

Pharmacy School as a Mission Field: **Being a Missionary at Home**

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Missions work has always been fundamental to life as followers of Jesus Christ. His last words included giving His apostles the responsibility of preaching the gospel and making disciples of all nations, a responsibility the Church has embraced as the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-18). This is the purpose of missions. Thus, wherever there is a person who does not know Christ, that place is a mission field. Most of us live

on a mission field and interact with people who do not know the Lord on a regular basis. Oftentimes, however, it seems as if mission trips are given more significance when they are tied to a place outside one's comfort zone, such as another country. For some, the farther away one has to travel and the poorer the people being served, the more exciting is the mission trip. This mindset might not be intentional, but it exists. In the world of academia, it is hoped that students and faculty members will consider why the concept of missions should not be tied to particular locations and everyone should be encouraged to embrace pharmacy school as a mission field that is ripe for harvest.

The Mission

The essence of the Great Commission is also described as the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). The apostle Paul explains it by first pointing to the sinner's reconciliation to God through Christ. It is important to note that one cannot give what he or she does not have. Apart from Christ we are lost in our sins and do not have a message of reconciliation to share. The mission of God on earth is to reconcile the world to Himself and He does this through His redeemed. Blessed are those whose sins are forgiven because they are given the privilege of carrying the name of Jesus. Mission trips have always been about sharing Christ whether they have a medical component or not. When Paul traveled from city to city, his purpose was to proclaim Christ. He courageously did so, carrying out the ministry of reconciliation, and people were saved. Churches were planted and new disciples soon began to do what Paul was doing. In His provision and through many faithful men and women, God has carried out His mission until today and it shall continue until Christ returns.

Whether one is called to reach people here in the United States or those in the most remote places in the world, the mission is to preach the gospel and make disciples. God's love is the same for all people and He desires all to come to faith in Christ. For this reason, no mission trip is more important than another.

As one matures in Christ and grows in the knowledge of God, He gives convictions and passions for different causes. These tend to go hand in hand with the gifts of the Holy Spirit given at the time of salvation (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11). Thus, although the ultimate mission is the same for all believers, God has written a slightly different story for each person. He seasons us differently such that we are able to give ourselves to be used by Him in different ways.

However, when missions work gets tied to particular places, this creates a mindset in which one is only on mission if he or she is in those places. As a result, one is always waiting, preparing, saving, and planning for the mission trip that will take place within a specific timeframe in the future. What about the daily mission field before the trip and to which one returns after the trip? There are people we see every day whom full-time missionaries around the world will never reach. We, on the other hand, can reach them because we know them. They are family, friends, classmates, and colleagues. Cutting the cord between missions and locations all of a sudden allows us to be missionaries where we are. There is no need for waiting. This is not meant to minimize in any way the work that is done through domestic and international missions. Rather, it is meant to lift up backyard missions to the same level of importance and intentionality.

Faith Backgrounds and Spiritual Needs

Faith backgrounds in pharmacy school, which is no different than other areas, can vary significantly. In most schools there are likely to be students and professors who are committed believers, some who simply believe in God, others who believe in nothing, and still others who in addition to not believing in anything might even be hostile toward the things of God. Among believers there may also be different denominations represented while some may not belong to one. I attend a Christian pharmacy school and the faith demographics among students are not much different. One might think that in such a school there are only people who are committed to the Lord, which is not the case. The university itself is Christ-centered and has been a tremendous blessing to me. Before pharmacy school, I longed to study in a God-honoring environment where professors encourage students in their faith, and it is with a grateful heart that I say this is what I have experienced over the last three years. However, because students are not required to be Christian to attend as well as the competitiveness of pharmacy school acceptance, most students are more than happy to be at the school even if they do not align themselves with its biblical foundation. It is important to recognize that a faith-based school is no less of a mission field than any other school.

Given that faith backgrounds vary, spiritual needs also vary. For those who do not know the Lord, the need is salvation. Believers

who are young in their faith need to grow and experience discipleship. Those who are mature in the Lord need constant encouragement to continue strong in Him. In addition, these individuals should serve as godly examples for the others. On the other hand, one should keep in mind that, although spiritual needs in general can be identified, in reality such needs are likely to be more specific. Every person has a different story with different pasts and struggles. This is why one-on-one gospel sharing and discipleship that extends from a friendship is one of the most powerful ways to point someone to Jesus, and it is also why every one of us can be a missionary where we are.

Pharmacy School Missions

What does it look like to do missions work in pharmacy school or where you work? First, it does not have to be formal because as previously mentioned, friendships are great platforms on which one can minister to another. It is in the context of friendships that people are most themselves and open about what goes on in their lives. During pharmacy school I have shared Christ with unsaved friends on numerous occasions. It was usually unforeseen and happened when we got together to study or work on a project. For this reason it is important that one be prepared at all times (1 Peter 3:15). Also, even though such opportunities often came unexpectedly, the conversations did not occur by accident. Initiating the topic was always required. Sometimes the discomfort of not knowing what the other person might think or say causes one to remain quiet or even change the subject. In these moments, however, one can choose to be courageous by planting a seed that may end up flourishing down the road for the glory of God. On a different note, sometimes out of a friendship came a more structured time of prayer and encouragement. I have been on the giving and the receiving end of this scenario. What a blessing it is to have a circle of friends who love the Lord, for today I may encourage someone but tomorrow I may need to be encouraged in a similar way.

Another way missions work can be done in pharmacy school is through ministries, such as CPFI student chapters. Getting together for a Bible study is a great way for students and faculty members to minister to one another in a small group setting. Such groups can also reach out to the rest of the school. When students get together during the CPFI annual meeting, it is always exciting to hear about the different things chapters are doing on their campuses to love on the student body. One thing the chapter at my school has done is initiate an encouragement email program. Anyone who wants to receive these weekly emails, which are all written by students, can sign up for them. After two years, I believe seeds have been planted in many hearts. The gospel has been shared numerous times and good feedback has been received, both from those who have been blessed by the encouraging words and from inquirers who desire to know more.

God can open some of the most unique doors of opportunity for ministry, whether it is through writing, service projects, Bible studies, presentations to large groups, or anything in between. The mission has to first be recognized. If the biblical concept of what it means to be on mission is upheld, one's attitude towards pharmacy school and workplace as a mission field should not be different from any other mission field. Being on mission is a lifestyle. God does not require one to know all the answers or have it all together. On the contrary, if in our often messy lives we daily seek to be restored by Him and have a heart that is intentional about loving others, He will give us a part in His work of reconciling fellow pharmacy students and colleagues to Himself. †

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Applying the Stages of Change to Evangelism by Rebecca Widder

James Prochaska and Carlo Di Clemente introduced us to their Transtheoretical Model of change in 1982.¹ Originally formulated to describe the psychological underpinnings of smoking cessation, it has since been applied to other forms of addiction, and eventually, health behavior change in general.² We know that a patient's response depends on their present stage of change. Our goal is always to move them a little closer to change (versus moving them further away) – and these same principles can be applied to our evangelistic endeavors as well.

Stages of Spiritual Change

Deciding to follow Christ means not just a lifestyle change, but a complete life change. The Bible refers to life before and after Christ in rather dichotomous terms: lost and found (all 3 parables in Luke 15), blindness and sight (John 9), light and dark (John 3:19, Eph 5:11-13), death and life (Eph 2:4-5, Col 2:13). Once we are following Christ, it involves a continuous process of change that we call sanctification. Couldn't this change also be described by Prochaska and Di Clemente's Transtheoretical Model?³ And if we

can apply the Transtheoretical Model – wouldn't it make sense to also use the same techniques we use in approaching patients who need to make a lifestyle change to approach those who we hope to show their need for a spiritual change? In fact, there's Biblical support for people being in these stages of change, and how to interact with them:

Pre-contemplative

Perhaps the most obvious example of people who just weren't ready for spiritual change would be the Pharisees. In John 9, Christ talks about their