? Is this wrong? At what point does it become sinful and motivated for selfish reasons? Read Luke 12:42-46.

BWV – In God's kingdom we will get exactly what is correct and beneficial for us and for those around us. Seeking to gain a greater name and greater power is the attitude of the world and is always destructive to someone. Jesus called this 'lording it over others (Mt 20:25).' It is the opposite of being a servant. Take the time to write down a list of motives for serving in the kingdom. Use this list to evaluate your reasons for being involved in the mission of God or your failure to be involved.

Inquiry 39

Ashamed or shameless

Phil 1:18-22

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Every one of us wants to avoid being ashamed. We don't like to be laughed at, ridiculed and criticized for the things we do that represent foolish decisions, careless actions and thoughtless behavior. I am not talking about those silly mistakes that we all can laugh at. A stumble, a mispronounced word, and other events of this nature. It is good to learn to accept them and laugh at ourselves.

The focus here is on insensitive and careless behavior. Action and words that make people wonder what kind of person we are and if we really care about others. These bring us into the realm of shame. A place where people criticize us and reject who we are. A place where we are afraid of what others will think of us because of our beliefs, our habits, our choices and who we are.

Paul is in prison. Soon he will be on trial. This trial is not about violation of any law but of his belief in God and his proclamation of the gospel. He has had time to think about this and it is not the first time he has had to face the judge and his accusers. He has clearly made a choice not

to be afraid of what people think of his belief in Christ. He proclaimed this clearly in Romans 1:19. He has stood before kings and governors. He has stood before his enemies and proclaimed that he will not be ashamed of his relationship to Christ and his desire that all would have that relationship.

Now he is talking about another level of shame. He is praying that he will not be shamed by those he must deal with. Such shame is a powerful emotion and can cause a great deal of fear in a person. In the Philippines they talk about four levels of shame and must learn to differentiate between each type. They are taught how to avoid shaming others, and how to avoid shame in the eyes of others. When such events occur they also learn how to deal with what is causing the shame. Each level of shame has an appropriate procedure to follow in revealing the problem and resolving it.

What is crucial to understand, if one wants to avoid shame and causing shame in others, is to learn what each culture considers to be a source of shame and how severely it will be treated. It is not the same and what one culture may consider humorous may be destructive in another culture. A comment that may appear innocent in one culture may be perceived extremely critical and insensitive in another. Tripping and falling may appear funny to one but be incredibly embarrassing in another.

Paul is aware of both. He has clearly decided that no matter what he will not be ashamed at one level. But he is concerned that he not be ashamed at another level. That his words, actions and manner would be appropriate for the culture and setting not result in shame.

Now why should Paul be worried about personal shame and the danger of making mistakes, or acting in a way that the people of that culture would interpret as shameful? It is an important question and critical to how people respond to us and the gospel. At one level people can be very forgiving of our foolish behavior, behavior which in their minds can be perceived as shameful. And they will willingly accept our apologies based on the idea that we didn't know or understand that what we did or said would be seen in that way. But a time will come when the period of grace comes to an end. If we keep on behaving disrespectfully and shamefully, as defined by them, then we will be rejected, our value will be rejected and what we have come to share will be rejected because it will be associated with our shameful behavior and no one wants to listen to or follow the beliefs of one who behaves in such a shameful way.

While we need to be very aware of these issues we will also need to work in another area. Being willing to deal with the shame of proclaiming the gospel even when it is in conflict with cultural standards of revealing the truth and talking about sinful (shameful) behavior. It is a critical issue when communicating the truth about sin. I recently read a prayer letter of a colleague working in a restricted area about this truth. This person was struggling to find a clear way to explain the concept of sin. The people involved do not have a western concept of sin but have a strong sense of shame. According to the note it was not going to be a simple process. But it would be absolutely essential if the people would have a chance to understand the following terms.

Forgiveness – Sin causes us to be ashamed and to believe we have lost face before others. This concept means we are without respect and others can no longer trust us. This is exactly our condition before God. Forgiveness means

restoring our face in the eyes of others. For that to happen means we have to regain their respect and trust. This is never easy and in some cultures almost impossible without the help of others. This is exactly the situation with God. We have lost face before God. We are not worthy of respect or trust. Jesus has come to restore both and place our face before God. To make us acceptable once again to be in his presence; to become visible again to God.

Faithfulness - Sin is a state of being unreliable. This is another profound aspect of shame. We become unreliable in the eyes of others. Our behavior reveals that no one can depend on us. This is a key part of the concept of being faithful. Again this is our status before God. We want to be dependable but our actions reveal we are not and so we continue to be a source of shame. God understands this problem and has promised us the Holy Spirit who works to accomplish two critical activities in our lives. He reveals to us the nature of the situation, in detail, and provides us the power to change, so that we do not have to depend on ourselves but can depend on him and so become faithful witnesses who do not act in shameful ways.

Courage - Shame has a very clear and negative effect on our courage. We cannot and will not admit to our own weakness. It is a struggle to admit we are our own worst enemy and that on our best day our activity, as good as it may appear to us, is sullied by who we truly are. People dealing with shame avoid others and when with others fight desperately to hide the shameful things they have done. The greatest act of courage is actually an act of honesty, confession. It is this action that opens the door to the capacity to receive everything we need to serve without shame and in the face of our fears of failure and the shame of our past.

Confidence - Shame robs a person of their confidence. They are often second guessing themselves about whether they said the right thing, acted in an appropriate manner or responded correctly. They are frequently seeking affirmation about just about everything in their life. It is a vicious cycle. Making a decision, then questioning that decision, seeking affirmation and then questioning the fact only confirms the reality of the situation. The person may say "I cannot trust even myself", which drags him into a pit of hopeless despair. Christ came to break this cycle so that we can regain a clear understanding of who we are and what God created us to be. We can live. We can serve. We can experience all the glory and wonder of God now and will one day be with the one who has taken away our shame. We can become the good and faithful servant in and through Christ.

Shame would destroy us. Christ has come to restore us. Let us join Paul in proclaiming our freedom in Christ and celebrate the truth that, in Christ, we can be exalted in our lives. The shame of the past can be overcome. The life we have been given is possible. The future is guaranteed. Celebrate the fact that to live is Christ and our earthly death will only open the door to the fulfillment of all of God's promises.

BS – Read Psalm 25. David discusses the idea of shame, the source of shame and his desire to not experience shame and how to avoid it. Define David's the idea of shame. Is there more than one type of shame? If so, how should you respond to them?

PR – Reflect on a time when the fear of being embarrassed influenced your actions. What was the source of your embarrassment or fear? How did you deal with it? How could that experience help you understand

how to deal with the fear of being embarrassed by your faith?

BWV – Paul declares in Romans 1 that he is not ashamed of the gospel. In Philippians he states that the chains he wears are bringing glory to God and the gospel is being proclaimed. For Paul the greatest shame would have been to hide his relationship with God. How about for us? Of all the things in the world there is only one thing that has value for eternity and that is my relationship with God. That is what defines who we are as Christians. The fact that we are members of God's family should be a source of pride and not shame. Look at your life. Are you proud of your relationship with God or embarrassed by it?

Inquiry 40 Ambition

Phil 2:3-4

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Have you ever gotten tired of hearing the same instructions, same warnings, same explanation again and again? Do you ever wonder why some are repeated more often than others?

It is usually because there is evidence that the people receiving the instructions are not listening, not doing what they have been told to do, or insist on doing what they are told not to do. So here we are again talking about the issue of ethnocentrism.

I could repeat many of the lines you have already heard such as:

- Don't be selfish
- Don't live to be impressive
- Don't be stuck-up

Or I could repeat some of the errors people make in their thinking and approach to others such as:

- I have come a long way to help you
- I have studied for so many years so you need to listen to me
- I gave up all of this to be with you

There are many more. It is important to remind ourselves of these errors because it is really simple to slip back into these modes of thinking.

One of my goals during our first four months of living in Papua New Guinea was to visit all of the churches in the area around us. So, week by week, I traveled by foot to visit the churches and pastors in order to be introduced as the new missionary and learn more about their life. Very quickly I begin to see some of the differences between their culture and the cultures we had worked with in Sierra Leone. I was reminded that they had much to teach me about how to live and how to work. Their methods and abilities that made it possible for them to not just survive but live comfortably.

During one of this trips I visited a missionary family from another group. They had chosen to work in a very remote location. There were only two ways to reach their house. One was by foot and the other by helicopter. I learned that they rarely traveled by foot but depended on regular visits of the helicopter to receive their supplies.

My visit to their house was quite interesting. It was furnished with a mixture of things local and imported. They had borrowed ideas and materials from the local culture but built a house quite different from those around them. From the outside it appeared traditional, but on the inside it was quite different. It had been supplied with furniture and other items that had to be flown in at great expense. These missionaries had, at one level, adapted to the location but, at another level, were telling everyone what they were unwilling to leave behind.

The missionary made an interesting comment to me about our pastors. He felt that they were more committed to the ministry than those that he was working with. It was a revealing comment. I wonder if his chosen lifestyle affected his pastors' commitment levels, There are so many ways in which we can communicate the wrong message and create misunderstanding about the gospel we have been sent to proclaim. It is not just about what we say but often about what we communicate through non-verbal actions and attitudes.

Is it wrong to bring a few things from home to the mission field? No. We are from another culture. We have different ideas about life and comfort. We think differently and process life differently. The problem is not in what we

have, but in what we embrace and accept from the host culture. These decisions will communicate loudly about whether we are willing to learn how to live in their world. It will impact their willingness to learn, to believe what the missionary says and be effective in the work they will be given to do.

Some time later I visited the house of another missionary from another group. The moment I entered the house I was amazed. The furniture, the decorations, everything in the house was from the USA. I learned that they had packed up their entire house and shipped it to their new location. Then they rented a house big enough and nice enough for their furniture. What do you think they communicated to the people they had been sent to serve?

Now we have even more situations that can reveal who we are and what we think of those we are living among. Facebook and other social media make our lives and comments available to anyone and everyone. Our comments, about what we miss, how we feel, and what is happening, become available to everyone and especially to those in our host country. I have seen a great deal of carelessness and hurtful communication in these medias. People comment that they wish they didn't have to miss a birthday party or other family event because they are in another country. People talk about the food they miss. People place photos of the garbage piling up in front of their house and comment that they would never see that in their home culture.

Frequently their comments include an evaluation of what is wrong with where they are, a wish that they were back

home to celebrate, to eat, to do something they cannot do because they are far away. Are these wrong feelings? Probably not but they are not balanced by comments about the friends God has given them, the new family they have become part of, the special events they are now enjoying. When the quantity of poor comments grows day after day with no positive balance then it will be a problem.

It is like the first family mentioned above. Coming and going by helicopter is not a big deal. But when all of their supplies come by helicopter and they are unwilling to use local resources for food and supplies people wonder what is wrong. When they are unwilling to pay a local person to bring in their supplies then all of their time of ministry could be limited and restricted. This family lasted only four years as a missionary family. When they left, the churches they were working with faltered and many closed. A lesson was learned. Nothing in their culture and life was of particular use in proclaiming the gospel and developing the church. Since the nationals could not live like the foreign missionaries then they decided to return to their old ways and old beliefs.

Are you getting the message? Ethnocentrism is dangerous. It can also be very subtle in how it is expressed. And the message is "I am better than you." "I am more concerned about me and having my culture than understanding you and your culture." What are you clinging to that will get in the way of people hearing the gospel? What tells people that you are selfish? What tells people you are more concerned about your interests and needs than those of the people you are living with?

This is not the first time Paul has identified this issue. In 1 Corinthians 9 he talked about becoming all things to all people to win as many as possible. In the last study we talked about not being ashamed of the gospel and not causing shame to the message we have been sent to proclaim. A key lesson to learn is not to let one's culture get in the way. Ethnocentric attitudes are a deadly poison and we need to be reminded of this fact so that we can be careful to review what we say and do and how we live to be sure we are not communicating a subliminal message that is in contradiction to the one we are proclaiming verbally.

Are we putting an ethnocentric twist to the gospel that says this..."God loves everyone and offers salvation to all through Jesus, but those who are like me will get more love and blessing?"

When you become aware that you are communicating this message take time to review and remind yourself of the truth:

- I have come a long way to help you – But...Jesus came from heaven to provide you salvation
- I have studied for so many years so you need to listen to me – But...Jesus spent thirty years in preparation to serve for three years
- I gave up all of this to be with you – But...Jesus gave up his throne and position to walk with us

BS – Read Philippians 2:4-8. This is a description of what Jesus was willing to do in relation to his culture. What did

Jesus willingly change so that he could communicate God's love to us?

PR - Each person has a personal culture. They have actions, habits, manners that define who they are and impact how people respond to them. What is your focus, making sure everybody sees you and does what you want or making sure they see Jesus and discarding anything that interferes with them seeing him?

BWV - The bible represents God's willingness to work with many cultures to communicate his word to others. Their language was not a barrier but a means to accomplish His goal of telling us about his love and plan. Consider your culture. What could God use to proclaim his love? What could be a barrier to that message being heard?

Inquiry 41

Minimal Risk Maximum Gain

Phil 2:25-30

But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for

the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

We have hosted many visitors over the years; People who generally come for a week and others for a month or more. From singles to groups of more than 20. We have studied and watched them. Most have been a great help and blessing to the church and to us. A few have caused us to wonder why they came. However we want to believe that they learned something about the importance of mission work and then shared it with others when they returned.

The above passage is about a short-term missionary who was a great blessing in one way, but in another way became a burden to his host and a source of great concern. This passage also helps us understand a critical question to consider before sending people on short term missions trips. These same concerns can also have a direct relationship to the decisions about serving as a missionary.

Description – Paul gives a clear idea of what kind of people will be the most effective in serving and be able to do the work that is planned. He uses three terms, brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier.

Brother – These people see clearly their relationship to those they will be working with. This is my brother, my sister, they are my family and deserve consideration and respect. Families have a unique relationship and generally work hard at caring for its members. They are quick to make sacrifices for each other. Think of all the benefits that come from being part of a family. This is what we should expect from each other. Also consider how respect works in a true family,

the younger ones respect the older ones, children respect their parents. Now you have a good idea of what should be happening with the visitor and the missionary. Think of how parents care for their children and you will understand how the missionary needs to care for the visitor. A brother is a person I can trust and who, I know, will respect me and I will care for him

Fellow worker – This emphasizes the ability to work side by side in harmony. Good workers understand the nature of the task at hand and usually need only a minimum of direction and supervision. When someone says he is my fellow worker it often carries a sense of pride and confidence in each other. We know the work and we do it. When direction is needed there is no problem receiving the instructions. When it is time to do the work there are no complaints. When the work is difficult, even unpleasant, there are no complaints. All the workers understand what needs to be done, why it needs to be done and how to do it correctly in that time and place. All the workers know who is in charge, yet being in charge does not become a reason to avoid doing what needs to be done. It is not about one controlling everyone and expecting submission. It is about knowing what needs to be done and the right people doing their part. Fellow workers are those who share equally in the value, work and results.

Fellow soldier – I find this to be a very interesting concept. While it is possible to have problems and a breakdown in function in the first two areas, it is more likely happen in this area. A soldier is a person who understands how to follow orders and understands who is in charge and why they are in charge. It is simple. Those in charge:

1. Understand the place – language, transportation, logistics
2. Understand the culture – how to do the work in this place and why we need to do it this way.
3. Understand the people – they know what makes for good relations and success. It may not be about how many building blocks we lay, how many people attend, or what the response we see. It may be more about the relationships developed and the seeds planted.
4. Understand the risks – they know both what will happen if something goes wrong and the dangers that exist for the visitors. This could involve risks to health, safety, relationships and the work.
5. Understand the limits – they know just how much can be accomplished, how effective the work can be, and (if they are wise and observant) what each group and person can truly do.

Those who come

1. Expect to be cared for – to have a place to sleep, food to eat and the transport needed.
2. Expect to have help – to find the materials needed for the task and to receive instructions and directions to do the work.
3. Expect to have direction – to know where the work will be done, when to do the work and to receive information about how to act, dress, etc.
4. Expect to have protection – to understand what could cause them harm and how to avoid it, to know where they can and cannot go, to have a place of safety to stay and to work.

At the same time those in charge:

1. Expect to be heard when giving instruction.
2. Expect to be respected as the person in charge and representing the local ministry
3. Expect to be trusted because they are responsible for the safety of the visitors.
4. Expect to be asked when there is any question or change.

We could continue with this. But this is sufficient for us to understand the relationships that exist between the two groups and the benefits received when the relationships function correctly.

Purpose: Paul shifts and talks about Epaphrodito as the messenger of the group who sent him. Every visitor is a representative. They all belong to a local church or group and become a messenger. A better word could be courier. This person carries messages from one to group to the other and often in reverse. It may be verbal, written, or even an object. Anything that helps each group hear and respond to the other. Those who do a good job are appreciated and respected. Unfortunately, many do not understand just how important this is. It is much more than just delivering the goods, getting the job done, or meeting the people. It is about developing a relationship, sharing blessings and struggles, revealing who we are and learning about who they are. Those who do well are honored and become a channel of blessing and understanding.

Results: Now we discover what the goal should be. The church in Philippi sent a person to help take care of Paul. For Paul those needs were fairly clear. He was chained to two guards and was not allowed to go anywhere. He was

under house arrest. He may have had a need for help to prepare his food, or even provide for that food and other needs. Philippi sent a person to help Paul. The most important aspect was to bring Paul a word of encouragement and companionship. We do not know how many people were with Paul, if any. However there is some indication that others spent time with him but may not have been with him the entire time he was waiting for his trial.

So Epaphroditus was sent to help, to be an encouragement - to provide for basic needs, for the everyday necessities. Such as cooking food, washing clothes, cleaning, whatever was needed. This should be a key reason for anyone who goes, to do what is needed. They need to be ready to help, in any and everywhere possible, so that they do not become a burden on the resources and life of the people they have been sent to "help in ministry." Yes, the focus is the ministry but that ministry will be useless and empty if it leaves those we have been sent to help depressed, exhausted and frustrated. If this happens then we become an unwelcome messenger.

The fact remains that before we go we need to be sure of the message we want to bring. Are we bringing a message like one of the following?

1. We have come to show you how to do ministry.
2. We have come to see another culture and country and do some work.
3. We have come so you can help us fulfill our dream of doing mission work.
4. We have come so we do something good and enjoy a vacation.

These don't sound like good messages. Here are some others.

1. We have come to help you do the work God has given you to do.
2. We have come to learn about other believers around the world.
3. We have come to learn how to be more effective in our prayers.
4. We have come to share what God has given us and learn from you.

When we don't understand these ideas we place ourselves and the missionary at risk.

And that brings us to another area of concern. What are the risks involved in such activity? Actually there are two categories. The one is the risk of failing in the areas mentioned above which could bring shame on the gospel, the church, ourselves, and those serving as missionaries. This is not about the mistakes that are made. There will always be mistakes, misunderstandings, and errors in judgment. We are in a different world and we will have moments of failure and understanding. A simple apology and willingness to learn why what we did, said, or how we acted caused a problem is enough to move on. Rather, the risk comes from an attitude that creates a steady reoccurrence of mistakes and an unwillingness to understand, learn, and change. That can place the work or ministry at risk.

The second area of risk is what happens when we change environments and find ourselves in a world very unfamiliar to us. Our customs, practices and abilities just don't fit or function and can place us at risk. Here is a list of these.

1. Health – Most people have heard of Montezuma's revenge. If not, simple put, it is when the stomach cannot deal with the changes in food, climate, bacteria and stress and rebels in one of two manners, vomiting and/or diarrhea. If one is not careful this can be a very serious issue and place a person in the hospital. More seriously is the exposure to unfamiliar and exotic germs and diseases. Usually a list is provided for vaccinations and treatments needed to avoid them. Failure to heed this advice can be very dangerous, particularly because many doctors in the home country do not recognize the symptoms or how to treat them.
2. Security – Everybody learns to identify what is dangerous in their environment. If you live in a place that is hot all year round you learn to watch for snakes. If you are in the city you learn to know where you can or cannot go and the dangers involved. If you live in a cold place you understand the dangers of truly cold weather. Let's call this an awareness our personal radar system which is programmed with specific information to scan for. When we leave our environment and visit a new place our programming no longer functions. We don't know what is dangerous, where we shouldn't go. All the signals we are used to no longer exist. So often I have seen situations where people thought they were safe only to walk into danger and put themselves and others at risk. Missionaries are especially sensitive to this fact and work hard to become a buffer around their visitors.
3. Climate – sometimes the climate is not an issue and other times it is. When you leave a

temperate area to go to the tropics, the changes can be severe and dangerous. The danger of exposure to the sun, dehydration, and the heat are very real. There was a marine on a team who refused to heed the instructions of the missionary about hydration. As a result that person ended up in the hospital receiving IV's to deal with their failure to listen. Going from sea level to high altitude can result in altitude sickness. This can cause various problems from a simple headache to a type of brain edema which can be deadly. Those who try to do too much too soon without allowing for their body to acclimate are the greatest risk. Those who don't listen can become disoriented and wander off. I have heard several stories where they simply walked off a cliff to their death. Knowing this could happen is not enough to prevent it. It requires knowledgeable leaders who know the risks and are willing to take critical decisions for the safety of the individual and group.

Risk benefit analysis is a term applied to determine if an activity is worth the risks involved. Is it worth the finances involved, the personnel that will be involved, and other factors? This passage looks at how to evaluate the value of short term activity. Will it be worth the cost or could we be more effective by sending finances to support the work being done? Will our presence be a benefit or will it cause a greater burden because of the issues of food, housing and safety? Will we truly learn from those we come to serve or just go to and reveal our self-centeredness?

Missions involves risk. There is a need for those who commit their lives to the work and for those who come to

help in specific ways for shorter periods of time. As long as we understand clearly the purpose and results of our activity and are willing to be brother, fellow worker and soldier when it is necessary then we can accomplish great things. The time frame is unimportant, a week or a lifetime. The goal is to serve without becoming a burden.

BS - Read the following two scriptures, Acts 15:37-8 and 2 Timothy 4:11. What do you think was the problem and what changed in the life of John Mark?

PR - Have you ever felt like you caused more problems than you solved in a specific situation? Or as another phrases puts it "felt like a fifth wheel" of little value in relation to what was happening? Why did you feel that way? What could you have done to change the situation?

BWV - The bible is filled with stories of people who served for a lifetime and of others who carried out specific tasks for a specific time period. Take the time to find and study an example of each one. What can you learn about the risks involved in serving and the results that were gained? Sometimes God asks us to risk our lives. Sometimes our resources. Sometimes what we value. What are you willing to risk? The rich young ruler said he wanted to follow Jesus but in the end the price was too high? Why?

Inquiry 42

The value of nothing

Phil 4:10-13

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned,

but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

As I start this reflection I am getting ready to sleep on a cot next to a group of four people who have joined me for a week of construction, children's ministry and service in a small church plant. We all have left our comfortable beds and normal life to serve. We have placed the preparation of our meals (including the selection of menu and food) in the hands of people we have had only limited contact with to share in their world. We have placed our security in their hands. Though we were given the keys to our lodging, a youth from the church has been assigned us during the night as our security.

It sounds like a great opportunity to live in faith and learn to share in a special way what we have learned about God and his love with others. It sounds like we are making great sacrifices to help a local church reach out to their community and proclaim the gospel. It sounds like we are special people willing to go the extra mile to serve.

But just how far are we willing to go?

Paul's comments give us a significant baseline to use in understanding just what is involved. The key concept is the word 'content.' Content when in need. Content when I have everything I need. Content when I have abundance. Content when I am struggling. Content when I am on top

of the world and nothing can go wrong. Content in learning the value of having nothing.

So what are we really giving up during this week? And how do we express (reveal) that we are content?

Are we in need of anything? We will have adequate food while we are here. It will be different than what we normally eat but it will provide us with the nourishment we need. Our stomachs may rebel but that isn't because we are in need, just the fact that the food is different. We may struggle with the flavors, but that is not an issue of need but of preferences. So, no, we will not struggle with the need for food.

But will we be content? What are the issues that reveal we are content?

Simple things may reveal more than we imagine. Did we bring snacks from home to eat, because? Are we leaving food on our plates because we are ...? Did we say thank you to those who prepared the food? What did we decide to say? Bringing snacks isn't necessarily bad. And yes, in some cultures it is rude to eat everything given to you. (But did you ask someone to see if this is true or are you using it as an excuse because ...?) There are many ways to say thank you, be sure what you say is honest. Are you truly grateful for their care and service? Being content is not as simple as it might appear.

We can go through the same process for the accommodations provided for sleeping. We can talk about the impact of the climate and how we respond to heat, cold, rain, and other ways the weather can impact us and make us uncomfortable, ready to complain. Yes, it can be

difficult, but you only have to survive a few days. Remember your hosts live with it every day.

We can talk about language, customs, limitations of resources, differences in materials, and on we can go. Each time we will have the same collection of questions. But will we be honest with ourselves and see how our responses, comments, and reactions reveal that we really aren't content?

Am I content to be here with this group at this moment? Do I want to know them? Do I want to help them serve? Do I want to go through the struggle of helping them understand the culture and connect? Do I want them to experience being content?

This is not the first time to think through these questions. It is not the first time to deal with the needs, plans and hopes of a group wanting to experience missions. It is not the first time to organize work and ministry. But each time the questions are there, and each time I must hit a reset button and the process is restarted. That is because it is never the same. The people, the setting, and the ministry and so much more are always different in so many ways. Being content is so much more than what is happening at this specific moment.

Some would use the idea of being satisfied. But contentment is so much more than simply being satisfied. It is possible to satisfy all the requirements and expectations of the moment and still not be content. It is possible to fulfill the task and not be content.

Some would talk about being fulfilled. But that is also limiting. So many feel fulfilled for a moment and in what they are doing but very quickly begin thinking about what

is next. They have fulfilled the role, the expectations and plan of this moment, and it was fulfilling. But it is short-lived and they begin longing for more, for something different, or for a change of any kind.

Missions can sound very exciting. It appears to be a life that many feel should bring one to the point of being content. Yet it is susceptible to all the ideas mentioned above. It is possible to be satisfied with the work in progress and its accomplishment and not be content. It is possible to do work that is very fulfilling and provides a sense of self-worth, and still not be content.

But how do we learn to be content? What does that really mean?

Actually being content is not about what we are doing or accomplishing. It is not about where we are and what we have or don't have. It is not about whether the activity is fulfilling or seen as the right thing to be doing. If you weren't content before you began the activity then it will not make you content.

Paul states he has learned to be content. His life can reveal what this means.

When Paul became a Christian he tried desperately to tell others and was rejected. He tried to convince the leaders he had changed and he needed the help of others to succeed in this. In the end he was sent away for his safety and of those with him. When Paul reappeared he was a different person and the results were quite different. He taught, he preached, he traveled and he worked. He was beaten, imprisoned, attacked and hated, but he was content. At times he worked to live, and at other times

people provided what he needed. He dealt with being sick, shipwrecked, and hungry; but he was content.

This meant that in each setting he had peace that he was doing the work he was to do, where it needed to be done, and with the people that needed to hear. If that meant going hungry, struggling to survive or having everything and more than he needed it didn't matter. What it meant was that he trusted that God would always know what was absolutely essential for each moment, each step, each location so that Paul could tell others the good news and then disciple them so they could tell others.

He had learned to be content. This man who was in prison for his faith. This man who was waiting for trial before Caesar, a trial that could bring freedom or death. This man who had traveled a road marked out for him by God. A road of risk filled with blessings. He was content. He was the approved workman who has studied the word of God and walked it and he was not ashamed of his faith.

He is content.

It did not matter, where Paul was, what he was doing, or who he was serving. He was where God wanted him, receiving what God had prepared for him, so that he would be able to do exactly what God had determined was necessary for that moment. Whether it was for a few days or a few years didn't matter. Whether it was with a small group or in the great court of Caesar, it didn't matter. Whether it was choosing this road or that road, to go by foot or by boat, or to leave now or stay longer, it didn't matter. Whether one responded or multitudes came to hear the word of God, it didn't matter.

He was content.

He knew life was uncertain. He knew there would be dark days and great days. He knew some would listen and others would seek to destroy his words and even try to destroy him. He knew there would be times when there would not be enough and then, in a moment, all he could ever hope to have. The situation could change just that quickly. One group would become his eternal friends and another his enemies throughout his life. Paul knew all of this but he was content.

Are you beginning to understand what it means to be content? Do I need to be more specific?

Jesus, in the garden prayed, to be rescued but was content to obey. Why?

Stephen was being stoned to death. He was content and forgave those throwing the stones. Why?

David was being chased by Saul, always on the run. He was content and refused to kill Saul when he had the chance on two different occasions. Why?

Because they all had one thing in common. They knew God and knew he was always with them. Completing the task, fulfilling expectations, (both personal and of others), seeking to be satisfied were not their focus. Being in God's presence, doing what God wanted, and trusting God for the rest opened the door to be content no matter what the circumstances were, no matter what the work was, and no matter what was coming next. God would always be there and there would be enough.

The key to being content is in the learning process. What are you letting God teach you about his presence and his provision, in place of asking him for what you want and

expect. That is what we need to keep in mind in each activity, each assignment, each step along the road chosen by us and for us. Being content is learning how to seek God's presence and purpose, seeing the evidence given, and finally helping others experience the insight we have learned from being content.

So am I content to be with this group. Yes. It is another opportunity to experience the wonder of God presence and helping others in their journey. The goal now is to help them learn what it means to be content. Their original plans were changed, the location was changed, and their finances have been impacted, causing additional changes. My task is to draw on my understanding of being content and help them learn to be content. But this is only possible if I have learned to be content.

To do the work of missions is only possible if we understand what it means to be content. It is not about doing something fulfilling, this is not possible if we are discontented. The change from being unsatisfied, unfulfilled in our life to being contented is something we must learn. Stop and evaluate your level of contentment today. Is it based on factors that could change in the next hour or day? Or is it based on your relationship and confidence in God? Is it based on doing something of value (and who makes that decision) or being who God wants you to be? If you lost everything today, would you be content because of the one thing that cannot be lost?

Will you learn to be content and truly serve in the kingdom of God?

BS - Read the following scriptures Psalms 37:4; 145:19. These are two passages that are often used to define what we should expect from God. Yet often people forget to

study two key phrases. The first is to learn what it means to "delight in the Lord" and how that defines what the desires of the heart will be. The second is to understand the phrase "of those who fear him" in order to gain insight in defining the desires God will fulfill. How would this two ideas affect your ability to be content?

PR - Has there ever been a time in your life when you did not have what you thought you absolutely needed? The truth is many of us have never truly been hungry, truly been abandoned or truly suffered. So how would we learn to be content? How did you deal with not getting or having what you wanted? How does that relate to what Paul experienced in serving God?

BWV - John the Baptist was a man called of God. The people believed him to be a prophet. He lived in the wilderness. His clothes were made of animal hair. His diet was basic. Jesus was the messiah. He was so very different from John the Baptist. And yet he talks about not having a place to lay his head. He only has one set of clothes, a robe made by his mother. He is dependent on the gifts of others. Both had one thing in common, nothing was as important as doing the will of the one who had called him. Both sacrificed their lives in that process. Think about this. They had nothing but they had everything. How is this possible?

Inquiry 43

Success is the gospel

Col 1:3-8

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of

your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

So how do you measure success?

This is a good question and can be simple or difficult to answer. In the world success is measured by a number of things - increased salary, increased numbers, increased involvement and winning more than losing. Often in the church we use similar concepts - more people saved, more churches built, more pastors trained, and more missionaries sent. To a certain extent these are valuable ideas in measuring success.

But is this all there really is to the concept of success?

In this passage Paul uses another set of terms. He writes about the increased faith in God and love for others of the Colossians. He also writes about how they have been growing in their knowledge of God's grace and in their ability to bear fruit. These are the results of the gospel being proclaimed making it possible for the gospel to cross all barriers and reach all classes of people.

Why is the first measure of success not being used by Paul?

After the first couple chapters of Acts, we don't read about the number of converts, new churches, or baptisms, or any other reference to numbers in reporting what God is doing. Simply put numbers do not represent real results.

Level of faith – So many people say they believe in God but not very many live their lives by faith. It is possible to believe in many things and never have to risk anything because of that belief. Yet, it is when our belief is challenged that we will begin to understand if we have faith in what we believe. The Colossian church was praised for the evidence of its faith. People in other cities were talking about their commitment to the gospel and to proclaiming it to others. Their faith was known and others believed what they had to say because they saw the evidence in the lives of the Colossians.

Expression of love – True love is not based on what already exists but in the hope of what could exist. This group of people chose to love others; not because of the relationship that they currently enjoyed but the belief in a relationship that could be created because of their love for others. They loved others because they had seen the changes God's love had made in their lives and wanted this same blessing for others. They loved those of the family of God because they saw how this love had brought key people into their lives to teach them and expand their understanding of God. They loved and cared for those who taught them how to understand God's love and, in turn, to share it with those who needed to experience this love through them.

Producing fruit – It would be helpful to know if they had read Galatians 5 and Paul's description of the fruit of the spirit. Maybe they had heard the story of Jesus teaching about the vine. It is likely they had heard both and it influenced their lives and so the nature of the fruit being

produced in them. It was fruit that contained all the benefits of the present (the meat of the fruit) and all the possibilities of the future (the seed in the fruit). They produced what people needed to be whole and healthy in their relationship with each other and God. They also produced what was needed to sustain this development within their lives and future generations.

Knowledge of grace – These verses state that they grew in their understanding of grace. Day by day they took the time to study the Word and learn more about what they had received. This had a profound impact on how they lived their lives each day. When we understand grace, it opens the door to a greater depth of understanding of who God is and what he has done for us. This will then change how we live and how we treat others. This, in turn, draws people into a relationship with God which is the true purpose of the grace offered to us through Jesus' death on the cross.

Success is more significant than just counting numbers. It is far more profound. It is about God penetrating the world of the gentiles as well as every culture, every tribe and every people. Success is based on the concept of producing mature believers who can reproduce the same in others. It reveals the impact of taking the next step and disciplining those who have taken the first step of belief. Success is about receiving the power of the gospel to overcoming the world and the power of Satan.

Consider the following statements.

The good news changes our focus from looking at this world to looking forward to the joy of heaven.

The good news changes lives because it has one focus, God's mercy and grace towards sinners.

The good news is not about success, not about healing, not about power, it is about forgiving sin and calling people back to God.

The good news is about a relationship with God that changes our focus and purpose.

Some people consider success as having more, the good news is about having exactly what you need.

Attracting people is easy. Many groups have used varying approaches that do just that - for a period of time. They give away free food, clothing, and other material goods. This quickly attracts people. But this will not change them. This will not guarantee that they truly hear and believe. Jesus healed multitudes of people, he fed them on two occasions, and he even raised the dead. Because of these actions the people followed him everywhere.

But! The leaders rejected him, and suddenly, without warning the same multitude agreed to have him crucified. Rome had no interest in saving him. The disciples fled and went into hiding.

Then things changed. These 12 unlearned men proclaimed the gospel fearlessly and it was clear that they were followers of Jesus. Their relationship with him had changed them. This same group that had fled began to boldly teach the truth while those who had crucified Jesus watched, unable to stop them or create fear in the hearts of those who chose to follow Jesus.

Success and the gospel is about the change that occurs in the individual. Change that causes them to tell others, change that causes a hunger to know more about God, change that calls them to risk everything in faith to follow God and proclaim the gospel, change that cannot be denied and causes others to respond. This change will result in more hearing and believing. It will result in the establishment of more churches. It will provide for discipling and training.

Now we see why Paul focused on the level of the Colossian's faith, how they expressed their love for others, the depth of their desire to learn more, and the nature of the fruit that was being produced. This is true success that only comes when we teach the whole gospel as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:20. When this happens the whole world will hear because such a response is infectious and exuberant.

True success is not about the numbers but how we get to those numbers.

We are called to proclaim the gospel. When we do this correctly then the rest will follow quite naturally. Whether it happens immediately or after years is not critical. What is important is that we teach faith in God and love for those lost in sin. Believers must be discipled in the truth and taught what it means to produce good fruit, which brings life and health to others.

If one soul is gained, if one person truly becomes a child of God and is fully committed then more will follow. This is how the gospel works. If we just gain numbers then it may look good for the moment but will crumble under the weight of life. What we really need are disciples; people

who have faith, love without limits, the desire to pursue the truth, and produce true fruit.

Consider this... If you were to disciple two people and they did the same, and so on, how fast could we reach the world? If you repeat the process 27 times then it will take 27 cycles to reach 100,000,000 people? So if this process of discipleship took one year then at the end of 27 years we could reach 100,000,000 in 27 years. In just three more years we would reach 1 billion and that is with each person only reaching two others in the entire period. This is if everything were ideal and there were no opposition to the truth. It is also based on having people who have truly committed themselves to their belief in God and reproduce that faith generation after generation.

This is the kind of work Paul is talking about. In only 13 years of ministry the church expanded exponentially. Paul's greatest success was during his time of teaching in Ephesus. He trained others and they did the same until all of the province of Asia had been reached - in only two years. The ministry was so effective that the silversmiths became worried about the loss of business. No one wanted their statues of Diana anymore. When the people came to Ephesus they came to do their business, sit in Paul's classroom and share what they had learned with others.

Think about this fact. Paul told Timothy to find reliable people to train so they could train others. This is why the church grew and why it was so powerful. It was not about numbers but about changed lives. When lives are changed then it is natural to expect more to respond.

How do you measure success in your life? By the numbers, or by the lives changed and serving in the kingdom?

BS - Read the following scriptures Romans 1:8; Ephesians 1:15; Philippians 1:4-5. Consider Paul's comments and what he considered important in evaluating the development of a church or group of people.

PR - How do you think people would evaluate your life as a Christian? What would they point to as evidence that you are worthy of the kind of praise that Paul gives the churches in the scriptures above.

BWV - In this world billions of people drink sodas. Consider why they do and why you do as well.

As a Christian we are called to invite others to taste and see that the Lord is good. Even more to reveal that there is nothing else that will satisfy the thirst of the soul. What will convince them that they should drink from the fountain of life?

Inquiry 44

A costly lifestyle

Col 1:24-29

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. 27 To them

God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Sometimes it is hard to understand what it cost for us to receive the message of the gospel. It is also very difficult to understand how Paul could rejoice in suffering. We wonder how suffering can be good and beneficial. Yet to achieve most goals in life it will involve some amount of struggle and even suffering. Consider with me what our salvation cost.

First we need to remember what Christ did for us. He gave up his place in heaven to come down to earth. He gave up his power to live as a human. He gave up his life to pay our debt of sin. In each of these steps he experienced the pain and suffering that is common to every person. He suffered for us to prepare the way to be reunited with God.

Now let's look at what Paul did for the Colossians. He gave up his position as a Pharisee to follow Christ. He gave up the security of his home and family to preach the truth to others. He gave up his freedom so that he could continue teaching. In each of these steps he accepted the beatings and attacks of others in order to continue sharing the gospel. He suffered all of this so that others could hear of Jesus suffering to restore our relationship to God.

Finally consider what was done for you to receive the gospel today. Many down through the centuries have given up everything of earthly value so that the next

generation, the next group of people, the next tribe could hear the message. Many down through the centuries have given up their rights to live a quiet and normal life, to enjoy the benefits they could expect in their own culture to tell others of God's love. Many have suffered and died, refusing to renounce their faith and in doing so reveal the true power of God to change lives. There is not space enough to even begin to share their stories.

This quick review makes it clear that to bring the gospel to others, to tell them the truth, will always involve a cost and the possibility of suffering. While the offer is free, making the offer available is not. It costs time and resources to do so, even when it is the person living next door. We will have to give up something so that they will not just hear our words but be willing to consider what we are telling them.

So what will you do for the lost?

This is the question that each Christian must answer. The reason is quite simple. It is not possible to preach the gospel and teach others about God without answering this basic question. It will cost every faithful witness something in order to tell others about God's love and forgiveness. We will have to sacrifice. We will have to take risks. Answering this question will expose us to the possibility of struggling to live and even suffering so that others will hear.

Struggles and suffering are most apparent in the lives of those who leave their homes and go to another country, culture, and language. They give up their position in their church, in their community and in their family. They give up access to all the benefits of living in their home country. They give up the benefits of family, friends, and

resources of their culture. They will give up their way of living to learn how to live in another place. That means learning to eat, sleep, and live, like those to whom they have been sent to tell the good news.

They may find themselves in dangerous places. In situations that will put them and their family at risk. At risk of disease, of unfriendly people, of war and attacks by enemies of the gospel. They may find themselves in situations that will change their status and acceptance. In their home culture they know what their rights and responsibilities are. Now they have no idea what is expected of them and how they should respond to those around them. Added to that they have no idea what their role and responsibilities are. Life is confused and often it seems impossible to find the answers needed for the questions being asked.

They may find themselves rejected and isolated. They are strangers and may not be welcome. They are unknown and different resulting in isolation and misunderstanding. They are foreign and so their words and information are rejected because it comes from strangers, people who are outsiders.

In reality, it is not much different for those who are called to proclaim the truth to their neighbors, family, and people they work with. A willingness to share our faith in God may involve the risk of being isolated and ignored when we are bold enough to declare our faith with others. For many this thought alone is enough to prevent them from telling others the good news. We don't want to be seen as different or a fanatic. That involves too much risk and suffering. But that begs a question, why are we unwilling to do such a simple thing when so many before us have placed their lives at risk and suffered so we could hear the truth?

So what will you risk, what suffering is acceptable to tell others about Christ and save them from an eternity separated from God, from hell?

So far this has sounded very negative, very harsh, and very hard. Yet Paul talks about rejoicing in the suffering. In other passages he talks about the joy of suffering for sharing the gospel (Philippians 2:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:9). His focus was simple. He rejoiced because his sufferings made it possible for others to know God as he did. The apostles rejoiced when they were beaten by the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:23). James encourages us to rejoice when we face trials because it increases our faith and that gives us greater strength to live for God (James 1:2).

The early Christians did not enjoy the suffering, but they rejoiced in what the suffering produced. It opened the door for others to hear the gospel and to know God as they did. They discovered that there was a greater purpose in living and wondrous blessings were available when they willingly risked their lives and possessions so others could know God.

So, again the question, what are you willing to risk so that you can rejoice? What will you gain when you are willing to suffer so others will benefit from what you have learned?

One final comment. Paul says this is not possible in our own energy and strength. He states that he does all of this in the power of Christ that is working in his life. Our critical decision is to do whatever God needs us to do. At that point, we will discover all that God has available to strengthen and guide us. But we will never understand this truth, or receive the blessings or experience the joy

that is a result of this decision, until we take the first step and risk everything.

What will you risk, what suffering will you allow, in order to understand the profound mystery that God has made available to us, the incredible blessings that are connected to this understanding, and the joy that comes when others hear and receive the gospel?

BS – Make a list of people in the Bible who experienced a period of suffering. Read their stories and describe the situation and the results both for them and for others. Why were they able to survive what was happening to them? How were they able to help others?

PR – Have you ever experienced an extended period of pain or suffering in your life? This could be from the result of illness, injury, or personal loss? In the midst of the pain were there times of joy? Was it possible to rejoice? How did your attitude affect those around you? Were there others who could help you deal with your struggle? Why were they able to help you? (If you have not experienced such an event talk to someone who has and ask them the questions above.)

MT – Ghandi's willingness to suffer for his people made it possible for them to gain freedom from British colonial rule. But they remained trapped in the bondage of the caste system. Political freedom did not bring social equality. Mandela suffered 27 years of imprisonment to bring an end to apartheid. The fall of this social system has not greatly changed the economic conditions of many. In both situations there are still people trapped with no hope and a very limited concept of joy. Consider how Jesus suffering was the same or different. Why can those

still trapped in social and economic structures rejoice because of Christ suffering?

Inquiry 45

Preventing religious Alzheimer's

Col 2:8, 16-23

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. 19 He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

20 Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and

teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Alzheimer's is a disease of the mind that causes one to forget what he/she has done or said in the past. Those with Alzheimer's forget critical information, their identity, recent activity and other areas that involve the memory. A person with Alzheimer's will repeat statements just made, forget who the people are around them, and lose track of time and responsibilities. I am currently learning much about this debilitating disease in the life of a person close to me.

Alzheimer's also opens the door to influence and suggestion by those around them. The affected person will readily accept the statements of others as true no matter how false they are. They are easily influenced to make decisions that are in contradiction to previous plans and preferences. They may agree to the recommendations of whoever they are talking to, even when it is the complete opposite of what they have stated when their mind was clear. In other words, they are highly susceptible to the influence and desires of others.

A person with Alzheimer's needs the help, supervision and protection of others to avoid being taken advantage of and to avoid hurting themselves. For this help to be beneficial it needs to come from those who love them and whose goal is to protect them both physically and emotionally. It is not an easy role to fill when it involves

loved ones and seeing them struggle with remembering and not understanding what is happening to them.

When this person arrives in heaven their struggles will pass and their memory will return. It will be restored, giving them a clear awareness of their relationship to God and their final status before God. In this world, many are looking forward to the day when they become fully aware of God and are welcomed into their heavenly home.

At the same time, there is another large group that do not look forward to this moment. One's final home is often a piece of information many try to avoid thinking about and selectively forget throughout their lives. This is a type of self-imposed or selective Alzheimer's designed to avoid any accountability for their actions. This is to avoid any changes or confession which would be required if they were to admit they had any knowledge of God. They want to forget they have a conscience and so have an excuse for their ungodly behavior.

Throughout our lives God is seeking to communicate with each person. The Bible is very clear that no one will be without excuse. They won't be able to state they didn't know, or that they forgot the truth. There is sufficient evidence to point every one of us towards God. But we conveniently ignore, forget and then claim we can't remember what we have seen or heard.

If desire to forget was the only problem we had to deal with then we might have a better chance of finally listening and hearing. There is an even greater possibility of us overcoming this issue if there are people around us

who care enough to patiently remind us and keep on doing so as long as necessary. Unfortunately this is not always true. All too often there are people who would rather take all they can from those who are lost and confused. They tell lies and deceive others to advance their desires and goals. They revel in this open door to confuse, alter, and destroy the truth.

First, they convince themselves that there is no truth or what has been given is irrelevant and/or ineffective for this modern era. They say that God is no longer relevant and neither is any truth that comes from God or relates us to God. Then they seek out others who are lost, who have forgotten what they have learned, and prey on them. They create entire religious structures to convince them there is another way. This is so effective that many people are fooled and willingly yield control of their lives to these false leaders.

This passage provides two critical ideas for us to deal with both the danger of forgetting what God has given us and being trapped in the false world of others. Paul talks about the danger of the false words of others and he talks about the danger of creating our own interpretation of the word.

The first idea is to be very attentive to what other people are saying. This means being aware of two key elements in their teaching; the first being a list of regulations to follow along with a description of appropriate behavior. The next element is the need to depend on them for correct understanding of the truth. These people tell others that only they have the insight, background, or

personal connection with God in to order properly interpret the truth.

The second idea is to be very sure to maintain your connection with Christ and those who believe. It is as we study God's word and use it to judge man's truth that we can keep our vision clear and our memory functional. We need to be sure we do not allow anyone to come between us and our relationship with God.

A sad truth is that once a person begins down the road of Alzheimer's it is very difficult to change the situation. A person with Alzheimer's can easily believe lies and can become horribly mixed up until they don't know what is truth and what is a lie. In the same way, one who has had a loss of memory of the truth about God, and distorted it, requires greater effort to restore the truth. It is amazing how tenaciously people will hold on to the lie, once they have forgotten or lost the truth. (An example: In 1978 in Guyana, cult leader Jim Jones convinced over 900 people to drink poison. They all died, believing they were doing the right thing.)

The reality is that everyone has been impacted by this selective memory loss. We all, in some way, are trying to avoid the truth and forget the facts. We have read the warnings of Paul. We are the ones who must be diligent to proclaim the truth and protect others from the deception of false teachers. The only protection they have will come from those who have found the truth and are willing to declare this fact for all to hear.

BS - Read Deuteronomy 6:1-12; 8:11-18. What has God done in your life to help you remember his word? What are you doing to be sure you remember his word and promises? How can you use this information to help others remember?

PR - Think about the last time someone confronted you with something you had done wrong, a sin, an error, or a mistake. How did you respond to being confronted? Did you want to find a way to escape, to find a way to excuse your sin or mistake? Or did you admit what you had done and thank them for reminding you of what was correct?

BWV - Every person who avoids the truth, who claims they didn't know, are following the original lie in Genesis. It was designed to confuse and misdirect each person who listened to it. The goal was to get all mankind to believe that we knew more than God. The plan was to convince man to forget what God had said and follow his own way. This lie has been the source of mankind's selective memory loss and opened the door to replace the truth with a thousand different forms of the lie. The lie says that we can be like God and know everything. As forgiven members of the family of God, as a people whose memory has been restored, we have a great responsibility to understand what has happened and help others remember who created them and loves them. This is not an easy task. Thankfully we have the Holy Spirit to help us remember and teach us what to tell others. What can you do today to make it easier for the Holy Spirit to use you to help others remember?

Inquiry 46

Updating the readers

Colossians 4:7-9

Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. ⁹ He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

The news media plays a big role in our lives. It informs us of current events and it helps us connect to each other in times of challenge and need. Let me share a few examples from the history of putting a man on the moon.

Putting a man on the moon

The news reported the decision to put a man on the moon. This announcement inspired a whole generation of scientists and engineers who diligently worked to solve a multitude of problems and issues to make this possible. The news kept the world informed and we shared in each success and groaned with each setback.

We celebrated when John Glenn became the first American to circle the world. We held our breath as the first American, Edward White, took the first walk in space. We watched in awe as we received the first views of the dark side of the moon. The world was transfixed as Neil Armstrong became the first man to step onto the

surface of the moon and utter those famous words, “one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”

These reports kept people informed and the funds flowing. It was a vast project and a costly one. It focused on getting one person to the moon, yet millions have benefited from the technology developed to make this all possible (from the development of water filters and insulation to cordless tools, CAT scans and the GPS network).

Thousands worked behind the scenes to develop the programs and technologies needed to accomplish the goal. A few enjoyed the glory. Even fewer have ever actually stood on the surface of the moon. But millions have benefitted from the work that was done.

One of the key elements for this great success was communication. It was important that each person knew what was needed and how they were doing so that they did the exact work that was necessary. Supervisors needed to be kept informed of the overall progress. This was important in order to maintain a flow of resources and ensure that the products and programs were ready when they were needed. At another level it was important that everyone involved in the project be kept up-to-date on the overall progress. It was important that they see and hear what was happening.

On the day that a man walked on the moon all the world was watching. Are we treating missions with the same kind of intensity?

Paul was very concerned that people knew what God was doing through him. His letters revealed much about his work and the conditions under which he labored. He took time to explain the issues that he faced and how they affected the progress of the work. On several

occasions he gave detailed information about the struggles he faced personally.

When necessary, Paul sent specific people with clear instructions to report the news. In this letter, Paul states that he is sending two people, Tychicus, to report on the conditions of the work, and Onesimus, to report on what is happening. Many news stations do the same thing. They have more than one reporter sharing different aspects of the same event. One talks about the actual event and the other about how people are reacting to what is happening. It helps us understand better.

Communication is an essential part of the process of making commitments and reaching our goals as missionaries. We also require communication to maintain our focus when we encounter struggles and barriers. Paul was very aware of this and the impact it would have on the continued work of missions. He was diligent in his communication and worked hard to be sure that people could connect with what was happening.

We often make the mistake of thinking that Paul was the only one doing the work. In reality there were probably thousands of people involved; each doing their part to make it possible for the few to travel and proclaim the gospel where it had not been heard. Paul shared this idea in his letter to the Romans. It was one of the key reasons he wrote to them. He wanted their help and was willing to spend time with them, teaching and discipling, in return for their help in his plan to visit Spain.

Paul had developed a network of people all focused on the same goal. Each one contributed at various levels, locally and regionally, to carry out the mission of God in proclaiming the good news to every tribe and nation. What Paul and the others accomplished in only 30 years was only possible because of a great host of people who

were involved. Some gave, others prayed, many provided key resources and skills when needed. And many more received the truth and told others.

They didn't have radio, television and newspapers back then. They depended on word of mouth and hand-carried letters to keep everyone informed and connected. And they did an incredible job of doing so. They did it so well that within 30 years of Jesus' death the gospel had reached Rome, India, Ethiopia, Southern Russia, most of north Africa, Spain and a large portion of what had once been the Persian empire.

To be effective, to build a strong team, we as servants in the kingdom need to learn to communicate. We need to be ready to share both the victories and defeats, the gains and the losses, our strengths and weaknesses. We need to help others understand how they are truly a part of what is happening and that their involvement is essential to the work being done.

The only time when communication might be restricted (a news blackout if you will) is when it is physically dangerous or impossible to do so. It might be that for that moment or in that location they are unable to communicate. Failure to communicate physically doesn't affect the ability to communicate with God. Those sent to serve are never completely without support. Lack of communication does not cause a breakdown in prayer or in the desire to keep others informed. In those situations God has a unique way of keeping both those sent and those supporting them in touch spiritually. God makes other avenues available to challenge people to pray and to keep the missionary aware that people are praying and supporting what is being done.

It is a key responsibility of every missionary, of everyone in ministry, to prepare reports and keep those

involved informed about what is happening. There is no excuse for not doing so. There should always be time to write a letter, a note, anything if we are to build strong commitments to the work God has given. This keeps those being sent accountable and keeps those who pray and give connected to what God is doing as a result of their prayers and support.

Paul had a plan. He wrote letters and sent people to keep others up-to-date. This made it possible for more people to get involved and for the gospel to reach far beyond Paul's physical location.

Do you have a plan to communicate? Do you understand what you should be sharing with others and how to share that information?

BS – Read John 17 and think about how Jesus was reporting to his Father what he had accomplished. Pick a letter of Paul and consider how the letter reports what Paul is doing to that group. What should we report and why?

PR – Consider the different situations in which you are expected to report about your work, or perhaps others are expected to write reports about what you are doing. What areas are covered in such reports and evaluations?

BWR – The Bible tells us that everyone will give an account of their life to God on judgment day. There are two key results of that review. Jesus described it as separating the sheep from the goats and He used a set of actions for deciding who was a sheep and a goat. Read Matthew 25:32-46. Paul later suggests that those who are called Christians will pass through a second process of testing their works; a test of fire (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). He says many will suffer loss but be saved. If someone were to read this evaluation what would they learn about you and your service?

Inquiry 47

Powerful Evangelism

1Th 1:4-6

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

I remember driving in the city of Georgetown and seeing a large billboard announcing the coming of an evangelist. This was not unusual. Many churches organized such campaigns and often invited well known evangelists like Benny Hinn and Luis Palau to come. This time I did not recognize the name of the person. Again not unusual. With dozens of denominations in the country it is very common not to recognize everyone who comes.

The thing that stood out to me was the announcement that was included along with the name of the person, location and dates. It declared, in very large letters, that everyone should come expecting to receive a miracle. It caused me to wonder if we can truly declare in advance that people will be healed, that miracles will occur, and that the power of God will be on display in such a visible manner.

There are many cases in the book of Acts where such miracles occurred. Those first weeks of the new church in Jerusalem were accompanied by miracles (Acts 2:42). Ananias and Saphira were struck down dead for lying to

the Holy Spirit and what followed was another round of miracles and signs (Acts 5:1-12).

There were more miracles confirming the work of Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:13). This time one person was not interested in the miracles for himself but in obtaining the power to do miracles and benefit from the people coming to him. Simon Magus was condemned in strong words for seeking miracles before seeking God (Acts 8:18-24).

The next time miracles are mentioned is during the time of Paul's ministry in Corinth. It states that God did extraordinary miracles through Paul (Acts 19:11-12). There were also other events that revealed power, but not in the context of evangelism or in the manner we would expect. For example, Paul's life was preserved in Derbe after he was stoned (Acts 14). An earthquake broke the chains and gates of the prison in Philippi (Acts 16). Paul and everyone on board the boat were saved from drowning (Acts 27).

But in none of these situations are the leaders calling the people to come and receive their miracle, their healing. God was in control and chose what to do, how to do it, and when it would happen. In many places there is no mention of miracles; such as in Paul's time in Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and many more.

Paul does declare that miracles and signs were common but he clearly states that everything was done through the power of the Holy Spirit. It was not Paul declaring he would perform miracles or signs or anything else. What Paul does declare is that he proclaims the truth.

Not in fancy words. Not in words of the philosophers or the sages, but simple and direct words.

1Co 2:1-5

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

So then if there were no miraculous healings, no earthquakes, no other wonders, what does Paul mean when he says the message came in power?

Before we answer this question we need to keep another thing in mind. Miracles do not save people from their sin and miracles do not guarantee that a person will choose to believe in the gospel. Why do I say this? Here are a few examples.

1. People of Israel - Forty years of miracles, food, water, and clothes that didn't wear out, but still they complained and failed to trust God.

2. Judges - Over and over God saved the people of Israel and yet each time they returned to following false gods.

3. Elisha and Elijah – These two performed incredible miracles and yet the people did not listen and turn to God. Only the foreigner Naaman chose to believe.

4. Jesus - Three years of miracles and still the people chose to save Barabbas and crucify the Son of God.

5. Pharisees and religious leaders - They heard the teaching, saw the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles, and refused to accept the truth of what they saw and heard.

6. Cripple at the pool of Bethesda - He was healed but Jesus had to warn him that he still needed to stop sinning or something worse would happen (John 5:14). He didn't listen and instead of being thankful, reported Jesus to the leaders. He was more worried about being accepted by the leaders than listening to Jesus, even after he was healed.

So back to the question. What would be a greater expression of the power of God than the healings and ability to drive out demons?

In 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 Paul mentions three things that reveal true power of God in their lives.

1. They became imitators of Christ.
2. They followed Christ in spite of severe suffering for that decision.
3. They turned from following idols to follow Christ.

Think about these items and what they reveal about the true power of the evangel and the power of the Holy Spirit to use our proclamation of the truth.

Let's start with #3.

1. The Thessalonians left their false gods and demons behind. This was not a simple decision. We have seen the pressure that is exerted on people when they want to change their religion. For many faiths, it is important that everyone participate in the rituals and customs of the local belief. The fear of the people is that if one person should refuse then everyone will suffer and be punished for that decision. However, many are willing to change if they believe the benefits are significant enough. Another aspect is that it is also difficult to give up the control and security that is often linked to fulfilling the rituals and actions of worshiping false gods and serving false religions. Yet, true power is revealed when a person stands firm in their decision to follow God even when they know they will be attacked for their faith in God.

#2. The Thessalonians made the decision to follow Christ in the face of severe trials that caused them a great deal of suffering. Usually when people are threatened they will do whatever possible to avoid suffering. The threat of attack or punishment will often force people to return to their traditions, even when they know the truth. The opposition against those who converted to Christianity was fierce and forced Paul to leave suddenly. They formed a mob and started a riot to attack those who followed Paul's teaching. The opposition even followed Paul to Berea to continue the attack. Even with this level of intimidation those who accepted Christ refused to recant and faced the attacks courageously. They received power to understand and maintain their faith. This was a

powerful revelation of the power of the gospel and of the Holy Spirit.

#1. They chose to be imitators of Christ - We are all called to be imitators of Christ. This is not difficult when everyone is supportive and does not oppose your decision. However it is difficult to be kind to those who attack you. It is even more difficult when to imitate Christ means forgiving those people and loving them. In Acts 7 the story of Stephen shows us what it means to truly be an imitator of Christ. Even as they attacked him, as the stones were flying, as he collapsed from the pain, as he was at the point of dying - he forgave those who attacked him. Stephen courageously declared the truth, even as Christ did, knowing what might happen. He chose to follow Christ in declaring the truth and forgiving the ones who were responsible for his death.

No promises of miraculous healing, no promises of signs and wonders were sought. Yet, the power of God, the power of the gospel was truly present and revealed to all. Actually, instead of healings and signs, a great persecution began. It is at this point in history that the greater power of the gospel was released. Instead of hiding in fear, people began to proclaim the truth wherever they went. They did this even though they knew they would be pursued, hunted down by Saul. They did this and more people responded to the message. The changed lives, the commitment to the truth, revealed a greater power and the change God wanted everyone to experience.

Paul closes this passage with this summary, "you know how we lived among you for your sake." The real power of the message was a life changed by God that all could see; a living Bible for all to observe and verify what God could really do. The power revealed a life of conviction, a life that could face any trial, any situation, and remain strong and true to the words that were spoken.

Your life is the evidence of the real power of the gospel and of the Holy Spirit. Miracles are temporary. The healing experienced today will not last. Everyone will die at some point. Wonders are temporary. They fill a specific need for a specific reason. Paul was imprisoned several times. Only once did he gain freedom as a result of a wonder. The other times he remained in prison. The third time he was imprisoned he was martyred for his faith.

The only miracle, the only true act of power of the Holy Spirit that is permanent, is our salvation. Only this and our relationship with Christ will last into eternity. So should we avoid praying for healing, avoid praying for God's provision and intervention? Should we avoid telling people what God has done and can do? No. But we need to be clear, as Paul was in this passage, that the true power of the gospel is its ability to change lives and restore broken relationships with God. And through this process, we will understand the truth and what is really important in life. We will reveal the power of loving others as we learn to be forgiven and express what we have learned to others.

For Paul this was the power of the gospel. Miracles may open doors, pave the way ahead, but they do not have the power to change a life and forgive.

BS – Read 1 Peter 2:20-21, 3:17, 4:15-19. Explain why Christians suffer and what God is trying to accomplish through us. Which has more power to change people, miracles or suffering?

PR – Risk is a difficult concept to understand. What risks do you take each day? Why do these risks exist? Why are you willing to take those risks? How do they compare to the risk of suffering for the truth and risking your life? What are you willing to risk your life for? Now ask the same questions about miracles. What miracles do you experience every day? Why do miracles exist? What miracles do you really want in your life? Finally, what risk will you take to see God's miracle of salvation?

BWV – God chose not to save James and Stephen from a martyr's death but later He saved Paul after apparently being stoned to death in Lystrum. He saved Peter from prison but allowed Paul to be imprisoned three different times. Sometimes God used his power and at other times he withheld that power. But always the people involved honored God with their lives and their commitment. So when you pray for protection or a miracle, what are you really seeking, safety or God's honor?

Inquiry 48

The fly on the wall

1 Thessalonians 1:7-10

And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Do you know what people are saying about you? Do you care what they are saying? More importantly, why do you need to know what they are saying? And, if you don't know what people are saying, why don't you know?

Often people say they would like to be 'a fly on the wall' when they are curious about what is being said or happening when they are not present. Such a comment indicates that someone is being excluded from the conversation and events.

There are two groups that might make such a comment. The first group is the ones who are doing the work and desire to know how they are doing, whether it is good or bad. They want to know so they can correct their errors, regain needed approval, and be able to continue doing what pleases those who supervise their work.

The other group are the supervisors who are not doing well at gaining the respect of those they are responsible for. They sense there is tension but because of their demeanor, style of leadership or other relational and work ethic issues they become isolated from needed input. As a result they have a desire to know what the workers think of them. Unfortunately these people have little interest in building better relations as a way of improving the situation. The most common purpose for such eavesdropping is to find a way to exert their control and force their people to improve their work.

So why do we have such situations where these groups seem desperate to know what others are thinking? Why do people have so much fear of sharing key information that could improve relations and the work being done? Why do we fear the opinions and evaluation of others especially as relates to the status and quality of the work being done?

So many of us struggle to trust others. There is a fear of what might happen if in fact the truth is shared, both praise and criticism. Praise - because there is a fear that such an action may lead to competition and inflated egos. Criticism - because the belief is that any criticism, even in constructive, beneficial forms, will create a loss of enthusiasm, or a lack of desire to continue, or worse, opposition. Such decisions actually breed more serious problems in communication, confidence and commitment to the work. This results in gossiping and false information in both directions.

At this point these groups wish, even more, that they could be that 'fly on the wall' to try and understand how things developed and if anything can be done to recover. What happened to bring them to this level of such loss of confidence and trust? It is likely that they have not paid

attention to the needs and development of others from the beginning. They have not listened nor sought out their comments and evaluation. They may have problems with pride and an overvaluation of who they are. They likely have focused more on themselves and less on others.

In this letter to the Thessalonians we have an example of what happens when someone chooses the other option, to be open and honest about how people are doing and what is happening. Paul does not wait, does not think too long. He quickly tells them what he is hearing and proceeds to approve and encourage them. They are doing a good job and people are responding, even better people are talking about what is happening. So much so that word reaches Paul of their faith, their choices, and how people are responding.

There are, in reality, two issues here. The first - how do we know how others are reacting to and evaluating our activity? Some would say if we are patient enough we will learn. Actually that is not enough. It is about whether we trust the people we are working with. This trust is built on honesty and confidence. It allows freedom for people to respond and tell Paul what is happening. It also means Paul is not afraid of them taking more control, doing more work, and expanding their ministry. The result is freedom to share what is happening, with the knowledge that Paul will not feel threatened, but instead joyful at how they have moved forward, even without specific direction from him.

The other issue - what are we doing to let others know how they are doing?

The people working directly with the Thessalonian church were aware of the growth and development that was

occurring and took time to specifically share this fact with others. This information was also communicated to Paul, the key person responsible for the work, who in turn let the church in Thessalonica know what he was hearing and that he was pleased.

This letter also deals with a number of critical theological issues as well as other concerns that were being raised by the church in Thessalonica. But before Paul deals with any of them he takes the time to let the church know he is hearing excellent reports about their life and commitment as Christians. He also takes the time to report on what he is hearing in specific areas; the Thessalonians are doing a great job of proclaiming the gospel and living as followers of Christ. They are a model to others.

Look again at Paul's comments. He does not try to establish control, does not try to assert his authority. He knows they have issues and these will be dealt with later. But he also knows they are young in their faith so he chooses to focus on what they have accomplished and the good work they are doing. His obvious joy for them and with them will make talking about the changes needed much easier and more effective.

We, as leaders, need to be willing and ready to share the progress people are making and do so in a positive way. It is a key part of effective leadership. It is our job to be an encouragement and let others know how we appreciate the people we are working with. Also if we are a supervisor of others and receive positive reports it is wise and necessary to let those we work with know that we are hearing good reports.

So often we forget this area and focus only on the problems, mistakes, and struggles. If this is all we see

then when we try to deal with the problems we will encounter greater resistance to our advice. If we cannot see the evidence of growth then how will we expect them to listen to our admonishment, or that of anyone else. We will only convince them that we have no confidence in them.

If our eyes are blind to what God has accomplished and what is happening, then those we are teaching and discipling will begin to exclude us from their gatherings and our relationships will be damaged. There will be no words of gratefulness and respect.

This process definitely flows both ways. Learning to praise and respect people for what has been accomplished will encourage them and go a long way in helping them to overcome other areas where there is need for correction and growth.

If we are careful and correct in our praise and how we respect those we work with then there will never be a need to be a ‘fly on the wall.’

BS – Read the following: Luke 12:42-43 and 1 Thessalonians 4:11. Now read the book of Titus. Explain the key points in trusting others to do the work they are assigned to do and how to supervise them.

PR – Reflect on what was required of you before your parents, employer, and friends began to trust you.

BWV – Learning to trust others is about learning the difference between trying to be perfect and being honest about who we are, our limits and weaknesses. Explain how this will make a difference in your ability to be trusted and them in trusting others.

Inquiry 49

Pain and misery - revenge

2Th 1:5-10

All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. **6** God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you **7** and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. **8** He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. **9** They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power **10** on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

Revenge is profitable (Edward Gibbon).

Or.

Revenge is a dish best served cold (old Klingon saying).

Or.

Revenge is sweet and not fattening (Alfred Hitchcock).

When trouble comes, when people make our life difficult, when we are insulted and ridiculed for our faith, it is easy to think about getting even. But do not worry, the time will come when all the scores will be settled and the debts tallied.

Many of us who are now part of the church used to be like those being condemned. We were idol worshipers (1 Thessalonians 1:9) and were likely involved in a number of pagan practices often associated with such worship. We were, in many ways, like the people mentioned above who will one day receive their just reward, everlasting destruction and separation from God.

Thankfully, as Christians, we have chosen to believe the message and will escape this fate and be among those who share in God's promises and live with him for eternity. How fortunate that we have heard the message and chosen to obey the gospel.

The day will come when we will find the relief we deserve. Those who cause us to suffer will no longer trouble us and they will get exactly what they deserve for causing such suffering. They will be punished. They will receive full payment and more for the suffering they caused. We can rejoice that we are no longer a part of their world and that we will join with all those who believe in Jesus and glorify his name.

Revenge will be done. Be patient and see how God treats sinners and those who serve Satan.

Now, pause and consider the ramifications of the thinking illustrated above.

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Now let's start over.

I don't think Paul was encouraging the Thessalonians to condemn those who tormented and attacked them for their faith. On the contrary, there are many comments in the

two letters he wrote about loving others and how they are to be an example for others. Paul states clearly that the gospel message rang out from them and reached to others (1 Th 1:8). He is helping the Thessalonians understand what they had been saved from and the urgent need to love those who persecuted them lest they be condemned and punished by God.

Revenge and justice are very close to each other in the results that may be gained. Revenge does not want anyone to repent or realize what they have done until it is too late. Justice reveals what awaits and the price a person will pay if they do not heed the warnings until it is too late. Revenge exacts payment at all costs. Justice metes out payment fairly and clearly and when there is no other option.

It is so easy to slip from justice (that God will deal justly with our opponents) into revenge (that wants the evil-doer to get what he deserves as soon as possible with no possibility of repentance.) Justice, the justice of God, allows room for repentance, revenge does not.

So revenge is sweet in the sense that we are pleased when someone gets what we believe they deserve. The saying, "It is best served cold" means it requires a cold heart to do so. But God does not seek revenge nor does he have a cold heart. He does not desire the death or destruction of anyone. His heart is heavily burdened by the fact that many will not listen and will one day taste death in its totality.

The message here is that we do not need to worry about getting even or making sure the enemies get what they deserve. Why? Because it wasn't that long ago that we deserved the same thing. In the end, God will settle the

score one of two ways, payment exacted from the person, or payment received through the sacrificial blood of Jesus.

So do we really want to see God tally up the score and enact justice as soon as possible?

It is good that Paul discusses the two concepts, those who oppose God will be punished and those who obey Him will celebrate Jesus' coming. Missions is about doing everything possible so that as many people as possible will face the day of judgment with Jesus at their side.

So instead of rejoicing at the death or suffering of our opponents, we should be on our knees praying for them. We should receive their insults and attacks graciously in the hope that God will use our love and patience to touch them before it is too late.

Revenge is neither sweet, profitable, nor a good thing to serve to others.

BS – Read the following: Proverbs 24:17-18; 24:29, then read Matthew 5:11-12 and Romans 12:14-21. Explain the difference between revenge and the vengeance of God.

PR – How did you feel when someone mistreated you? Did you deserve it? Were you really better than them? Did they deserve to be treated the same way? Consider this, the person who mistreats others is actually the weaker needier person.

BWV – How did Jesus and Stephen respond to those who killed them? Respond to the following scripture. Jesus said if we only do good to those who do good to us we already have our reward. It is when we do good to those

who cannot repay us or do not deserve such treatment that we truly understand the forgiveness we have received. (Luke 6:32-35)

Inquiry 50

Photo op

1Th 2:1-9

You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. **2** We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. **3** For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. **4** On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. **5** You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness. **6** We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, **7** but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. **8** We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. **9** Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

If you wanted to do a photo shoot of a missionary what would be the best place and time to do so? Would you

want them to come to the studio and prepare a special backdrop for them? This would allow you a great deal of control over the content of the picture. You could select the angles, posture and clothing for the missionary. It would look clean and professional. We have done this type of picture every four years or so for our prayer card. It is always a nice picture of us.

Maybe you would like to treat it more like photo journalism by following the missionary around and taking pictures as their life happened. This means being ready to take a picture and realizing you won't have a second chance to take it, and you won't have control of the background, and other aspects of the photo. Real life is that way. It is risky because you will see the reality of life, both the good and the bad. You will see the responses of those watching and participating. Your goal is to share the good moments, but life is not so simple and there is always more revealed in the photo than you expect.

Actually the best photos reveal the reality of who the missionaries are, what they are doing, and who they are serving. Nothing like real life to expose people to what is really happening! Do I dare say that such images will also expose those who really are serving from those who solely give lip service to the idea.

So here we have Paul the great apostle, the one who did more to advance the gospel than any other person, contemporary, past or future. And instead of highlighting a great success, a powerful event or victory, he chooses to reveal reality.

It is a gritty set of images.

Photo one – an image of Paul speaking while people around him are insulting and ridiculing him. What would you do if every time you shared the word of God or tried to explain your faith the people physically attacked you for your belief? Few people want to see this image. When we want to encourage people to evangelize we carefully avoid these images for fear we will discourage others. Not Paul.

Photo two – an image of Paul suffering. Paul was often attacked. He was stoned, chased out of town, and beaten with rods many times. Nobody wants to see these pictures or we reserve them to play the emotion card. Not Paul. He put himself center stage. It was part of his reality. Paul didn't avoid it. Bottom line - it is often with great suffering that great victories are won.

Photo three – an image of Paul proclaiming the word in the synagogue. This is the image we want to see. We want to see that people are doing what we sent them to do. We want to see the teaching, the preaching, the baptizing and then those who respond to do the same. Paul made sure that the people understood the purpose of his ministry and so he included this image that would help people see very clearly what it means to serve in the kingdom and its mission.

Photo four – an image of a group of leaders offering Paul money and inviting him into their house. There are two reasons behind this action. One is to support and encourage Paul. The other is to gain control of Paul and restrict him from proclaiming the truth about their lives. There will always be those who want control. There will always be temptations to deal with. Paul did not hide this truth and by doing so helped himself remain focused. People who give and send may try to exert more control than is appropriate. And there are always those on the

receiving end who think they should have more control than is proper. They want the benefit, position, control, and material and will use many avenues to get it. (Paul at times accepted such finances and at other times chose to support himself as a tentmaker in order to avoid such situations.) Paul was clear about finances and made sure people understood that his dependence was in God.

Photo five – an image of people forcing Paul out of the synagogue. Paul was not always accepted by those who you would expect to welcome his message. So often these people became his greatest opponents and Paul often had to revise his plans. This image helps us keep a crucial factor in focus. Sometimes the door we think should be open is the one closed, but then other doors open. Again we often avoid this image thinking it may reveal us as a failure. Not Paul. One closed door simply meant there were other doors waiting to open. Even with these changes, his goal never changed: to proclaim the gospel to the lost.

Photo six – an image of Paul teaching a group of hungry seekers by the river. This is another image that excites us. It is about results. It is about accomplishing what we set out to do and then seeing those who respond going the next step and being prepared to continue the work. Yet there were times when people turned against Paul. This did not stop Paul and he continued to invest his life, always believing in the power of the word of God to change a sinner into a child of God.

Photo seven – an image of Paul sleeping on the floor while someone covers him with a blanket. So often we struggle with these images. They can easily be abused, used to convince people they need to give more so that the missionary can live comfortably. Yet we need to understand that the life of those we send is often

drastically different. The missionary may not be dealing with uncomfortable living conditions but about the discomfort caused by living in a foreign culture, adapting to settings that are unfamiliar which can cause us stress and discomfort. This picture always needs balance. All too easily the focus can be on the stressfulness of the life, the strangeness and not on what is happening. The focus needs to be on the care being received and the relationships being developed. Paul did not let his imprisonment affect his ministry and often that setting became the bridge to communicate with people who needed to hear.

Photo eight – an image of Paul sewing tents. This image is about taking care of one's needs. Life is life. It doesn't matter where in the world you are you still have the daily needs of life. You need to eat and that means taking time to cook and eat and then clean up. You need to deal with caring for shelter, water and so on. It may seem a bit mundane but large periods of time must be given to this. Yet it is in this daily snapshot that people learn who we are and that we are human beings like them. Besides, how many contacts are actually made in the routine of daily life?

Photo nine – an image of Paul being escorted by friends as he leaves the city. This is the ultimate photo. This is what happens when we have done the work we were sent to do; when we have dealt with the struggle, suffering and challenges that are always present, and we choose to follow where God chooses to lead us. If we are faithful, then the day we leave will be sad but joyful. We will have built a church, a community of people of faith in God who become our family. Paul's letters are full of such moments of celebration. He was successful but knew when it was time to leave.

So what kind of photo shoot are you planning today? Is it highly controlled and with prepared backgrounds? Is it designed to protect you? Is it designed to make you look good and hide the blemishes?

Or

Are you ready to be real? Are you ready to share the struggles, the challenges, the victories, the relationships, the life and service as it really is? If you are, when you get to that last photo the people will really see what God has done and not just your carefully selected photo shoot.

BS – Read the following two passages about Paul’s life. Philippians 4:3-7 and 2 Corinthians 11:21-30. How do you feel about the image Paul is portraying about the life of a missionary?

PR – I have seen the following pictures on facebook, personal blogs, and websites of people who are serving as missionaries. Comment about whether you think they are appropriate and why.

Picture of garbage piled in front of their house.

Picture of an exotic place visited during their vacation.

Picture of the beggars and the homeless of the country where they serve.

Picture of a birthday party of a national friend.

Picture of their home.

BWV – Jesus’ life was filled with encounters with real people and real life. He was often criticized by the leaders

for his willingness to do so. He also chose to live a very simple life, dependent on others for his daily needs. These two factors discouraged many from joining him and following his example. Imagine what pictures Jesus would take to reveal the true purpose of his ministry.

Inquiry 51

When will I be big enough

2Th 3:1-5

Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. **2** And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. **3** But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. **4** We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. **5** May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

The church in Thessalonica had a difficult history. Paul was only able to spend a few weeks there before the Jews drove him out of town. He traveled on to Berea and then Athens but his thoughts often returned to this group and wondered how they were doing. Paul sent Timothy back to encourage them and he moved on to Corinth. When Timothy returned he brought good news and a few concerns. So Paul wrote the first letter of Thessalonians and sent it to them. A few months later he received word that the church was doing well but there was still some confusion about the return of Christ.

Overall the reports suggested that the church was growing and that the people, in Thessalonica and beyond were

being reached with the gospel. Paul encouraged them and sought to draw them even further into the ministry of evangelism. He asked them to pray for him and to continue the good work they were doing.

There is an interesting factor to consider here that will impact how we relate to new believers and the new churches that are being planted. It relates to the question of when to release control to local leaders and when they are capable of becoming involved in the mission of God.

This has been a point of discussion among missionaries and mission boards through the centuries. Opinions range from releasing control after a very short time frame, to waiting and working for decades before letting go of control and expanding beyond the local work. The debate covers areas of leadership development, availability of resources, and other related topics. In Paul's day, if he could stay to disciple and train the new converts he would, but never for more than a few years. In the first generation of missionaries there were very few that stayed in one place for a long period of time. They taught and trained, then under the direction of the Holy Spirit, selected local leaders to continue the work and moved on.

Their example represents two critical concepts. 1. A confidence in the promise that the Holy Spirit would fulfill the promise given and reveal the truth to those who believed. 2. A confidence that God could accomplish his plan with anyone and in any place as long as there were people willing to obey.

Paul dedicated the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians to the first concept; it is not the word and wisdom of man that makes a difference. It is the simple message of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit that changes the

lives of people and makes possible the revelation of God's presence and power. This is a concept that is repeated over and over in Paul's letters.

The second idea is not dealt with as specifically but is revealed in Paul's prayers for the churches that are included in almost all of his letters. He is always praying that they will grow in their knowledge of God. This knowledge will open the doors to service and the proclamation of the gospel. It is further evident in various letters as he comments on their faith and how it has impacted the lives of others and encouraged others in their faith.

Does this mean there is no place for a longer-term relationship? No. Paul often went back to places he had lived to provide further instruction and encouragement. Sometimes he sent Timothy, Titus and others to visit these places with the same purpose in mind. But they were always sent with the intent to help continue the process of local development and responsibility for the work.

Another interesting fact is that Paul never looked at the age or size of a church when considering whether they should be involved in proclaiming the gospel. He expected it of them; from the very first day of their existence. Proclamation was to be the norm and it was not to be restricted to their immediate location. Notice again in the introduction that Paul praises the people for their faith and service because it is having an impact, not only in Thessalonica, but in the entire region and even beyond.

This is something we must always keep in focus as we serve in this world. The message and its development is not dependent on us. If we try to make the work

dependent on our presence, our ability, our insight, or any other issue that keeps us in a position of control, then we are laying the foundation for future problems. We may believe that our presence and control will help to avoid certain problems. However, it may also mean that we are preventing others from learning key skills, or at the very least, delaying that process. The truth is there is no guarantee that our presence will reduce future struggles.

The other item to keep in focus is that we may be, unintentionally, creating dependency in ministry. Maintaining the idea that churches can't do anything because they are too young, don't have enough training, or have limited resources is an error. Almost all of the churches in the book of Acts were young and small with limited resources. Yet they were the churches that carried out the mission. The only church that had any strength or size may have been the church in Jerusalem. And this church needed special prodding and direction from God to move beyond itself to other peoples and locations.

The truth is, any group of believers can begin praying about missions from the day they are organized. Any group of believers can begin giving. Their offerings may be small but Jesus clearly told us that even the smallest amount given in faith and obedience has great value and power (widow's mite). Any group of believers can become involved in proclaiming the gospel and reach out beyond their community to others (clearly stated in this letter of Paul).

A key part of our task is to learn this truth for ourselves. Anyone, anywhere, at any time, with whatever resources are available can be involved and be responsible for the work of God. Why? Because the work does not depend on us but on faith and confidence in God and the freedom given to the Holy Spirit to work in and through us. This

should be the reality behind everything we do in evangelism, missions, church planting, and leadership development. It begins the moment we pray to advance the kingdom of God. This truth is based on the assumption and reality that every church can do the same work that they are praying to be done in the lives of others.

The kingdom does not advance on the heels of great people and monumental efforts. The kingdom advances because everyone is involved.

BS – Compare Jesus' promise in John 14:25-27 and 15:26-27 with Paul's words of encouragement to the church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:1-10). What can you learn about trusting the Holy Spirit to care for the work?

PR – Are you a controller who likes it when people are dependent on you? Or are you an enabler who does everything possible to let others share in the work?

BWV – A key question is whether we truly trust God? Do we believe that the one who called us is faithful? Are we ethnocentric and selfish or Christocentric and generous? Is our ministry defined by our way or are we open to different perspectives on what can be done and how it can be done? These are critical questions that will either open the way to deeper growth or shallow dependence.

Inquiry 52

1 Timothy 1:12-14

Application Guide

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

How often have you filled out an application form? Did you fill out one for education, for employment, or for a loan? These are the most common applications.

Application forms are also used to apply for membership to an organization or program. These could be organizations like service clubs, training centers, gyms, and others. Any time a group or organization wants to evaluate a person they ask him/her to fill out an application form. This involves providing basic information about who he is, where he lives and other similar data. Some applications stop at this point.

Others, however, ask for more information regarding one's education, employment experience, and references from various persons regarding how that person performed as a student or employee. At some point, depending on what is being applied for, some personal questions may be asked about personality, health, financial status, and even criminal record. These must be answered honestly because the second step in an

application process often involves verifying the information that has been supplied.

The organization may contact the police, they will check credit scores, and they will speak with former employers. The applicant may even be required to supply a set of fingerprints. In some situations the organization will require a health checkup (especially when applying for life or health insurance). There are even positions that will require a person to take personality tests and meet with a specialist in this area.

The above passage is interesting in that Paul is writing about his history. In Biblical days, there were not likely any formal application forms to be a missionary. Yet Paul was very aware that there were requirements that were essential to being able to do this work. What is interesting to note is that Paul attempted to serve as soon as he became a follower of Christ but this caused a great deal of concern for those near him (Acts 9). Paul was barely allowed to meet the governing body because of his past history and their distrust of him. It took the help of Barnabas to arrange that meeting. In the end, the leaders decided that, in spite of how well educated Paul was he just was too big of a liability and so they sent him home.

But Barnabas did not forget Paul. When the time was right, he went to find him and invited him to come help with the work in Antioch. But it would take another year of preparation before God felt Paul and the church were ready to begin the work of carrying the gospel to the world.

Here Paul is writing to Timothy, a young man just beginning his time of ministry. What is interesting is how Paul starts this letter. This not the kind of material we

would usually expect as part of a resume. He starts out saying just how bad he was. He was a blasphemer – he hated Christians and hated the idea that God came down to earth in human form. He denied vehemently this idea and attacked, both verbally and physically, all who supported this interpretation of God’s word. He was a persecutor – he abused and tortured people in the attempt to make them renounce their belief and abandon their faith in Jesus. He probably had many Christians jailed and even killed. He was a dangerous man. Even more so, he states he was a violent man – he gladly stood as a witness against Stephen. He approved wholeheartedly the decision to stone him. He was a man who could explode in fury when people refused to bow to his will.

Usually we would not include such information as part of our application. We try to avoid our failures, our weaknesses, our character faults and focus on why we would be a valuable addition or asset to the organization we are applying for. But, Paul’s comments before and after are significant for us to keep in mind.

Given strength – As Paul reviewed his life and how he entered into the work of missions he realized that every time he tried to do something in his strength it was ineffective, inadequate and doomed. It wasn’t until he learned to turn to God for strength that he was able to truly serve. Yet, he still struggled with this area and God sent a thorn (2 Corinthians 12:7) to help keep him focused on God’s strength and not his own.

Shown mercy – This was a trait that Paul (Saul) had very little of. He was not a merciful man. He realized that his ability to serve at any level was only possible because God chose to be merciful and forgive him. Furthermore, he learned that mercy was made available to him through people like Barnabas. This was a difficult lesson for Paul

and he did not always apply it to others. For example, he rejected John Mark and allowed this conflict to cause a division between him and Barnabas. In time, Paul saw this fact and learned to appreciate John Mark. He learned to receive mercy and show it to others.

Considered faithful – Paul knew that he had seriously damaged the faith and lives of many. For the devout Jew, being faithful to God was based on a legalistic system that had little concern for the value of people. Paul had done this but he had been completely unfaithful to the truth of the gospel. Yet God saw Paul's commitment and knew once redirected Paul would apply that same focus to whatever task he was given.

Grace, love and faith poured out on me – Before, Paul's life was based on fulfilling a legalistic prescribed program in order to have his application as a Pharisee approved. It had nothing to do with such things as grace. His legalistic lifestyle deserved acceptance. Love was irrelevant. Serving the law had very little to do with love and everything to do with compliance and will power. Faith was not in God but in one's ability and control. All of this led to a very angry and frustrated man who lashed out at anyone who opposed him and interfered with his ability to reach his goals. However, after his salvation, Paul's life was completely committed to one purpose, helping others find the forgiveness and restoration he had experienced.

We all will fill out many application forms in our lives. They are important but not as important as the one we must fill out for God. But this application is not so much for God to read it is an opportunity to understand what God wants us to learn about ourselves and so discover how to let him rewrite the information on the application.

Look at the following list of terms and consider the statements made about each of them.

Skills – What skills do you think God has provided you with? What does God want you to do to hone those skills for his service?

Availability – What does it mean to be available for service in the kingdom? How would you evaluate your level of availability? Are there attitudes or goals in your life that God needs to change in order for you to be completely available?

Needs – What are the needs that you feel you could fill? Why do you think you could do so? What is your desire to serve based on?

Experience – How important is experience in serving God? How do you know if your experience is adequate for serving? What/who determines what experience you need to gain?

Readiness – This idea follows closely on the idea of experience. What determines when a person is ready to go, ready to serve, ready to obey God? How will you know if you are ready?

Faithfulness – Are you a faithful person? Have you ever given up and quit? How would someone decide that you would be faithful in the work assigned?

Relations – Do you get along with others? Have you attacked others when they don't support you or like you? How do you treat your enemies?

Pattern of Trust – Is there any reason people should trust you and your life?

Known for reliability – Do you make promises, and more important importantly, keep your word?

None of these attributes are easily dealt with or easy to answer. We are more interested in sharing our success and what we have accomplished. We are very reluctant to consider our failures as the place to begin in learning to serve God. Yet it is the focus of what Paul shares above and in other scriptures. There are two places in Paul's letters where he lists facts about his life. The one lists all the qualifications that gave him status in the world, but he concludes by declaring that every one of them is worthless (Philippians 3:7). The second list is about all the sufferings and attacks he has suffered for proclaiming the gospel. To him such suffering meant nothing (2 Corinthians 11:30).

All the things we hope will impress others really mean very little. The key to an application for serving in God's work is not about what we have accomplished but what God is doing to create in us a tool which he can use. Many times he sees key qualities that simply need to be redirected. Other times he sees the errors and applies ample doses of mercy, grace, love, and faith to change us as needed.

Remember Paul attempted to serve and failed, not once, but twice (Acts 9). He caused more trouble than he was worth and so was sent home. He accepted that judgment. But based on the action of Barnabas he didn't go home to pout. He went home to learn and allow God to work in him. His earlier resume was based on what he had

accomplished. His new resume was based on what God had accomplished.

Take time to review the list of terms above, but instead of doing so from your perspective, review them from the perspective of what God has done or will do to make your application for service acceptable.

One of the dangers of not evaluating what would appear on such an application is that we risk creating a false confidence in our ability and not faith in God. We think more of our self-worth than our value as a child of God. This can result in us becoming more of a detriment than a benefit to the work. Evaluating honestly will help us see the truth. This is not about gaining approval. God already knows us and our abilities. He is waiting for our honesty before he assigns us to our area of responsibility.

BS – Review the lives of Jacob, Moses, Samson, and Gideon. Were these men qualified to serve God? Each had a key problem in their personality. What was it? What lessons did God prepare for them so they would be qualified to serve?

PR – Write out a resume as if you were filling out an application to serve in the kingdom of God.

BW – Reflect on the qualities the world looks for in those chosen to be ambassadors. Read again the passage above and write out a list of qualities desired for an ambassador of Christ.

Inquiry 53

The world not the church

1Ti 1:15-17

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Jesus came into the world. What does this mean for us to today? Why is this saying so important?

It means Jesus did not just come for a visit. He came to live in the world. To do so he became part of a particular group; a group prepared by God to make his life on earth as effective as possible. We always need to keep this in mind. Nazareth was part of a bigger environment called Galilee. Galilee was part of a bigger location called Israel. Israel was part of the larger context which is the world. Jesus did not come to the church; it did not exist at that point in history. The church came later and has the responsibility of announcing the arrival of Jesus. But first Jesus came for the world.

Jesus came into the world. He was not the employee of any specific organization. As a matter of fact, he rejected any structure that sought to take possession of God and to control others, especially those wanting control of who could have access to God. He was not the property of a denomination, or mission, or other ministry of the church. The church did not create Jesus and give him life, Jesus

brought the church into existence to carry his message to the world that he had come to save.

Jesus came into the world. He did not come to buildings. He came to people. He met a woman by a well, and another woman in the street following the coffin of her son. He met people on the seashore, on the mountainside, and walking down the road. He went to people's houses, places of work, and on occasion, to the synagogue.

Jesus came into the world. He came in search of people. He came with a plan to go wherever they were to help them find God. He went to a cemetery to meet a man rejected by society. He traveled in the open remote areas to meet the lepers, people avoided by all because of their disease. He met people in their times of pain and sorrow, in times of celebration, and times of searching.

When we arrive at a place of ministry where do we go? And when we leave that ministry what will others say that we did while we were with them? Did we go to church and wait for people to come? Did we sit in our house and wait? Or will they say we went to them?

Jesus came to save sinners. This shocked the leaders and many others. They didn't want to be saved from sin. They wanted to be saved from invaders. They didn't want to submit to God's power, they wanted a world of power because they had been made politically comfortable.

Jesus came to save sinners. He came to those not burdened with their own self-worth and hypocritical life. He came to those who confessed their failures, accepted their limits and understood the nature of the gift of forgiveness. He came to the lost, the ones who knew they were lost. While He focused on these He also came for

the ones who believed they deserved a place in God's kingdom, who believed their obedience to the rules gave them a special position and that God would honor them for their attempt at being good enough. To prove that they too would have a place in the kingdom, that God wanted to restore them as well, he forgave them even as they crucified him. Later in Acts we are told that many of this group became followers of Jesus (Acts 6:7).

Jesus came to save sinners. He went looking for them. He spent time with them. He revealed God's love for them and chose to walk in their shoes and be a part of their lives. He found them because they wanted to be found. Some did not believe they were lost. As a result when Jesus came they had difficulty seeing him. Their self-centeredness and egoism were like a house of mirrors making it difficult to find and meet the real person and help them see their need to be found. So many false images. They would not be found until they stepped out from behind the mirrors and false images of their hypocrisy. Only a few were able to do so.

Jesus came to save sinners. He came to help us see the nature of our sin and the damage it has done to our relationship with Him. He came to reveal what that relationship could be. He came to save what had been lost. He came to help each person see just how lost he is. As Paul states, "I (each of us) was the worst of sinners." Jesus' presence reveals this truth and opens the door to true and complete salvation.

When we arrive at a new place of ministry, what is our purpose? Do we come with the hope of making someone's life better? Do we bring material goods so that others can have better health and greater comfort? Do we come to save them from poverty and many other maladies that we believe damage a person's life, health and so on?

Do we come to make a difference or to satisfy their concept of what it means to be saved? Saved from poverty, political strife, unhealthy conditions and...? Or do we come to be sure that they understand that their condition in life is unrelated to their true status before God? Food, clothing, justice and other such help will not provide the fundamental need that must be filled: forgiven.

Jesus came to reveal mercy, to reveal that no one deserves to be forgiven. To reveal that everyone is under judgment. Yet, in this process, Jesus reveals the extent of God's love; that God is ready to give us something none of us deserve.

When you arrive at your place of ministry, what are you revealing in relation to mercy? Do your actions cause people to believe that only some people are worthy of mercy?

Jesus came to demonstrate patience. He revealed the patience of God. He gave himself completely and patiently taught all who would listen. He showed the extent of God's plan and how God has been patiently working and preparing the way to salvation so that Jesus could come and each of us could be restored.

When you arrive at your place of ministry, how long are you prepared to work? How long will you struggle so that others will be convinced that you care and that the message you share with them is true? Are you ready to be patient and gently lead them until they understand?

Jesus came to the world and we received the opportunity to believe, be forgiven, and receive eternal life with him in heaven.

What does your arrival provide for those you meet? What do you hope they will receive because you have come?

BS – Read about the life of Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33:9-15. The people expected the king to lead them and help them live. What happens when we only think of ourselves? How hard is it to recover from the effects of a selfish attitude and its effect on others?

PR – What is the evidence that others believe you care about them?

BWV – The world is desperately in need of people who do more than say they care. They want to see the evidence in lives committed to caring. How much time is necessary to prove we care about a person, a group of people, or those of another culture? How much time did Jesus commit to revealing his love? Respond to the following statement: “only those ready to commit their entire life will be able to convince others they care.”

Inquiry 54

Taking it on the chin

2 Timothy 2:10-13

Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Here is a trustworthy saying:

If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he

will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

I would not call this one of the more pleasant passages to read when trying to encourage a person to hear God's call to mission. Words like "*die*, and *endure everything*," don't make us feel comfortable. We are too focused on our comfort and safety and enjoying life.

I see this truth in a variety of ways when we have visitors on the mission field. I am not referring to the dangerous and difficult things that would place their lives at risk. I am talking about their reactions regarding food, clothing, no access to internet or their cell phones, and their expressions when asked to do something different.

People want to have their comfortable life and all its benefits while serving God. They don't want to sacrifice or endure anything. So many say that they feel called to missions because it looks exciting and it would provide incredible opportunities to see the world. But when reality sets in the number of people who say they will go reduces quickly. This number reduces even further when they discover what is really involved.

Many people envision going to Africa and in their mind they see the herds of wild animals, the natural wonders like Victoria Falls, the Rift Valley, and so on. I have visited Kenya and have seen the animals and some of the wonders but I have also encountered some of the reality: foods that were totally unknown, living conditions that were unlike anything I had experienced, and very limited access to resources and materials with which I was familiar. After this experience I thought I was ready for the move to Sierra Leone to serve as a missionary with my family.

When we arrived, the capitol city of Freetown was in a complete blackout, my body began to react to the anti-malaria medicine, and the struggle to learn the language became a reality. And that was only the first week. The next week we arrived at our new home to find that there was no electricity (the main generator was broken and the backup could only be used once a week because of a fuel shortage in the country). Our house needed a lot of repairs. The kitchen ceiling was falling down in places, the screens on the windows were damaged and on and on went the list. Our mission director and his wife only stayed with us two days and then left, they had other work to do, and there we were, unable to speak more than a few words of the language, and alone. The next few months presented a continuous barrage of situations and changes.

We learned to eat monkey, wild rats, rice with a variety of sauces, (some of which looked very unappealing), and more rice and more rice. We began to deal with a daily flow of people who wanted us to help them. They all had problems and thought that we had enough money to solve them. We had to navigate through a maze of new customs and structures for living. In other words, we had to learn to endure so that in the end we would know how to survive, communicate, and finally be able to live as part of this new world to which God had sent us.

We endured, but Paul also mentioned dying. “If we died with him, we will also live with him.” It would be so easy to respond in the manner of some, “No problem I can learn to die to myself and give up my desires to serve.” And that is an appropriate answer to a point. We are told that we must die to ourselves and to the world that has held control of our lives. We need to let go of the things of this world, (and today they are present in an overwhelming abundance). Yet, we still can struggle at a profound level to disconnect from the world and its

growing web of stuff, even when we think we have left it behind.

How about dying to your family? In the past this was a significant issue. Leaving one's family behind was a major decision. Jesus used some really strong phrases in describing this and how important this decision is. He told people they must hate their family if they truly wanted to love him. He told one person to let the dead bury the dead (he was referring to letting others take care of his parents). Jesus reacted fairly strongly to his family when they demanded to speak to him. He stated that his true family were those who follow and obey him.

Young missionaries hardly consider this a concern. They set up facebook accounts to share pictures. They open skype accounts so they can communicate daily with family and friends and do this in real time video. Instead of celebrating key holidays and birthdays in their host country they make quick trips home to be with family and abandon the people they are trying to minister to and welcome as part of God's family. This has at times become so damaging to the development of the work in some countries that many missions are banning any travel home during the first term of missionary service, except for extreme emergencies (funerals, serious illness).

Dying really begins when the ADVENTURE wears off and true living begins. When you realize that what looked so exotic from afar is of only passing interest to those who live there. Dying really begins when the STRANGE food becomes the norm and you realize that what you eat at home is strange to everyone around you. Dying really begins when you realize your FAMILY is too far away to truly be a part of your life and you learn about your new family.

But that is not the full extent of the concept of dying. Now comes the real point of Paul's comment. The TRUTH, Jesus died. He died on a cross because he chose to come to us. The TRUTH, Paul died. He endured beatings, he was put in jail and much more. Once the stoning was so severe everyone believed he was dead and stopped throwing more stones. But, in the end he died. He was crucified in Rome for his faith in Christ and his proclamation of the gospel.

Let's return to Sierra Leone. The history books include this country as part an area of Africa that became known as "The White Man's Grave." Malaria, cholera, typhoid and other diseases took an incredible toll on those sent to the region. Also, a number of missionaries were killed in various uprisings, both political and religious. While we lived there a number of missionaries were killed in Liberia and a doctor and his family were killed in the eastern province of Sierra Leone. During that time all expatriates were evacuated because of the threat to our lives. We went back three months later. Within a year all missionaries were evacuated a second time and we were not allowed to return because of civil war.

Last year we received the report of a single missionary serving in a restricted country who died from an explosion in his kitchen. In the news this week (July, 2014) are reports of a resurgence of Ebola in West Africa and that over 600 people have died (the number is now over 3000). Serving Christ in another country can be dangerous. Paul's comment is not just about dying to self or to others. It is about being willing to DIE so that others will hear.

He closes this passage with the word faithful. This is not a decision that is made once and is final. It is a decision that has to be made and lived out daily. You may survive or live through one struggle or threat only to encounter another one. Or the struggle may involve years of effort to deal with it and overcome it. Mission work requires a lifetime of commitment. Every day the decision to endure and be ready to die must be reviewed and renewed. Some days this will be easy, the work is going well. Other days it will be a decision that requires the full extent of your energy and it will not be enough. Then it will require faith and grace to keep moving forward.

The phrase “take it on the chin” is appropriate. This refers to the ability to absorb a blow and keep going. Jesus used a related idea when talking about negative responses from others. If they slap you on one cheek offer them the other (Matthew 5:39). If the work, the people, the situation walks up and slaps you then take it on the chin and move forward.

Our responsibility is to endure, and to endure, and to endure, even to the point of death. Because we are already convinced and clear about what will happen to our life, we belong to God and will live with him. But those who are lost in sin do not have this knowledge and they desperately need us to endure, to be ready to die and to faithfully take it on the chin - whatever comes our way - so that others will see a living example of Christ and respond to the truth.

So how is your chin today?

BS – Read the following passage: 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. Write a clear definition of the cost of serving in the

kingdom of God. Then write a description of the blessings and benefits.

PR – What are you willing to sacrifice today to be deemed worthy of serving?

BWV – Paul declared that to live is Christ and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21). In that passage he was referring to death but in many ways this is true of our life as a Christian as well. Look up some of the passages on dying to self, family and worldly possessions. Now write about how dying to self makes it possible to gain Christ and much more.

Inquiry 55

What you are there for

Titus 1:5

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.

Do you know why you are where you are? Do you know the task you are to do and how it relates to the development of an organized church?

There are a lot of key concepts hidden in those questions. They are like landmines ready to explode and ruin the work you are trying to accomplish. There are so many possibilities for service in the world of missions today that it can be easy to lose sight of what we are really there for. If we are not careful the end result will not be a fully equipped mature church that is a contributing member of

God's work. Instead the church will become dependent, weak, and immature.

Many people have tried to work out the stages of a church's development from the planting stage to the mature church that is ready to repeat the process. A colleague of mine, Lindsay Cameron, defined 5 such stages in development. They are establishing relationships, teaching believers, preparing spiritual leaders, transitioning roles, and reaching beyond.

These stages can be useful in helping to determine how to assist in the continuing process of development. But it also is a bit restrictive because no church should be in only one stage. This is because it should be regularly adding new members and so it would be constantly dealing with people at different stages. What is of greater importance is that as the process of development proceeds the church needs be actively involved in all the levels so that people in the church are being equipped, mature and can lead the church.

Actually a good analogy would be that of the extended family. A family is always in development. It is always adding a new generation and developing the existing ones to take over the responsibilities of the older members as they move to the next stage. So you have infants who need all the help and support they can get; children who are learning about their place in the family; youth who are beginning to take on more responsibility in the family; young adults who have learned the structure and are reproducing and being given greater responsibility; older adults who move into the role of counselor and historian for the younger ages; and finally the elderly who have earned the right to enjoy the fruit of their life and provide a reference point or context for the following generations. Within the family there are a variety of roles and tasks.

No one is responsible for everything and everyone is expected to contribute. There is also a continual influx of new people through marriage. They bring new perspectives and new skills and the possibility of continued existence and adaptability to the family.

Can you begin to see the church?

What happens if someone interrupts this process? Say one of the elderly refuses to let go of control. They don't want to share key knowledge and responsibility with others. If they suddenly die a vacuum is created and this loss of knowledge and continuity can adversely affect the family. Or say a child manages to have excessive influence? Have you ever seen a family dominated by the desires and behavior of a child? What happens when this happens? Key lessons are not learned that are necessary for a later stage and stagnation sets in. Everything is focused on the present and no preparation is made for the future. Key resources may be squandered and a lot of time is wasted in yielding control. This selfish attitude will have ripple effects in the development of each following generation who is either deprived of needed care or is taught the same pattern.

Let me illustrate from my life. We were asked to move to Sierra Leone as the principal of the Bible School and help in various programs of training and discipleship. Our purpose was clearly defined; train students to become pastors and help in planting churches and in the maturing process of the church. As a part of this goal we were to disciple others to take over our roles and work on making the Bible school less dependent on funding from the USA. We labored for six years in this process and were planning on turning over a number of key leadership roles to others, including the role of principal. Our focus then would be on development issues and the long range goal

of sustainability. Unfortunately the civil war came to our village and we were not able to return to Sierra Leone. So the questions began. What would happen to the school? Where would the funding come from? And so on.

During the civil war, the Bible School was forced to close. It would be several years before it reopened but it did and with national staff in charge. The agriculture program survived as well and began to produce marketable products to help fund the financial needs of the school. It has been almost 10 years since the school reopened and we are hearing great reports. Also, in spite of and during the war, we learned that the church continued to plant churches and grow.

We were not the ones who started the Bible School but we played a part in its history. We were asked to do a task and prepare people to take over. This is what Paul is telling Titus. "I sent you with a task in mind." He was to take care of unfinished business (this is not defined) and appoint leaders for each town and group of believers. Paul had done one task, he had planted and disciplined the first group. Now it was time for the next task, the unfinished business, which would make it possible to appoint leaders. Taking care of the unfinished task would be key to creating an environment where the newly appointed leaders could function effectively. Again there is no clear idea of what that task was but Paul was very clear that Titus was not to get involved in other activities. He was to do what he was sent there for.

Earlier I mentioned that if key concepts are not dealt with properly they can become landmines and be very destructive to the work.

Poor focus – This can create all kinds of havoc. It is like trying to drive in the fog. If you don't have really clear idea of where you are going it is very easy to miss a turn or veer off the road. We need to have a clear idea of our assignment and what we are doing so that when distractions come, and they will, we will keep to the path.

Misdirected efforts – There are so many good things that can be done, or should be done, but they interfere with what must be done. A missionary cannot do everything and if you use up your energy and resources in the wrong area then what needs to be done is never done. So many ministries are well-meaning but lose sight of a key issue. The need to reproduce a mature church. If we use up our resources in the wrong area then we may not make it to this destination. We may have helped many people but have left no one and no structure in place to continue the work. It will remain dependent or it will die.

Misunderstanding of what is really needed - When we don't examine carefully what the real need is, we may be in a constant fight with the people we are trying to work with. They tell us what is needed but we already have a plan and have not allowed for the possibility of adapting or changing direction. I am not talking about working with a group who only wants their needs met. This is about listening to those who understand the culture and the issues in order to better accomplish the task.

Succumbing to the 'take care of me' syndrome - This is a common situation and so many programs are developed to take care of people. It is a dangerous area because there are legitimate needs in health, clean water, and economic development. In fact, the list is dangerously long and can become a black hole for resources and people if not carefully examined and incorporated into the greater reality of what we are there for. Digging wells is a good

idea but needs to be tied to the ministry of the church and the proclamation of the gospel. Unfortunately, I have seen a well drilling program that turned into a nightmare because of misuse of equipment and lack of maintenance (lack of parts and adequately trained people). This great benefit became a negative testimony.

Titus was likely capable of doing much more but Paul was very clear in this text. An expanded version of Titus 1:5 may read something like this. “I sent you for a purpose. Don’t let the people, the circumstances or any other event distract you from doing what I sent you to do. You are there to help the church become mature and able to carry out the work God gives it. You are there to make sure there are leaders capable of leading by the time you leave.” It is clear Titus was not sent there with the idea of never leaving. We need to keep this in mind as well. Whether it is a year, 10 years, or more. At some point the church should not need us anymore. They may still like our help in key areas from time to time, but not out of necessity, rather as equals sharing together in the work.

BS – Read the following scriptures: 1 Chronicles 15:16; John 15:16; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 1:3. These are only a sample of the passages that deal with the selection of people for a task. You could also read about the selection of Saul, Gideon, David and others. How were the selections and assignments made?

PR – Why were you selected for what you are doing? Think about why you got into the college you did, why you got the job you have, why your spouse chose you, or any number of other possibilities that reflect others choosing you. What can you learn about yourself from this?

BWV – God knows better than anyone the best way for us to serve and the best work for us to do. So often we get focus more on where to serve than how to serve. How important is the place of service in using your skills and doing the work God has for you to do?

Inquiry 56

The partners

Tit 3:12-13

As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there. **13** Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need.

Do you have partners in your work? I don't mean those who support and pray for you. I mean other groups and ministries that you work together with, or share specific skills with, to accomplish ministries that may be greater than one group can accomplish on their own.

Or, are you a loner?

Do you isolate yourself? Not because of your location but because you don't have time to think about others and only want to focus on doing your work, where you are.

Do you know the broader context in which you are working? Not the bigger context of your organization but the bigger context of the place where you live. Do you know the needs, concerns and desires of the greater world beyond where you are?

It is all too easy to fall into the trap of thinking we are all there is and can do everything that is needed to provide for the ministries we are involved in. The truth? That is never possible. There is always more than a person can possibly do. A church planter may not have the skill set or time to do theological education. Nor can he do medical/health ministry. A teacher may be able to set up a program at one level of education but have neither the time, the facilities or enough students to do so at a higher level. Directing conferences and managing retreat facilities adds another skill set, and time frame that may not fit into a missionary's already overwhelming schedule.

City wide evangelistic crusades, medical facilities, higher level training, radio ministry, aviation transport, language translation, etc. are all examples of when cooperating others is helpful even, necessary. When we lived in Papua New Guinea we worked together with several organizations. Here is a short list and what they provided.

Transportation – MAF (Missionary Aviation Fellowship)
– The Wesleyan Church has ministries in remote areas of the country and the only way to reach them is many days on foot or by air. MAF was a valuable service that helped us stay connected with these ministries.

Communications – CRMF (Christian Radio Ministry Fellowship)- This organization supplied and maintained shortwave radio sets. They also dealt with technical issues of licensing and bandwidth assignment as well as scheduling access to radio time. PNG has over 700 tribal groups. It takes a lot of mission groups working together to reach them. CRMF helped make that happen through their radio ministry.

Translation – SIL (Wycliffe Bible Translators) The Wesleyan Church worked with SIL in translating the Bible into the language of two of the tribal groups we worked with. There were several other translation groups working in many areas of the country (New Tribes Mission, Pioneer Bible Translators, Lutheran Bible Translators).

Printing – The Wesleyan Church worked with both the Evangelical Free Church and Lutheran Publisher to obtain discipleship materials for our extension programs.

Training – CLTC (Christian Leaders Training Center) The Wesleyan Church had one level of training and we sent our students to an interdenominational school for the next level.

Children's education – SIL operated two schools for missionary kids.

Documentation – EFC (Evangelical Free Church) – This organization assisted many mission groups with visa renewals and other government documentation.

And the list could go on...

The point is that we need to realize that we are not alone and it is not always wise to go it alone. We need to know how we fit into the bigger picture, both as part of our team and its ministry and how we fit into the broader ministry taking place throughout the place in which we serve.

Paul had this concept in his mind. He had a step by step plan for the ministry he was responsible for in Crete. He sent Titus to carry out one aspect of the plan and then sent

Artemas and Tychicus for the next phase. But he was also aware of the activity of others and made sure that those he was directing were aware of their presence and ready to help them as needed. This would benefit both ministries. It would strengthen the worker through fellowship, strengthen the work as others observed the unity expressed, and benefit each group through time together which would allow them to share insights and resources.

There are so many benefits when we take down the barriers that keep us inward focused and see beyond ourselves and our little world. When we work together the work is multiplied and greater results are possible.

So what do you see? Do you see the greater needs and how to partner to care for them? What does your ego look like?

BS – Research the following names: Aquila, Priscilla, Tychicus, Silas, Epaphroditus, Epaphras. Using this information define what a partnership is and how it functions.

PR – How well do you work with others? List your weaknesses and strengths. How can you use your strengths to overcome your weaknesses?

BWV – Partnering across cultures presents unique opportunities and challenges. Explain why this is so and how being a Christian makes a difference.

Inquiry 57

Going native

Hebrews 2:14-18

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil— **15** and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. **16** For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. **17** For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. **18** Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

One of the long running debates in missions is just how much of the host culture do we adopt? Do we adopt their food, dress, housing, and other things related to the environment? Do we accept and follow their customs and structures in how we relate to each other and live together?

Some have adopted and promoted total immersion into the culture. Great missionaries like Hudson Taylor became as much a part of the Chinese culture as he could. He believed that until he understood their life and culture at the level of full participation he could not truly communicate the truth and have the message accepted.

Others felt that it was not necessary to go to such an extreme. While it was important to understand as fully as possible the host culture, it was not critical, to the

reception of the gospel, to look and live as they did. There were several reasons for this: 1. Health issues 2. The danger of appearing to approve of beliefs and practices that were contrary to the gospel 3. Supporting oppressive cultural structures.

This is an important topic to consider. Our decisions may have a significant impact on how the gospel message is received and how it is interpreted. When we choose not to adapt, we possibly create an environment where the people believe they must change their culture to look like ours before they can truly receive the gospel. The ethnocentrism of many missionaries created such an environment. Mission compounds were created and those who wanted to be Christians often became part of that compound and changed their behaviors to match those of the foreigner. These people gained position and responsibility while those who remained in their villages and maintained their cultural heritage were relegated to lesser roles.

Others missionaries fought to avoid this extreme situation, trying to develop a more indigenous church. They followed Paul's principle of becoming all things to all people without violating God's word. Many have gone to villages and lived with the people and seen God work in wondrous ways to overcome false traditions and worship. There are many stories of this kind within the various groups involved in the translation of the Bible.

We have found ourselves faced with the impact of various levels of this adaptation process. In Sierra Leone we arrived at the mission compound in Gbendembu and soon discovered that our house was the nicest in the entire village. Everybody knew where the missionary lived and had already determined our status in the community and what would be expected of us. It could have been very

easy to simply follow the past and be the foreigner living among them. The villagers were already comfortable with the customs of such people.

We had to make many decisions about how we would respond to such a history and expectation. It was not long before we heard stories of the different missionaries who had lived there in the past. The most common and positive stories were about those who did not let the housing situation control their relationships and adaptation to the culture and community. The missionaries were remembered fondly because they set aside the compound mentality and became part of the community. We made this the goal of our life as well and God provided us with a variety of situations where we could learn to become part of their culture.

In Papua New Guinea we again found ourselves in the finest house in the village. Here we heard two sets of stories. A very negative story focused on the missionary who obtained the land and built the missionary house, a huge structure by local standards. We listened as the people shared their frustration with where it was located, about a mile from the village, which made it difficult to meet with the missionary, who rarely went into the village. A sore point with them was the fact that no one was ever allowed to enter the house or even permitted on the open veranda in front of the house.

The second set of stories was about another missionary who worked hard to relate to the people. He was appreciated greatly and they often talked about how he built a small second house based on their technology and often invited men to come and visit him in this house. It was never clear whether they were welcome in the missionary house, but it was clear they appreciated the attempt to connect.

We were greatly saddened by the first story and encouraged by the second. We felt that we needed to continue the process of the second. So we built a second house made of palm and bamboo, just to learn more about their lives, we bought a pig, (which meant we had to go to the village often to buy food for it) and we chose to buy local products and learn how to cook them. This encouraged people to come to visit and we spent many hours talking on our veranda. This led us to invite people into the main house, which surprised them greatly.

We used the traditional palm house for a variety of purposes. I would invite the men over for a traditionally prepared meal, which was cooked and eaten in the small house. They were surprised that I had learned to cook this way, which opened the door to learn more about their culture. This knowledge was helpful in preparing classes for leadership training. But, mostly this house provided a way for us to learn more about their lives and culture and for us to have a fun place to go and spend time.

While we have never gone 'native' and fully adopted the life of those where we have lived we have learned the importance of learning living in their world. This is crucial in order to truly communicate the important message that we have to tell them.

Jesus went native. God became one of us - completely. It didn't matter which tribe or culture he chose. The result would have been the same. He would look like the people, learn their culture from birth, understand everything about the way they thought and lived. That is what this passage tells us. He looked, acted, and thought like they did. Or did he?

At the appearance level, yes. His clothes were the same as theirs. His food was just like everybody else's, never a meal from his former culture. Oh yes, Jesus had definitely come from a different culture; heaven was a very unique culture. But, on earth, he was bounded by the laws and culture of the place where he lived. He even learned a trade like everyone else. But, on a more profound level he did not appear like everyone else.

He used their lives and culture in his teaching, but his teaching was not traditional or culturally bound. His behavior did not follow the standard practice of the culture. He spent time with all the wrong people and criticized those who were normally used as the standard for correct behavior. He was not bound by the traditions and even the current interpretation of the law was targeted for debate.

People quickly realized that while he looked and acted much like them, there was something very different about his understanding of truth and God. He was clearly introducing elements of his heavenly culture into their world. He created a bridge and then crossed it to meet them and openly invited them to come and visit him. He told them stories of the kingdom and its culture. He showed them how one could become a member of that kingdom and the changes that would be necessary in their culture.

The point, the central point, is that he first came to them. He adapted as much as possible without sacrificing the truth, so that he would be accepted and as a result the people would be willing to listen to the truth and consider becoming part of this new culture. It was possible to be saved, restored and live once again in the presence of God.

Our goal is to have an acceptance of the message. We will need to adapt to the culture for this to happen. How much we adapt is not the real point. The real point is that we adapt enough for the people to stop thinking of the message as foreign to their lives and culture and begin to see it as a fundamental truth that transcends all cultures, even theirs.

There are some adaptations that will be clearly unacceptable. We should never participate in the rituals and ceremonies that are connected to worshipping spirits and idols. Other adaptations are unacceptable because they maintain traditions and practices that are damaging to the people and their environment as well as used to maintain structures that are oppressive in nature. These are usually quite clear.

The reality, is there is much we can do to adapt and learn how to live in their world and in the process learn how to communicate the truth. Jesus spent 30 years adapting and learning to live. This experience empowered his teaching and drew the people to the message. In three short years he changed the direction of history.

While we may not be in a position to change the history of the world, we are in a position to change the history of individuals and groups. But we will need to let go of who we are to become who God wants us to be. At key levels we need to be able to go native in order to proclaim the gospel

BS – Compare this study with Paul’s ideas on cultural identity in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

PR – What are you doing in your life to identify with the people you come in contact with? Is this easy or difficult

to do? What would it take for you to make the changes necessary for people to accept you and your message?

BWV – How does one's culture and lifestyle impact the ability of others to not just hear the gospel but accept it? What will it take for them to not treat the gospel as something foreign?

Inquiry 58

The Pain Hall of Fame

Hebrews 11:35-40

Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Here I sit in the chemo room with my wife. We have just talked with the doctor. The report is not good or bad, it is the same. It is good in that there has been no growth and no new cancer. It is bad in that there is still cancer. And so we continue the treatment. It is not a pleasant time. Chemo creates a specific schedule for our lives and defines what is possible between each treatment and

during each cycle. Life is planned around it and brings a subtle form of struggle and suffering. The side effects have been manageable but are evident. Mainly, my wife is tired. The impact is even more subtle in me, a different form of struggle. A different form of tiredness. A different understanding of suffering.

As I sit here I think back to our wedding vows. We didn't use the specific phrases of 'for richer or poorer' or 'in sickness and health.' Yet those concepts were an integral part of what we promised to each other. We were ready to accept all situations, all conditions in order to live life together and to insure the care and happiness of each other. That meant we would accept the times of struggle, of suffering. This fact would keep hope alive and create the strength needed to pass through to the blessing waiting on the other side of the struggle.

This commitment and willingness to suffer for each other has allowed us to experience the joy of each other's faith and love in ways not possible before the time of struggle. While we do not enjoy the suffering involved, and we do not enjoy watching one another struggle. We have learned to rejoice in a number of ways not previously possible. We have seen our faith in God grow. We have seen how others grow as we trust in God to care for us. We have seen how God works through every situation to reveal himself to us and others. What we gain is always greater than what we suffered.

Even now, as I sit in the chair next to my wife, we know that God is working. Our lives and our struggles, will help others to know God and to grow in their faith. We don't know who, how, or when, but we do know it will happen. Suffering for the sake of serving God opens doors that would otherwise never open. Accepting the struggles that come our way and letting God work in us, shows others

the true nature of God. He does not desire that we suffer. He desires that we know him and that through us, and how we live in the good and the bad of life, others will know him.

Suffering cannot be avoided. It is a part of life. Mankind's sin has caused a fundamental shift in existence. That shift opened the door to selfishness, which will always result in the suffering of others. Satan is also part of this shift and encourages it. Our desire to follow God has made us enemies of Satan. He will make people suffer so that they will be unwilling to accept God's love. For those who overcome this and follow God, he will do anything possible to make them suffer, even as he tried to make Christ suffer and renounce God.

Suffering cannot be avoided. It is part of the process of life. Nothing comes without a price, without struggle. Athletes put their bodies through great trials and training, even suffering, to compete. Businessmen place their resources at risk, they suffer doubt and worry, over what will happen, in order to succeed. Parents place all they have at risk, suffering, to raise their children. Farmers suffer the heat of the sun, the attack of insects and weeds, to gain the harvest. Every trade, every occupation, every phase of life includes struggle and suffering as part of the process involved in doing the work required, maturing and accomplishing the goals that are part of living. Always the goal is the rejoicing that comes after the suffering.

Those who don't understand this live a life of hopeless despair. They are trapped in a world called fatalism. They have no choice and no chance to find joy in living. They are constantly depressed, constantly worrying over what cannot be changed. They build their own prison and design it to block out all light. They try to escape and

avoid all suffering only to create a world of fear - another level of suffering.

And so they never rejoice. This does not mean there aren't moments of happiness. It means they never know why they are happy and they never can find the joy that exists when we overcome the struggle.

This brings us to the passage here in Hebrews. History records that many chose suffering and even death instead of sacrificing their faith and relationship with God. They decided that to give up their faith, to deny their God, was not worth the risk of the joy they had received from knowing God and knowing the truth of his promises to them. They chose to serve God and not the thinking and desires of man.

Serving God always places one at risk. At times God provides great strength even miracles to deal with the risk. At other times, but rather chooses to provide a deeper more powerful faith. This faith faces the dangers and declares that there is something more valuable than life itself, a relationship with God. It declares to all who are present and echoes down through history that God is greater than death itself, and the believer will survive and live with him for eternity.

BS – Read Jeremiah 20:1-2; 37:15; 38:5. Now read Lamentations. Why did Jeremiah chose to proclaim the word of God even when he knew he would suffer for doing so?

PR – Many people do not experience profound suffering or encounter serious risks for their faith. Take time to talk to someone that you know or read a book about someone who has). Now reflect on how well you would do in such

a situation. What would it take for you to trust God, or take such a risk?

BWV – There has never been a time in history where all Christians lived in peace and security. The historical record reveals that every time there was an advance in the kingdom there was also an attack by Satan and the world to destroy those who chose to believe. The list of martyrs is long and filled with records of those who chose to trust in God no matter what the cost - from the first martyr, James, to those dying for their faith today in Iran, Sudan, Pakistan and other places. Each time one chooses to seek God and not worry about suffering, to obey God and not worry about the risk, God works to use their faith and their sacrifice to change the lives of the unchangeable. What about you? What price are you willing to pay so that others will be changed?

Inquiry 59 What, Why, What

1John 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. **2** The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. **3** We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. **4** We write this to make our joy complete.

Three key questions to always keep in focus.

What am I doing?

Why am I doing it?

What will be the result?

John helps to define these for us as he reflects on his history and then shares his insight about what he has learned.

John has spent his life doing three key things. He has been watching and listening making contact with his Lord. He learned the importance of these quickly as he first followed the Lord, walked with the Lord, and then led others to do the same.

Question 1 – What are you doing?

John saw the Lord and the reality of his existence. He saw God's power, not only in the great miracles, but in the life of faith that Jesus lived before them every day and in every moment. He saw the impact of the message on the lives of the people who heard, responded, and were changed by the Holy Spirit. He saw the real nature of love, from the concern for a leper, to raising a man's only daughter from the grave, to the forgiveness given even to those who crucified him. He saw a thousand times over the fulfillment of God's promises in every person who received the message and chose to give their life to God. He saw the importance of opening the eyes of those he met to the possibility of blessing them by sharing what he had seen.

He heard the Lord. He heard Jesus call him to follow him and began a new career of rescuing the lost. He heard the teachings over and over until his life resonated with their truth and made it possible for others to hear. He heard the people as they proclaimed Jesus the messiah and then

heard the same people call for his crucifixion. The he heard them cry as Peter told them what they had done and what it meant. He heard cries of sorrow that changed to relief, then to joy. It was a sound he would hear over and over as he spoke and people heard the message. He learned the importance of hearing and then how to help others hear.

He also learned about touch, about being touched. Not just the physical touch but something much more profound. He learned what it meant to have his soul touched by God and how to reach out and touch God. He saw Jesus touch people. He healed their bodies, drove out the demons, and restored them. He saw how a touch could restore a person; the Samaritan woman, the woman caught in adultery, the tax-collector Zacchaeus. Then he saw people who wanted to touch Jesus; the woman who was bleeding, the woman who washed his feet with her tears, the one leper who came back when he realized he had been healed.

From this John learned that truly connecting with God was first being touched by God and then touching God. He discovered step by step that when he reached out to God that is when God's touch worked the greatest miracle. He saw this over and over. So many came to be healed. Jesus touched them all and they were healed at one level, but so many never made a deeper connection. Like the lame man at the pool of Bethesda. He was healed physically but not deep within his soul. In contrast, the blind man, was healed and abandoned everything to follow Jesus instead of submitting once again to the authority of the Pharisees. John saw what happened year after year as he reached out to touch people and how they responded to that touch. He saw how God could work through his touch and make it possible for others to touch God.

What are you doing? Are you listening to what God is saying? Are you making it possible for others to listen? Are you seeing what God is doing? Are you making it possible for others to see? Are you touching others and making it possible for them to touch God?

Question 2 – Why are you doing it?

For John there was a very clear and concise reason; so that others could be a part of the fellowship, a fellowship that included the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This unique fellowship was always active, always accessible. Walking with Jesus for three years created the foundation for what that meant.

A key aspect of that foundation is the word ‘love.’ A word that John uses more frequently than any of the other gospel writers or Paul. He defines all aspects of life within the fellowship in the context of love. He declares that a person is not truly a follower of Christ if he does not have love for others. Love both defines what fellowship means and what fellowship provides.

For John his very existence was based in a love that can only be understood by knowing God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He knew the One who decided to save us, the one who took the necessary action to save us, and the one who applies that love to each of us. That means that love can only be experienced fully in the context of fellowship, by existing in relationship with others that begins with God’s love flowing into us and to others through us.

Because John lived his life in the context of this fellowship, saw its benefits, heard its words, and both touched it and through it touched others, he wanted others to have this experience. And he knew that everyone who

was willing to believe will experience this fellowship. And if they experienced this fellowship they would grow deeper in their knowledge of God and in all He is and the profoundness of the love that makes this fellowship possible.

John knew what this fellowship was, what it could do, and what was required for others to become part of the fellowship. He clearly spoke of what he had heard, seen, and touched.

Does your experience of fellowship with God define who you are, what you are doing and more importantly why you are doing it?

Question 3 – What will be the result?

John clearly knew the goal. It was the same goal Jesus had revealed in his prayer for John and the others in the garden - that others would become one with God and realize all that is possible when one is part of the family of God. John wanted everyone to experience this unique fellowship, a fellowship based on God's love for us and the love that can exist between those who have experienced this love and have learned to share it with others.

John saw how this relationship can carry people through the most difficult times. He watched as his fellow disciples were martyred for their faith and saw the impact of their relationship with God on those who watched them die, even on those who carried out the sentence of death. He heard the stories of what was happening in such places as Spain, Ethiopia, India and so on. People's lives were being changed and the joy created by this relationship with God was contagious.

John had experienced firsthand the attacks of those who feared the truth, served Satan, and sought desperately to avoid dealing with the truth. He had been banished, sent into exile. There he learned the depth of God's control over history and that there was nothing that could separate him from God's love. He may have been exiled from human contact but there was nothing that could exile him from God. Even death could not do this. Instead of causing separation from life, death carried one directly to the source of life and the final restoration with God and a life that would last for eternity.

What are people learning from you about this relationship that God has promised to all who confess their sin and discover the true meaning of His love for them? Is your life based on this relationship? Are you helping others to discover God, his love, and how to live no matter what is happening in the world? Is central purpose of your life making it possible for others to know God and share in the fellowship that exists in the family of God?

We have been called to tell others what we have seen, what we have heard and what we have touched. That is the task of a world class Christian. We have also been called to do this in every tribe, every nation and in every language of this world. We are called to help people find and meet God where they are just as God came to earth to find and meet us where we are.

This is the life of a world class Christian, to find the best way to carry out this task., the best way that works in every culture, every nation and every language. We must find the best way, so that people meet God in their culture and are not bound to ours. God left his culture, entered a specific culture and taught us that this is possible.

Let others know what you have seen, heard, and touched so they too can see, hear and touch God and become part of the family.

BS – Read the following scriptures: Psalms 66:16; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 3:10. Explain what it means to have fellowship with God.

PR – Make a list of what you have seen, heard and how God has touched you in your life?

BWV – Consider how you can communicate what you have seen, heard, and touched across a cultural barrier? What makes the message universal? Why is it possible to cross such barriers?

Inquiry 60

Reversing Babel

Revelation 5:9-10

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Revelation 7:9-10

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

After the fall of man in the garden, a series of events occurred that created the world we exist in today.

1. The murder of Abel by Cain and his banishment revealed the depth of the problem of sin. We will destroy anything to get what we want or to prevent others from having what we want.
2. The flood revealed how serious God feels about sin. He will not condone sin and will punish sin. There will be no escape from that judgment.
3. Babel revealed just how far man will go to replace God with a lie. So God scattered man to the ends of the earth. This created the basis of man's current existence and revealed the truth of our sin and the division that exists between us, God, and each other. There is only one voice and it is his. Man believes that there are many ways to find God and allow him to control God.

Then Jesus came and began the process of reversing this reality. It would come at great cost and further reveal the depth of the issue. We will kill in order to avoid the truth. But, as always, nothing we do can change the truth or the depth of our need. We are broken and divided. We cannot restore ourselves. But it is possible for God to restore us as individuals and as a race.

At Pentecost the process was initiated. Quickly comes the work in Samaria, the encounter of Philip with the Ethiopian, and Peter's meeting with the centurion. This is followed by the work of a group in Antioquia who readily accept anyone who wants to hear the truth. This opens the way for Paul and Barnabas and so the first steps are taken

to reunite the nations under one banner, the banner of the kingdom of God.

Today we are continuing this process. The challenge has been sent out to identify and reach every group that has not heard the gospel and send someone to tell them of God's love. It is not a hopeless task, not an impossible task, not a task that will never be completed. Here in Revelation we are told simply and clearly that God will succeed in his plan of using us to unite people from every tribe, every language, every people group and every nation under the banner of the kingdom of God. This is not about conquering people, of forcing them into submission, but of restoring them to relationship, of revealing to them their true purpose; that they were created for the purpose of knowing God and having a personal relationship with God.

They will come to Christ because they will discover that they are loved, that their presence is desired and that they belong in God's family. They are a creation designed to experience God freely and without fear. They will come because they will hear the voice of God and will know it is the only voice worthy to hear. They will be free and they will come to celebrate, to lift their voices as one to celebrate God.

We are called to be part of this great mission. To allow God to use each of us to reach one more people, one more tribe, one more language, and go to one more nation until the day comes when God gathers us all to celebrate. The day when people of every tribe and language and group and nation celebrate as one the love of their creator.

BS – Make a plan to read the bible through and understand what God has done and wants to do through you to reach someone lost in sin.

PR – Evaluate your life to see if you are part of the solution or part of the problem. Begin now to make the changes needed to get involved in carrying the gospel to the world and to help others get involved.

BWV – God's view of the world is that everyone is equally lost. There are no exceptions. God's view of salvation is that everyone should have the chance to hear of his offer of love and forgiveness. There is no one excluded from this offer. Do we see the world the way God sees it?