

Motivation makes a difference

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” John 20:18 (ESV)

“This week we have mission teams going to Croatia and Brazil. In 2 weeks we have teams going to Tanzania and Kenya. This summer we will have teams headed to Nepal, Taiwan, India, inner city Chicago, and Colombia.” For many churches, these are common announcements. Multiple mission teams head to many different places in what at times seems like an endless stream. Likewise, within Christian Pharmacists Fellowship International (CPFI) increasing numbers of members are engaging in short term mission projects. It is exciting to see so many people concerned and engaged in mission outreach. There have been few times in the history of the church when such a broad group of people have been personally involved in cross cultural mission efforts.

While this movement among Christians is encouraging to see, it can also cause us to pause and consider the motivations to join a short term mission effort. For some individuals, they may be motivated by a desire to travel and see the world. For others, it may be a desire to experience a different culture. Some may be motivated by a concern for poor and needy people. Other motivations include a feeling of being left out of a short term mission effort or a sense of adventure and seeing the unknown. It can also be an effort to assuage a sense of guilt for having material goods when others have so little. No matter how good or worthy any of these or other similar motivations

may be, there needs to be an overarching motivation of obedience to Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals—the ultimate glory being the glory of God. Absence of this motivation will often result in personal disappointment or negatively impact the entire team. It is important that we routinely consider what are Biblical motivations and guidance on engagement in mission efforts. Repeated reminders help to focus on what God wants and desires in and through all mission efforts.

In thinking about motivations from a Biblical perspective for any mission involvement, many different references can be studied or used. Often these give good understanding of God’s concern for the world, that the Gospel be proclaimed, and for people and His creation to be redeemed. However, beyond the well known descriptions of the Great Commission found in the Gospels and in Acts, there are 3 portions of Scripture that give us great insight into motivations behind God sending His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world and what Jesus told His disciples about being sent. These passages are a description of the servant mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5-11), Jesus announcing his ministry in the synagogue (Luke 4:16-21), and Jesus’ instructions to the disciples as He sent them (Matthew 10:5-15).

From John’s accounting of the Great Commission, it is clear that the pattern for mission involvement is Jesus Christ. Motivation for mis-

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sion is deeply rooted in the peace of Christ, from which flows the example of Christ. In the same way that Jesus was sent by the Father, so Jesus is sending us. These verses make it clear that our motivation for mission is strongly tied to the way that Jesus was sent. Because our sending is in the same way that Christ was sent, we will briefly explore the 3 portions of Scripture that give insight into the way that Jesus was sent and sent out His disciples. In these passages we find the framework for our involvement in mission.

Humility

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by coming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV)

In 1975 I made my first venture into short term missions by spending the summer at a mission hospital in south Thailand. For those old enough to remember that year was not a very good year in Southeast Asia. Governments were in transition in that part of the world and totalitarian leaders were taking over countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Needless to say, it was not an optimal summer to be going on my first extended short term mission trip.

Preparing for that trip our group spent 2 hours studying and considering what Paul was saying in Philippians 2 about the way that Christ Jesus was sent and came. It is clear that humility was a major motivation behind His coming. It was not a superficial humility, but a humility that cost Him greatly. There are several components to the humility that Christ embraced when He came to earth. He gave up being equal with the Father at least temporarily, He became a lowly servant, He was confined to a human body, He became obedient to His heavenly and earthly fathers, and He submitted to earthly authorities. The result was a terrible death. It is almost impossible to fathom the depth of the humility of Jesus in His coming to earth. Yet, it is essential. Without understanding the humility embraced by Jesus we cannot be sent as He was sent.

The other important realization from the discussion of Jesus' humility is that without this humility the purpose for him being sent would never have been achieved. It was in His willingness to be humbled to the point of death, that He completed the sacrifice for sin, broke the power of death, and was exalted.

At the end of our study of Philippians 2, the leader of our group made an interesting statement. He said that unless the humility of Christ was clearly in our thinking and attitudes when we encountered the first difficulty in the country where we were headed we would mentally or physically turn around and head home. For example, if we stepped off the plane in a completely foreign country and the individual who was designated to pick us up at the airport was not there to meet us, we would mentally or physically head home. Each of us had to humble ourselves to stay and be effective where God had sent us. This explanation was repeatedly impressed

on me throughout that summer, as I endeavored to grasp the humility of Christ in my short term service.

Too often it seems that the humility of Christ is not represented in short term mission teams. When it is not present, people in the places we go quickly sense the less than humble attitude and put up walls and barriers without us even realizing what is happening. As an example, I recently received comments from an Asian Christian colleague who was commenting on the involvement of an American student on a short term mission experience. To summarize my colleague's perspective and reason for limiting this student's involvement in mission efforts, she indicated that she felt that American Christians come with grandiose ideas and pride about what should be done. While this may or may not be true, somehow American Christians have left the impression of pride rather than humility. What is clear is that others easily detect prideful or humble motivations on the part of short term team members.

There is a connection between the detailed explanation of Christ's humility and the preface that Jesus gives in John's accounting of the Great Commission. Peace is essential to the ability to be humble. Being at peace is integral to humility. Without God's peace in our lives, we grasp for things and attempt to achieve in our own powers. I have seen this truth be reality on several mission trips. When working a country with restricted access our team was meeting with government officials to set our plans for the team. The officials had very different ideas of our schedule than we desired or had planned. At that point we could have complained and forced our perspective or we could have listened to these officials. Realizing that despite the fact that these leaders were likely not followers of Christ, we

decided to comply with their desires. The result was a highly effective ministry with many opportunities to talk with people about the Gospel. Peace allows us to rest in Christ, trusting Him at every turn to meet individual needs and use us to accomplish His purposes. This is true even when we submit to people who are in positions of authority but are not Christians.

The humility of Christ built upon His peace must be at the core of our motivations to participate in short term missions. Without giving up things that may rightfully be ours and submitting ourselves to those we serve, our efforts will be ineffective and result in outcomes that are the opposite of what we desire to see accomplished.

Proclamation

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
Luke 4:18-19 (ESV)

Jesus stood in His hometown synagogue and was asked to read from the Prophets. He chose to read a section from Isaiah. The section of Isaiah that he read is very important, because it clearly applies to His mission and motivation for coming to earth. As Jesus states after reading this portion of Scripture, it was fulfilled in the presence of those who witnessed Him reading it. There is no question that Jesus applied these prophecies to Himself.

In our reading of this account, we tend to emphasize the themes of justice, freedom, and healing. Each of these is integral to Jesus' purpose. However, the word that is repeated several times is proclamation. While Jesus did restore sight to blind peo-

ple and gave freedom to people who were oppressed, the majority of His ministry dealt with proclamation of these concepts. His teaching and preaching gave people the understanding of what it meant to have good news even though poverty was all around, what freedom and liberty means, and what healing could do in the lives of those who suffered. It seems that proclamation was equally important, if not more important, than bringing justice, freedom, and healing. The likely reason for proclamation being so important is that it plants within people the thoughts of being free from oppression and disease. In so doing, it inspires people to seek something better, something that God can bring to reality in their lives and the lives of other people.

For many short term teams the focus is on a specific activity. It is easy to have proclamation take second or third place to the team's worthy, but narrow, purpose. Operating a clinic, constructing a church, or teaching English are typical activities for short term teams. Logistics, planning, and acquiring materials for the team to perform its specific function easily distract from the purpose of proclamation and addressing the deeper needs of people. Perhaps we need to be rethinking the way that short term teams operate to make proclamation, through word and deed, a greater emphasis. Proclaiming the Gospel will enable people to see and understand there are better things and better ways. Making sure the Gospel is clearly communicated will change people's lives for eternity.

A number of years ago I had the opportunity to be in a country on a short term trip over Easter. The purposes for the team were to provide medical education and care and to teach English. During English classes we taught Easter songs with the assistance of long term workers who

were Christians. One of these colleagues felt that it was inappropriate to actively talk about the Gospel or "force" Christianity on people. When it came to explaining the meaning of an Easter song, he skipped over the portion of the song that referred to Christ's death and resurrection. While he did not fully neglect the aspect of proclamation, he left the students on their own in figuring out the meaning of this part of the song. Additionally, it seemed rather odd to give an explanation for the remainder of the song, ignoring a short part of the lyrics. Those who were listening quickly picked up on the omission and asked other Christians for an explanation. Had members of the class not sought out the explanation, proclamation would not have completely occurred.

It is clear from the example of Jesus that proclamation must be a major motivation for joining a short term team. Certainly, the team needs to consider ways that proclamation can be done in a culturally sensitive and winsome manner. Bible thumping and forceful actions will not result in accurate communication of the Gospel, but proclamation coupled with humility is extremely powerful in making known the liberty, justice, and healing that is at the core of the Gospel. Proclamation does result in changed lives of those we serve in short term missions.

Selfless Authority

And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold nor silver nor copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics nor sandals nor a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. Matthew 10:7-10 (ESV)

The disciples were being sent out for the first time by Jesus to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. Picking up on the idea of proclamation, Jesus makes this the first instruction given to the disciples. It is followed by commands to heal and to deal with spiritual enemies. To follow through on these commands required an extraordinary authority. However, the attitude and lifestyle to be embraced by the disciples is one of selflessness. The disciples are to be entirely dependent on others for their welfare and supplies. In many ways these 2 statements seem contradictory to each other. How can a person exercise great authority, but be selfless?

Several examples illustrate how this can happen. Mother Theresa clearly was entirely dependent on others for support of her livelihood, as she ministered to the needs of the poor and hurting in India. She clearly proclaimed the kingdom of heaven while bringing healing, justice, and liberty. It was precisely her selfless life that allowed her to stand in the presence of world rulers and challenge injustices like abortion, slavery, poverty, and oppression of people. All of this was done with the objective of declaring Jesus Christ. A similar thing can be said for Hudson Taylor as served to reach China for Christ. He adopted Chinese culture and dress, healed the sick, and proclaimed the Gospel. All of this was done without directly asking Christians for financial support. His statement, "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply," is an example to follow. The result of his actions was a respect among many Chinese for the service that he rendered to that country. Possessing selfless motivation with great authority put Hudson Taylor in a position to alter the history of a great nation and impact the church at large.

On a more personal scale, a number of years ago I was visiting a university in Asia. The focus of the trip was to teach in the area of pharmacy, and proclaim Christ. Having visited this location several times previously, I had a number of good friends and professional colleagues. During my visits I was entirely dependent upon my hosts for my needs. Following an afternoon visit to the therapeutic drug monitoring program, a couple of pharmacists were walking me back to my room. During the walk they said that I was different than others who visited with them. They explained that many foreign experts visited their program and lab. Typically, these people would come, give a presentation, and leave. However, they told me that I took the time to talk with them, learn what they were doing, and tried to understand their program. This approach had given me the opportunity to impact their program and lab.

Short term team members may never be recognized as examples like Mother Theresa or Hudson Taylor. However, joining a team means that members approach the experience with a motivation of selflessness.

Being part of a short term team is not an easy venture, and often team members are asked to function without the amenities that we typically consider to be necessities. Without a selfless attitude, misery and frustration will creep into attitudes, impairing the ability to function as a team member. Yet individual members need to recognize the authority Christ gives over the powers, situations, and barriers they will encounter. It is not an authority to be used for selfish personal or corporate gain. It is an authority to bring release from the bondage of sin and the impact of sin on all of life. Combining selflessness with appropriate authority in the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel is a powerful combination that is not easily defeated.

Conclusion

Much of the effectiveness of a short term team is dependent upon God's working in the hearts and minds of team members. Motivations and attitudes of individuals greatly impact the way a team functions and the ministry impact the team has. Individually and as a team, short term mission teams should spend a good

amount of time considering motivations behind the desire to be part of a mission effort. To be sent with the peace of Jesus Christ, humility, proclamation of the Gospel, and selfless authority should be interwoven into all aspects of the team's planning and efforts. When this happens, the short term team will leave a lasting impression for God's Kingdom in the hearts and minds of the people being served. ✠

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