

An Analysis of Missions

by Jeffrey Copeland



There are many words in the Christian life that are misunderstood. Some contain many letters while others are composed of a few. Some bring joy when considered while others strike a deep sense of fear. One of the most fearful words in all of Christianity is “missions.” The mere sound or sight of the word sends many running for shelter. A misunderstanding of missions may fuel part of the fear. A clearer picture of the What, Why, Who, Where, When, and How of missions may help quench this fear.

What

The two primary questions concerning the “What” of missions are: what is missions and what is a missionary? Missions is a purposeful, Spirit-led endeavor to free people of all tribes, languages, peoples, and nations from the penalty of sin so they may enter into a loving, eternal relationship with God (Matthew 11:28-30; John 3:16; Romans 1:5; Revelation 5:9-10). Missions is not focused upon counting the number of people who profess faith in Christ, but upon making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). A disciple is one who comes to faith in Christ, is baptized, learns to follow Christ, then leads others to Christ and teaches them to follow Christ. Coming to Christ is simply the first step in becoming a disciple – it is not the only step. The heart of the Great

Commission is discipleship; and the heart of the disciple is the heart of God whose heart beats for those not in a relationship with Him. The Great Commission will not be complete until there are disciples from all nations.

A missionary is one who enters the world to purposefully share the life changing message of salvation with those who do not have a relationship with God and instructs believers in how to grow in that relationship. A missionary is not defined by geography or occupation, but by purpose. A missionary is committed to making disciples of others. A missionary follows Christ’s example of humble service to mankind so that those who are without Christ may enter into an eternal relationship with Him (Philippians 2:5-11).

Why

There are six core reasons why a believer must be involved in missions:

God is Glorified

The overarching theme of Scripture is doxological – the glory of God. All that we do is to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Peter 4:11). A subtheme of the doxological theme is soteriological – salvation. God is glorified when a person is saved (Luke 15:7, 10; Philippians 2:5-11).

Mission Emphasis in Scripture

A prominent theme in Scripture is missions. A mission emphasis is evident in both the Old and New Testaments, and the numerous appearances highlight its importance. However, if it were mentioned only once, that would be sufficient reason to engage in missions.

Christ is the perfect missionary. He left His heavenly home to become a man, live among humans, serve humans, and die for sin. His mission was to serve others and save people from their sin (Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10). We are blessed with the responsibility of sharing the message of His loving sacrifice with others.

Commanded

We are commanded to participate in missions. Each of the Gospels and the book of Acts contain a version of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). We are commanded to share the Gospel and disciple others.

Motivation

We are to live a life properly motivated by a love for God and a love for others (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28). If we love God and others, then we will engage in missions. It is impossible to properly love God and others while being unconcerned about the spiritual death of unbelievers and the condition of believers who have not progressed toward spiritual maturity (Colossians 1:28; Hebrews 6:1). Another part of proper motivation is a sincere thankfulness for who God is and what He has done, is doing, and will do in our life. All that we are and all that will be accomplished is because of Him and for Him (Colossians 1:13-20; James 1:17-18). If we believe God is this great, we will tell others. If we believe God has done great things in our lives, we will tell others.

Spiritual Status of Humankind

Prior to a relationship with God, each unbeliever was dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1,5), alienated from God (Ephesians 2:12), hopeless (Ephesians 2:12), helpless (Romans 5:6), ungodly (Romans 5:6), an enemy of God (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21; Philippians 3:18; James 4:4), and aligned with Satan (2 Corinthians 6:15; 1 Peter 5:8). The spiritual status of humans who are not in a relationship with God are considered to be in a state of total depravity. Total depravity is the inability to do anything worthy to earn salvation. Total depravity does not mean that each person demonstrates the fullness of depravity, lacks a moral conscience, commits every possible sin, or is incapable of performing good acts. However, all the good acts that may be done are never adequate to earn salvation. The measure of depravity is the holiness of God. The breadth of depravity is all people (1 Kings 8:46; Psalms 14:1-3, 130:2, 143:2; Proverbs 20:9; Isaiah 53:6, 59:1-8; Romans 3:9-31, 5:12, 6:23; Ephesians 2:3). The breadth of depravity includes great men of God (**Noah** – Genesis 9:22; **Abraham**, the “friend of God” – Genesis 12, 16, 20; **Job** – Job 14:16-17; **Moses** – Numbers 20:10-13; **David**, the “man after God’s own heart” – 1 Samuel 13:14; Psalm 51; **Jesus’ twelve Disciples** – Matthew 16:23, 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-27; **Paul** – Philippians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:15). The depth of depravity includes all of our faculties (**mind** – 2 Corinthians 4:4; Romans 1:28; Ephesians 4:18; **emotions** – Matthew 5:21-22; Romans 1:21, 24, 26; Galatians 5:24; 2 Timothy 3:2-4; Titus 1:15; **will** – Romans 6:20, 7:20; Psalm 36:1-4; **heart** – Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 11:19; Psalm 51; Matthew 5:27-28, 15:18-19; **flesh** – Galatians 5:17; **body** – Romans 6:6, 12, 7:24, 8:10, 13).

Missions is focused upon leading lost people into an eternal relationship with the Lord and then teaching them to follow Christ so that ultimately they will make disciples out of others (Matthew 28:18-20). A lost person is one who is separated from God. The Bible is very clear in stating that sin caused this separation. Sin entered the world thousands of years ago in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-7) and has spread to each man since that time (Romans 3:23, 5:12). One of the

results of sin is death (Genesis 2:17, 3:3; Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23). This is more than physical death but involves spiritual and eternal death. Spiritual death is the separation of man from God (Ephesians 2:1). If a person in a state of spiritual death experiences physical death (separation of the spirit from the body), then eternal death (eternal separation from God) results (Revelation 20:14). Once physical death occurs, judgment is imminent (Hebrews 9:27) and there are no more opportunities to receive eternal life. Clearly, sin causes a person to be lost.

God is not hidden from those who never hear the Gospel since “what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, because they are understood through what has been made. So people are without excuse” (Romans 1:19-20). Natural revelation is adequate to make a person responsible, but it is inadequate to save a person. The truth that was known was rejected. Hearing the Gospel does not make a man lost; it is man’s sin that causes him to be lost. God is just in that He does not cause Himself to be separated from man; but it is sin that separates man from God. He is fair, just, loving, and gracious in that He has made Himself evident to all men.

Throughout history, salvation has, is, and will always be by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3-8; Ephesians 2:8-9). The Lord Jesus Christ must be the focal point of faith (John 3:16-18; Acts 16:31; Romans 3:22-24, 5:17-19, 10:9-13). Although the world claims many different ways to God, Jesus is very clear in stating that He is “the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Previously, He also stated that He is “the door. If anyone enters through me, he will be saved” (John 10:9). Any other means besides grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ does not lead to God. It is also written that “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12); “there

is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human” (1 Timothy 2:5); and that “Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring you to God, by being put to death in the flesh but by being made alive in the spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). Thus, “the one who has the Son has this eternal life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have this eternal life” (1 John 5:12). The only hope of glory is Christ in you (Colossians 1:27). God in His graciousness and love provides reconciliation in His Son for those who believe in Him to be His children. Romans 5:8 is the perfect example of God’s love to us. No one could ever force God to supply the sacrifice for our sins. Out of His love for us, He has graciously supplied the only acceptable sacrifice that satisfies His holiness and righteousness. When a person understands and acknowledges his sin and its consequences, believes that Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection is the only and full payment of the penalty of his sin, and turns in faith from self to God for the forgiveness of sin, then the person enters into an eternal relationship with God.

There are three examples in Acts of people who knew about God and even feared God, but were lacking the full message of the cross. One example is the account of the Ethiopian eunuch who was traveling to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 8:26-40). Although he was reading a passage from Isaiah, he did not understand what he was reading; so Philip was sent to explain the Scriptures and proclaim the Gospel to him (Acts 8:35). A second example is the account of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:18). Although Cornelius was a devout man who feared God, gave alms, and prayed, Peter was sent to speak words by which Cornelius and his family would be saved (Acts 10:2, 11:14). The third example is Priscilla and Aquila who explained the Gospel more accurately to Apollos even though he was mighty in the Scriptures, was instructed in the way of the Lord, and was speaking and teaching accurately (Acts 18:24-26). In each example, the focal point of salvation is the Lord Jesus Christ. Without believing in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, these men would remain lost.

Man’s sin separates him from God; and since man is reconciled to God only by believing in Christ’s atonement for sin, man must hear this Good News. In Romans 10:14-15, Paul raises four critical questions. The first is, “How are they to call on one they have not believed in?” Without faith, it is impossible to call on the name of the Lord to be saved. The second question is, “How are they to believe in one they have not heard of?” It is impossible to believe in Christ without hearing about Him. As it is written, “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the preached word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). Hearing the message is crucial, but “how are they to hear without someone preaching to them” (Romans 10:14)? God, in His sovereignty, has chosen human beings to be the carriers of the Gospel. He could have chosen any means He desired, but He chose dust created in His image (Genesis 1:26-27, 2:7) to be the bearers of the Good News. The fourth question is, “How are they to preach unless they are sent” (Romans 10:15)? Being sent is an integral part of God’s redemptive plan. The three previously mentioned episodes in Acts exemplify the need to hear and believe the message that was delivered by those who are sent. These four questions address God’s fairness, justice, love, and grace. God was not required to supply the message for salvation or the people to be sent to proclaim the message. Praise God that He has chosen to do so! Hence, it is essential that a missionary share the way of salvation with those not in a relationship with God.

Who

A very personal question is often raised concerning missions: mainly, should each person be involved in missions? The Bible does not merely contain information about missions – it is a missionary text that paints the picture of God’s heart for the nations. Old Testament missionary emphasis is present in the **Pentateuch** (Genesis 12:1-3, 18:18, 22:18, 28:14; Exodus 19:4-6, 23:12; Leviticus 16:29; Deuteronomy 4:5-8, 28:10), **Historical Writings** (1 Kings 4:29-34, 8:41-43; 2 Chronicles 6:33), **Poetry** (Psalms 2, 33, 6, 67, 72, 96, 98, 105, 117, 145), and the **Prophetical Writings** (Isaiah 40-53, 56:-8; Jeremiah 12:14-17; Daniel; Obadiah; Jonah; Nahum; Habakkuk 2:4, 14, 20; Zechariah 2:11; Malachi 1:11). New Testament missionary emphasis is present in Christ’s earthly life as recorded in the Gospels, the founding and growth of the church in Acts, the instructions in the Epistles for the church and believers, and culminates with

future events in Revelation. Throughout Scripture we see that both Jews and Gentiles deliver God's message. We see that people of both highly respected professions (priest, prophet, king) and hated professions (tax collector, beggar, prostitute) share God's message. We see that both old (Abraham, Moses) and young (Mark, Timothy) people share God's message. We see both the highly educated (government officials) and uneducated (twelve disciples) share God's message. We see both male and female deliver God's message (Priscilla, Aquila). So a missionary is not limited by race, profession, age, education, or sex – a missionary is only limited by the heart's condition. A heart beating in rhythm with God's heart is the heartbeat of a missionary. The Holy Spirit specializes in healing arrhythmias.

The Great Commission applies to all believers (Matthew 28:18-20). Each believer is to be a missionary. Although each believer was created uniquely (Psalm 139:13-16), spiritually gifted uniquely (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; 1 Peter 4:9-11), and uniquely prepared for ministry (1 Corinthians 12:27-31; Ephesians 2:8-10, 4:11), each believer is to glorify God (1 Peter 4:11) as we unite together in love, harmony, and humility (1 Corinthians 12:12-26) to disciple believers of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 1:5; Ephesians 4:12-16). Each believer has a crucial, God-given missionary purpose to fulfill. Each God-given assignment is eternally important. It is essential for each person to lovingly and faithfully obey the Lord according to how He leads.

Where

There are many people all over the world who do not have a relationship with Christ. Spiritually speaking, there are walking, talking, breathing, singing, eating, and laughing dead people all around us. A legitimate question to be addressed is where mission work should be performed. People without Christ are not limited to a certain geographic area, profession, or race. Missions is by no means limited to foreign soil. A person's mission field may be his country, state, city, work, school, neighborhood, or home. It may very well be a simultaneous combination of these areas. A mission field is any and every place where there is a person who does not have a relationship with Christ. A mission field is any and every place where there is a believer needing discipleship. We live in our God-given mission field. Throughout the book of Acts (1:8, 8:26, 29, 10:1-11:18, 16:7, 10, 23:11), God directed

His servants where to go and proclaim the Gospel. Today, the Holy Spirit continues to direct believers in the direction that will "bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles on behalf of his name" (Romans 1:5). We are to follow His direction.

When

Another important question posed is: when should believers be involved in missions? There is not a simple answer to this question. On one hand, all believers are to be involved in missions at all times. On the other hand, it depends upon the type, duration, and location of the mission work. Missionaries requiring special skills need adequate time and opportunities to develop those skills in order to reach an acceptable level of proficiency. The length of preparation varies among individuals and specialties, but what is important is that they are well trained. Foreign, long-term mission work requires a great deal more time and specialized preparation. Skill preparation, at a minimum, should include studies in foreign language, culture, government, world religions, specifics about applying their specialty in the region, and missionary life. Even while one is preparing "to go," the believer is in a mission field during the preparation phases.

Spiritual preparation is essential for all missionaries. In the calling of the twelve disciples in Mark's Gospel (Mark 3:13-19), Jesus "appointed twelve, (whom he named apostles), so that they would be with him and he could send them to preach" (Mark 3:14). It is important to note that spending time with the Master preceded being sent out to represent the Master. Spending time with the Master in preparation for missions is vital. This time cannot be skipped or neglected. For those who are doing the "sending of missionaries", there is no better time than now. Sending involves – but is not limited to – prayers and finances. It is important to be well informed about the individuals being supported and the missionary agency. It is not uncommon for someone who is preparing to "go to the foreign mission field" to be simultaneously involved in "sending someone to the mission field." A "sender" today may be a "goer" at a later time.

How

The last great question to explore deals with "how" a person may be involved in missions. Opportunities may be divided into three broad categories: The first category involves "sending" others into missions. Missionaries are unable to go unless there are people who provide the necessary support to send

them. Support includes prayer, finances, encouragement, and service (Philippians 4:15-20; Colossians 4:2-6). The type of missions (foreign or domestic, short-term or long-term) will determine the extent of support. All missions, however, must be supported by prayer. Prayer is essential.

The second category of mission involvement is "going" as a missionary into the mission field. Since missions is defined by its purpose (to make disciples) rather than its geography or occupation, all believers may continually participate in missions in the location and occupation that our Lord has sovereignly determined. There are people in all occupations in all locations that need to hear the Good News of Christ and need to be discipled. Professional, fully paid clergy will not reach everyone. All missionaries are equally important to God; there are no sub-classes of missionaries. We are all gifted by God for His purposes according to His will. Some are gifted as full-time paid missionaries while the vast majority of believers are gifted as bi-vocational /tentmakers. A tentmaker is a believer who is dedicated to missions using income from employment to cover the expenses of personal ministry. The employment serves not only as the financial support, but also the area of ministry (Acts 18:1-4). Tentmakers have unique access to people, professions, and areas of influence that are closed or hostile to clergy. Non-clergy believers engaged in missions are a powerful witness to a lost and dying world.

The medical field provides an excellent opportunity for missions. Of the 35 recorded miracles of Christ in Scripture, 26 of them (74%) are healthcare-related (20 miracles or 57% if demon possession is excluded). While instructing His disciples, Christ combined healing with evangelism. This combination occurred in Matthew 10:5-8 when He sent out the 12 disciples ("Jesus sent out these twelve, instructing them as follows: 'Do not go to Gentile regions and do not enter any Samaritan town. Go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near!' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.'") and also in Luke 10:9 when Jesus sent out the 72 disciples ("Heal the sick in that town and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come upon you!'"). A medical missionary tentmaker maximizes the use of the God-given education and training while walking daily with the Lord among believers and nonbelievers in the joys and pains of life.

The third category of mission participation is the ideal combination of the first two categories. This missionary actively “goes” into missions and also “sends” others into missions.

Conclusion

Missions is a multifaceted task requiring complete dependence upon God and enablement by Him. It is not the work of a handful of Christians, but to all who

call themselves followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Missions involves love, dedication, and sacrifice; but there is nothing and no one more important than Jesus, and there is no greater message than the love of Jesus. People must hear and believe this Good News!

All Scripture passages from the New English Translation (NET Bible) †

Jeffrey Copeland is an ordained Baptist minister, the Assistant Dean of Experiential Education at the University of the Incarnate Word, Feik School of Pharmacy, and an associate professor of pharmacy practice. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry from Berry College, a Master of Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Pharmacy from Mercer University. He and his beloved wife, Julie, are blessed with two sons, Nathan and Matthew.