

# Missions

Renewing our perspective  
in the light of Scripture

by William F. Ritchey



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# Chapter 1

## The need for renewing our perspective



### ***Important remarks regarding this English translation***

This work was originally published in Spanish for use among the Evangelical churches of Latin America. As such, its content at times reflects a strong Latin American “flavor” and context. This will be most notable in this first chapter, which was written specifically as a challenge to the Evangelical churches of Latin America. This strong Latin American focus then tapers off rather rapidly in the remaining chapters, which are more general in nature.

In considering the translation of this work into English, two basic options presented themselves: either recontextualize the specifically Latin American content into a North American or European context, or allow it to remain while translating the language. Both options have their benefits. The first produces a work that will “speak” more directly to the English reader. The second produces a work which will give the English reader a better introduction to the reality and potential of the Latin American Evangelical churches. In analyzing the benefits of each option, the translator opted to strive toward a combination of the two. In this first chapter, much of the Latin American flavor will be retained, so that the reader may gain a better grasp of the context and potential of our Latin American churches. In this chapter, phrases like “our churches” and “we” should be understood to refer especially (though by no means exclusively) to the Latin American context. The remaining chapters will then be more adapted to a North American or European context, providing the reader with a more directly-applicable study. Having said this, it must also be noted that this first chapter, even with its Latin American focus and “flavor,” will offer important lessons for the English reader. But, they will not be quite so directly applicable. More thought will be required to detect and apply these lessons.

Finally, the reader is strongly encouraged to remember that this first chapter was written specifically to be a *challenge* to the Evangelical churches of Latin America. It is a *call* to awaken these churches to their current participation and future potential in the task of world missions. If

this is not born in mind by the English reader, the tone and content of this chapter may at times seem to be unduly harsh or critical. *This was never the intent of the author, nor has this work been viewed by our Latin American readers as being unduly harsh or critical.* The statistics and observations presented here are given as a loving, but also urgent, call and challenge to these churches. There is an immense harvest awaiting laborers, and the Latin American churches can provide many workers for this harvest.

### ***General introduction***

What is “missions”? What is a missionary? Why should the local church send missionaries to other parts of the world and maintain them there on the mission field? What should be the attitude of the local church with regard to the Great Commission? How should we respond to the spiritual need of our world? When? What does God expect of us? Is it really wise for us to spend our precious resources in missionary work in other parts of the world when there are such great needs in our own neighborhoods and cities?

In other words, we know that we ought to be doing something, but we may not be very certain regarding what, how, when, why, and for what reason we ought to be doing what we ought to be doing. It appears that this uncertainty is present far too frequently in our Latin American churches nowadays, and it underscores the need for a serious study like the one offered in this work. *There appears to be too much confusion in our Latin American churches with regards to missions work.* This confusion has weakened and diluted the missionary efforts of our churches, and it has limited our achievements in this area. And quite frankly, this should not come as any surprise to us. How can we achieve great strides if we do not truly know what we are doing? How can we make a great and lasting impact in the world if every person has his or her own definition and concept of what “doing missions” is?

Operating this way, it is impossible to truly work together. It is impossible to expect that our congregations strongly and wholeheartedly support a missions project whose very concept and definition vary from member to member. This situation

demonstrates the old adage taught in logic classes: a term that means everything means nothing. Nowadays, it is feared that the term “missions” has reached the point that it means so many things to so many people that it has almost lost any unique meaning. The term is so moldable that it almost cannot maintain its own unique form. It changes form as it goes from person to person. *We must rescue the unique meaning of missions.*

But how can we rescue a meaning that has become so flexible and moldable? How can we refine our concept of missions so that it is better aligned with what God expects of us? *It is only through the study and analysis of Scripture, under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the subsequent application to our lives of what we have learned, that we can correctly transform our manner of identifying, perceiving, understanding, and participating in missions work. In other words, we must change our perspective of missions.*

Now, if it is true that there is too much confusion and flexibility in our concept of missions, if it is true that there is a certain deficiency of a unique meaning of missions, if it is true that this deficiency and confusion are weakening our missionary efforts, and if it is true that the Bible is our source of knowledge for correctly transforming our perspective of missions (and thus removing the confusion and eliminating the deficiency), then we find ourselves with an urgent need to transform or renew our perspective of missions in light of the Scriptures. And our future achievements in the field of missions will depend greatly upon the degree to which we can achieve this transformation and renovation.

In some ways, our situation is similar to that of the field of science in the sixteenth century when the Copernican revolution came. Copernicus was a Polish astronomer who lived between 1473 and 1543. For more than a thousand years, people had believed that the Earth was the center of the universe, and that everything (sun, moon, stars, etc.) revolved around our planet. But Copernicus demonstrated that the Earth really rotated around the sun, and that it also traveled through space in connection with the other planets. Without this Copernican transformation of scientific thought, it would never have been possible to develop the whole area of space exploration and space travel that we have now. Or, to refer to something not so buried in ancient history, our situation may be compared to the revolution that occurred in scientific thought when the transistor and integrated circuits were invented. Without these two inventions, and the transformations that they

brought with them to the field of electronics, it is very doubtful that we would have today such things as cell phones, personal computers, and a thousand other electronic devices that daily impact our lives.

*At times, it is necessary for us to change, transform, and renew our thought patterns so that we may progress toward a specific goal.* I believe that this is what Paul had in mind when he said in Romans 12:2 “and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” According to this verse, the renewal of our mind is the means by which we achieve the transformation that we should experience. And this transformation then leads to our proving or verifying what the will of God is. If our goal is to understand the will of God, we must be transformed, and this comes through the renewing of our minds. In other words, to reach the goal, our minds, our thought patterns, must be renewed. And what better source for achieving this renewal than the Holy Scriptures? As Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16, “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” So, if we wish to make good progress in the area of missions, and to do it in God’s way, then we must understand His will for us, which involves our transformation, which in turn involves the renewal of our mind and thought patterns according to the Scriptures.

### ***The Farmer and the Tools***

I would like to use a short fable to illustrate the urgent need for the transformation and renewal of our perspective with regards to missions. It is entitled “The Farmer and the Tools.”

Once upon a time there was a farmer who lived with his son on a very large wheat farm. They both enjoyed working their land, sowing and harvesting their wheat. But the farm was very large, and they always needed help every harvest time. So, during one of the long winters, the farmer set about to create 100 special tools to help him and his son in the task of harvesting. With much love and care, he personally crafted each tool. He selected the perfect alloy of metals so that each metallic part was strong, resistant to rust, and able to quickly fulfill its unique function in the harvest. The farmer chose only the best wood so that each wooden part was strong, but also smooth to the touch. He carefully sharpened each sickle and scythe, so that it would be able to harvest the grain quickly. He

crafted each harvesting fork so that it would hold the maximum amount of cut wheat, and carry it without losing any of the precious harvest.

And so the farmer worked, handcrafting each tool until he had created 100 perfect tools. When he had finished, he built a special toolshed near the barn, and he placed the tools in it so that they would be ready when the time of harvest came. Having finished all this, the farmer then did something very special. He brought each tool to life, so that the tools could go out and work all by themselves in the harvest, and thus be of greater help to the farmer and his son. And last of all, he gave special instructions to each tool, telling it what its special function was in the harvest, and how to best fulfill its purpose. Then, the farmer closed the toolshed doors.

In the days that followed, the farmer and his son worked very hard in the sowing of their lands. They desired a very great harvest, so they decided to plant in the same way, with a very great sowing. The work was hard and very tiring. The sun in the sky shown down upon them without mercy, and there was little shade. One day, in the middle of sowing a field, the farmer's son collapsed from the heat and exhaustion. The farmer ran to him, but when he reached his side, he realized that it was too late. His son had died. Alone, now, the farmer finished what was left of the planting.

The rains fell, and the sun shone. Each day, the wheat grew taller and taller. And each evening, when the sun would set, the farmer would stand for a few moments and look out over his lands. Never before had he seen a crop that promised such an abundant harvest. And every time that he looked at a stalk of wheat, he thought of the cost of this immense harvest: the life of his own son.

Finally, the wheat was ripe and ready for harvest, and the farmer gave orders to his tools to go out into his fields and harvest the grain. Little by little, the grains of wheat began to trickle into the grain bins. But the farmer noted that the process seemed quite slow. So, he decided to go out and see what was happening with his tools. When he reached his fields, he noted that only 47 tools were out working in the harvest. Fifty-three were missing. The farmer then walked back toward the barn and quietly approached the special toolshed he had built for his tools.

As he got closer to the toolshed, he heard his tools talking among themselves. One said, "I know that I ought to go out and work in the harvest, but I don't know what I'm supposed to do nor how I'm supposed to do it." The farmer thought to himself, "I gave you all the special instructions that you

need to accomplish the function that I have planned for you in the harvest; but, you don't remember." Another tool said, "I'm not properly made to do my part in the harvest. If I try to do it, I'll break." "I made you with the best of materials, and your strength is more than sufficient for the task which I have assigned you," thought the farmer. "But I like being here in the toolshed with the other tools," said a sickle. "Look, my wood is highly polished and there's not a speck of rust on my blade. I'm in perfect condition. But, if I go into the harvest, I'll come in contact with the ground. I'll get dirty. The dirt and mud will damage me. My blade will get dull and rusty and my wood will get scratched." The farmer simply said to himself, "without contact with the soil, there can be no harvest." Another tool said, "If I were a harvesting fork, I'd go out and work in the harvest. I want to be a harvesting fork, but I'm a scythe instead." "I made you with a special purpose in mind," thought the farmer, "there is no mistake in what you are." Another tool said, "if the farmer wants help with his harvest, then he should make more tools. Why do we have to be the tools that have to work? Let others do the work of the harvest." In a very low voice the farmer replied, "No other tools do I have. You are the only ones that can harvest the grain." Then one tool began debating with three others about whether or not the farmer's orders were really to be applied to them or not. Perhaps they did not have to obey his orders. Perhaps they only applied to others.

And so the discussions continued. The strange thing was that these 53 tools apparently did not even miss the 47 that were out working in the harvest. *Their toolshed was their world, and they were very content in it.*

After standing by the toolshed for several minutes, listening to these conversations, the farmer walked away from the barn. Once again, he looked out over his lands and the abundant harvest that was waiting. He saw the 47 tools hard at work. He remembered the price of this particular harvest. He thought of the 53 tools still in the toolshed. And then he sadly walked back to his house. The harvest was plentiful, the tools were all desperately needed in the fields, the hour was late, and much precious fruit was being lost.

### ***The facts behind the fable***

This little story illustrates a very serious situation in the arena of world missions. According to statistics for the year 2010, the great majority of the cross-cultural missionary harvest rests upon

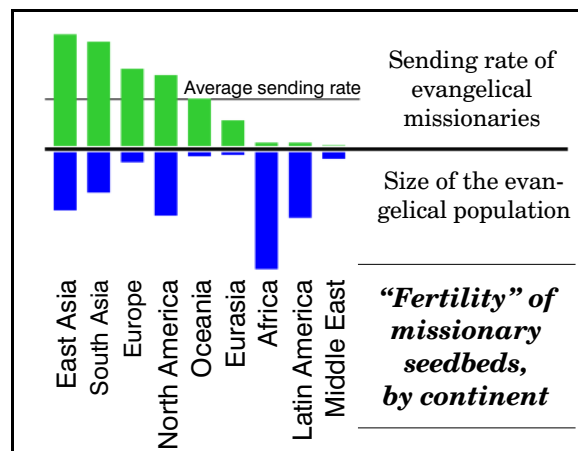


the shoulders of a little less than half of the world's evangelical believers. To be more precise, 47% of the world's total evangelical population sends out and maintains 95% of all the world's cross-cultural evangelical missionaries. The remaining 53% of the world's believers send out and maintain about 5% of the world's cross-cultural evangelical missionaries. This is a serious imbalance that carries with it negative repercussions. Over half of the world's believers are not involved in the harvest as deeply as they should be.

It is also interesting to note that this 47% of the world's evangelicals (those that send out and maintain 95% of the missionary work force) is not distributed evenly around the globe. Rather, it is concentrated on four of the world's nine continents (for a further explanation of these nine continents, please see the note at the close of this section). These four continents are: East Asia, South Asia, Europe, and North America. In fact, of the 20 countries in the world that have the highest cross-cultural missionary sending rate (the greatest number of cross-cultural missionaries sent out per million believers), 17 are found on these four continents. Also, of the 20 countries that send out the greatest total number of cross-cultural evangelical missionaries, 13 are found on these four continents. Appendix "A" presents this statistical information in a more detailed form, together with additional information on the Latin American countries with the greatest cross-cultural missionary activity. It is very instructive to compare the global statistics with those of Latin American nations. But, for now, we will just speak in terms of continental totals (as versus country totals). Thus, we may summarize all this information in the following graphic.

A quick analysis of the graphic will lead the reader to note the high cross-cultural missionary sending rate of these four continents. In fact, they are the only continents in the world that are sending out evangelical cross-cultural missionaries at rates higher than the average worldwide rate. Basically, we see that East Asia sends out missionaries at about 2.4 times the average rate, South Asia at about 2.3 times the average, Europe at 1.7 times the average, and North America at 1.5 times the average.

Note that the evangelical population of these four continents (the lower bars in the graphic) represents about 47% of all the evangelical believers in the world, and their missionary sending rates (the upper bars in the graphic) generate about 95% of all the cross-cultural evangelical missionaries in the world. This means that the rest



of the evangelical world, the total evangelical population of the other five continents (a population which represents 53% of all the world's believers), sends out missionaries at sending rates which generate 5% of the world's cross-cultural evangelical missionaries. At least, this was the situation in the year 2010 (the last extensive global census, which is taken every 10 years).

[*Note with regard to continental divisions:* in the World Missions Academy, we prefer to divide the world into nine major continents. This continental division allows us to take into account both natural geographical land groupings and general sociological-religious groupings based upon elements such as language, religion, and culture. These nine continents, listed in alphabetical order, are: **Africa** (basically, the countries to the south of the Sahara desert), **East Asia** (China, North and South Korea, Japan, Mongolia, and Taiwan), **Eurasia** (basically the nations of the old Soviet Union), **Europe** (the countries to the north of the Mediterranean Sea and to the east of Russia, with the exception of Turkey), **Latin America** (the countries in the Americas, from Mexico south), **the Middle East** (the countries from Turkey to Iran, the Saudi Arabian peninsula, and the countries north of the Sahara desert), **North America** (the countries in the Americas, north of Mexico), **Oceania** (the islands of the south Pacific, including Australia and New Zealand), and **South Asia** (the countries from Afghanistan and India to Indonesia and the Philippine Islands).]

[*Note regarding the statistics that appear in this text:* in the task of compiling and interpreting the statistics that are used in this study, the author has found one particular source of information that has proven to be balanced in its approach and very helpful as a starting point in this process. This source is *Operation World Professional DVD-ROM* by Jason Mandryk, published in 2011. This work is

available in various languages and in either electronic or paper format. If you are interested in obtaining a copy, please visit the following web site: [www.ivpress.com/operation-world-resources](http://www.ivpress.com/operation-world-resources). The DVD format of this work also includes the extensive databases used by Jason Mandryk. *Operation World* is strongly recommended for anyone desirous of learning more about the spiritual needs of the world and about missions statistics.]

### ***Two unique continents with great missionary potential***

In the preceding graphic there are two continents with large evangelical populations (together, they represent roughly half of all the evangelical believers in the world), but whose missionary sending rates are well below the average. These are Africa and Latin America, both with missionary sending rates that are less than one tenth of the worldwide average. These two continents represent unique missionary seedbeds (without detracting from the importance of the seedbeds on the other continents). Here, we have an *immense* evangelical population with an *immense* potential to send out cross-cultural missionaries.

To enable the reader to glimpse some of the missionary potential that lies in these two continents, consider what could be the total missionary impact if these seedbeds were to raise their missionary sending rates to the level of the current worldwide average. The impact would be enormous. Africa would send out about 110,000 additional cross-cultural missionaries, and Latin America would send out about 61,000 additional missionaries. Does the reader begin to see the potential of these two unique missionary seedbeds? Do we begin to see what these tools can achieve in the harvest once they get into the field (to use the terminology of our fable)? A change like this would add approximately 170,000 additional missionaries to the current evangelical cross-cultural missionary workforce, increasing its ranks by almost half.

But, for all of this to happen, the “fertility” of these two seedbeds needs to be improved. The “soil” needs to be fertilized. It needs to be tilled and worked. The seeds of thousands and thousands of cross-cultural missionaries need to be sown. And this “soil” needs to be prepared to send out and sustain these new missionaries. Long-set missionary tradition needs to be changed. *In short, the missionary perspective of these seedbeds needs to be renewed.* This is where the studies and materials of the World Missions Academy (including this text) can make a significant contribution.

### ***Latin America: unique among these two unique continents***

In the previous section, we saw that two continents were unique due to the fact that they possess a very large evangelical population with an equally large potential to send out missionaries. But, among these two unique continents, one stands out as being especially unique. This continent is Latin America, and it is especially unique for two basic reasons.

**The first reason:** Latin America combines the three key elements of a large evangelical base of believers, an atmosphere of great freedom to promote missions and send out missionaries, and an infrastructure that facilitates the sending and supporting of missionaries.

What do we mean by the word “infrastructure”? In this study, we use “infrastructure” to refer to the structural aspects that a nation develops and that facilitate the sending and maintaining of missionaries on the mission field (especially cross-cultural missionaries). For example, having *widespread access to technology* like computers and Internet communication, and the ability to use technology like digital pictures (recording, sending, receiving, image processing, and projection), can be a big help in the sending and maintaining of missionaries. How? By facilitating the exchange of timely information between sending churches and their missionaries, and by facilitating the communication of this information to the members of the congregation. In other words, technology is helping the sending church stay up to date with their missionaries. And, when the sending church is more current with its missionaries, it will tend to provide a stronger and more stable support of these missionaries. *Banking systems* are another example of infrastructure. If a country has a banking system with international connections, then it will be much easier for the sending churches to send their gifts and offerings to their missionaries. *International transportation facilities* are yet another example of this infrastructure. It is much easier for a missionary to travel between the mission field and their sending churches if they have access to an international airport within their sending country. And even *governmental infrastructure* can help in the sending of missionaries. How? Through providing the necessary documents for international travel (like passports), or by having consulates, embassies, and a thousand other diplomatic connections with the countries where these missionaries are

working. These connections can facilitate the entry and permanency of the missionary in that country, providing for getting visas, renewing visas, etc. All these examples, and many others like them, are tied up in the concept of “infrastructure.”

Now, why would we say that Latin America is unique in combining these three key elements? Because although Africa has the largest evangelical population and many of its countries enjoy considerable religious freedom, it tends to lack the widespread benefits of a well-developed infrastructure like that enjoyed in Latin America.

**The second reason:** Latin America is a unique continent because of its special connection with the Muslim world. This connection began in Spain in the year 711, with the invasion and conquering of the country by Muslim groups from the Middle East and north Africa. The Spanish Christians sought refuge in the mountains of northern Spain, where they organized a resistance movement that fought against the Muslims. But for the next 800 years, Spain basically was under the control and influence of the Muslim world. This was a time of great advances and developments in Spain, and the country grew in world importance. In the year 929, Abderraman III founded the Califate of Córdoba. This city achieved worldwide fame, and the successors of Abderraman III continued its development, especially in the areas of art and culture. In later years, Spain was divided up into small Muslim states called *taifas*, and this appears to be the beginning of the end of Muslim control over the country. In 1492, with a Spanish victory in the battle for the city of Granada, the Muslims were expelled from Spain.

Why all this study of history in a text about missions? Because if we are going to be good missionaries, if we are going to be churches that correctly and faithfully send out missionaries, *we need to understand who we are*. Without this, how can we hope to achieve the corrections, adaptations, and renewal of perspective that is required by the task of missions? Who we are is our starting point. And, to a large degree, Latin America is a direct product of the Muslim reign in Spain.

It was during these 800 years of Muslim occupation that Spain grew and developed into a world-class country. These were years of political development, with the founding of the different Muslim kingdoms that would later consolidate into the provinces of Spain. These were years of artistic development, in which elements of Arab architecture played an important role. These were years of cultural development, when the country’s very

“personality” was refined under Muslim guidance. In short, during these 800 years, Spain absorbed many Muslim influences. And, when Christopher Columbus set sail in 1492 (the very same year that the Muslims were expelled from Spain), in his voyage that would take him to the Americas, it was with a strong Muslim background. This was also true of the Conquistadors that would come later.

So, the colonization of Latin America was done by Spaniards who had drunk deeply from Muslim wells. And this Muslim heritage is still evident, even today, some 500 years later. Of course, the Latin American culture has undergone many, many modifications during these years, but a distinct Muslim “flavor” still may be found in many aspects of Latin American life. Who knows, perhaps the independent spirit (or concept of individual sovereignty) that seems rather typical of Latin American interpersonal relationships is due, at least in part, to the same spirit that divided Spain into small Muslim states so many years ago.

What is important here is that Latin America, through its historical and cultural ties to Spain, has a certain Muslim background. And this background should make it easier for a Latin American missionary to more quickly and easily understand a Muslim context. It should also make it easier for this missionary to adapt to a Muslim context and live within it with fewer cultural difficulties (in comparison to missionaries who have grown up in other cultural contexts).

Yes, Latin America is an especially unique continent. It has a large evangelical base of believers, it has religious freedoms, it has a developed infrastructure, and it has “bridges” that help connect it with the Muslim world and the Middle East (one of the more resistant continents to modern missionary efforts). We need to equip ourselves to make the most of the advantages that God has given us. We need to mine and refine the “gold” that God has placed in our context. We need to become the missionary seedbed that God wishes us to become. We need to renew our perspective of the whole area of missions.

This can be accomplished, at least in part, by achieving a thorough understanding, in the light of Scripture, of the nature, role, and interaction of various elements such as the missionary call, the definition and concept of missionary work, and the general concept and interrelation of the principal missionary entities (God, the sending church, the missionary, and the missions agency). The remainder of this text is dedicated to a brief study of each of these key elements.

# Chapter 2

## Renewing our perspective of the missionary



Let us begin the renewing of our missions perspective with a study of what a missionary is. What exactly does the term “missionary” mean? And what does it mean to “be a missionary”? A good grasp of this term is fundamental to a correct and adequate understanding of both missions and missionary work.

When we want to understand the meaning of a word or of a biblical concept, we oftentimes go to a dictionary to get its “secular” definition, and then we go to the Bible to see how the term or concept is used in the Holy Scriptures. This way, we broaden and correct the dictionary’s definition with the Bible’s usage and definition. This method of refinement is normally a very good method to use, but we will have to modify it a little for the word “missionary.” Why? Because the word “missionary” does not appear, as such, in the actual text of the commonly-used English translations of the Bible (King James, New American Standard, New International Version).

### ***Definition according to the dictionary***

*Webster’s New World Dictionary* (revised edition of July 1983) defines “missionary” as “a person sent out by his church to preach and make converts in a foreign country” (noun form), and “of religious missions” (adjective form). To complete this definition, we need to also look up the word “mission.” According to this same dictionary, “mission” means “a sending out or being sent out to perform a special duty,” “a group of missionaries (or its headquarters),” “a diplomatic delegation,” “a group of technicians, specialists, etc. sent to a foreign country,” “the special duty for which one is sent,” and “a special task to which one devotes his life.”

In analyzing these words, a common thread runs through their definitions: the idea of being sent out to perform a special duty. At the heart of “missionary” and “mission” is the sense of being sent out with a special purpose. Other key elements highlighted by these definitions include the concept of being a delegate (a representative) and of devoting one’s life to the special purpose for

which one was sent out. Synthesizing all of this, “mission” (or “missions”) may be described as *the sending out of a representative with a special purpose to which this representative then devotes his or her life*. “Missionary” may be described as *the representative thus sent*.

### ***Definition according to the Bible***

As was mentioned above, the word “missionary” does not appear in the text of the commonly-used English translations of the Bible. And the word “mission” or “missions” only appears seven times or less (depending upon the English translation). For example, in the King James version, the words “mission” or “missions” are never used. In the New American Standard Bible “mission” is used three times, once in each of three verses (1 Samuel 15:18, 20; and Acts 12:25). The New International Version uses “mission” six times, once in each of six verses (Joshua 22:3; 1 Samuel 15:18, 20; 21:2; Isaiah 48:15; and Acts 12:25), and it uses “missions” once (1 Samuel 21:5).

Basically, in these seven verses, “mission” or “missions” is used to translate four different words in the original languages of the Bible (three words in Hebrew and one in Greek). The word most commonly translated “mission” (or “missions”) is the Hebrew word *derek* (דֶּרֶךְ). This translation appears four times in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 15:18, 20; 21:5; and Isaiah 48:15). *Derek* basically means “way,” “path,” or “journey.” Two other Hebrew words are also each translated “mission” once in the Old Testament. The first word is *mishmereth* (מִשְׁמֶרֶת), found in Joshua 22:3. It basically means “charge” or “ward.” The second word translated “mission” is *dabar* (דָּבָר), which is found in 1 Samuel 21:2. It broadly means “word,” “thing,” “matter,” or “business.” There is also one word in Greek translated “mission” in the New Testament (Acts 12:25). This word is *diaconia* (διακονία), which carries the idea of “ministry,” “service,” “contribution,” “help,” “assistance,” “mission,” or “charge.”

Unfortunately, our analysis of the use of the words “missionary,” “mission,” and “missions” in the common English translations of the Bible

really does not offer us much additional information about their meaning. These translations use these words too broadly, skipping over the more technical meaning highlighted by the dictionary. So, we have to add one more step to this process of investigation. We need to see if there are *other* words in the Bible to which “missionary” and “mission” could refer, but that for one reason or another, when the time came to translate these words into English, “missionary” and “mission” were not used. Using this new investigative approach, we find two words in the New Testament which are very closely related to the general concept of “missionary” and “mission.” These are the Greek words *apostello* (ἀποστέλλω) and *apostolos* (ἀπόστολος).

***Apostello.*** From a grammatical point of view, and taking into account its biblical meaning and usage, *apostello* (ἀποστέλλω) is a verb that basically means “to send” or “to send out.” More specifically, it means “to send out with authority, with a specific purpose or mission.” It also includes the idea of authority being delegated to the one being sent. Biblical examples of this usage include the following verses (and please note how these verses demonstrate the different facets of the meaning of *apostello*). “These twelve Jesus *sent out* after instructing them, ...” (Matthew 10:5). “And when the harvest time approached, he *sent* his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce” (Matthew 21:34). “And as they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He *sent* two of His disciples and said to them, ‘Go into the village opposite you, ... find a colt tied there, ... untie it and bring it here’” (Mark 11:1–2). “But He said to them, ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was *sent* for this purpose.’” (Luke 4:43). “Or else, while the other is still far away, he *sends* a delegation and asks terms of peace” (Luke 14:32). “For God did not *send* the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him” (John 3:17). [Jesus, speaking of the Father] “As Thou didst *send* Me into the world, I also have *sent* them into the world” (John 17:18). “And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has *sent* me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 9:17). “And how shall they preach unless they are *sent*? ...” (Romans 10:15).

As can be seen in these verses, the dictionary definition of “mission” fits very well with the

biblical definition and use of *apostello*. There is a definite sense of sending someone out to perform a special duty, to accomplish a special task. The one being sent is a delegate, a representative, accomplishing the will of the sender.

***Apostolos.*** The word *apostolos* (ἀπόστολος) is the noun associated with the verb *apostello*. In the Bible, we find two basic uses of this word. The first and more frequent is a technical use of this word, where it refers, in a technical sense, to the 12 Apostles and Paul, and perhaps James. These 13 or 14 men were unique people in the history of the world. They were chosen by Christ for a very special function in the early Church. They were His special ambassadors. And, when *apostolos* is used in this technical sense, our English Bibles usually translate it with the word “apostle.” Examples include the following verses. “Now the names of the twelve *apostles* are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ...” (Matthew 10:2). “And the *apostles* gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught” (Mark 6:30). “And when day came, He called His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as *apostles*” (Luke 6:13). “And when the hour had come He reclined at the table, and the *apostles* with Him” (Luke 22:14). “Until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the *apostles* whom He had chosen” (Acts 1:2). “And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven *apostles*” (Acts 1:26). “Paul, an *apostle* of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:1). “And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve *apostles* of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:14). As can be seen in these verses, the technical use of the word *apostolos* is reserved for a very small group of people, perhaps only 13 or 14 persons (and normally only 12 persons).

***Nontechnical use of the word apostolos.*** The Bible also uses the word *apostolos* in a much broader and less technical way. And this use is not reserved for only a small group of people. For example, we have already seen in John 17:18 that every believer has been sent by Jesus just as Jesus was sent by the Father. All believers are representatives of Jesus Christ, we are apostles of Jesus Christ. He has sent us into the world to represent Him and communicate His message. We are His

delegates. We are ambassadors of Jesus Christ.

Other verses that highlight this nontechnical use of *apostolos* include the following. “But when the *apostles*, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes ...” (Acts 14:14). Please note that Barnabas was not an apostle in the technical sense of the word. He was not part of the small group of 13 or 14. “Now these things, brethren, I [Paul] have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, ... for, I think, God has exhibited us *apostles* last of all, as men condemned to death; ...” (1 Corinthians 4:6, 9). Apollos was not an apostle in the technical sense of the word, either. “For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed ... nor did we seek glory from men, ... even though as *apostles* of Christ we might have asserted our authority” (1 Thessalonians 2:5–6). A quick study of Acts 17:1–14 shows that this group of apostles that began the work in Thessalonika included Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Silas and Timothy were apostles only in the nontechnical sense of the word.

Taking into account these verses and the biblical meaning and use of the verb *apostello* (“to send out”), we can say that *apostolos*, in the broad and nontechnical use of the word, has the meaning of *an ambassador, a delegate, a messenger, a representative sent with authority and with a specific purpose or mission*. This meaning fits very well with, and amplifies significantly, the dictionary definition of “missionary.” This biblical clarification and amplification of the meaning help us broaden and correct our concept of what a missionary is. In other words, they help us renew our perspective of the missionary.

And who does this “nontechnical” apostle represent? Whose ambassador is he or she? The majority of the times when the Bible uses “apostle” in the New Testament (both in its technical and nontechnical senses), it is referring to a representative of Jesus Christ, an ambassador of Jesus Christ. Luke 11:49; John 17:18; Acts 1:2; 1 Corinthians 1:1; and 1 Peter 1:1 are all examples of this type of use of the word “apostle.” But there are also times in the Bible when the apostle represents other entities as well, especially a church. For example, Philippians 2:25 says “but I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your *messenger* and minister to my need.” The word translated “messenger” here is *apostolos*. Epaphroditus was an apostle, and ambassador, a delegate or the church in Philippi, and he represented the Philippian brothers as he ministered to Paul in his needs. And the representation that Epaphroditus gave

was so closely linked to this church that he literally fulfilled what was lacking in the *Philippians* ministry to Paul. As Philippians 2:30 says, “because he [Epaphroditus] came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life *to complete what was deficient in your service to me*.” In other words, Epaphroditus was the representative, the ambassador, of the church in Philippi, and through his ministry to Paul (that is to say, through his representation of this church), this church reached out and ministered to Paul in his needs.

Another example of the word “apostle” used in connection with a church is found in 2 Corinthians 8:23 which says, “as for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are *messengers* of the churches, a glory to Christ.” Once again, the word here translated “messengers” is the plural form of word *apostolos*. These brothers were apostles, ambassadors, of these churches. And please note what is said in verses 18 and 19 of this same passage, regarding one of these brothers: “and we have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches; and not only this, but he *has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work ...*” Apparently, these churches had appointed at least one of these brothers to serve as a traveling companion of Paul. In this appointment, please note the elements of authority exercised by these churches (as evidenced in their appointment of this individual) and the specific purpose that this appointment had (to be a traveling companion of Paul). Here we have the sending out of an ambassador, done with authority and with a specific purpose or mission in mind. Here we have an *apostolos* of these churches. Here we have a missionary of these churches.

### ***The laying on of hands***

Another biblical element that offers us some additional information with regard to the meaning of the word “missionary” is the practice of the laying on of hands. We read in Acts 13:2–3 that “... while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, when they had fasted and prayed *and laid their hands on them*, they sent them away.” What does the laying on of hands mean? What additional information can it give us with regards to the meaning of the word “missionary”?

The laying on of hands is a symbol rich in content, and it speaks of, among other things, the

importance and authority of the local sending church (we will study this facet in greater detail in chapter 5). This church, as a sending authority, lays its hands upon the missionary. And the missionary, in his or her submission to this laying on of hands, recognizes, accepts, and submits to the authority of this church.

The laying on of hands also demonstrates the creation, identification, and accreditation of an official representative of this church. In Leviticus, chapters 3 and 4, we find an example of how the laying on of hands was used to create, identify, and accredit an official representative for the person who deserved punishment for his or her sins. Through the laying on of hands, the person's guilt and punishment were "transferred" over to his or her representative.

Therefore, in addition to speaking of the authority of the local sending church, the laying on of hands also underscores the element of representation inherently present in the word "missionary." So, when a church lays its hands upon its missionary, this church should be recognizing at least three different things. First, it should be recognizing that it has *created* an office of official representative (in other words, it will have individuals who officially represent it). Second, it should be recognizing that, through this symbolic laying on of hands, it now *identifies* this individual (or family) as one of these official representatives. And third, it should be recognizing that it now officially and formally *accredits* this individual (or family) to exercise this representation. The laying on of hands is not simply a nice, thoughtful gesture. At the same time, the missionary, in his or her submission to this laying on of hands, should also be recognizing at least three different things. First, he or she should be recognizing his or her *identification* with this church (he or she will be this church's official ambassador). Second, he or she should be recognizing his or her *submission* to the general leadership and direction of this church (he or she is now this church's ambassador, sent out to minister in the place of this church). And third, he or she should be recognizing his or her *firm commitment to be a true and faithful representative* of this church. If either party is not willing to wholeheartedly recognize these three key elements, the representation inherent in being a missionary of this church is seriously jeopardized.

Understood this way, the laying on of hands also points to the fact that these two parties (missionary and sending church) are truly in adequate condition to achieve this representation. Otherwise, what sense would there be in officially

naming somebody as your ambassador, and accrediting them as such, knowing all along that they are not really going to be able to fulfill this representation with excellence? What sense would there be to claim to identify with and submit to an entity, knowing all along that you are not going to be able to represent this entity with excellence? Given this reality, the two parties involved (missionary and sending church), *prior to constituting this individual as an official and accredited representative of this church*, must confirm the existence of certain mutual similarities and responsibilities that underlie and make possible a faithful and adequate representation. *To the degree that these mutual similarities and responsibilities are missing, these parties are running the risk of weakening this representation and even making it completely impossible.*

### ***Critical mutual similarities and responsibilities***

As has been noted in this study, there is a very close relationship between the concept of "missionary" and the representation of the entities that send out this missionary. In fact, this representation is so closely tied to the concept of "missionary" that it is *inherent* in the concept. You cannot truly have a missionary (at least biblically speaking) without having this representation. The missionary is the ambassador that represents his or her sending entities. And, as has been mentioned, there are certain mutual similarities and responsibilities that underlie and make possible a faithful and adequate representation. What are they? At least nine elements have been identified as being fundamental to the achievement of a good representation.

To facilitate the explanation of these nine elements, they will be presented in the general context of a cross-cultural missionary and a potential sending church, both parties having reached the point of analyzing whether or not it would be wise for them to associate together as ambassador and sending entity. Although these nine elements will be presented in this particular missionary context, they also will be applicable to practically any other context involving a representative and the entity that this individual represents. So, we should not limit these nine mutual similarities and responsibilities only to the world of missions. They can have a much broader application.

Before entering an analysis of this list of nine elements, please note a couple very important

observations. First, this list takes for granted that the representative (in this case, the missionary) is willing to recognize and accept the authority of the sending entities (in this case, his or her sending churches) and to submit to this authority and to these entities as their ambassador. Second, this list also takes for granted that this representative is committed to offering a faithful and accurate representation of his or her sending entities as their ambassador. Thus, these two points, although very important, do not appear in this list of nine elements. In a very real sense, they underlie our list, because without these two fundamental issues of willing submission to authority, and commitment to achieving a faithful and accurate representation, it is impossible to have a true and natural representation *no matter how many similarities the potential representative and the potential sending entities may share*. No country in the world would accept as their political ambassador an individual who 1) was unwilling to recognize, accept, and submit to the authority of the government of this country, or who 2) had no commitment to being a faithful and accurate ambassador of this country. To do anything else would be to run immense and unnecessary risks. It is the same way with missions and missionaries.

① **Similarities with regard to their basic missionary purpose.** The missionary and the entities that he or she represents (their sending churches) should share the same basic missionary purpose. This purpose basically answers the fundamental question as to the core reason why the entity is involved in missions. It answers the question “what do I live for?” or “what do I want to achieve most in the mission field?” The basic missionary purpose defines, in very broad, basic and fundamental terms, why the entity desires to work on the mission field.

As may be expected, this basic missionary purpose has very far reaching consequences or ramifications. It will establish the basic and general priorities for the particular entity in the area of missionary activity. It will also set the parameters that determine, in general terms, what activities this entity will consider to be its *preferred* activities (“I certainly want to do this with all my heart”), its *acceptable* activities (“although not so much a priority for me, I’m willing to do this as well”), and its *unacceptable* activities (“I’m not going to invest my time and efforts in this”). As can be imagined, if the potential missionary and potential sending church do not share significant similarities in this fundamental area, it will be

highly difficult to achieve a faithful and acceptable representation through this ambassador.

For example, how can a missionary, whose basic missionary purpose is to work in the area of theological education in Africa, faithfully and adequately represent a sending church whose basic missionary purpose and desire is to plant churches in Asia? The only way that this missionary can represent this church is *marginally*, unless the church also has an additional missionary purpose of helping in theological education in Africa (it is not at all rare for a church to have more than one basic missionary purpose, since the church is a rather large entity with multiple ministry facets). And if the representation happens to be marginal, what type of connection will link this missionary and this sending church? It will be a *marginal* connection. And marginal connections are very easy to break. So, sooner or later (and many times much sooner than later), a day comes when this church stops supporting this missionary in Africa. Why? *Because as a church, its heart never was involved in this ministry in Africa*. It was never a priority ministry for this church. And when this happens, the poor missionary in Africa finds himself or herself in very difficult circumstances. Why? *Because all this time he or she has been inadequately representing this sending church (perhaps even unknowingly), due to differences in their basic missionary purpose*.

When there is a lack of similarities or commonality in the area of basic missionary purpose, this potential missionary and this potential sending church should recognize this lack *from the very beginning*, and they should also recognize that due to this fundamental difference, this individual really is not in condition to correctly represent this church. *There is no sin nor any problem in admitting and recognizing differing basic missionary purposes*. God is just calling these two entities to different activities. He has a right to do this, and He does it from time to time. The problem comes when we do not recognize these differences, and we try to achieve a representation without having an adequate underlying base.

*This is such an important truth that it warrants repeating. When there is not a high degree of similarity between the potential missionary and the potential sending church with regard to their basic missionary purpose, there will be problems. Sooner or later, either one or the other (or perhaps both) will feel “betrayed” because their deepest dreams and desires were not reflected in the other entity. And instead of seeing their resources and efforts being dedicated to activities that they consider as a*



*true priority, they have been obliged to dedicate these resources and efforts to activities which they view as only secondary or marginal.*

② **Similarities with regard to their basic missionary vision.** This element may be a little bit more nebulous than the basic missionary purpose, but it is related to this purpose. The basic missionary vision describes where the entity wishes to head in the future in missionary work. As such, the basic missionary vision has much to do with determining what will be an entity's *future* basic missionary purposes. For example, a missionary may have a *current* missionary purpose to work as a missionary doctor in a clinic in the jungles of South America. But, his or her vision for the *future* might be to open a complete hospital in this jungle setting. If so, then opening a hospital is not his or her current basic missionary purpose, but it very well could become their basic missionary purpose within the next 10 or 15 years.

Since this area deals with the *future*, and treats *anticipated* changes in the future, it is not 100% obligatory that the missionary and his or her sending churches share similarities with regard to missionary vision. But it certainly helps if they can share them, because these similarities will allow the ministry to develop in a natural and harmonious way as the years pass. If the entities lack similarities here, the deepest future dreams and desires of these two entities are not in agreement, and this very well could create a growing "distance" between the missionary and the sending church as time goes on and as the work becomes more fully developed. This distance will become an obstacle to a faithful and adequate representation in the future, and it will likely impact negatively in achieving a deep and lasting relationship in the present (since both entities are on different paths which just happen to cross each other right now but that are headed in different directions with the passage of time).

③ **Similarities with regard to doctrine and theology.** For the well being of the missionary endeavor, it is very important that the potential missionary and the potential sending churches share significant similarities in doctrine and theology. Obviously, these entities should both share an *evangelical* doctrine and theology. But even within the evangelical camp there are theological and doctrinal differences of opinion that cannot be ignored when we are dealing with being a representative and an ambassador.

Let us take, for instance, the case of a mission-

ary who comes from a non-Pentecostal background. He wants to go to Russia and evangelize and plant churches. So, he begins to search out potential sending churches that will be able to provide the support that he will need to minister in Russia. And it turns out that there are many more Pentecostal churches in his sending country than any other kind of church. So, he goes to these Pentecostal churches and requests that they send him out as their missionary to Russia. Furthermore, let us suppose that these Pentecostal churches have also felt the need to evangelize and plant churches in Russia (similarity of basic missionary purpose), so they accept this individual as their missionary, and send him to Russia. And some seven years later, let us suppose that this missionary has founded three churches. But, what kind of churches? Will they be Pentecostal churches (as per the desires and expectations of his sending churches), or will they be non-Pentecostal churches (as per the personal convictions and background of the missionary)? How can he, being non-Pentecostal, *faithfully* and *adequately* represent Pentecostal churches in the task of church planting? Sooner or later, somebody's theological and doctrinal position will end up being violated.

Similarities in the area of doctrine and theology can help a lot in achieving a close, faithful, and adequate representation. Also, they lead to an environment which permits an efficient and tranquil achievement of the missionary objective, without undue theological and doctrinal obstacles. Furthermore, similarities here will reduce the risk of a future "betrayal" that could occur because the ministry on the mission field (which is isolated and very removed from the sending churches) developed along theological and doctrinal lines that held little semblance to what was expected and desired by these sending churches.

④ **Similarities with regard to the concept of or philosophy of ministry.** Although this area is not as fundamental as the area of doctrine and theology, it is still very important to analyze what degree of agreement exists between the concept of ministry (or the philosophy of ministry) that this potential missionary and this potential sending church have. What does "doing ministry" mean for each of them? What is their concept or philosophy of key ministerial terms like "evangelization," "church," "discipleship," "theological education," or "Bible study"? To what philosophy of ministry do they adhere?

For example, the missionary may have a philosophy of ministry that places a lot of emphasis

on the study and the preaching of the Word of God. If so, then this missionary may spend three days studying and preparing for the Sunday sermon. But not everyone views the ministry this way. Perhaps the sending church has a concept of ministry that places a lot of emphasis on elements like visiting the people, playing basketball with the youth of the neighborhood, or spending long hours in counseling sessions. If this happens to be the case, then this missionary and this sending church are probably going to have problems.

In very simple terms, an entity's philosophy of ministry will define which types of activities it will consider to be of priority. A lack of agreement here will lead to problems because the representative (the missionary) cannot dedicate himself or herself to what is really a priority according to the entity being represented (the sending churches) without betraying his or her own personal philosophy of ministry and sense of priorities. When this happens, there is a considerable risk that each entity will feel that what is *really* a priority activity is only of minimal importance to the other. This can lead to the point where each entity feels abandoned by the other, left alone to achieve the truly priority items that they long to accomplish. Obviously, this type of an arrangement is not conducive to good relationships nor to working in fellowship and harmony. A lack of agreement in the area of philosophy of ministry weakens the representation that an ambassador can provide.

**⑤ Similarities with regard to priorities in the ministry (or focus within the ministry).**

The basic missionary purpose dealt with *basic and general* priorities within the scope of missions. The philosophy of ministry dealt with priorities within the *types or genres* of missionary activities. Now, this point regarding the priorities in the ministry will deal with the *specific* priorities (at the level of the actual activities) in the scope of missionary activities. Here, we are looking at analyzing the degree of similarity that exists in the priorities assigned to these activities by the potential missionary and by the potential sending church.

This step is necessary because it is not enough to simply share the same basic missionary purpose and the same philosophy of ministry. Although agreement in these two areas should guarantee a considerable agreement with regard to general priorities and the priorities assigned to types or genres of activities, it does not guarantee agreement with regard to the priorities assigned to the *specific* activities that fall with the framework established by these general priorities and priority

types or genres of activities. *In other words, being in agreement with regard the general points does not automatically signify an agreement in all the minor points.*

Let us use the example of a missionary that wants to serve in Africa, and who has plans to join a missionary team that does evangelism and church planting in the city of Dar-es-Salam in the country of Tanzania. This missionary's basic responsibility within the missionary team will be in the area of music (she will handle the basic details of all the musical aspects of the team's events). Understood this way, we can say that this missionary's *basic and general* priority is evangelism and church planting. Her priority with regard to *types or genres of activities* is the use of music in evangelistic and church planting activities. And her priority with regard to the *specific activities* could be to program all facets related to the use of music in evangelistic events and in the church services that this team serves in. Thus, before heading off to Africa, this missionary communicates all this to her potential sending churches. Those that wish to work with her in these types of activities (that is to say, those with similar priorities to hers) then send her to Africa to serve as their representative, planning to fulfill their plans and desires as sending churches through the representation that she provides them.

But, upon arriving in Dar-es-Salam, and upon seeing the conditions in which the street children live, this missionary then decides that God is calling her to change her ministry focus, leave the missionary team with which she planned on working, and work directly with these children. She will still be working in evangelism. And, to at least a certain degree, she will still be working in church planting or church strengthening (since the new converts among these children should be incorporated into a local church). So, there has been no drastic change in her basic missionary purpose. There may have been some change in her concept of ministry or philosophy of ministry, due to her transition into using her musical gifts in this work with these children. And there has been a quite sizeable change in the area of her *ministerial focus* and in the area of her *specific priorities in the ministry*. She now is seriously contemplating leaving the missionary team with which she planned on working, and she now plans for her main ministry to be the work with these children. These are significant changes to what her sending churches understood when they decided to send her to Africa.

Obviously, this type of change in ministry

priorities or ministry focus jeopardize a faithful and adequate representation of the sending churches. *These churches did not send her to Africa to do this type of ministry.* This does not mean that this change in ministry focus is necessarily incorrect, but it does mean that it does not necessarily represent the desires of the sending churches, and thus complicates being their ambassador. So, before making a ministry change like this, this missionary should contact her sending churches, inform them of her desire to change her ministry focus to working with these children, speak of the need and urgency of this type of a ministry, explain how this new ministry can contribute to the goals and objectives that she and these churches still have in common, and ask them if they would seriously consider whether or not God would have them *expand* their missionary ministry to include these activities. *Please note here that the emphasis is on what God would have these churches do, and not on what this particular missionary would like for these churches to do.* For the churches that do agree to expand their missionary ministry to include this work with the children, there should be no problem. This missionary can work in this ministry and still be an ambassador of these churches.

But, for the churches that feel that God is not calling them to broaden their missionary ministry this way, but rather wish to continue within the ministry parameters that they had agreed to earlier (before sending their missionary to Africa), *there is a serious problem.* This missionary is no longer able to faithfully and adequately represent these churches. She no longer satisfies the basic conditions necessary to be their ambassador. If this happens, it also probably means that these churches will cease supporting her before too very long. After all, what church has such a surplus of resources that they have the luxury investing some of them in a ministry that does not really contribute to the basic ministry goals of this church? And this lack of support may very well mean that this missionary will need to return to her sending country to look for additional support before continuing with her ministry in Africa.

All of this demonstrates the importance of confirming, as much as possible, the existence of similarities in the area of ministry priorities and ministry focus, *before sending the missionary to the mission field.* Similarities and differences in this area will have a far reaching impact on the representation that can be achieved by this missionary.

#### ⑥ Similarities with regard to geograph-

**ical and ethnic focuses.** What church would send their missionaries to France when they really want to develop a ministry in India? Or what missionary, desirous of working among a Chinese population, would limit his search for a support base to churches that principally want to work among the Eskimos of North America? Of all the similarities in our list, this one is perhaps the easiest to understand and grasp. If God is calling us to a ministry in a certain geographical area with a certain ethnic population, then we need to team up with other entities that share this geographical and ethnic focus. To do otherwise seriously complicates a faithful, natural, and adequate representation.

Thus, the missionary seeks to be an ambassador of sending churches that share his geographical and ethnic focuses. He looks for support from churches that share this element in common with him. And if he does not do this, how can he expect to be a faithful and adequate representative of these churches? How can he, as their ambassador, help these churches achieve the tasks to which God has called them, if he feels called to work in another area? How can he be the “arms,” “hands,” and “feet” of these churches, reaching out into areas where they want to work, but he does not?

#### ⑦ Similarities with regard to expectations regarding employment arrangements.

Here, the phrase “employment arrangements” is used to signify the type of work commitment that the missionary has with the mission work (and his or her mission agency). For example, there are *short-term missionaries*, who expect to serve on the mission field for two to six months (or perhaps a bit more). There are also what might be called “*medium-term*” missionaries, who expect to serve on the mission field from one to three years (more or less). And there are *long-term missionaries*, who expect to spend at least four years (and frequently much more than four years, many up to their entire lifetime) serving on the mission field. In addition to this, there are also missionaries who are dedicated exclusively to missionary work (known as “full-time” missionaries), and then there are missionaries who have a secular job in addition to their missionary activities (known as bivocational missionaries or “tent-makers”).

There are advantages and disadvantages to each of the above “employment arrangements,” but it is not our focus here to analyze them. Rather, what we want to do here is simply point out that these options do exist and that it is very likely that the future missionary and the future sending

church will each have their preferences with regard to what type of “employment arrangement” they wish for their representative. Obviously, an agreement in this area will make it much easier for the missionary to provide a faithful, natural, and adequate representation of his or her sending churches.

How can a missionary that feels called to dedicate herself exclusively and completely to the task of her missionary labors (that is to say, serve as a full-time missionary) contemplate going out as the ambassador of sending churches that only wish to send out bivocational or “tent-maker” missionaries? There is no agreement with regard to her “employment arrangement.” And let us suppose for a moment that she really does leave for the field as the missionary of these churches. Then they very well may expect her to get a secular job (and thus help defray the expenses of her overseas living), and work in her missionary labors in her free time in the evenings and on weekends. But she, on the other hand, feels that God wants her to dedicate all of her time to her missionary labors, and resents being told that she must get a job or go hungry. As can be seen, this can be the grounds for a considerable disagreement between the ambassador and the sending entities.

Or let us suppose that the sending churches want their missionary to work full-time in his or her missionary labors (for example, so that evangelism and church planting can occur at a much faster rate). Then how can these churches think of choosing as their missionary, their ambassador, someone who feels called to be a bivocational missionary? There is an inherent conflict of interests, priorities, and dedication here. How can this individual faithfully, naturally, and adequately represent these churches?

Once again, similarities here will tend to lead to a more faithful and adequate representation, accomplished in an environment of greater harmony. Differences here will tend to obstruct this type of a representation and make the work environment much less harmonious. And the degree of difference will tend to determine the degree of obstruction.

⑧ **Similarities with regard to expectations in areas like spiritual support, logistic support, and financial support.** The successful completion of cross-cultural missionary work requires spiritual, logistic, and financial support. *Spiritual support* covers activities like praying for the missionary and encouraging him or her in their labors. *Logistic support* covers activities like

helping the missionary send out their prayer letters (printing out the master copy, photocopying it, and mailing the letters to their recipients), or maybe sending down a work team to help in a construction project required by the missionary’s ministry. And *financial support* covers activities like taking up offerings so that the missionary may have the finances necessary to fulfill his or her ministry.

Without these three types of support, it would be almost impossible to accomplish the cross-cultural missionary task. But, each human entity involved in the sending of the missionary (both sending churches and missionary) may have different expectations with regard to this type of support. In fact, they may each have their own definition of what this support is (and these definitions may not agree). For example, the missionary may expect that his sending churches will pray for him daily, but his sending churches may only be planning on praying for him “formally” (from the pulpit) one Sunday a month. The missionary may expect that his sending churches will put together a monthly missionary prayer bulletin (based upon news and prayer requests that he sends them), but the churches may expect that, if they are going to use something like this bulletin, then the missionary himself should put it together and send it to them. The missionary may expect to receive an adequate salary according to the economic realities of the country where she works, but the churches may very well have a very different concept of what is an “adequate” salary. The missionary may expect that her sending churches will add up their missionary offerings on a monthly basis and then every month deposit her portion of the offerings in her bank account in Germany (to list a foreign country) through an international bank transfer. But the churches may expect to add up the missionary offerings during an entire year and make just one deposit each year, and that directly to a bank account that the missionary holds in a bank within the sending country (the country where the church is located). Or the missionary may expect that his sending churches will send volunteer work teams to help in some of the logistical aspects of the missionary’s ministry (construction of a church building, remodeling a school, building a clinic, offering free medical checkups to the community, etc.). But his churches may expect that the missionary cover these needs using volunteers from within the evangelical population of the country in which he works. Or perhaps the churches expect to be able to send occasional work teams to the mission field, and

they also expect that their missionary will set aside the necessary time to organize this visit, supervise it, provide the team with a brief orientation to the country and to the ministry, and serve as general translator and advisor. However, the missionary might be expecting to spend her time in another way.

All of these are reasonable (not far-fetched) examples of how the sending churches and their missionary might possibly have differing expectations with regard to responsibilities in the areas of spiritual support, logistic support, and financial support. And to these examples, thousands more could be added. So, the more agreement that there is in this area (and especially with regard to the more important or critical expectations), the more harmony there will be in the mission field and within the missionary's labors. The greater the degree of similarity in expectations here, the easier it will be to achieve a faithful, natural, and adequate representation.

In many ways, missionary work is very much like marriage. The future groom and the future bride each come into a marriage with certain expectations. Some have to do with their own role within the marriage, and others have to do with the role of their future mate. And even others have to do with more "neutral" elements like the home, home life, home economics, child rearing, and a thousand other "minor" details. The more similarities that there are between their expectations, the greater the harmony that will exist within this marriage and this home. The greater the differences between their expectations, the more friction there will be within this marriage and this home. *And when the differences are sufficiently great enough and important enough, the couple must seriously question whether or not they should really get married.* Otherwise, they may very well be running a great risk of having a divorce in the future and destroying much of what they have labored together to build up.

It is the same way with the potential missionary and his potential sending church. To send out a missionary, and to form the ties that are implied in this sending, is (in a very real way) "getting married." The tie between the missionary and his sending church should be almost as strong as the ties created by a marriage. Together, the missionary and his sending churches are forming a new "family." And the missionary's ministry and mission field will be their "home." The greater the degree of similarity between the "couple," the greater the harmony and productivity within the "family" and within the "home." We need mission-

ary "marriages" and missionary "homes" that are happy and productive.

⑨ **Similarities with regard to expectations and responsibilities in the area of communication.** If sending out a missionary is like a marriage, then communication between the "couple" will play a very vital role in making the "marriage" and "home" happy and productive. This need is even more greatly underscored by the missionary's role as ambassador. What country would allow their ambassador to fulfill his or her role without being in practically constant contact with the government that he or she represents? *The caliber of his or her representation rests upon clear and frequent communication with his or her government.* Can it be any less with the missionary and the sending church?

In many ways, this area is very similar to the preceding area (point eight in our list), except that here we are concentrating exclusively on the aspect of communication. Within the task of missions, both the missionary and her sending churches will have expectations (and responsibilities) with regard to communication. For example, the missionary may expect that her sending churches will send her monthly updates on what is happening within these churches (how the Lord is blessing the work, what their future plans are, etc.). As their ambassador, this missionary feels very much a part of these churches and wants to be informed regarding events in the lives of these churches. To fulfill this expectation, these churches will need to first agree with the validity of the expectation, and then they will need to accept certain responsibilities to make it happen. And the sending churches will have expectations here as well. For example, they may expect that their missionary send them monthly prayer letters with news of the ministry and prayer and praise requests. They may even desire to receive these letters every couple of weeks. After all, these churches feel that they are very much a part of the missionary's ministry, and they want to be informed regarding events in the life and ministry of their missionary. To fulfill this expectation, this missionary will need to first agree with the validity of the expectation, and then he or she will need to accept certain responsibilities to make it happen.

Therefore, the potential missionary and the potential sending churches need to examine and analyze what are their various expectations in the area of communication. What does each entity need (communication wise) to be able to achieve a faithful, natural, and adequate representation?

What does each entity expect of the other? What does it expect of itself? What responsibilities must be accepted if these expectations are to be met? Is the missionary willing to accept his or her portion of the responsibilities? Are the sending churches willing to accept their portion of the responsibilities? For example, if the churches and the missionary desire rapid and frequent communication between themselves, then they need to be willing to accept the responsibilities necessary for this expectation to be met. For the churches, this could mean setting aside additional funds each month so that both they and their missionary will be able to connect to the Internet and enjoy e-mail capabilities. For the missionary, this could mean setting aside a few hours each week for the tasks of writing, polishing, and sending a periodic prayer letter to his or her churches. Or here is another example. Suppose that the sending churches and the missionary both wish to be able to share pictures of the ministry and life on the mission field with these churches. Then this expectation will probably generate several responsibilities with regards to funding the purchase of a digital camera, learning a bit about how to take good pictures, and setting aside the time necessary to take the pictures, provide any necessary captioning or formatting, and then send them on to these churches via Internet or on CD's in the mail.

But what if the expectations of one entity happen to generate responsibilities that prove to be an undue hardship for the other (like perhaps expecting that the missionary send out a prayer letter with full-color pictures every week)? Then the two will need to talk things out and be willing to mutually modify their expectations and responsibilities some to eliminate this undue hardship. However, the communication aspect still needs to occur, regardless of what final arrangement is reached. We cannot mutually agree to cut out all expectations in this area. Communication is a nonnegotiable item. It is inherent in the very concept of being a missionary, of being an ambassador. If we want a truly successful missionary work, if we want a faithful and adequate representation on the mission field, if we want each member (missionary and sending church) to feel that they are a vital part of this missionary team, then we must have good and frequent communication.

### ***Some conclusions***

We have investigated the meaning of the word "missionary." We have seen the laying on of hands, and its impact in the concept of being a missionary.

And we have examined nine similarities and responsibilities that underlie a faithful, natural, and adequate representation. Now, what conclusions can be extracted from this study?

① By definition, a "missionary" is an individual that has been sent with authority to fulfill a specific purpose on behalf of the sending entity. As such, the missionary is an ambassador, a representative, an authoritative or official delegate of the entity or entities that have sent him or her.

② Since the missionary is sent under the authority of the sending entity, he or she is under obligation to respect and submit to the will of this entity. A missionary is not an independent being. A missionary has no more freedom to do or say what he or she may want than any other political ambassador of any country. The missionary exists to officially represent the sending entity and accomplish the specific purpose for which that entity sent him or her. Within these parameters, a fair degree of liberty may be given to the missionary to adapt the ministry to the specific context and needs of the mission field, but these liberties do not produce an independent entity. The missionary must always give account to the sending entity for the representation achieved.

③ The word "missionary" can be employed in a "nontechnical" or general and broad sense. We have all been sent by Jesus Christ (John 17:18), therefore, every true believer is an "apostle" (a sent one) of Jesus. We are all His representatives, His ambassadors, sent into the world. We are all His missionaries. Because this sense of the word is very broad and general, referring to all believers across all generations since Christ, it is an acceptable but nontechnical use of the word.

④ The word "missionary" can also be employed with a more "technical," special, and limited definition (a definition that refers to a much smaller group of individuals). This is its use when it is employed to refer to representatives of human entities (such as churches). Not all believers are these representatives or delegates. Not all have received the laying on of hands by these entities. Not all have been identified, constituted, and accredited as the official representatives of these entities. This definition or use of the word is true only of a particular and limited group of individuals, and because of this, this special and limited use is an acceptable but technical use of the word.

⑤ A missionary is responsible to faithfully and adequately represent the entity or entities that have sent him or her. Since Jesus Christ has sent His Church into all the world, then all believers are responsible to faithfully and adequately represent

Jesus. Since some are also missionaries in the more technical, limited, and special sense of the word, and have also been sent by other human entities (such as local churches or groups of churches), then they also carry the *additional* responsibility to faithfully and adequately represent these additional entities.

⑥ The representation achieved by the missionary should be so faithful and so closely related to his or her sending entities that wherever he or she happens to be, it is as if his or her sending entities were actually there present in the person of their missionary, accomplishing this task. Just as a government is always present in the person of their political ambassador, so also the sending entities ought to always be present in the person of their missionary. And whatever the missionary does, it is as if his or her sending entities were physically there present, doing the activity with their own hands. In a very real sense, the missionary is the “hands” and “feet” of his or her sending entities. Through the person of their missionary, their ambassador, these entities literally “go” to locations otherwise inaccessible to them and “do” a ministry they could otherwise never accomplish.

⑦ Therefore, it is only through their missionaries (using the special, limited, and technical sense of the word) that the local churches can personally and corporally fulfill the Great Commission. It is impossible for them to *physically* (as a congregation) go to all the world and make disciples of all the nations. It just cannot be done. But, through the person of their missionary, their official ambassador, *and the representation that this missionary offers them*, these churches really can corporally go to all the world and personally fulfill their obligations to the Great Commission.

⑧ A missionary is a voluntary, official, accredited, and authentic representative of his or her sending entities. Of his or her own volition, they fulfill an accurate and authentic representation, and are officially and formally constituted by these entities as their representatives, their ambassadors.

⑨ A missionary identifies with his or her sending entities, submits to their general direction and leadership, and commits himself or herself to be a true and faithful representative of these entities. A missionary understands that he or she has a very serious responsibility and a very key role to play in the fulfillment of the Great Commission by the *sending entities*. He or she understands that the missionary is the hands and feet of these entities. Without the missionary’s faithful and accurate representation of these entities, they

would not be able to carry out these ministries that God has for them under the Great Commission. The missionary further understands that in the body normally neither hands nor feet tell the brain what to do, but rather the brain (the sending entities) normally tells the hands and feet (the missionary) what to do.

⑩ A missionary recognizes and respects the need to attain and maintain the conditions necessary to achieve a faithful and adequate representation of his or her sending entities. The missionary understands that his or her ministry flows from this representation. Therefore, he or she understands the importance of achieving a faithful and adequate representation, a reliable representation of his or her sending entities. And he or she recognizes that this type of a representation is built upon the base of certain critical elements that he or she holds in common with his or her sending churches. Among these critical elements are: their basic missionary purpose; their basic missionary vision; their doctrine and theology; their concept of ministry or philosophy of ministry; their priorities in the ministry (or their ministry focus); their geographical and ethnic focuses; their expectations regarding employment arrangements; their expectations in areas like spiritual support, logistic support, and financial support; and their expectations and responsibilities in the area of communication. *The missionary recognizes that to the degree that similarities are missing in these critical elements, a faithful, natural, and adequate representation of the sending entities by this missionary is jeopardized (and perhaps completely obstructed).*

### **“Missionary” and “missionary”**

What is the difference between “Missionary” and “missionary”? The first is written with a capital letter and the second is written with a lowercase letter. And what is so important about that? As we have seen, the term “missionary” can have a special, limited, and technical meaning, and it can have a general, broad, and nontechnical meaning. Therefore, we can say that there are “Missionaries” with a capital “M” (those who are missionaries in the special, limited, and technical sense of the word) and there are “missionaries” with a lowercase “m” (those who are missionaries in the general, broad, and nontechnical sense of the word, that is to say, all believers).

Understood this way, there is a very important difference between “Missionary” and “missionary,” and the two must not be confused. It is very similar to what we saw with the word *apostolos* (apostle) in

the New Testament. The Bible uses *apostolos* in a special, limited, and technical sense to refer to a small group of men that probably included no more than 13 or 14 persons. These were the Apostles (with a capital “A”). They had received the responsibility to represent Jesus Christ in a very special and particular way. Jesus had personally, directly, and specially chosen them for this task. Only they, *and no others*, were to have this responsibility and privilege. And normally the rest of the believers accepted this fact and vied them as Apostles (with a capital “A”). We have also seen that the Bible uses the word *apostolos* in a more general and less technical way (“apostle” with a lowercase “a”). Silas, Timothy, Apollos, and Epaphroditus were all examples of this nontechnical use of the word. But nobody confused “apostle” with “Apostle,” even though it was the identical same word being used. No one thought that Silas, Timothy, Apollos, and Epaphroditus were Apostles. Everyone understood the inherent distinction in the meaning of the word, and it is a good thing, too. Why? *Because the authority, responsibility, and work of these two groups (Apostle and apostle) were very different.* It would have been a serious error for an apostle (with lowercase “a”) to think and act as if he were an Apostle (with capital “A”), based solely upon the fact that he was called an *apostolos*.

So, what is the great and important difference between “Missionary” and “missionary”? We have seen that both have been sent to represent their sending entities. We have seen that both are ambassadors, the “hands” and “feet” of these entities. Both are responsible to achieve a faithful and adequate representation of their sending entities. Both ought to tightly identify themselves with their sending entities. Both ought to verify the existence of key important similarities that underlie the representation. And so we could go on throughout the list of elements that we have noted in this study already. Then, what is the big difference? *The difference here rests basically in who is being represented, and in the nature and uniqueness of representing this particular entity.* In order to examine this difference, it might help to think of it as a jewel with various facets or polished surfaces. Each facet shows us the same jewel, but each facet also highlights certain unique internal characteristics of the jewel. Here, we will analyze four facets that will highlight key differences between “Missionary” and “missionary.”

The first facet deals with *the entity that is being represented.* For the missionary (with lowercase “m”), he or she represents Jesus Christ. He or she is a voluntary representative of the Lord because of

his or her free will they decided to represent Him. Also, he or she is an officially identified and accredited representative because they have received and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. And he or she is accountable to Jesus Christ, their Sender, for the representation achieved.

In contrast, the Missionary (with a capital “M”) represents Jesus Christ plus other human sending entities (such as sending churches). Therefore, the Missionary (with a capital “M”) has all the attributes that we saw under missionary (with a lowercase “m”), plus these same attributes applied to the other sending entities as well. As such, the Missionary is responsible to represent not only Jesus Christ, but also his or her sending churches. He or she is a voluntary representative of these sending entities because of his or her own free will they decided to represent them. Also, he or she is an officially identified and accredited representative of these churches (many times symbolized or witnessed to by the laying on of hands). And he or she is accountable not only to the Lord but also to his or her sending churches for the representation achieved. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the Missionary is not responsible to represent all of the churches, but rather just those that have sent him or her.

The second facet deals with *determining the specific purpose of the missionary and choosing the basic activities required by the representation of the sending entity.* Due to the nature of being a representative, and due to the relationship between the representative and the sending entity, it is the sending entity’s responsibility to set the specific purpose of its ambassador and choose the different basic activities that will be required by this representation. For the missionary (with a lowercase “m”) that represents Jesus Christ, Jesus Himself will define the specific purposes that this missionary will have. Jesus will also choose what different basic activities will be involved in carrying out this representation. And this missionary should adhere to and follow Christ’s divine will. In brief, Jesus is the one being represented here, so He will determine how the desired representation will be fulfilled and within what parameters.

In contrast, the Missionary (with a capital “M”) does all this plus he or she applies it also to his or her sending churches. For the Missionary, since he or she represents not only Jesus Christ but also his or her sending churches, both (Jesus and sending churches) define the specific purposes that the Missionary will have. Jesus plus the sending churches also determine what will be the basic activities that this Missionary will have in



fulfilling the representation of these entities. And this Missionary should adhere to and follow the will of the sending entities (both Jesus and the sending churches).

But, if the Missionary has to adhere to and follow the will of both Jesus and the sending churches, do not we run a considerable risk of having a conflict of wills here? On the surface, it would appear that we would be running a risk like this, but really, it rarely ends up that way. Not if the sending churches are sensitive to the plans that God has for them, not if the Missionary is sensitive to the plans that God has for him or her, and not if both (Missionary and sending churches) have verified the existence of deep and broad similarities such as in the nine areas listed above. We must remember that God alone is the General that guides His army. Also, God is the One who assigns the missionary responsibilities to the sending churches and to the Missionary. And in God, there can be no contradiction. Therefore, if all are sensitive to His direction and if all are aligned with His will for them, there should be no contradictions because God will not assign contradictory missionary responsibilities. He will not ask a church to do one thing, and then ask that same church to accomplish that ministry through a Missionary whom He has assigned to do something radically different. In almost 25 years of missionary service, the author of this work is a first-hand witness to the fact that this whole area of assignment of purposes and activities can and does function without serious contradictions.

The third facet that we would like to examine deals with *the uniqueness or particularity of the representation of the sending entity*. For the missionary (with a lowercase “m”) that represents Jesus Christ, he or she accomplishes this representation along with a huge group of other representatives. Why? Because all believers in the world are representatives of Jesus. Therefore, although the representation that this missionary achieves may be unique (he or she may be the only believer in the world doing this particular activity), this missionary is not the unique representative of Jesus Christ. He or she shares this office with millions and millions of other missionaries around the world. Furthermore, all these believers have something in common with this particular missionary. For example, to a large degree, they all share the same basic conditions that underlie a faithful and adequate representation of Jesus Christ. Yes, there are differences between these missionaries, but they are secondary in comparison to the great similarities that are rooted in sharing the same

office. They all represent the very same Jesus, and this is a very strong unifying force. As Paul says in Ephesians 4:4–6, “there is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.” This unites all believers into one worldwide Body of Christ. Of course, this unity does not prevent diversity within the Body, for Paul goes on to say in the very next verse (Ephesians 4:7) “but to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift,” and then he goes on to point out in the following verses that Christ has given multiple and different gifts to the Body. But this diversity is secondary to the unity that we all share in Christ.

In contrast to the case of the missionary, the Missionary (with a capital “M”) has some of this same sense of unity and working together with a large group of co-representatives (since the Missionary also is a representative of Jesus Christ), but in addition to all of this *there is a special sense of uniqueness and particularity in the Missionary*. Given the fact that he or she also represents certain sending churches, his or her representation is unique (he or she may be the only one in the world doing this particular activity) and his or her position or office is also unique (of all the believers in the world, he or she may be the only person responsible to represent this particular church in this particular activity). Among other things, this places a greater responsibility on the Missionary’s shoulders when it comes to representation. In a very real sense, it is very likely that the responsibility for the total representation of his or her sending churches in this particular ministry rests solely and exclusively on the shoulders of this Missionary. There is none other chosen by these churches to do this ministry. This Missionary is the only ambassador that these churches have in this ministry. If he or she does not accomplish this ministry, these churches will not be able to accomplish what God has called them to do. To a certain degree, this gives greater weight and seriousness to the representation achieved by this Missionary. Furthermore, since his or her position or office is unique (he or she is the only Missionary that this church has in this ministry), then this Missionary does not necessarily share the same basic underlying conditions that support a good representation (the nine critical areas that we have seen) with all the other Missionaries of the world. Sure, all Missionaries will share certain similarities with regard to their common representation of Jesus Christ, but the similarities will tend to end there.

Due to the Missionary's representation of unique sending churches involved in unique missionary ministries, the similarities that exist between Missionary and sending churches will vary greatly from Missionary to Missionary, just as they vary greatly from sending church to sending church. One may be Pentecostal, the other may be Baptist. One may work in China, the other in Europe. One may evangelize and plant churches, the other may work in community development. In other words, each Missionary is unique in the qualities that make him or her a good representative of these unique sending churches. Uniqueness requires uniqueness in order to be correctly represented.

The fourth facet that helps distinguish between Missionary and missionary deals with *the Missionary's missionary call, a special, personal, particular, and captivating call*. We will spend the entire next chapter examining this call, so we will just mention here that a missionary has received a *general* call to be involved in Christ's work, while a Missionary has received a *special, personal, particular, and captivating* call to serve as an ambassador of his or her sending churches. As we will see in the next chapter, the difference between these calls is fairly great and fairly easy to detect. It also helps distinguish between who is a Missionary and who is a missionary.

Having seen all of this, how can we know when to use the term "Missionary" and when to use "missionary"? I believe that the answer to this question rests in whom the individual referred to is representing. If the individual is a representative of Jesus Christ alone, without also being an official and accredited representative of other human entities (such as sending churches), then this individual is a missionary in the general, broad, and nontechnical sense of the word. If the individual is a representative of Jesus Christ plus other human entities (such as sending churches), then this person is a Missionary in the special, limited, and technical sense of the word. And please remember that these differences do not mean that one is better than the other, nor that one is of greater value before God than the other. The apostle and the Apostle, before God, are equal. Neither is more important than the other, but both have different responsibilities. If this is not taken into account, there will be much confusion.

### ***Why is this difference important?***

At this point, there are probably a number of readers that are asking themselves this question. What is so important about whether a person is a

"Missionary" or a "missionary"? Is not this all just a matter of mere semantics, a game of words? Actually, the answer is "no," this is not merely a matter of semantics. It is important that we be able to differentiate between Missionary and missionary. Again, it is like what we saw with the difference between Apostle and apostle. Confusing or blurring the two can create serious problems.

For example, if a church does not distinguish between Missionary and missionary, then it will have difficulties adequately distinguishing between the everyday members of its congregation (who are all missionaries) and its special ambassadors who should be examined, identified, and accredited to officially represent this church in areas where it cannot go without the help of this ambassador, and in ministries which it cannot capably carry out without the help of this ambassador. It is only the special ambassador that qualifies as a Missionary. And the church that has difficulty distinguishing between Missionary and missionary may very well find itself facing one of two basic options due to this confusion. Either it will try to send out all of the everyday members of its congregation to go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations (not a very viable option, nor necessarily a healthy one), or it will tend not to examine, identify, and accredit a special official ambassador of this church to do this task (a more likely option). If the church happens to choose this second option, due to confusing Missionary and missionary, and due to not knowing the special role and function of a Missionary, then its connection with its Missionary will probably be rather superficial, and its achievements with regard to the Great Commission will probably be rather limited. It cannot truly take full advantage of the office of Missionary if it does not realize what it is, why it exists, or that it exists.

Furthermore, a church that does not adequately distinguish between Missionary and missionary is also more likely to not distinguish between Missionary work (the work achieved through its official and special ambassador) and missionary work (the work achieved through the everyday members of its congregation). Both of these works are very important, and every church should be involved in each. But, without a good understanding of the difference between the two, there will probably be a strong tendency for the church to concentrate upon missionary work (with a lowercase "m"). After all, this is the easier of the two works to accomplish. It is also the more economical of the two. And, it is a lot more visible to the average member of the congregation, and it is seen more frequently (thus more readily coming

to mind). All of this can combine to make a church tend to concentrate on missionary work to the detriment of Missionary work. And, if the confusion between the two is great enough, the church might even see itself as being a great, missionary church, because all of its congregation is involved in missionary work (evangelism, Bible studies, community service, etc.), and it may not even notice that its “missionary” activities may be very lacking in the area of Missionary work. It may think that it is fulfilling the Great Commission, because it is heavily involved in missionary work, when really it may be making very few contributions toward going into all the world and making disciples of all the nations. A church like this may be blind to the fact that it is not nearly as missionary-minded as it may think.

In summary, a church that does not distinguish between Missionary and missionary is not truly adequately capable of fulfilling the Great Commission. The command to go and make disciples of all the nations cannot be achieved solely with missionaries (with a lowercase “m”). The church needs Missionaries, in the special, particular, and technical sense of the word. The church needs official ambassadors to go where the church cannot, and to fulfill the ministries that the church is unable to do alone.

Therefore, it is a serious error to confuse Missionary and missionary. And this error can lead to seriously weakening the entire missionary thrust of a church due to not adequately recognizing the nature of Missionary work nor the resources that God has set aside for this work.

Given all this, are we going to keep referring to “Missionary” and “missionary” throughout the remainder of this text? No. To do this would create

more confusion than benefit. The distinction between these words has been intentionally made in this chapter to highlight the difference between the two, and to highlight the importance of doing both. Now, having highlighted this difference, it should no longer be necessary to make multiple references to the two. Then, which form of the word will be used in this text? *In this text, and in the other texts of the World Missions Academy, the word “missionary” is generally used in the special, particular, and technical sense of the word. Therefore, although it usually will not appear with a capital “M,” its meaning is that of Missionary. And when the text wishes to refer to missionary in a more general and inclusive sense of the word (missionary with a lowercase “m”), this more nontechnical use will be clarified in the text (or a completely different word will be used).*

### ***Additional questions***

By this point, we have examined what a missionary is (and remember, we are now using “missionary” in the special, particular, and technical sense of the word). But now, some additional questions may come to mind. For example, who decides who should be a missionary? Does the missionary himself or herself decide this? Does the local church decide this? Who determines that this person should be a missionary and that person should not? Also, what exactly makes a missionary a missionary? Is it the fact that you are serving overseas? Is it the fact that you are working in a linguistic and cultural setting that is not your native setting? The following chapter is dedicated to studying these issues and answering these questions.

# Chapter 3

## Renewing our perspective of the missionary call



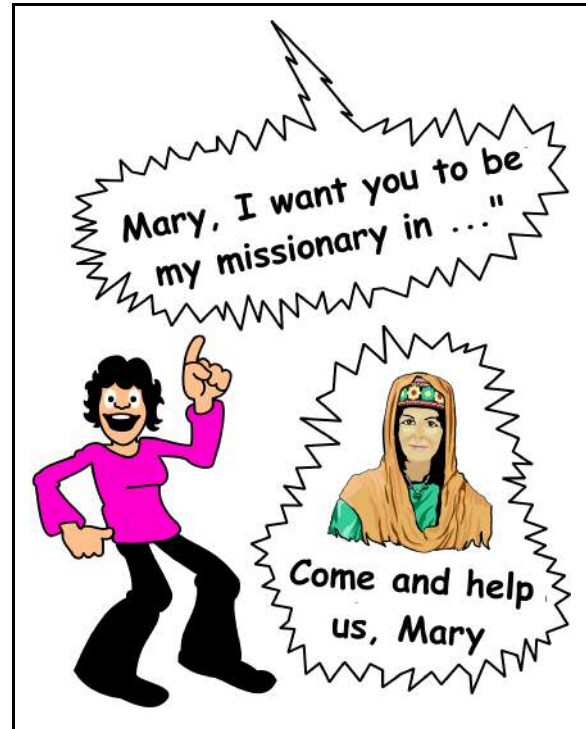
Just as it was necessary and important to renew our perspective of the missionary, in the light of Scripture, so also it is important that we renew our understanding of the missionary call in the light of Scripture. As we will see, the missionary call has a lot to do with who decides who should be a missionary, and what it is that makes a person a missionary.

Unfortunately, there seems to be a fair degree of confusion nowadays regarding the meaning, role, and importance of the missionary call (and once again, please remember that we are using the word “missionary” in the special, particular, and technical sense of the word). For some people, the missionary call may mean one thing, and for others it may mean something very different. Some may even doubt whether or not a missionary call really exists in Scripture. Is there really such a thing, in the Bible, as a special missionary call? Some say “yes,” and that a missionary needs to wait until he or she receives this call before heading out as a missionary. Others say that there is no need for a special missionary call, so we should not wait for anything like this before heading out into missionary service. Who is right? In this chapter, we will study this as we renew our perspective of the missionary call, in the light of Scripture.

In this study of the missionary call, the author is deeply indebted to his friend and missions professor, Dr. J. Herbert Kane, who introduced him to these basic elements and concepts in his book *Life and Work on the Mission Field*, published in 1980 by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. The reader is encouraged to consult this work, should he or she desire further information.

### ***Three inadequate concepts of the missionary call***

Let us begin our study by briefly examining three popular, yet inadequate, concepts of the missionary call. The first two concepts represent the two extremes of opinion regarding what a missionary call is and how important it is to have one. The third concept represents a rather significant danger with regards to the discernment of this call.



The “Macedonian call”

**The “Macedonian call.”** Among other things, this concept of the missionary call (in its classic and traditional form) involves four key beliefs. First, it believes that the missionary call does truly exist as a special calling upon the life of an individual. Second, it believes that this calling is usually accompanied by visions, voices, dreams, and/or other spectacular supernatural aspects. Third, it believes that through this spectacular event, the will of God for this person (with regard to his or her dedication to missionary work) is revealed in a direct and practically infallible manner. And fourth, it believes that every missionary, before leaving for the mission field, needs to have received a call like this.

Biblically speaking, this concept of a “Macedonian call” is based upon a famous portion of the book of Acts which states:

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And when he had seen the

vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

— Acts 16:9–10

With regard to our analysis of this concept of a “Macedonian call,” three basic observations can be made. *First, its biblical base is problematic.* These verses in Acts 16 really do not appear to be an example of a *missionary call* but rather an example of *divine direction and guidance* in the life of one who has already received his missionary call and who is now involved in his second missionary journey. According to the record of Acts, Paul received his missionary call years before this particular event of Acts 16. This call is first mentioned in Acts 13:2 (quite a bit prior to Acts 16), and a description of the call can be found in Acts 9:1–19; 26:12–18; and 22:17–21.

*Second, the “Macedonian call” tends to place limits upon missionary service that are not clearly seen in the Scriptures.* When this concept says that this type of a call is *indispensable* to be a missionary, it is saying that only those with this type of an experience ought to be missionaries. The problem is that the biblical evidence does not necessarily confirm this extreme of a position.

In the Old Testament we most certainly find cases where a call to God’s service is accompanied by elements such as voices from heaven and visions. Examples include the case of Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3:1–10), Isaiah and his vision of the Lord (Isaiah 6:1–8), and Jeremiah and the word of the Lord that came to him (although it is not clear if it was necessarily audible) and the touch of God on his lips (Jeremiah 1:4–10). However, not every call to God’s service in the Old Testament was necessarily accompanied by these spectacular and supernatural elements. For example, the call of Bezalel in Exodus 31:1–5 does not mention that he saw visions nor heard voices from heaven. Rather, the emphasis of this passage seems to be on the fact that God had divinely equipped him for the task to which he was called. In the case of David and his selection to be king (1 Samuel 16:11–13), we find no reference to David hearing voices nor seeing visions. Rather, the emphasis here seems more to be on the fact that it was God who chose him or called him to this task, and on the fact that God had divinely equipped him for the task to which he was called.

And in the New Testament we find a similar record of events. The call to God’s service sometimes comes accompanied by spectacular and supernatural elements like voices and visions. Examples include the case of Paul’s missionary call

(this call seems to be associated with the experiences related to his conversion as well). Paul saw a great light and heard a voice (Acts 9:1–19; 26:12–18), and he also had a vision of the Lord (Acts 22:17–21). But there is no evidence that other missionaries like Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, and Timothy had a similar missionary-call experience (with these dramatic, supernatural elements). Actually, the Bible says very little about the call of these other missionaries. And the call of the twelve disciples (another example of a call to God’s service, and of which we do have a description) does not evidence these supernatural elements either.

So, what can we conclude from all this? The biblical evidence supports the *possibility* of having a call accompanied by voices, visions, and other supernatural elements like these. But, it also appears to demonstrate that these dramatic and supernatural elements do not form an *inherent* part of the call. In other words, the Bible does not evidence that these dramatic elements are *indispensable* for receiving a call. Therefore, it seems to be possible to receive a call with or without these elements. What definitely does seem to be indispensable is the role of God in this whole process. God is the one who calls, and He can choose to communicate this calling through various means.

*The third observation that can be made here is that the “Macedonian call” may result in keeping those who have a missionary call from going to the mission field.* How? By placing such a high degree of importance on the dramatic and spectacular elements that may accompany this call, and by making these elements indispensable to going to the field. If every person that has received a missionary call were to postpone going to the mission field until they also had received an experience like this, it may very well be that many would end up waiting indefinitely because they are waiting for an experience that is never going to come. God just does not have spectacular elements planned into their call. And when this happens, these people never get to the mission field. But it is not due to a lack of a call, but rather due to a lack of a certain particular form of the call.

**The “general call.”** At the other extreme from the “Macedonian call” is the “general call.” In its classical or traditional form, the “general call” maintains that the missionary call is simply a general call, made to every believer, and universally applicable within the Church. For the “general call,” there is no need to receive a *special, particular, and unique* call. Every believer has



The "general call"

received the call to be a missionary (through the Great Commission), and there is no sense waiting for any additional call before heading out as a missionary. Furthermore, since every believer has received this call to be a missionary, then, every believer already is a missionary. They just need to get involved in missions. As the reader may imagine, the "general call" fits very well into the system that does not distinguish between missionary (with a lowercase "m") and Missionary (with a capital "M").

With regard to our analysis of the "general call," four observations can be made. *First, it is very difficult to align this concept of a call with the biblical evidence in favor of a call that is special and particular (in other words, non-general, not made to everyone).* In Acts 13:2, Barnabas and Saul (later called Paul) were called in a special and particular manner. Their call was not simply a common and universal call applicable to all the believers in the church at Antioch. Rather, this call was particular, by name, and applicable only to Barnabas and Saul. In these verses, we do not find the others who were present in this meeting asking themselves if this call was applicable to them as well. No, the call was aimed directly and exclusively at Barnabas and Saul.

And this is also true of many of the other calls to God's service in the Bible. For example, study the calls recorded in Exodus 31:1–5; Matthew 4:18–22; Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:15–16; and the whole general concept of the process of a call in Ephesians 4:8–12. In just a short while we will analyze in greater detail each and every one of these passages. But for now, suffice it to say that these calls refer to calls that are not general, that are not applicable to all believers. Rather, they are

calls that are *particular*, made to one particular person. Also, almost all of these calls are *personal* calls as well, calls that clearly identify the particular person to whom they refer. For example, please note how particular and personal the call of Bezalel is in Exodus 31:2, where God says "See, I have called by name Bezalel, *the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.*" This call was so personal that it not only named the individual (Bezalel), but also gave a list of his ancestors (just in case there might be some doubt as to which Bezalel God was referring to). Nowadays, this would be similar to identifying a person by first name, last name, and Social Security number (or any other unique number). There was only one person in all the world to which Exodus 31:2 referred, therefore, the call was very *particular* (as versus being universal). Also, this individual in Exodus 31:2 was furthermore identified by name and by ancestors, therefore, the call was also very *personal* (no confusion as to whom it applied).

*The second observation that we can make regarding the "general call" is that it does not sufficiently take into account the great inherent difference between serving as a missionary (and please remember that we are using the word as if it had a capital "M") and serving as a regular member of the church congregation (missionary with a lowercase "m").* This difference is not really based so much on the *context* in which they work (although this context many times will be a very different one from the context of the local church), but rather in the *very nature* of being a missionary. As we have seen, a missionary is an ambassador, and official and formally-accredited representative of the local church. Therefore, the missionary is a very special entity, with special and unique responsibilities and privileges (in comparison with the rest of the congregation). Just as a political ambassador, by being chosen and named to this special and official position, is *inherently* and by the *very nature* of his or her position a very different individual from the average citizen of this government, so the missionary is different from the average member of the congregation. It is not that one is better than the other; but rather that one has responsibilities and privileges that the other does not have, simply because he or she was chosen by their government to represent this government.

*Third, the "general call," by losing the uniqueness of the missionary (by making the missionary equal to every other believer – "we are all missionaries"), also loses the uniqueness of the missionary work (as has been seen in the previous chapter).* With the "general call," missionary work begins to

include a great many activities done by a great number of individuals in this congregation, *until it reaches the point where it is impossible to differentiate any specific work as being missionary work (in contrast to another type of activity)*. If everyone is a missionary, then every activity done by everyone is really missionary work. The logical conclusion is that there is no unique missionary work or activity.

And fourth, it would appear that the “general call” may run the risk of sending unprepared people to the mission field. How? By blurring the distinction between missionary (with a capital “M”) and ordinary member of the congregation (missionary with a lowercase “m”), and by blurring the distinction between missionary work (again, with a capital “M”) and the everyday religious activities accomplished through the ordinary members of the congregation (missionary work with a lowercase “m”). When these distinctions are blurred, *people lose the ability to detect the true nature of missionary life and missionary work*. Everything becomes blurred and confused. All work is missionary work. This, then, leads to an increased risk of not sufficiently perceiving the difference between serving the Lord within our own church setting and within our own cultural and linguistic setting, and serving the Lord in a radically different cross-cultural setting (in another geographical location, with another language, within another culture, and within another religious context). If the church cannot adequately grasp the drastic differences between these contexts, then this church may very well send out missionaries without a truly adequate preparation to work in this very different context.

Having said all this, it must also be mentioned that the “general call” does have a point in its favor. It encourages every member of the congregation to take seriously the Great Commission and become involved, one way or another, in missions. *And this is what the Bible intends to have happen. Every believer ought to be involved in one way or another in missions*. But, as we will see through this study, it is possible to achieve this universal participation without blurring these distinctions and losing the uniqueness of the missionary and the missionary work.

**The “emotional call.”** The third inadequate concept of missionary call that we would like to study may be referred to as the “emotional call.” This type of a call places great emphasis upon the person’s emotions, and in a very real way, their emotional feelings are equated with the call. For example, a person who believes in the “emotional



The “emotional call”

call” may attend a missionary conference where they hear a very moving presentation about missionary work in Japan. They are very strongly impacted by this presentation and by the spiritual need of the Japanese. They are very strongly moved by the urgent need for missionaries in Japan. And, all of a sudden, they have a missionary call to serve among the Japanese people. Then, a month later, they attend another missionary conference where they hear another moving presentation about the missionary work among Hindus in India. They are very strongly impacted by the spiritual need of this population and they are strongly moved by the urgent need for missionaries in India. And, all of a sudden, they now have a missionary call to work in India.

What can we say with regard to the concept of the “emotional call”? We can make at least three observations. *First, the “emotional call” is like the young man in the diagram above. He sees a beautiful young lady and immediately he thinks that he is in love with her. He has confused true love with his emotional feelings.* Really, he is not truly in love with the young lady. Rather, he *feels* (an emotional response) an attraction to her. *And feeling an attraction toward something is very different from true love.* Of course, emotions have their place in true love, but this love goes far beyond these emotions. And it is the same way with regard to the missionary call. People who confuse their emotions with the missionary call *feel* an attraction to missionary work, but this is not the same as a missionary *call*. The missionary call goes far beyond these emotions.

*Second, since the base for the “emotional call” is an emotional attraction, then every time that this person hears a moving missionary presentation, there is a possibility of conflicting emotional attractions, and therefore also a possibility of changing his or her mind with regard to their “call.”* As we will see shortly, the true missionary call is something that is not nearly as fluctuating. It is not so superficial. Just like true love, the missionary call is something that is much deeper, much more solid, and much more durable than mere emotions.

*Third, the true missionary call is not born of nor proceeds from the emotions. Rather, it comes from God Himself.* Please note the role of God in the missionary call of Barnabas and Saul in Acts 13:2 “... the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” Also, note the role of God in the call of Bazalel in Exodus 31:1–5 “Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘See, I have called by name Bezalel, ... and I have filled him with the Spirit of God ...’”

Now, what can happen when a person bases his or her call exclusively on their emotions? Sometimes they never get to the mission field, because their “call” always changes before their departure. With this type of a person, they are headed to India for a while, then they change their plans and head for China. But then they hear about missions in Russia, and all of a sudden they want to be a missionary to Russia ... until they hear about the needs in Algeria, and so forth. This type of a person can be very frustrating to themselves, to their sending churches, and to their mission agency. But at least they never arrive on the mission field, so they are not so frustrating to the mission work in India, China, Russia, Algeria, etc. In a way, it is like a young man who always switches from girlfriend to girlfriend before reaching the point of marrying any of them. It is frustrating, but it also is survivable.

However, this case can become much more serious if this type of a person really *reaches* the mission field. Why? Because they will function well as a missionary until something comes along to change their feelings, their emotions. And when their emotions change (and our emotions are constantly fluctuating), the missionary work in which they are involved loses its attraction, and the missionary call under which they came to the mission field is no longer valid. Now they have another call to another work in another mission field, or perhaps they have no call now. *Whatever their response, they are no longer a productive unit*

*on the mission field where they currently serve.* To put it in terms of our emotional young man above, it would be like actually marrying his girlfriend, based solely upon his emotional feelings, and then requesting a divorce because he no longer feels the attraction that he once felt. This is a much sadder case than the young man that just went from one girlfriend to another. Because they are married, this case now has very enduring and very deep consequences. *This case, then, is not only frustrating, but it is also actually harmful and damaging.*

### ***The missionary call, in light of the dictionary***

With regard to the term “missionary call,” we have already investigated the meaning of the word “missionary.” Therefore, we only need to study here the meaning of the word “call,” and then modify that definition with our definition of “missionary.” *Webster’s New World Dictionary* (revised edition of July 1983) defines “call” (among other things) as “to say in a loud tone,” “to shout,” “to summon,” “to give or apply a name to,” “to describe as specified,” “to give orders for,” “a summons,” and “an invitation.” This dictionary also defines “calling” as the “act of one that calls,” “one’s work or profession,” and “an inner urging toward some vocation.” As can be seen, “call” and “calling” can have a fairly broad range of meanings. Of these meanings, “to give orders for,” “a summons,” “an invitation,” “one’s work or profession,” and “an inner urging toward some vocation” probably cover best the concept of “call” in “missionary call.” In addition, this dictionary also defines “vocation” as “a career to which one feels he is called,” and “career” as “one’s progress through life” (among other definitions). Thus, “vocation” includes the idea of a significant dedication of time to the task. Combining all of these definitions from the dictionary, we can say that *the missionary call is an invitation, a summons, a giving of orders that leads to an inner urging toward missionary work and toward making missionary work one’s vocation or profession (understood as being a serious dedication to this task).*

### ***The missionary call, in light of the Scriptures***

The biblical concept of missionary call is fairly similar to the dictionary concept, except that the biblical concept is much more explicit. Once again, since we have already investigated the biblical



meaning of the term “missionary,” we can limit ourselves here to an investigation of the term “call,” “called,” or “calling” (and then adapt it according to its application within the context of “missionary”).

As was the case with the dictionary definition, the Bible gives us a fairly broad range of meanings with regard to “call.” Basically, we can divide these into three large groups or genres of meaning.

**The common, everyday use.** The first group of meanings is the use of “call” with the sense of “to say in a loud tone,” “to shout,” “to summon,” “to give or apply a name to,” “a summons,” and “an invitation.” We can say that this is the Bible’s common, everyday use of this word, and it is used this way quite frequently. Verses that illustrate this usage include: Genesis 1:5; 22:11; Isaiah 45:3; and Acts 4:36.

**The technical use, with a general or universal sense.** In this second group of meanings, the Bible uses the term “call,” “called,” or “calling” to refer to a summons, an invitation, or the giving of orders to an *entire* group of people to dedicate themselves to a certain activity (to adopt this as their “vocation”). For example, the Bible calls *every* believer to live according to a biblical life style. It also calls *all* believers to make disciples of all the nations.

We may refer to these calls as technical calls with a general or universal sense. They are *technical* calls because the Bible is using the term “call” in a more technical and special sense of “to summon,” “to invite,” “to give orders to.” And they have a *general or universal* sense because they refer to each and every member of the group (there is no believer who has not received the call to live according to a biblical lifestyle, there is no believer who has not been called to make disciples of all the nations).

The following are some examples of Bible verses that use the term “call” (or its general concept) in a technical manner with a general or universal sense. Thus, as believers, we have all been called:

- ◆ To be saints — “To all who are beloved of God in Rome, *called as saints*: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 1:7)
- ◆ To live in peace — “Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has *called us to peace*. (1 Corinthians 7:15)
- ◆ Into the kingdom of God and His glory — “So

that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who *calls you into His own kingdom and glory*.” (1 Thessalonians 2:12)

◆ To sanctification (or holiness) — “For God *has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification*.” (1 Thessalonians 4:7)

◆ Into fellowship with Jesus Christ — “God is faithful, through whom you *were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*.” (1 Corinthians 1:9)

◆ To Christian freedom — “For you *were called to freedom*, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” (Galatians 5:13)

◆ To suffering with patience — “... But if *when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it*, this finds favor with God. For you *have been called for this purpose*, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ....” (1 Peter 2:20–21)

◆ To go and make disciples of all the nations — “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18–20) [These verses are commonly known as the Great Commission, and many may view them as an example of a missionary call. But they really are not (at least not in the sense of missionary with a capital “M”). As we will soon see, the missionary call is a particular, personal, and captivating call that is made to a limited group of people. In contrast, the Great Commission is a call made to every believer, summoning them to a specific activity (in this case, the broadening of their sphere of ministry). As such, the Great Commission best fits with the other general and universal calls noted here.]

**The technical use, with a particular, personal and captivating sense.** In this third group of meanings, the Bible uses the term “call,” “called,” or “calling” to refer to summoning, inviting, or giving orders to a *particular individual* to dedicate himself or herself to a particular activity (to adopt this as their “vocation” or “profession”). As can be seen, this use is similar to the use we just saw, except that this use is more specific and deeper. We are still dealing with a *technical* use of the word “call” because the Bible is using this term in its more technical and special sense of “to summon,” “to invite,” “to give orders

to.” But now the term is going to be used in a *particular, personal* and *captivating* sense. It will be *particular* because the call will be made to one person alone (or to a reduced group of people). Therefore, this call will not be applicable to all believers equally. It will be *personal* because the call itself will identify to whom it applies. And it will be *captivating* because the call will end up taking the recipient captive for the task to which they have been called. The recipient will be literally captivated by the call. His or her obligation to the call will be so strong that they will actually become “prisoners” of this call. And they will end up dedicating their very lives to this call. For this reason, this type of a call usually ends up becoming the individual’s new vocation or profession.

As can be imagined, this use of the word “call” is not as frequent in the Bible as the other two uses. But it does appear with a certain degree of frequency. Examples of this use of the word “call” include the following verses.

◆ The call of Paul as an apostle — “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, *called as an apostle*, set apart for the gospel of God, ...” (Romans 1:1)

◆ The call of Paul to preach Christ among the Gentiles — “But when He who *had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace*, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, ...” (Galatians 1:15–16)

◆ The call of Bezalel — “Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘See, *I have called by name Bezalel*, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship.’” (Exodus 31:1–5)

◆ The call of Peter, Andrew, James, and John (please note that although technically the verb “call” is only used with James and John, the meaning is also present in the case of Peter and Andrew) — “And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, ‘*Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.*’ And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him. And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and *He called them*. And they immediately left the boat and their father, and followed Him.”

(Matthew 4:18–22)

◆ The call of Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for missionary work — “Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘*Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*’” (Acts 13:1–2)

◆ The captivating element of this calling — “Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, *He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.*’ ... And *He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers*, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:8, 11–12)

### ***An examination of the texts***

As the reader can probably imagine, the missionary call (missionary with a capital “M”) belongs to the third group of uses noted above (the technical use, with a particular, personal and captivating sense). A brief analysis of the verses cited under this use will highlight certain elements of this type of a call.

In Romans 1:1 we see that the call of Paul coincided with the fact that he was *set apart* for the gospel of God. When Paul was called, he was also set apart or “reserved” for this particular task. Therefore, this type of call implies a dedication of the recipient to the specific task referred to in the call.

In Galatians 1:15–16 we see once again the fact that Paul was both called and set apart. We also can note that he was set apart before he was ever born. And we may observe that this divine calling came through God’s grace. These verses end with a brief summary of the specific task for which Paul was called, preaching Christ among the Gentiles.

In Exodus 31:1–5 we see that this type of a call is very personal and specific (Bezalel was called “by name”). We also see that this call comes accompanied by a divine equipping for the task (“filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship”). We may also note that the call includes a rather detailed description of Bezalel’s future work, and we may presume (although it is not definitely mentioned) that this work implied the dedication of this individual to this task (in other words, this was to be his new vocation or profession).

Matthew 4:18–22 shows us four individuals involved in the secular employment (fishermen). Christ comes, He calls them, and they “immediately” abandon this employment in favor of the task to which Jesus had just called them (fishers of men). It is interesting to also note that for two of these four persons, their secular employment appears to have been a family job, and abandoning this job also meant leaving their father. Therefore, following this type of a call may very well mean leaving one’s previous vocation for a new one, and it may even mean leaving one’s family in order to be able to fulfill this new vocation.

In Acts 13:1–2 we see that it is God who does the calling, and we see the church recognizing and agreeing with this call, and setting apart the recipients of the call for the ministry to which God has called them. We also can note that this call was not a general call but rather a particular and personal call. There are no doubts expressed in these verses as to whom the call should be applied. It was not applicable to everyone, but rather it was reserved solely for those mentioned by name in the call itself. Furthermore, please note that the call was a rather costly one for this church, because they had to set aside productive personnel and dedicate them to another ministry. Barnabas and Saul (Paul) were two of the five prophets and teachers mentioned in this church, so this call hit the leadership team rather hard. However, this church was willing to pay the price.

And in Ephesians 4:8–12 we see that being an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, or a pastor and teacher in the church is linked to a very special event that has occurred in the life of this particular individual. In the words of Paul, this individual has been taken captive by Christ and then returned to the church as a human “gift.”

Having said this, it is likely that these verses of Ephesians 4 will probably require some additional clarification. First of all, please note that we have quoted verses 8, 11, and 12, jumping over verses 9 and 10. This is because verses 9 and 10 form a separate clarification that Paul makes in the middle of his more general explanation (as if this clarification has been placed in parenthesis). Therefore, in order to more directly follow the “thread” of Paul’s thinking here, it is helpful to jump over the parenthetical clarification and go directly from verse 8 to verse 11. This is not to say that verses 9 and 10 are not important. They just are not directly related to Paul’s line of reasoning that he is using in verses 8, 11, and 12.

In verse 8, Paul tells us that Christ led captive a host of captives and gave gifts to men. But, what

are these gifts that He gave to men? Is he speaking of spiritual gifts like prophecy, healing, distinguishing of spirits, or tongues? No, I believe that Paul here is speaking of something much more personal, and I believe that he clarifies this in verse 11 when he says “and He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.” So, verses 8 and 11 are both talking about what has been given by Christ (and the word used in Greek in each verse is the same word for “give”). In verse 8, Paul says that Christ gave gifts to men, and in verse 11 he says that Christ gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.

Based upon this, it appears that apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers are the gifts referred to in verse 8. And this is in keeping with the general sense of verse 8, where these gifts are not seen so much as activities or offices, but rather as *persons themselves* whom Christ has taken captive and then returned to the Church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (as Paul continues in Ephesians 4:12). It makes much more sense to take a person captive and then return that person to the Church as a special worker, than to take an office or an activity captive and then return that office or activity to the Church. Understood this way, the gifts of Ephesians 4 are the *people* who have been *captivated* by Christ for certain special ministries within the Church (and these are then enumerated as being apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers).

Please note how well this interpretation of Ephesians 4:8–12 fits with Paul’s own description of himself just a few verses earlier in Ephesians 4:1. Here, in Ephesians 4:1, Paul refers to himself as “the prisoner of the Lord.” Literally, the original Greek text says “prisoner in the Lord.” Given the context of Ephesians 4, I do not believe that Paul was here referring to his time in roman prisons. Rather, I believe that he was here referring to the fact that he himself had been taken captive by Christ (that he was, very literally, a prisoner in the Lord), and then returned to the Church for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry. In other words, Paul himself was one of these human gifts that Christ had given to the Church, and about which he was writing.

And remember, the word “apostle” used in verse 11 is the very same word as the one we have studied as the meaning of missionary. In other words, verse 11 could read (with no stretch of the

imagination and with no grammatical violations) “and He gave some as missionaries, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.”

Having said all this, it should also be noted that this interpretation of Ephesians 4:8–12 in no way should be construed so as to diminish the idea of spiritual gifts as including certain abilities and skills that God has given us. There are verses (such as 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 28) that clearly demonstrate that spiritual gifts include what might be referred to as abilities and skills. Of this there can be no doubt. What we are trying to do here is broaden our perspective of spiritual gifts to also include certain *persons themselves*, when they have been chosen by God to be captivated by Christ and then returned to the Church for a special ministry. In cases such as this, these people themselves are the gift.

### ***Basic conclusions***

So, what kind of basic conclusions can we reach with regard to the “call” (in its technical use with a particular, personal, and captivating sense)? We have seen that this call:

- ◆ Proceeds from God, for His wisdom and from His plans which have been formed from before the very birth of the individual being called.
- ◆ Comes through the grace of God.
- ◆ Is personal and specific (there is no doubt with regard to whom the call refers – the recipients are clearly identified)
- ◆ Is particular (it does not refer to all believers, but rather to a limited group, whose composition is decided by God and communicated through the call).
- ◆ Is accompanied by a divine equipping for the task involved in the call (gifts, abilities, and skills).
- ◆ Means setting aside the individual for a ministry that has been especially chosen for him or for her (not everyone has been called to this ministry).
- ◆ Should be recognized by the local church, which should then respond by taking the called individual or individuals and setting them aside for this ministry (even when this individual may be a very productive part of this church’s current ministry program).
- ◆ Frequently means, on the part of the recipient of the call, abandoning his or her previous employment to dedicate themselves to a new vocation as indicated in the call.
- ◆ Sometimes means that the recipient of the call will need to leave their parents in order to carry out the call.

◆ Many times comes accompanied by a description of the task to which this individual is being called. Sometimes this description may be very well defined (as in the case of Bezalal), and sometimes the call will only include the basic idea (as in the case of Peter, Andrew, James, and John). Also, please note that this description is not *always* present in the call (as in the case of Acts 13:1–2).

◆ Captivates the recipient of the call for a special ministry. The recipient of the call has been captivated by Christ for this ministry. He or she is now a prisoner in the Lord. Fulfilling this ministry is now obligatory. They have no choice. They must do this ministry. It has become their very reason for living. They have been captivated for this very purpose. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:16, “for I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for *I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.”*

◆ And we should point out one more aspect regarding this call that we see especially in the life of the Apostles. It would appear that *none* of them (including Paul) ever returned to their previous vocations or professions. *It appears that their calling was for life.* Christ had taken them captive for this ministry, and they dedicated their very lives to this cause. Yes, it is true that Paul did make tents occasionally (see Acts 18:2–3), but there is no evidence that he did it as a *vocation* once again. Rather, Paul seems to have done it to support himself from time to time, *so that he could continue with what was his vocation, taking the gospel to the Gentiles.* And as soon as his need to support himself disappeared, so did his job making tents.

### ***A formal definition of the missionary call***

In light of our studies about the meaning of “missionary” and the meaning of “call” (especially in its technical use with a particular, personal, and captivating sense), we can now assemble our formal definition of a missionary call.

**The missionary call is a captivating call that proceeds from God, that is accompanied by a divine equipping for the task, and that should be recognized and honored by the local church, made to a specific individual who is clearly identified in the call, requiring that he or she leave his or her previous vocation or profession and dedicate themselves with all their heart and life (and it**

**would appear for a rather long time, up to their entire lifetime) to a ministry that has been especially prepared for them by God, in the field of missionary work.**

We have yet to provide a formal definition of missionary work, but do not worry. The next chapter will be dedicated to this task. But, before continuing with that chapter, we should consider three additional important points about the missionary call.

### ***The need and importance of the missionary call***

What does the missionary call do? What exactly are its functions? Is it really necessary and important that every missionary have a particular, special, personal, and captivating call before leaving for the mission field?

In the first place, *the missionary call has an identifying function in that it identifies the future missionary from among the other members of the congregation.* It is expected that every believer will work in the Lord's work, testify, evangelize, and become involved in one way or another in the Great Commission, regardless of his or her vocation. But, some will receive a special call to leave *everything* and dedicate themselves *completely* to the ministry (and in this case, the missionary ministry). They have been captivated for this ministry. God, through the missionary call, has taken them prisoners for this very purpose. As such, the missionary call functions to identify (for both the local church and for the recipient of the call) who these individuals are. The case of Barnabas and Saul in Acts 13:1–2 is a classic example of this identifying function.

In second place, *the missionary call has an accrediting function in that it shows that the recipient has been chosen by God for this task, and has also been divinely equipped by God for this work.* This divine selection and equipping are always important, regardless of the ministry area, but they become even more important when we are speaking of a missionary call to a cross-cultural context. Why? Because the person who has to work in a cross-cultural context will have to overcome *many* barriers. They will need to live in a different culture and be able to present the gospel in a radically different context (language, religion, etc.). Thus, it is *very* important to check and confirm that they have been divinely selected and equipped for this task. In other words, it would be neither wise nor safe to send a person to work as a cross-

cultural missionary without first analyzing the evidence and verifying that God has chosen them and equipped them for this ministry. The case of Bezalel in Exodus 31:1–5 is a classic example of this accrediting function of the call.

In the third place, *the missionary call has a justifying function in that it justifies the local church in setting aside a currently productive individual and dedicating him or her to a ministry that in all likelihood does not even form a part of the local ministry of this church.* The local church is responsible to wisely administer the gifts and abilities that the Lord has given it through the members of its congregation, carefully involving them in the ministry according to these gifts and abilities. The church should neither squander nor lose these precious resources. Also, the local church is responsible to wisely administer the financial resources that the Lord has given it, investing them correctly in the Lord's work. Therefore, it ought to be a very serious step for this local church to contemplate setting aside (or reserving) one of its productive members to be a missionary, and dedicating him or her to a ministry that may be very different from the one where this individual is currently experiencing the Lord's blessing. It ought also to be a serious step for this local church to contemplate investing its financial resources in a missionary who will be ministering far from this local church. In this church's analysis of whether or not it should set aside this individual or support this ministry, the missionary call enters as a very important factor in determining the correct placement of resources. Through this call, God is showing that it is correct to set this productive individual aside for this other ministry. And through this call, God is also showing that it is correct for the churches to support this missionary and this ministry (at least the churches for whom this missionary can serve as a true ambassador – more about this in chapter 5). The case of Barnabas and Saul in Acts 13:1–2 illustrates this justifying function of the call.

And in fourth place, and this is very important, *the missionary call has a “captivating” or “committing” function in that it provides the strong personal conviction that underlies the strong and enduring commitment required by missionary work.* We saw part of this when we studied the “emotional call.” The task of missions (and especially cross-cultural missions) cannot be achieved simply with a light commitment or a merely emotionally-based commitment. Many, many times the success of the task of missions will require a commitment that is *very, very* durable on

the part of the missionary and on the part of the local sending church. Missionary work is very arduous and exhausting, and if the missionary or the local church lack a firm, durable, long-lasting commitment to this work, then they run a very great risk of “hanging up their gloves” before finishing the fight. Therefore, missionary work requires individuals with a personal conviction so strong that they can say: “This is the only ministry for me. I’m a prisoner in the Lord, and I really have no other choice. I’ll do this ministry, no matter what the cost. I’ll fulfill this ministry, no matter what the obstacles.” *This strong a personal conviction and commitment come from only one source: the fact that this individual has been taken captive by Christ for this ministry, and then returned to the Church to fulfill this ministry.* And how is this captivity communicated? It is communicated through the divine call upon the life of the recipient of this calling. Therefore, the call is inextricably intertwined with this strong, enduring commitment. Paul himself can serve as our example of this type of commitment. As we have seen, he considered himself to be a prisoner in the Lord for missionary work. In 1 Corinthians 9:15–16 Paul says “... it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast [of preaching the gospel] an empty one ... for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” Only a person with a very strong personal conviction and commitment can say something like this. Only a person who has been literally captivated for this ministry can talk this way. When the future missionary and the local church recognize that this future missionary has received this type of a captivating call, then they will be *convinced* that this individual *must* do this ministry. This is the “captivating” or “committing” function of the call.

Having seen all this, we return to the last of our original questions: is it really necessary and important that every missionary have a particular, special, personal, and captivating call before leaving for the mission field? The answer is: *yes, it is very important* because this call identifies the missionary, it accredits the missionary (gives evidence of his or her divine selection and equipping), it justifies the local church in dedicating this individual to this ministry and in supporting him or her, and it provides the strong personal conviction that underlies the strong and enduring commitment required by missionary work. And *yes, it is very necessary* that this call be evidenced prior to leaving for the mission field because without it, we do not know who should be the missionaries, we

do not know whether or not they are properly equipped by God, we are not truly justified in dedicating them to this work nor in supporting it, and we will very likely lack the conviction and commitment necessary to carry the work to its completion. Therefore, those who leave as missionaries and those who send them out are running very serious risks if they do so without analyzing and confirming the evidence of this type of a call.

### ***Maintaining the optimum conditions for detecting and/or receiving this special, captivating call***

Since this special, personal, particular, and captivating call plays such a key and important role in the lives of its recipient, of the local church, and of the ministry, we ought to be in optimum conditions to detect it and receive it. Also, we ought to be able to recognize this call and evaluate it (tell if it is a true call or not, and determine where an individual may be in the whole process of receiving this call). In this section of this chapter, we will study the optimum conditions for detecting and receiving his call. In the next section of this chapter, we will study how to recognize this call and evaluate whether a person has received one or where that person might be in the whole process of receiving this call.

But if the call is based upon an event or a particular act (being taken captive by Christ for a special ministry), then why are we speaking here of the process of the call? We are using this terminology because many times the call can *appear* and *be detected* more as a process than as a specific point in time. I believe that this is due to the fact that many times it takes time for the “captivity” to have a visible impact in the life of the recipient of the call. Furthermore, certain people will be more sensitive to the Lord and more pliable in His hands, so the visible impact of this captivity in their lives will come earlier. Others will tend to evidence this captivity at a considerably slower rate. Given all this, I believe that it is helpful to detect the call as if it were a process which can be either fast or slow, depending on the individual.

As can be expected, the special, personal, particular, and captivating call is also a spiritual call. It comes from God and has to do with being taken captive by Christ. Therefore, many of the elements which will help put us in optimum conditions to detect and/or receive this call are spiritual elements. The following is a list of eight elements that can help us in the task of detecting and/or receiving this call. The list is by no means

exhaustive, but I do believe that it focuses on the more important elements. With regard to the development of this list, the author is indebted once again to his colleague and friend Dr. J. Herbert Kane, who introduced him to these elements in his previously mentioned text *Life and Work on the Mission Field*.

① **Recognize the lordship of Christ.** Christ is our Lord and we belong to Him (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Heart, soul, mind, and strength, we ought to surrender all to Him (Mark 12:30). We have been crucified and we no longer live, instead, Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20). God should have control of *all* of our being, and we should obey His will. If we are not willing to do this, how can we expect Him to reveal His will to someone that is not going to pay Him any attention? Therefore, if we are looking to receive a call, we should start by recognizing the lordship of Christ. And if we wish to detect a possible call upon the life of others, we should look for potential recipients among those who recognize the lordship of Christ.

In analyzing these optimum conditions for detecting and receiving the call, we must also take into account elements like the spiritual maturity of the individual. We should not look for the same degree of commitment and understanding in a child that we would look for in an adult. The measurement of these conditions should always take into account the individual who is the potential recipient.

② **Understand the general will of God as revealed in His Word.** Since it is our responsibility to obey God, then we need to understand what His general will is for us. This general will is His plan and purpose for all of creation, and it is directly and explicitly revealed through the Scriptures. Since it is revealed this way, there should be no doubt nor mystery regarding what this will is. And it is applicable to all of creation, so there is no context, person, nor circumstances to which this will does not apply. For example, we know that it is the general will of God that no one should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). This verse is applicable to *all* people in *all* contexts and circumstances.

*Whatever call God may have for us (either to receive the call or to detect it), it will fit perfectly within the parameters established by His general will as revealed in the Bible.* God cannot contradict Himself. Therefore, knowing the Bible and knowing the parameters of His general will can help us a lot in detecting His call. How? By focusing our

search and by eliminating an immense group of potential options. For example, if someone comes and says that they feel that God is calling them to a certain activity (let us say, to run away with their secretary who is married to another), and if this activity goes against the revealed general will of God (as this particular case clearly does), then we can know that it is *extremely* doubtful (or even impossible) that this “calling” is an authentic call proceeding from God. There is too great a degree of contradiction between this potential call and His revealed general will.

③ **Listen to the Holy Spirit.** According to what we have seen in Acts 13:2, it is the Holy Spirit that communicates the call (at least, the missionary call). So, if we wish to detect or receive a call, we have to be sensitive to and listen to the source from which those calls proceed.

And here it is important to also point out that the Holy Spirit moves, works, controls, and guides according to His sovereign plan and taking into account the nature, personality, and temperament of the individual. I do not believe that any human being can say beforehand (at least with any high degree of certainty) when and how the Spirit will move and work, *except that His moving and working will always be according to the parameters established by the Bible.* This is one of the factors that makes the call so unique to the recipient, and makes one call be so different from another. Actually, the range of calls is so broad that it is impossible to signal out just one form or just one experience, and say that all calls must be like this.

④ **Possess a pure heart.** If we wish to be able to detect or receive a call, we ought to possess a pure heart. Why? Because the call is a spiritual call, communicated by the Holy Spirit, and possessing a pure heart greatly facilitates our communication with the Holy Spirit. In other words, we ought to be clean vessels to receive His message (1 John 1:5–2:6). Therefore, when we study the Bible and when we study about God’s will (as we saw in point two above), we do not do these things simply as intellectual exercises. We do not study these things to become more intelligent; we study them to become more holy, more pure, more transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. In other words, God reveals His Word and His will to us in order that we may *follow* them, and not just *know* them.

⑤ **Maintain an open mind.** Many people have already decided that there are certain things that they will never do, and therefore, for them, it

is inconceivable that they would ever do these things. They cannot even imagine themselves doing them. *Now, we are not talking here about things that are sinful, things that the Bible says that we should not do.* Rather, we are talking about things like, “I could never learn another language,” “I could never live in another country,” “I could never dress that way,” “I could never eat that,” “I could never live that way,” or “I could never take my wife and kids to live under those conditions.” For the person that thinks this way, his or her mind is closed to these options. Obviously, it will be quite a bit harder for a person with a closed mind like this to receive a call to these types of activities than for a person that has a more open mind.

This holds true not only for potential recipients of calls, but also for those that desire to detect the presence of a call in someone else’s life. If we think (and here I am referring not to what we think theoretically; but rather to what we think practically) that God would never send one of our congregation to such and such a location, to live under certain conditions, to wear a certain type of clothing, to adapt themselves to such and such a type of cultural setting, etc., *we are closing our minds to that possibility.* If we think that John Doe is too old to learn another language, or if we think that Jane Doe’s health is too weak for her to travel to another country, *we are closing our minds to these possibilities.* Take, for example, a friend of mine who is a lady of rather advanced age, with many health problems (among other things, she suffers from cerebral palsy), and who has physical disabilities that oftentimes require her to use a wheelchair. A lot of people would think that this lady cannot really travel very much, and that she should stay at home and be content ministering through her prayers. But, this lady travels all over the world (countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America) carrying out her international ministry. How? By not allowing her problems or her situation to close her mind to this type of an activity.

So, if we wish to facilitate the detection or reception of a call from God, we need to be open to all the legitimate (not sinful) options with regard to God’s will for our lives and for the lives of others. In fact, we even need to keep our minds open with regard to who might be a potential recipient of this type of a call (such as in the case of my friend with cerebral palsy).

Having said all this, it should not be interpreted to mean that we cannot have *preferences* with regards to missionary service. Nor does it mean that we should not take *sane precautions* when dealing with situations that could be danger-

ous. What we are trying to avoid here is the *practically automatic elimination* of certain options for missionary service that truly should remain viable and legitimate options.

⑥ **Be occupied in the Lord’s work.** In the Bible, it appears that God normally calls people who are already occupied doing something. In other words, it appears that God does not tend to call unoccupied people into His service. God wants *workers* in His harvest, and workers will tend to be occupied in the Lord’s work no matter where they might be. Therefore, those who contemplate the possibility of receiving a missionary call ought to be involved in some facet of the Lord’s work right now. *It is not upon touching foreign soil that the missionary “magically” is converted into a hard worker for the Lord. This happens much earlier.* And for those who are interested in detecting a possible call in others, they should look for potential recipients among those who are currently serving the Lord. How can we expect God to call someone into full-time missionary work, a work that requires a very strong dedication and commitment, if that person is not doing anything for the Lord now?

⑦ **Be willing to dedicate yourself to the task and to work full-time in this task.** As we have seen, the special call of God is a call that captivates the recipient for a special ministry, many times requiring that he or she leave their previous vocation or occupation and dedicate themselves with all their heart and life to a new ministry. Therefore, those that contemplate the possibility of receiving this type of a call ought to be open to dedicating themselves this way to this ministry. And those that wish to detect a possible call in others, ought to look for potential recipients among those who evidence this willingness to dedicate themselves to the task. This willingness is an important sign that the person has been captivated by Christ for this ministry.

⑧ **Seek out the confirmation of the local church.** Although Christ is the One who captivates the person (Ephesians 4), in Acts 13:1–4 we see the Holy Spirit communicating this calling to the local church, and then, working through this church to accomplish this calling. Actually, the association between the Holy Spirit and this local church was so close that the author of Acts could say, in Acts 13:3–4, “then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit,



they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” In one verse, it says that these missionaries were sent out by the local church, and in the very next verse it says that they were sent out by the Holy Spirit. The association between the local church and the Holy Spirit was so close that there was no contradiction in these verses. The Holy Spirit worked through this church.

Therefore, if we wish to confirm the existence of a calling, we ought to look for the confirmation of the local church. Of course, this church should be in close communion with the Holy Spirit, so that He can speak freely to the church; but if the church has this type of communion with the Holy Spirit, then it should know if the Spirit is calling one of its members. It is possible that the particular member may know it before the church does (as appears to be the case with Paul), but the church, sooner or later, ought to be able to confirm the call.

In this step, I believe that the role of the local church extends far beyond simply testing to see if the person has received a call from God. With its confirmation, this church is also confirming, or giving its seal of approval or backing, to at least two things. First of all, it is approving the dedication (the setting apart or reserving) of this person for this ministry. Secondly, it is also approving the activities contemplated in this ministry.

Please note that this confirmation does not *necessarily* signify that this church will support this individual financially in his or her ministry. This type of support depends, among other things, on whether or not this person is truly qualified to be a faithful and adequate ambassador of this church in this ministry (as we saw in the previous chapter). For further details regarding the local church’s selection of missionaries and representatives, please see the chapter on the sending entities.

### ***How to recognize and evaluate a special, captivating call***

Having seen some of the things that we can do to maintain the optimum conditions for detecting and/or receiving a special, captivating call of God, now we need to study how to recognize and evaluate the possible existence of this type of a call in our lives or in the lives of others. In this study, we take for granted that the eight points seen in the previous section are underlying this current section and any observations made here.

Let us begin with a few basic questions. How can we know if a person has received a special call from God (like a missionary call)? What should we

look for as signs of this call? We have noted that the work and movement of the Holy Spirit vary greatly from individual to individual. We have also noted that it is impossible to signal out a particular type of experience and say that all callings *have* to duplicate this particular experience. If this is so, if God’s callings are so varied and so particular to the individual, then what can we go on to recognize and evaluate a potential special call?

Due to the varied and particular nature of God’s calling, we dare not base our identification and evaluation of a potential call in either the *form* of the call or in the *particular concrete experience* associated with that call. These elements are too unique to the individual’s case, and vary too much from individual to individual. But there are identifiable elements in a call that are more universal (across many individuals), and we can use these to help us identify and evaluate a call. These more universal elements are certain things common in the apparent *process* of the call. As we will see in this section, there are seven steps or stages that appear to be common to many people in the process of receiving their special call, and these steps are fairly easy to recognize and to identify. Therefore, we will be using these steps or stages as indicators that will help us identify a person’s position in the apparent process of receiving a call, and by doing this, they also will help us identify and evaluate whether or not the person is receiving (or has received) a call from God.

Obviously, this is not a totally predictable science (unlike the science of mathematics that is predictable). Here, we are dealing with individuals and with God’s working in their lives. So, as we approach this subject, we must always remember that God’s work in the lives of people can vary greatly from individual in individual. Therefore, these seven steps or stages, and the accompanying diagram, should only be applied as *basic or general suggestions*. We should never seek to apply them with mathematical precision.

In this section of the text, the author is greatly indebted to his friend and professor J. Herbert Kane for identifying these common steps in his book *Life and Work on the Mission Field* (mentioned earlier). Dr. Kane’s observations form the starting point for the development of this section. Also, a special diagram has been developed that concisely displays this whole process of calling. It is suggested that the reader frequently refer to this diagram as a help in understanding this process.

**Step 1 — Curiosity.** For many people, the first noticeable step toward a special calling (such

as a missionary call) begins with the awakening of a curiosity with regard to some ministry or work of the church (such as cross-cultural missions). In this step, a ministry or work captures the attention of the person. Perhaps for the first time in his or her life, this person begins to take note of this ministry. This awakening may be fast or slow in its development, and it might even be so slow that the person does not even realize that it is happening. Also, this curiosity may spring out of a great variety of contexts (such as through reading a missionary biography, or reading a missionary's letter, or attending a missionary conference, or listening to a missionary sermon, or simply conversing with a friend).

**Step 2 — Interest.** Once a curiosity has been awakened, it leads to an interest in the object that aroused the curiosity. In this step, the individual begins to *study* and *think about* the area that has caused his or her curiosity. Perhaps for the first time in their life, they begin to actually think about this ministry. They seek further information about it, contemplate on it, and perhaps even talk with their friends about it. If the interest area is missions, they may look up books about missions and talk with some missionaries. Why? Because they are now *interested* in missions work.

**Step 3 — Understanding.** Based upon his or her studies and contemplations, the person now begins to truly *understand* the ministry that has captured his or her interest. Little by little, they begin to understand the demands, the costs, and the requirements of this ministry. They begin to understand things like the nature of cross-cultural missionary work. They begin to understand the implications that the Great Commission may have for their lives. They begin to understand how the lostness of mankind, the magnitude of the missionary task, the urgency of missions, and the lack of available missionary resources might all have direct implications for their lives. As may be expected, this third step tends to be a rather slow step in developing, requiring both time and study.

Unfortunately, some people *jump* this step and go directly to attraction (step four), basing themselves only upon their interest (step two). When this happens, the attraction that ought to be based upon a broad understanding of the ministry is based rather upon something much more superficial and emotional. People who do this run a great risk of responding to a mere "emotional call." *It is always better for the attraction to come after the step of understanding, using this understanding as a*

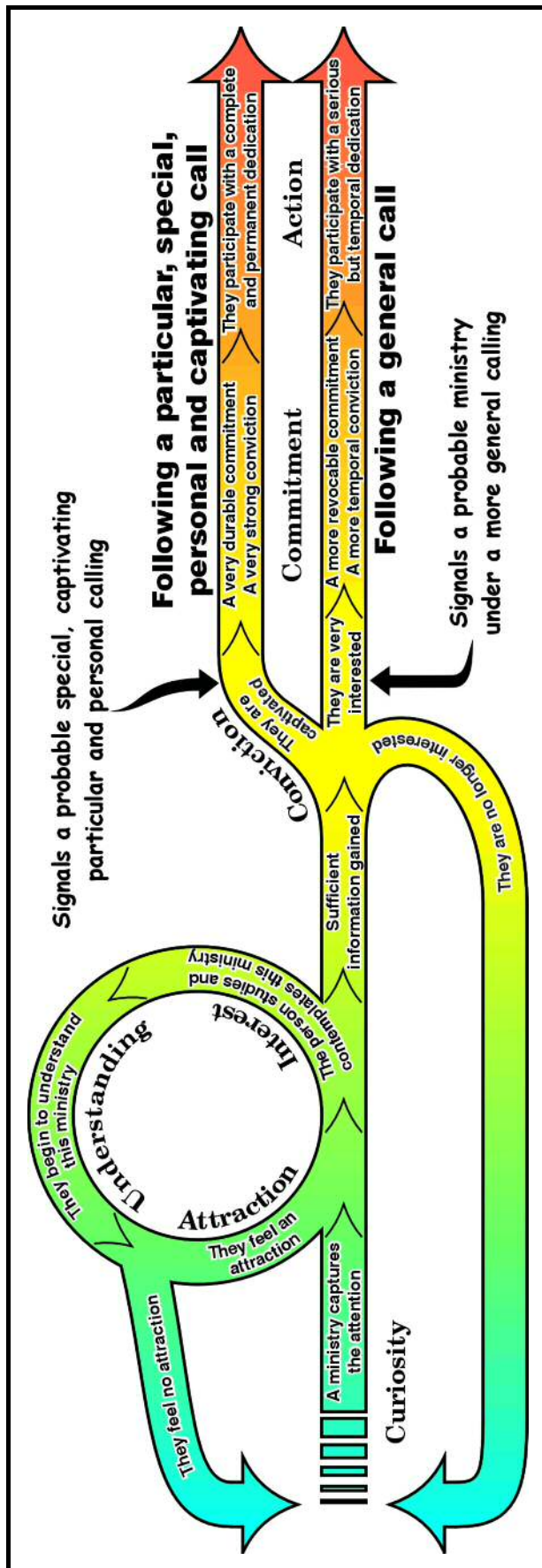
*firm basis for this attraction.*

**Step 4 — Attraction.** In this step, and based upon their interest and understanding of the ministry under study (the two previous steps), this ministry now either becomes something fairly attractive to the individual, or it begins to lose whatever attraction that it had. In other words, in the light of his or her studies, contemplation, and understanding of the reality of this ministry, the idea of working in this area either becomes attractive or not. If it is not attractive, or no longer attractive, then the person likely will cease studying it and examining it. They will probably abandon this particular process and return to the very first step where they will begin the process all over again with another ministry that has captured their curiosity. But, if the idea of working in this ministry is attractive to the individual, if they can see themselves working in it and being happy, if this ministry is truly *desirable* and *credible* from their perspective, then they will most likely stay "on course" with the process.

In this latter case, this attraction will usually lead to greater interest in the ministry, which in turn will lead to greater study and understanding of the ministry. And this is only normal. Due to the attraction that the person feels, they now have a greater interest in the subject and a greater desire to study it and understand it better. One leads to the other, which then leads to the other, which then fuels the first. This is why steps two, three, and four form a cycle in the diagram.

How long should a person spend in this cycle? The amount of time will vary greatly from individual to individual, and it will *especially* vary according to the degree of commitment that the person begins to feel with regard to this ministry. If they feel only a light commitment, they probably will not spend much time in this cycle before passing on to the next step. However, if they detect or feel a possible serious level of commitment here, then they probably will spend much more time in this cycle so that they can more deeply understand this ministry before proceeding to the next step.

It will probably be in this cycle of interest, understanding, and attraction, that the person, *for the first time*, will detect the possible existence of a special calling upon his or her life. And this is only logical. If the person has been captivated by Christ for this ministry, then it should be in the process of studying this ministry and understanding it that he or she begins to understand the personal ramifications for his or her life. It is probably a bit early yet (depending on where the individual is in



the process of the cycles) to declare the probable existence of a special call in this individual’s life, but it definitely is an encouraging sign.

Therefore, if, in the process of this cycle of interest, understanding, and attraction, the person begins to feel a strong attraction to a ministry, and also begins to feel a serious desire to commit or dedicate himself or herself to this ministry, I believe that it is safe to say that this individual is “on the way” to a probable *special and captivating calling* to work with this ministry. If the person does not feel a serious desire to commit or dedicate himself or herself to this ministry, but still feels an attraction toward it, then I believe that it is safe to say that this individual is “on the way” to a probable *general calling* to work with this ministry (the differences between a general calling and a special and captivating calling will be highlighted in the remaining steps of this process).

Furthermore, for many people, it is in an early stage of this cycle of interest, understanding, and attraction that they will, for the first time, speak to others regarding their interest in this area. Thus, we may use this external verbalization of an internal interest as an indicator to help us locate a person in the whole process of calling. In other words, if the individual is speaking to others about this individual’s possible involvement in this ministry, then it is very likely that he or she may be located at least somewhere in the cycle of interest, understanding, and attraction (in the diagram).

**Step 5 — Conviction.** When a person has been in the cycle of interest, understanding, and attraction for sufficient time, they acquire sufficient information to form a firm base for their decision regarding the next step. And the decision that they make will show their degree of conviction with regard to this ministry. Looking at it from a different angle, the person has now reached the point in this cycle where the attraction that he or she feels toward this ministry has grown and grown until it has become a firm and strong well-informed interest. For this individual, it has now become a conviction. And remember, the amount of time dedicated to the process of this cycle will vary greatly from person to person, and it will vary *especially* with regard to the degree of commitment that they feel (the higher the commitment, the longer the cycles). The important thing here is not the number of times that a person has gone through the cycle, but rather that he or she *remain* in the process of the cycles until achieving sufficient information to provide a solid base for his or

her conviction.

In this step of conviction, there basically are three possible responses, and each one is an important indicator with regards to the type of calling that the individual may be experiencing. Therefore, we will analyze this step in a bit more detail, since it is an important indicator that can signal the existence of a special and captivating calling.

In this step, based upon the information acquired through the cycles of interest, understanding, and attraction, the person is now ready to choose one of three possible paths (illustrated by the three arrows in our diagram). The first path is for those who are no longer interested in this ministry (the lower arrow). The second path is for those who are very interested in the ministry, but only interested (the middle arrow). And the third path is for those who have been captivated by this ministry and must dedicate their lives to this ministry (the upper arrow).

Let us analyze the first path, which is represented by the lower arrow that curves toward the left in the diagram. This is the path of the people who, after having studied and understood this ministry, now feel no great interest in it. For example, a person on this path may say something like “now that I understand what it means to minister to the four-year-olds in Sunday School, now that I know more about what is involved in working with them, I am no longer interested in this. This ministry really is not for me.”

For this person, either God has not given him or her a serious interest in this ministry, or, this individual is ignoring an interest that God is trying to open in his or her heart. Either way, the result probably will be the same: this person probably will return to the first step in the process and begin all over again with *another* ministry that captures his or her curiosity. *As such, this individual does not evidence a special call or even a general call to the ministry they had originally studied.* And what if this person is “running away” from an interest that God wants to awaken within his or her heart, but that they are refusing to recognize it? In a case like this, I believe that sooner or later God will cause this rejected ministry to once again create a curiosity in this individual’s heart, and they will then begin the whole process again.

*In all of this process, please also remember the following, because it is very, very important. It is not the responsibility of the local church to assign or to make calls. The local church’s responsibility is to recognize and to confirm calls that God is making or has made. The local church also has the*

*responsibility to build an environment that is conducive to detecting, receiving, and recognizing God’s call (such as was seen in the previous section). But through this all, it is Christ, and not the local church, who takes captive a host of captivities (as mentioned in Ephesians 4).*

Let us now go on to the second path, which is represented by the straight arrow in the middle of the diagram (the lower of the two arrows that point to the right). On this path we find the people who, after having studied and understood this ministry, feel that they are very interested in this ministry, but *only* interested (they do not feel captivated for this ministry). When a person feels this way, it is a good sign that he or she probably has encountered the ministry in which God wants them to work right now, under a more general call (a calling that is serious, but not captivating).

For this person, this ministry is going to be both desirable and important, because it is through this ministry that this individual is going to fulfil their responsibility with regard to God’s general call upon them. But, this person probably will not feel a *super-strong* attraction toward this ministry nor a *long-term* commitment to it. For this individual, this ministry will be important, but not *imperative* nor *obligatory*. In fact, this person will probably work in another ministry sooner or later, and he or she will probably be very happy in this other ministry as well. In other words, this individual does not evidence being a *prisoner* in the Lord for this ministry, and therefore he or she does not evidence a *special* and *captivating* call to this ministry.

Now, with the passage of time, this person may transition from this path to the upper path (the upper arrow), if God causes this individual’s interest, commitment, and conviction to grow through their involvement in this ministry. If this happens, then this person changes arrows when his or her conviction becomes so strong that it evidences that Christ has *captivated* this person for this ministry. This individual will continue on toward the same direction and the same end (both arrows point toward the same result). But, he or she now will be traveling the path of a much greater conviction and commitment. And when this happens, *this person now evidences a special and captivating call for this ministry.*

Let us now study the third path, represented in the diagram by the upper of the two arrows pointing toward the right. On this path we find the people who are not only interested in this ministry, *but that also have been captivated by Christ for this ministry.* Since this arrow is the only path that

includes this element of captivation, and since this captivation is a *very* important indicator of a particular, special, personal, and captivating call, then *this upper path is the one that identifies the people who evidence a special calling (such as the call to be a missionary, a prophet, an evangelist, or a pastor and teacher – to cite the list found in Ephesians 4).*

For the person traveling down this path, and using the illustration of a call to be a missionary, this individual no longer thinks “I can be a missionary.” They also no longer are thinking “I want to be a missionary.” As we have seen, these phrases fit better in the cyclic process of interest, understanding, and attraction. Rather, at this step of conviction, the person’s thoughts are more likely to be “I have to be a missionary.” Or “this task is imperative for me, I cannot escape it.” In short, this individual has reached the point of recognizing that he or she has been taken *captive* by Christ and returned to the local church to *dedicate* themselves to this ministry. Therefore, for these people to dedicate their lives to any other occupation, profession, or ministry appears to them to be both ridiculous and impossible. They can do nothing else, they must be missionaries. They are “prisoners in the Lord” for this particular ministry. *In very simple terms, they evidence having received and recognized a special, particular, personal, and captivating call.*

And it appears that when a person with this type of a special call arrives at this fifth step, normally they do not turn back. Nor do they switch to one of the lower paths. The individual is a “prisoner” and cannot change. He or she has been captivated, understands the special call of God upon his or her life, and has accepted this call and its ramifications. There are still two steps left to finish the process, but this individual now has “made the decision” to be a missionary, a prophet, an evangelist, or a pastor and teacher (to use the list from Ephesians 4). Please note the use of quotation marks above. Really, this person is not making this decision. Rather, this decision was made by God before this person ever was born, according to Galatians 1:15–16, and this person really is just recognizing and accepting God’s decision.

Before passing on to the next step, let us note one more observation about this fifth step. Although the diagram has the cycle of interest, understanding, and attraction located prior to this step of conviction, this does not mean that this cycle stops with this fifth step. Rather, interest, understanding, and attraction continue throughout

this fifth step and the remaining two steps. In the ministry, very seldom do we ever reach the point where our interest ceases to push us onward to greater understanding and greater attraction. We are always studying and learning.

**Step 6 — Commitment.** For the person who is following the path of a general call (the lower arrow of the two that point to the right), in this sixth step he or she *seriously* commits himself or herself to the ministry, but in a more nonpermanent way, and many times for a specific duration of time. Therefore, this commitment is temporary, in a certain sense. This individual is not thinking of dedicating his or her *life* to this ministry. Furthermore, obstacles, discouragements, and opposition can negatively affect his or her level of commitment (*and the church must be careful to maintain these negative elements to a minimum*). And, with the passage of time, it is not unusual to see this individual choose another ministry in which to serve. He or she has fulfilled God’s leading for his or her life, for this time period and ministry area, under a general call.

In contrast to this, the person who has been captivated for this ministry (and is following the upper arrow of the two that point to the right) feels a much deeper, firmer, and durable level of commitment. In a very real way, he or she now *lives* for this ministry. As Paul remarks in Acts 20:24, this individual no longer considers his or her life of any account as dear to himself or herself, if by sacrificing it he or she can finish the course and ministry that God has set before this individual. Therefore, this person firmly and deeply commits their very life to the cause to which God has called him or her. And this individual’s conviction is so great that it normally will overcome all obstacles, discouragements, and opposition. Of course, as with any human being, this person’s commitment might diminish a bit sometimes, but it always comes back. It never disappears in a permanent way.

**Step 7 — Action.** For the person who is following the path of a general call (the lower arrow), this last step perhaps begins with some sort of preparation or training for his or her ministry. But, the expectations with regard to training and preparation will be in accord with the individual’s degree of calling, commitment, and conviction. No one will expect that this person will take a three-year course in theology so that he or she can teach a Sunday School class for one or two years. Their training will be something much

simpler. And once they have finished this training, these individuals will actively participate in the ministry with a serious but temporary dedication.

In contrast, for the person that is captivated for this ministry (the upper arrow), this last step perhaps begins with dedicating themselves to receiving the serious level of training and preparation that their life of ministry will require. Once again, the expectations here are only in accord with the individual's degree of calling, commitment, and conviction. Thus, with this individual, we may expect a lot more with regard to his or her dedication to their studies. We may expect that he or she will dedicate the time necessary to adequately train themselves for the ministry (according to their abilities and the opportunities open to them). For the future cross-cultural missionary, this very well may involve studying a full-time training program for two to four years. For the future pastor, this may involve theological studies for a similar amount of time. But, due to the fact that this individual is dedicating his or her very life to this ministry, setting aside these years for training is not an extreme measure. And, when they are ready, these individuals will participate in their ministry with a full and permanent dedication. After all, they are "prisoners in the Lord."

**The use of the diagram.** As can be noted, it is not too difficult to analyze the call of any member of a congregation by applying this diagram to their life. All one has to do is ask the question: where do we see you as being in this process? If the person is publically communicating his or her concern or interest in this ministry, it is a good sign that, *at the very least*, they are in the cycle formed by the steps two, three, and four. If this person evidences a serious conviction with regard to this ministry, and also has sufficient information and understanding to form a solid base for this conviction, then it is a good sign that this person is, *at the very least*, in step five (conviction). The degree of commitment felt (if only very interested, or if captivated) will be our major indicator to signal whether the person is responding to a special and captivating call or to a more general call. *If there is no solid evidence that Christ has captivated this person for this ministry, then there is no solid evidence that this person has a special calling to this ministry. And if there is solid evidence that Christ has captivated this person for this ministry, then there is solid evidence that this person has a special calling to this ministry.*

To facilitate the detection and evaluation of a possible special, particular, personal, and captivating call, a special sheet has been developed and appears in Appendix "B" of this text. This sheet contains the eight elements that were studied in the previous section (the optimum conditions for receiving a call), and it also contains a copy of the diagram contained in this section.

And, lastly, please always remember that although this diagram and these steps have been applied and tested with multiple people in various settings, and have been proven (by God's grace) to be helpful in recognizing and evaluating a person's calling, *this is not a certain science*. We are speaking of human beings and of God's work in their lives. We must always remember that God's work in the life of an individual can vary greatly from person to person. Therefore, these steps and this diagram should be applied only as a *general guide* or *general rule of thumb*. They cannot be applied with mathematical precision.

### ***Additional questions***

We finished the previous chapter with some questions. We would like now to answer these here, in light of what we have seen in this chapter.

◆ Who decides who ought to be a missionary? God decides who ought to be a missionary, who ought to be captivated for this ministry and set aside for dedication to this ministry.

◆ Who or what makes a missionary a missionary? Is it the missionary himself or herself? Is it the local church? What makes a missionary a missionary is Christ's taking this individual captive and returning him or her to the church for the purpose of being a missionary. This captivating act is also reflected in the person's missionary calling. *Therefore, Christ, and not the local church nor the missionary, makes a missionary a missionary.* We can also add here that it is not the *activities* done by a missionary that makes this individual a missionary. Being a missionary is the product of Christ's work in a person's life, and his or her activities are simply a fruit or a consequence of this work. In other words, a missionary does what he or she does because they are a missionary; *but they are not a missionary because of what they do.*

◆ Who determines that one person is going to be a missionary and another is not going to be a missionary? Christ captivates people according to His wisdom and sovereignty. He captivates some and not others.

# Chapter 4

## Renewing our perspective of missionary work



Now that we have renewed, in the light of Scripture, our perspective of the missionary and of the missionary call, we can now examine and renew our perspective of missionary work.

### ***Basic definitions***

With regard to the word “work,” *Webster’s New World Dictionary* (revised edition of 1966) defines it as “bodily or mental effort exerted to do or make something”; “purposeful activity”; “labor”; “toil”; “employment”; and “occupation” (to give a few of the definitions). The basic idea here is that of effort or activity that is focused on some purpose or end. The Bible also uses the word “work” with the general definition of “act”; “service”; “occupation”; “deed”; “ministry”; and “labor” (to give a few of the definitions). Since these definitions are rather general, they do not offer too much specific grammatical information. However, when we team up the general word “work” with the specific adjective “missionary” (and with the information that we have already seen about the meaning of “missionary”), it is possible to achieve a more precise definition of “missionary work.”

**The definition of “missionary.”** Up until now, we have studied the meaning of the word “missionary,” but we have not assembled a formal definition. With what we have seen of the special and captivating missionary call, we now can present the following definition of the word “missionary” as a noun. Its adjectival meaning (such as in “missionary church”) is based upon its meaning as a noun (in other words, the adjectival usage will refer to activities and qualities related to achieving the representation implicit in being a missionary). Having said all this, we may define “missionary” as:

**A believer whom Christ has set apart, captivated, and returned as prisoner to the Church to dedicate himself or herself to serving as the formal and accredited ambassador of Christ and of the local churches that send him or her out, offering**

**them a voluntary, authentic, genuine, and responsible representation (including submission to the authority and direction of these represented entities, and accountability to them for this representation), so that, through the sending of these ambassadors (with a delegated authority and a specific purpose) and through the representation thus achieved, these represented entities can fulfill the responsibilities that God has given them with respect to the Great Commission.**

**The definition of “missionary work.”** Now that we have our formal definition of “missionary,” we can assemble a formal definition of “missionary work.” In very simple terms, and based upon the meanings of the two words “work” and “missionary,” missionary work is the activity or the labor involved in achieving a faithful representation of the entities that have sent out the missionary. But we can achieve even greater precision in this definition by focusing on a few of the “facets” of the concept of missionary work.

The first facet that we want to look at is *the activities involved in missionary work*. In our definition of “missionary,” we said that this representation is achieved so that the represented entities can fulfill the responsibilities that God has given them with regard to the Great Commission. Therefore, the Great Commission defines the range of activities involved in missionary work. Although we will study the Great Commission in considerable detail in the next section of this chapter, we can highlight here that it includes the activities of going, preaching, testifying, evangelizing, incorporating new believers into churches, and teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded us. As can be seen, *the Great Commission basically contemplates all the activities of a local church, carried out in a different context*.

The second facet that we wish to look at is *the area, context, or location where these missionary activities are carried out*. By definition, missionary

work requires the use of a missionary. Also by definition, this missionary is the ambassador of his or her sending entities. And, through the person of this ambassador, these represented entities achieve what they could not accomplish without this ambassador. Therefore, by definition, *missionary work must be carried out beyond the current sphere of evangelical influence of the sending entities. Furthermore, it is also common to carry out this work beyond the current sphere of evangelical influence of all evangelical churches (“pioneer work”).*

What is this “current sphere of evangelical influence”? Each church, through its contacts as an entity and through the personal contacts of the members of its congregation, generates a “sphere of influence.” Within this sphere live unsaved people who can be reached by the members of this church, without having to overcome any great barriers. It is not necessary to overcome great barriers because this unsaved population lives “close” to this church and to its members, they live *within* the sphere of evangelical influence of this church. Therefore, evangelizing and working with this unsaved population is relatively easy (speaking of obstacles and barriers). And, if we add up all the evangelical spheres of influence of all the evangelical churches in the world, in this current moment, then the broad sphere of influence that results would be the current sphere of evangelical influence of all evangelical churches.

But why is missionary work located beyond the current sphere of evangelical influence? Because within this sphere, the members of the congregations of these churches can and ought to carry out the labors of the ministry. Normally, it is not necessary to use a special missionary, a special ambassador, to teach a Bible study three blocks from the church. Normally, it is not necessary to use a missionary to evangelize young people who are friends of the youth of the church. The youth of this church themselves can accomplish this task. Rather, a missionary, an ambassador, is required to represent the church in areas beyond the normal reach of this church, in areas where the church cannot minister by itself.

And why is it also common to carry out missionary work beyond the current sphere of evangelical influence of all evangelical churches? Why is it not sufficient just to work beyond the evangelical sphere of the sending church? Because if we do not stress pioneer missionary work, we could end up sending out all our missionaries to work in other locations beyond their sending church’s sphere of influence, but within the sphere

of influence of viable evangelical churches on the mission field. Unless we have a very good reason to send out missionaries to work within this evangelical sphere on the mission field (for example, because they are working in strengthening these churches), we could end up wasting precious resources reaching a population that could have been reached more easily by the church in their locality. Also, we have to remember that approximately *one-half of the population of the world* (almost 3.5 billion people) live outside the sphere of evangelical influence of all evangelical churches. The only way of reaching this portion of the world is through missionaries that work where this population lives, beyond the sphere of evangelical influence of all churches.

The third, and last, facet that we would like to look at is *the context of missionary work*. Since it requires the use of a missionary, and since it is located beyond the current sphere of evangelical influence (at least of the sending church), *many times this context is going to be different, and very possibly radically different, from the context of the sending church*. This means that the missionary will have to adapt the presentation of biblical truth to this new context. This could include such things as learning another language, learning about another religious system (along with its basic religious aspirations – so that the missionary can show how only Jesus Christ can truly satisfy these aspirations), and learning how to live, communicate, and be a viable example of a disciple of Jesus Christ in this new cultural context.

Here we must also remember that differences in context do not necessarily follow geographical differences and political divisions. For example, a population living on the other side of a large city might very well be *within* the sphere of evangelical influence of a church in that city (because this church has various families living in that sector of town), while a Chinese population a block from the church might very well be *outside* this church’s sphere of evangelical influence (due to the religious, linguistic, and cultural differences between this population and this church). There are a number of factors that go into determining the “coverage” of any particular evangelical sphere of influence.

Having seen these three facets of missionary work, we now can offer the following definition:

**Missionary work is the divine and imperative commission that the Church has received to evangelize and make disciples, beyond the current sphere of evangelical influ-**



**ence, by going (in the person of their representative or ambassador) to where this unsaved population lives, by presenting the gospel in a persuasive and effective manner, by teaching all that Christ has commanded us, and by founding new churches (according to need) that aim at evangelization, discipleship, and the application of the biblical message and principles to the particular socio-cultural context of this new church, and beyond.**

When this activity involves work in cultural contexts that are significantly different from the original context of the missionary, we have a special form of missionary work: *cross-cultural* missionary work.

### ***The Great Commission***

We have seen that the Great Commission defines the range of activities involved in missionary work. The missionary is sent out so that his or her sending churches, through the representation of this missionary, may fulfill their responsibility to the Great Commission. But, what exactly are the activities included in this commission?

To answer this question, we need to study the texts of the Great Commission. Accounts of this commission are found in the four gospels and in the book of Acts. Each account presents the same commission, but focusing on different elements. Following are presented these five texts, with a brief analysis of that each text has to say with regard to the activities involved in missionary work.

#### **Matthew 28:18–20**

*And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

Of the five texts of the Great Commission, Matthew has the most detailed description of the activities involved in accomplishing it. Grammatically speaking, these verses contain one central command and three gerunds that highlight the activities associated with fulfilling this central

command.

The central command in these verses is “make disciples of all the nations.” This activity, therefore, is the principal focus here. The Church has to *make disciples*. It is not enough to just evangelize; the Church needs to continue this activity on to Christian maturity. Every believer should become a complete disciple in Jesus Christ. Perhaps this is why the message of these verses focuses so much on including every area of Christian life and Christian maturity. And the Church also needs to make these disciples *of all the nations*. It is not enough to just make disciples among the Church’s own ethnic and socio-cultural group. The whole world is the sphere of activity.

The three gerunds that highlight the activities associated with fulfilling this central command are: *having gone* (more accurately, a compound gerund), *baptizing*, and *teaching*. It is as if these verses had said “make disciples of all the nations, going, baptizing, and teaching.” These are the three sub-activities that focus on reaching the chief goal of making disciples of all the nations.

The first gerund, *having gone*, is translated in these verses with the force of the command “go.” And this gerund picks up the force of a command due to the fact that it describes the *background necessary* to achieve the principal command. Making disciples of all the nations presupposes the activity of going. The author assumes that the Church will go, and no separate command is necessary. Without going to where the unsaved are, it is impossible to make disciples of them. Thus, this first gerund focuses on the *geographical activity* necessary to make disciples of all the nations.

The second gerund is “*baptizing* them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” This gerund highlights the death of the old man and the resurrection of a new creature in Jesus Christ that occurs when a person believes in Christ. It also highlights the public identification of this new believer with the triune God and with His Church. Therefore, this gerund refers to both *the evangelization of the unsaved and the incorporation of new believers into the Church (and thereby also into a local church)*. Thus, these verses cover the base for discipleship (salvation and regeneration) and the environment in which this discipleship takes place (the Church).

The last gerund is “*teaching* them to observe all that I commanded you.” With this gerund these verses focus on two basic things: the activity of instructing these new believers, and the content of this instruction (everything that Christ has

commanded us). Please note that with regard to content, every aspect of the Christian life is included in this description. Thus, this gerund refers to *teaching and instruction*.

These three activities (of going, baptizing, and teaching) are *all* necessary if we are to make disciples of all the nations (the central command). And please note that they are given in their proper chronological order: first, we have to go to where the lost are; second, we have to evangelize them and incorporate the new believers into the Church; and third, we have to teach them concerning Christian maturity. We cannot evangelize or incorporate a person who has not been geographically reached, and we cannot truly instruct a person in the ways of the Lord if they do not first have a personal relationship with Him.

**Mark 16:15**

*And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."*

In his gospel, Mark has the tendency to record things in a very concise and brief form, and his record of the Great Commission is no exception. Just as in the Matthew account, there is only one central command here: "preach." The word "go," once again, is a compound gerund ("having gone") that basically achieves the force of a command, but is not the grammatical focus of the verse. Therefore, the central activity here is *preaching the gospel to all creation*. The Church needs to proclaim, announce, spread abroad the message of the gospel to all people all around the world, and this will involve, of course, going to where they are.

**Luke 24:46–49**

*And He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."*

In this text, Luke basically focuses on two activities: *preaching* ("proclaiming") and *being a witness*. The Church must announce, proclaim the message of repentance for forgiveness of sins. And it must be a witness to the death and resurrection

of Jesus Christ and to repentance and forgiveness. We must be witnesses to what Christ has done in us and for us.

**John 20:21**

*Jesus therefore said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."*

The text of John is another concise and abbreviated presentation of the Great Commission. As such, it focuses on being a sent one, being a representative. Therefore, the central activity here is that of *being sent by Jesus Christ, being His ambassador*.

**Acts 1:8**

*"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."*

These verses record one basic activity, that of *being a witness throughout all the world*. To achieve the Great Commission, we must be witnesses of Jesus Christ to what He has done in and for us, and our testimony must reach to the remotest part of the earth.

***Basic activities in missionary work***

**A summary of these activities.** We have seen that the Great Commission defines the range of activities involved in missionary work. And we have analyzed the different texts of the Great Commission with regard to the activities contemplated in these verses. Now, we can summarize what we have discovered with respect to the activities required by the Great Commission.

- ◆ *Make disciples of all the nations.* This phrase of Matthew's summarizes, in a very concise way, the principal general goal of missionary work.
- ◆ *Go to where the unsaved people are.* We should not wait for this people to come to us. It is our responsibility to go to them.
- ◆ *Evangelize.* We need to persuade the unsaved people to see their spiritual need, and show them how Jesus is the only true answer to this need.
- ◆ *Be witnesses to what Christ has done.* We need to communicate what Christ has done for and in our lives, showing how He has resolved our spiritual needs.
- ◆ *Proclaim repentance for forgiveness of sins.* We

need to announce that in Jesus Christ, and through repentance, there is forgiveness for our sins.

◆ *Incorporate new believers into a good, evangelical church.* This church will be the environment and family within which a very significant part of teaching and discipleship will take place.

◆ *Preach and announce all that Christ has commanded us.* We need to preach and announce the Bible in its totality.

◆ *Teach them to observe all that Christ has commanded us.* This simple sentence summarized the entire area of discipleship.

◆ *Serve as ambassadors sent with authority and with a specific purpose.* Jesus has sent us, and we represent Him. And when local churches are also involved in this process, they also are represented by their ambassadors, their missionaries.

◆ *Plant new churches.* When the activities contemplated here require the planting of new churches for these new believers (such as in a pioneer work, where there are no other evangelical churches, or in a cross-cultural work where the differences are so great that an existing church cannot really meet the needs of these new believers), then these new churches must be planted.

*As can be seen, this summary highlights a strong emphasis on evangelization and discipleship. The evangelization, and the new converts produced through it, provide the base for everything else. And discipleship is everything that is built upon this base.*

**Types or areas of activities.** As can be seen, the activities contemplated by the Great Commission cover almost all the activities of a normal church. What church activity would not be included in the phrase “teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded us”? Thus, the Great Commission implies an enormous range of activities. But, is there not a way that we can refer to these activities with some degree of precision, but without assembling an extensive listing? Yes, I believe that there is a way to do this. If you analyze the activities contemplated in the Great Commission, I believe that you will find that they tend to fall under five general types or areas of activities. By focusing on the five divisions of these activities, I believe that it will be easier for us to see how these activities fit in and are applied to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

The first type or area of activity is **worship**. This division groups together the activities that honor and reverence God (like the worship in Revelation 4:10) and the activities that declare His

glory and praise (like occurs in 1 Peter 2:9 and Psalm 19:1).

The second type or area of activity is **teaching**. This division groups together the activities that focus on strengthening, growing, and building up the believers. Especially important here are the activities that focus on achieving a full knowledge of the Son of God. We need strong, mature, and intelligent believers. Ephesians 4:11–16, 29, and 1 Thessalonians 5:11 are some of the verses that speak of this teaching or training.

The third type of activity is **communion**. Here, we group together activities that focus on the sharing and companionship that exist between brothers and sisters. These are the activities that highlight our relationship as the family of Christ. We have many things in *common* with our brothers and sisters (the same Lord, the same faith, the same Spirit, the same hope, the same baptism, the same God and Father), and all of this unites us as a family and compels us toward a care and concern for each other. Verses that speak of this communion include John 17:21; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 4:4–6; 1 John 1:7; 4:7–11; and the entire letter to the Philippians.

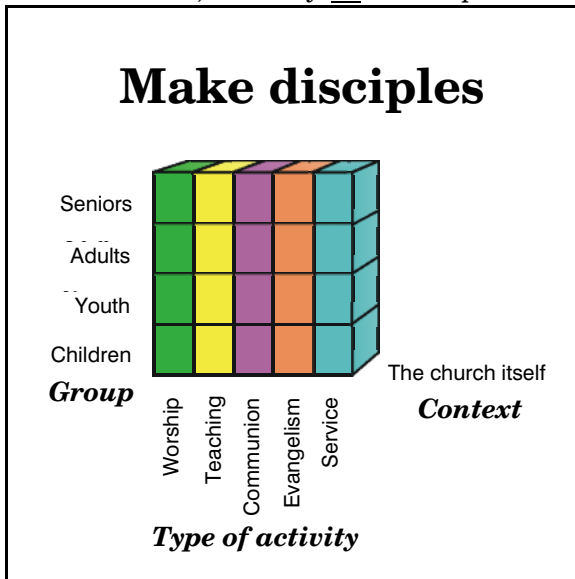
The fourth type or area of activity is **evangelism**. Under this division we group together activities that focus on the persuasive communication of the good news about what God has done through His Son Jesus Christ. Therefore, here we have activities like testifying, witnessing, preaching, and evangelizing. Verses that speak about this type of activities include Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46–48; John 3:16; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:14–15; and 2 Corinthians 5:14–6:2.

The last type of activity is **service to our neighbor (or compassion ministries)**. This division joins together all the activities that the Church does and that manifest, in concrete, visible terms, the love of God toward humanity. In very simple terms, it is doing good to all, especially to those who are of the family or household of the faith (Galatians 6:10). Other verses that speak of service to our neighbor or of compassion toward our neighbor include Matthew 14:14; 20:34; Mark 6:34; 8:2; Luke 7:13; and 10:25–37.

In summary, then, these are the five types or areas of activities: worship, teaching, communion, evangelism, and service. Under these five, I believe that we can group every activity of the local church. But, as we will see, within the local church we have not only these five divisions of activities, but we also have other divisions as well, based upon other factors.

**The impact of the age of the individual.** Within the local church, each one of our five types or areas of activities now has to be subdivided according to age. For example, worship done by adults is very different from worship done by little children. The teaching offered to the young people is very different from that offered to the senior members of the congregation. The communion that exists between children is very different from that which exists among the youth or the adults. And thus we could progress throughout the entire list of activities. Practically every activity of the local church is adapted some way or another to the age of the individual involved.

Given this information, we can now draw a simple diagram to describe the activities within a local church. This diagram appears below. Each vertical column represents one of the general types of activities. Each horizontal column represents a different group of the congregation, divided according to age and maturity. To keep the diagram simple, we have only noted four age/maturity groups: children, youth, adults, and seniors. Thus, a church offers differing worship activities for the children, the youth, the adults, and the seniors. It also offers different teaching activities that take into account the nature of these four groups. It offers activities of communion for each group. The church also puts together evangelism activities which are in accord with the age group that is evangelizing and the age group being evangelized. And it offers service activities which encourage each age group to minister to their neighbor according to that particular group's capacities and abilities. All of these activities are developed within the same church, and they all form a part of the



Activities within a local church

total process of making disciples of the members of this congregation.

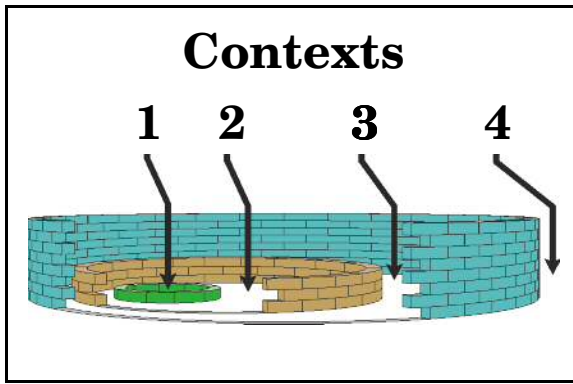
### **Barriers and contexts**

Although the preceding diagram is interesting, and illustrates various truths about discipleship in the local church and about the ministries and activities included in this discipleship, this diagram also is *incomplete*. Why? Because it does not take into account any context beyond the walls of this local church and beyond the context of its congregation. But, in our definition of missionary work, we said that this work is the divine and imperative commission that the Church has received to evangelize and make disciples, *beyond the current sphere of evangelical influence*. It is the last portion of this definition that highlights the inadequacy of this graphic.

In considering the ministry of the local church, including its contributions toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission, we must also take into account the fact that we begin to encounter barriers almost as soon as we begin to extend ourselves beyond the four walls of our church. And these barriers will form new contexts in which we must minister, if we are to reach the people there. Please note that we are not talking here of spiritual barriers of satanic opposition (although these surely exist). Rather, here we are talking of *human* barriers (sociological barriers and religious barriers created by human religions) that become obstacles to the communication of our message, to evangelism, and to discipleship.

In very general terms, we may say that the interaction of these barriers with the members of the congregation of this church form four different general contexts, each one being the product of one or more barriers. Each of these four contexts can be seen as concentric circles drawn around the local church, each one increasing more and more the distance between this church and the population that lives in this context. And between each context is found a wall, composed of one or more barriers. The further away from the church the wall is located, the higher the wall will tend to be and a greater the number of barriers will tend to make up this wall. All of this is represented in the first diagram on the following page. Please note that for clarity, some portions of the walls in this diagram have been left "open" so that the reader may be able to see the walls and contexts behind the higher outside wall. In reality, these walls would be complete, without these openings.

The first context, context number one in the



Contexts and walls

diagram, is the context of the church itself. Beyond this context, the church finds a low wall separating its congregation from the next context, which is context number two. If the church wishes to minister within context number two, it has to overcome this low barrier or wall, or it can never get to where these people are. And context number two is surrounded by yet another wall, which is a bit higher than the first. Beyond this second wall the church finds context number three. If this church wishes to minister within context number three, it will have to overcome *two* walls to get there. And this third context is also surrounded by another wall, even higher than the first two. Outside the barrier of this higher wall is context number four. If this church wants to work in context number four, it has to overcome *three* walls to reach the people who live in this context.

**Context 1 – the context of the church itself.** What do all these walls and contexts mean? What can we learn from them? Let us begin with context number one, located within the first and lowest wall. This is the context closest to this church, in fact, it is the context of this church, formed by this church and all the members of its congregation. Therefore, we call this context “*the context of the church itself.*” The members of this church feel a large number of similarities with this context. They feel religious similarities because in this context everyone practices the same religion and shares the same basic beliefs. They feel linguistic similarities because everyone in this context speaks the same language. They also feel geographical similarities because all the members of this context live in relatively close proximity to each other. And they feel cultural similarities because everyone in this context shares the same basic culture.

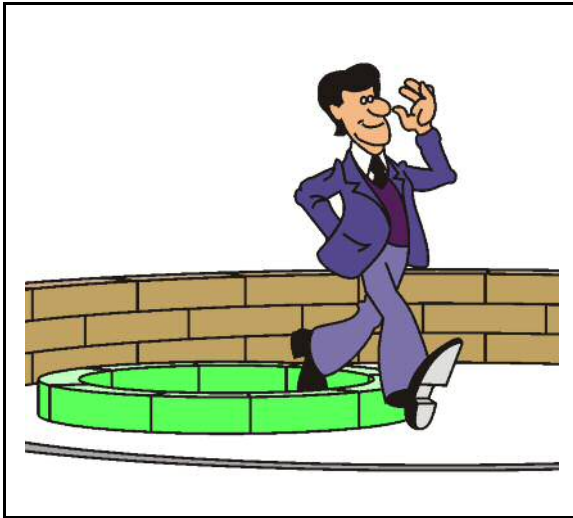
So, within context number one, this church does not perceive any principal human barriers within its group. The group is, to a large degree,



Freedom of movement within the context of the church itself

*homogeneous.* This means that this church can “move” or minister with great freedom and ease within this context. The church knows the context very well, because this is its own context. It can interpret correctly the reactions between people. It can anticipate, without much difficulty, problems and questions among its population. It can present the message of the gospel in a pertinent and persuasive manner for this context. And it knows how to best achieve discipleship in this context. *In short, in this context this church knows how to carry out the five types of activities that we have seen, throughout the different age and maturity levels of the population.* As can be seen in the diagram above, this church is at “home” in this context, with great liberty to move and to work. There are no significant barriers to be overcome.

**Context 2 – the near context.** Let us cross over now to context number two, the context just beyond the low wall surrounding the context of the church. We refer to this context as “*the near context,*” because it is the one that falls immediately beyond the church’s own context. Therefore, it is the context that is near to the church, separated only by a small wall. The members of this congregation feel many, many similarities with those who live in this near context. In all likelihood, they feel linguistic similarities because they all speak the same language. They feel geographical similarities because they all live in relative proximity. And they feel cultural similarities because they all share the same basic cultural traits. Therefore, the only principal barrier between this church and an effective ministry among the members of this second context is a religious barrier (represented by the small wall). The members of this church are believers, and the common and everyday member

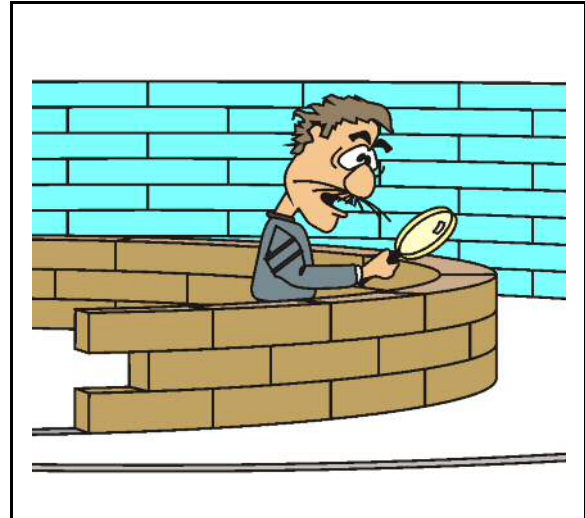


Ease of penetrating the near context

of this near context is not a believer. But even given this religious difference, due to the geographical, linguistic and cultural proximity of this group, the members of this church can accurately understand much of the total context of those who live in this near context, and they can even understand a fair amount of the differing religious context, since many of these members once belonged to context two before they were saved. Therefore, the church can do a fairly good job of understanding this population's religious aspirations, their spiritual searching, and their spiritual needs. And, the church also understands a lot about how to present the gospel in a manner that will be persuasive and pertinent to this context.

So, it is with relative ease that this church can cross this small wall and minister to the population that lives in the near context (as the diagram above illustrates). Of course, the church will always have to recognize and keep in mind the religious differences that exist between itself and this context, and it will have to take them into account when it ministers in context two. But, really, this is not too difficult for this church to do.

**Context 3 – the similar context.** Let us now cross over to the third context, beyond the second wall. We call this context “*the similar context*” because it is a context that is not real close to the church's own context, yet it is not real far from the church's context, either. In other words, it is a context that is somewhat similar to the church's. So, in this third context, there will be limited religious, linguistic, geographical, and cultural similarities. The people of this similar context will have *certain* things in common with the members of this congregation, but they also will have some *very important differences*. And these differences

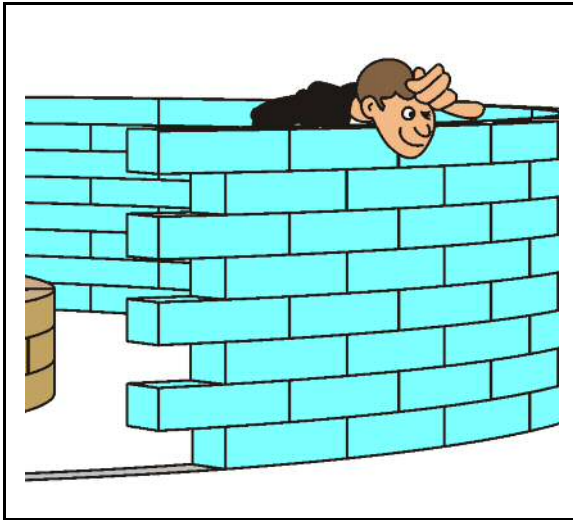


Studying the second wall before entering a similar context

are what create the wall that separates the second and third contexts. And, as can be seen in the diagram above, this wall is higher than the first, because it represents a greater number of differences.

In this second wall, the barriers to be overcome *tend* to be the religious barrier plus one additional principal barrier (it can be geographical, linguistic, or cultural). For example, when a church plants another church in another portion of its country, it will normally cross two principal barriers: the religious barrier (it will be working with the unsaved) and the geographical barrier (it will be working in a region that is far away from the church). Or, when a church opens one of its services for another ethnic group (for example, for a Chinese service or a Hispanic service), this can be an example of working in a similar context if there are only *two* principal barriers between this church and this group (for example, the religious barrier and the cultural barrier). But, if there are more than two principal barriers involved (such as adding a linguistic barrier to the two noted above), then it is very possible that this ministry ought to really fall under context number four in our list.

Due to the increased number of barriers making this second wall, when the church arrives at this wall it cannot cross it so easily (as it did with the first). Since this second wall is higher, it requires that this church stop for a while and study this wall so that the church can better determine how to minister effectively among the people of this third context. To cross this wall successfully will require greater adaptations of this church's ministries, if it is to achieve a healthy contextualization among this population. It may require that this church send someone to this location (if it is a distant region of the country). It may require that



Overcoming the third wall to enter the different context

this church study and understand another religion (such as Chinese folk religions) so that it can present Jesus Christ as the only true answer for this population's spiritual searching. Whatever the barriers happen to be, this wall will require greater analysis and greater efforts to overcome it.

**Context 4 – the different context.** And now we finally get to the fourth and last context, the context that is farthest from this church, beyond the third wall. Since this context is so far away, so removed, so foreign, it forms a context that is quite different (and many times radically different) from the church's own context. Therefore, we call this fourth context "*the different context.*" In this area, very few religious, linguistic, geographical, and cultural similarities can be found with this church. The people of this context live according to another religion, they speak another language, they live on another continent, and/or they have a very different culture. An example of this type of context could be a ministry among the Chinese that live in the same city as this local church, but who follow traditional Chinese religions, have a Chinese culture, and speak Chinese. Another example could be a ministry among the Japanese that live in Japan (following traditional Japanese religions, with a Japanese culture, speaking Japanese, and living far away from this local church). Thus, the principal barriers here, represented by the third wall, are three or more: the religious barrier, plus a minimum of two additional barriers like geography, language, and culture. And the more barriers there are, the higher the wall becomes.

Given all this, what does this church do when it arrives at the wall separating it from this fourth context? This wall is so high that the church almost needs a stepladder to be able to see over it.

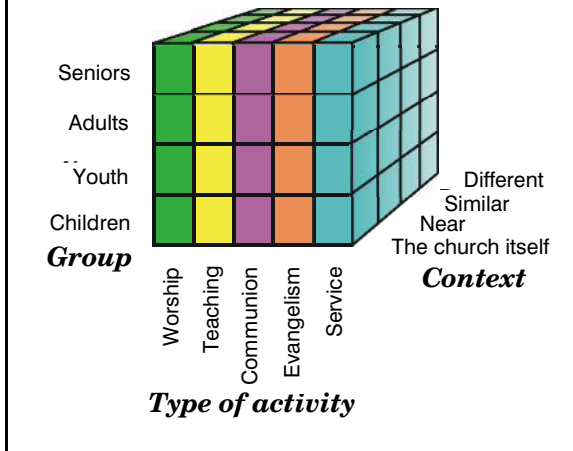
So, what does this church do? Does it give up? Does it admit defeat? By no means. If God is calling this church to minister in this context (and is this not what God is doing through the Great Commission?), then God will make this ministry possible. But, this church needs to study and contemplate the barriers that make up this third wall and separate it from this context. In a very real way, this church needs to see beyond this wall. It needs to see the people of this different context, with their immense spiritual needs. It needs to understand their religion, their language, and their culture. It needs to adapt and contextualize its ministries so that they may be pertinent, intelligible, and persuasive in this new context. And it needs to select its missionary, its ambassador, who will go to this place so that through the representation given, this church will be able to fulfill its responsibility to God with regard to the Great Commission.

**A non-optional activity.** Now, having seen all of these four contexts and three walls, and all the difficulties and adaptations required to minister in these contexts, we need to remember one more thing. *We must remember that none of this is optional for the local church.* The Great Commission requires that each and every church work (in one way or another) in each one of these four contexts. Only by doing this can these churches go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that Christ has taught us. There is no other alternative. There is no plan "B." And there is no fast and easy way to accomplish this task without wrestling with each one of these walls and with the differing realities of each one of these contexts.

### ***The "ministry cube"***

Now that we have seen the four basic contexts in which the church is to minister, and having renewed our perspective by having understood this reality, we now can correct the incomplete diagram that we saw earlier with regard to the five types of ministry activities and the different age groups for these activities. Actually, the correction of this diagram does not so much involve the *changing* of the information contained, but rather the *broadening* of this information by adding on the three contexts that were missing. The diagram that appears on the following page is the result of having made these changes. We call it "the ministry cube" because it demonstrates the three "dimensions" that the local church's ministries

# Make disciples of all the nations



The ministry cube – completing the church’s activities

ought to have. The horizontal axis of these three dimensions is the type or area of ministry activity. The vertical axis is the subgroups of the population, divided according to age and maturity. And the diagonal axis is the four contexts in which this church needs to develop its ministries.

**First row: the context of the church itself.** In this diagram, the first row of horizontal and vertical columns (the row that is closest to the reader) represents all the ministries that this church has that deal with the context of the church itself. In this row, the church offers many opportunities (according to age and maturity) for the members of its congregation to become involved in activities of worship, teaching, communion, evangelism, and service, all within the basic context of the church itself.

**Second row: the near context.** In the second row of horizontal and vertical columns (the one right behind the first row), we have represented all the ministries that this church has in the context that is near to it. Once again, these are divided according to age and maturity, but now they are also adapted to this near context. Here, the church offers activities of worship, but adapted to the reality of the people that live close to, but not within, the context of this church. In this row, the church also offers teaching activities (such as Bible studies) adapted to reach out and be pertinent to this near context. Here, in this row, this church offers activities of communion that reach into the population living in this near context.

Also, in this row, this church offers evangelistic activities that are applicable and pertinent to the reality of this near context (that is, evangelism that speaks to and is intelligible in this near context). And, in this second row, this church offers opportunities for its congregation to serve the population that lives in this near context (such as a clinic, community service, providing food and clothing, and doing minor house repairs).

Basically, in this second row, this church is fulfilling its activities as a church, but *within* the near context. And by so doing, this church is *extending* itself into this context. Since this context is a near one, and not too different from the day-to-day realities of this church itself, it is likely that these adapted ministries and activities will appear fairly similar to these same types of activities, done with these same age and maturity groups, within the church itself. In other words, worship in the near context probably will not be so dramatically different from worship within the context of the church itself. A Bible study in the near context probably will not be so different, either. And thus with all the other activities, as well. There are differences between the two contexts, but the differences are small.

**Third row: the similar context.** The third row of horizontal and vertical columns (behind the second row) represents all the ministries of this church that have to do with the similar context. This is the context where there are *limited* religious, linguistic, geographical, and cultural similarities with the context of this church itself. As usual, we have the activities of this row divided according to type of activity and age group. But, all these activities are now aimed at reaching a context that is *fairly* different. Therefore, these activities are adapted to the reality of this third context. They are activities that are pertinent and intelligible to this *new* context (rather than to the church’s original context). Thus, here this church offers worship activities, but adapted to the people of this context (their language, their geographical location, their culture or personality, their religious aspirations, etc.). The church also offers teaching activities that have been adapted to this different reality. It offers biblical communion, but in ways that respect the differences in this new context. It does evangelism, but in ways that are adapted to the new context, so that they will be pertinent and persuasive to these people. And it serves its neighbor, but again in ways that are adapted to the reality of this context that is similar, and yet quite different.



Basically, in this third row, this church is fulfilling its activities as a church, but within a context that is quite a bit beyond the near context. Here, this church is extending itself into a context that is rather different. It is fulfilling its ministries in a context that has only limited similarities with its own reality as a church. Therefore, this context calls for *greater* adaptations and adjustments in all of these activities. And if these adaptations and adjustments are not achieved, this church runs a very significant risk of offering activities that lack pertinence and/or sense within this third context. Thus, the activities in this context will appear fairly *different* from these same types of activities done with these same age groups, but in the context of the church itself. This is because of the barriers and the “distance” that separates this church from this context. And, when this “distance” is sufficiently large (and here we are not *only* speaking of geographical distance, although it also figures in), this church has to think about using ambassadors to help it achieve its extension into this context.

**Fourth row: the different context.** In the fourth and last row of horizontal and vertical columns, we have represented all the ministries of this church that have to do with the different context. This is the context where there are very few (and many times, *very, very* few) religious, linguistic, geographical, and cultural similarities with this church. Once again, in this row, we have these activities divided according to type of activity and age group.

Now someone may ask: why do we have all of these types of activities in this fourth row? Why do we have all of these age and maturity divisions? Why do we have so many activities in this fourth row? This is a row that is very far away, and very difficult and costly to work with. Why, then, do we have such a complex ministry contemplated here? The answer to these questions is rather simple. We have all these activities because we are making disciples of all the nations, and not simply evangelizing all the nations. We want new believers, of course, but we also want *mature* believers, capable of continuing this whole process in other areas around the world. *In other words, we are planting a church in this context, and this population’s most basic and “generic” needs are not so very different from our own. This population needs to worship, they need to study, they need to have communion, they need to evangelize, and they need to serve their neighbor. And they need to do all this, not only adapted to their general context, but also adapted to*

*the age and maturity divisions within their population. If we do not achieve all of this, we will not have a complete church in this context.* Of course, to facilitate this task, we can and ought to unite ourselves with other like-minded churches, so that no one church is responsible for all the 80 different ministry areas. But we also have to be careful that at least *somebody* is achieving all these areas.

So, here, in the fourth row, this church (and helping churches) accomplishes these five types of activities among the basic age and maturity groups, but now these activities are geared toward a *very* different context. So, this church adapts its activities to this different reality, and many times, to a *very* different reality. And by doing this, it achieves activities that are pertinent to this context and intelligible to the people who live in it. Therefore, here the church offers worship activities that are truly biblical *and also pertinent to this context* (and remember that this context will vary greatly from the church’s). Here, this church offers teaching activities that are truly biblical *and also pertinent to this context*. It offers biblical communion *that is also meaningful to this context*. It does truly biblical evangelism, *but also evangelism that is understandable, persuasive, and pertinent to the needs of the population living in this context*. And it carries out truly Christian service to its neighbor, *but also in a way that is meaningful to this context*.

In the preceding paragraph, much emphasis has been given to the adaptations necessary so that these activities will be *pertinent* in a different context. And this is only reasonable. In this fourth row, this church basically is fulfilling its activities as a church, in this new context. It is planting a new church of this context, a church that will belong, as much as possible, to this context. But, with all of this, are we saying that the context will determine the activities of this church? What about sinful contexts where we really cannot adapt certain elements? This is the reason why we said above that these activities were truly biblical and Christian, and pertinent. First of all, these activities must be truly biblical and Christian. After this, *and without removing even a grain of the activity’s biblical and Christian nature*, we adapt these activities as much as possible to the new context, *without involving sinful or anti-Christian activities*. By doing this, our adaptations tend to have more to do with things like *focus, presentation, and/or expression* of an activity. But the context never can be allowed to change the biblical content of an activity. *When the Bible establishes the basic content of an activity, it is equal and unchangeable*

across each and every context of the world. What differs is its application.

Therefore, here in this fourth row, this church is extending itself into a very different context. It is fulfilling its ministry activities in a context that has very few similarities with its own context as a church. Thus, this context requires greater adaptations and adjustments than any of the other contexts. And if these adaptations and adjustments are not achieved, this church runs an even greater risk of offering activities that lack pertinence and/or sense within this new context.

For this reason, the activities of this fourth row will appear fairly different (and sometimes very different) when compared with the same types of activities made with the same age and maturity groups within the context of this church itself. Once again, this is because of the barriers and the “distance” that separates this church and this context. But, *the church needs to understand that when these contextualized activities are truly biblical and Christian, and also accurately aimed at a different context, then these are legitimate and parallel activities to its own “sister” activities that it practices within its own congregation. When the church remembers this, it can see in these radically different and foreign activities the true and contextualized expression of its own activities as a church.* And this realization is necessary, because these actually are parallel activities that this church is accomplishing through its ambassador.

And when the “distance” is sufficiently large enough (and this is very common in this fourth row), this church needs to think about using an ambassador to help it extend itself into this different context. This is where its missionaries, and especially its cross-cultural missionaries, fit in.

### ***Is it really necessary to work in all four contexts?***

Since there are so many adaptations to make in the last two rows, perhaps it would be easier to just work in the first two rows of the “ministry cube,” and let the “professional” missionary churches handle the last two rows. And this is exactly what a number of churches do. Therefore, the question arises: is it really important for each church to have activities in all four contexts?

The answer to this question is “yes.” Yes, it is important for our churches to work in all four of these contexts. Why? Because this is the only way to fulfill the Great Commission. This is the only way to make disciples of all the nations. We cannot truly achieve this goal through other options. And

each and every church needs to be involved, in one way or another, in this global task. The Great Commission is not the “Great Option.”

Although this work is difficult, it is more than achievable through the use of missionaries, the special gift that God has given the Church for this task. So, when churches work in the last two rows of the cube, they frequently do so through their missionary, their ambassador. And, through the representation offered by this individual, these churches achieve this extension.

*Since the use of a missionary is very important (and many times even indispensable) in these last two rows, we can refer to rows three and four of the “ministry cube” as the area of missionary work (understood as a capital “M”).* Since the first two rows seldom require the use of a missionary ambassador, we can refer to these rows as the area of ordinary and daily church work (missionary work with a lowercase “m”).

### ***When should the church work in these four contexts?***

Some may ask: since the work in these last two rows of the cube is so difficult and costly, would it not be better for the church to wait to participate in this task until it has solid maturity and growth as a church? Initially, this might appear to be a very wise step. But, we must always remember that *missionary activity is not so much the fruit of spiritual growth and maturity, as a path to spiritual growth and maturity.* Fulfilling the Great Commission is not so much the *fruit* of being a good disciple as a *way* of becoming a good disciple. In other words, work toward the Great Commission is more a *cause* of spiritual growth and maturity than an *effect* of them. Therefore, we need to see missionary work as an opportunity to grow, and even young churches should be involved in the task, in one way or another, according to God’s leading in their midst.

### ***What makes an activity a missionary activity?***

We will finish this chapter with this question. What makes an activity be a *missionary* activity (understood with a capital “M”)? Basically, *what makes an activity be a missionary activity is the imperative need for the church to use a missionary (a representative or ambassador) in order to adequately achieve this activity.* As we saw above, this need can be common in activities of the third row of the cube, and very common in activities of

the fourth row. Therefore, *missionary activities are those activities through which a local church accomplishes the ministries of worship, teaching, communion, evangelism, and service to its neighbor, especially in contexts that are different from the context of the church itself (for example, in the contexts entitled “the similar context” and “the*

*different context” in the ministry cube), by using an officially and carefully chosen representative (a missionary).* Without the need of this representative, this missionary, we do not truly have a missionary activity (understood with a capital “M”).

# Chapter 5

## Renewing our perspective of the missionary sending entities



Up to this moment, we have studied and analyzed the missionary, the missionary call, and the missionary work. Now, all we have left is to consider the missionary sending entities. And here, there are basically three entities that we want to consider: God, the local church, and the missionary agency.

### **God**

As we have seen, and in very simple terms, the triune God is responsible for the creation of missionaries. In John 20:21, we see God the Father sending Christ, Who then sends us as the Father has sent Him. In Ephesians 4:8–12, we see Christ (God the Son) who has led captive a host of captives and given gifts to men. These gifts include apostles (the same word as “missionary”), prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. And in Acts 13:2 we see the God the Holy Spirit who communicates the missionary call to the church. Therefore, the three persons of the Trinity are intimately involved in the whole missionary process. In very simple terms, *God is the principal sending source of missionaries.*

And, according to Matthew 28:18–20, Christ has received all authority to send missionaries. Therefore, there is no country in the world, no people group in the world, no cultural context in the world, no language in the world, and no religious group in the world where Christ does not have all necessary authority to intervene in that place and context and send missionaries there. Furthermore, since Christ has all authority, there is no church in the world nor any believer in the world where Christ does not have all the authority necessary to say “set apart for Me this brother and sister for the work to which I have called them.” God determines who is going to be a missionary, and He also determines what that person’s work will be. Therefore, we can say that Christ has *supreme* authority to send out missionaries.

With this brief summary, we will unfortunately need to turn to the next sending entity. Although it would be very interesting to stop here and study more deeply the divine role in the missionary

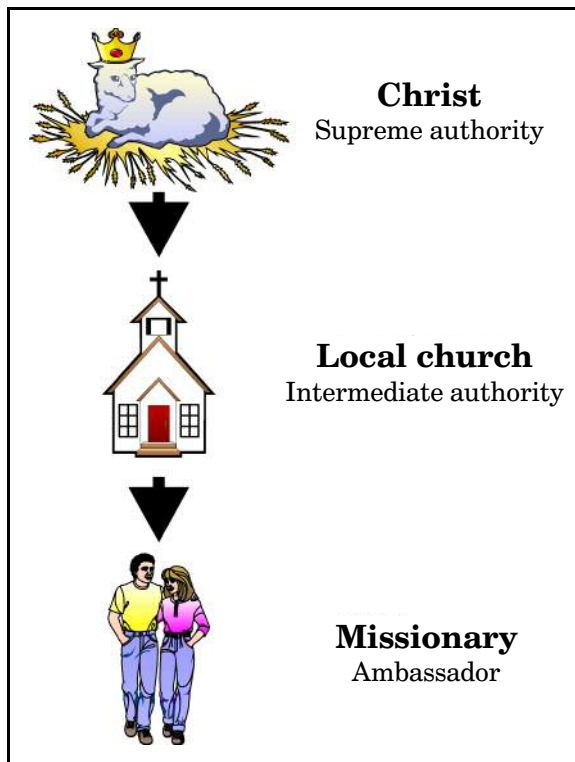
process, that is not the focus of this present text. Here, we are focusing more on renewing our perspective of the *human* entities that send out missionaries.

### **Local church**

**Authority.** Although Christ has *all* and *supreme* authority to send out missionaries, we have also seen in Acts 13:2–4 that the Holy Spirit chooses to exercise this sending through the local church. Actually, in this sending of missionaries, the Holy Spirit and the local church are so closely identified that the author of the book of Acts says in Acts 13:3 that the *leadership of the church* sent out this first group of missionaries, and in the following verse, the author says that the missionaries were sent out by the *Holy Spirit*. And there was no contradiction in the mind of the author. The Holy Spirit did the sending, but through the means of the local church. The Holy Spirit worked through this church to send out these missionaries.

Therefore, Christ has all authority to call and send missionaries, but He desires to exercise this authority in connection with or through the local church. Thus, this local church constitutes what we may call *an intermediate sending authority*, located between Christ and the individual missionary. So, the individual missionary, in his or her role as ambassador or representative, is located below the *immediate* authority of his or her local sending churches, and under the *ultimate* authority of Christ. The diagram on the following page helps illustrate this whole concept.

The local sending church’s intermediate authority also is highlighted through the laying on of hands (an element that we have already studied). In this symbol, this church, as an intermediate sending authority, has the authority to lay hands on this missionary, identify him or her as its missionary, and officially and formally accredit this individual as its representative. Furthermore, the missionary, upon receiving or submitting to this laying on of hands, is demonstrating his or her acceptance of the authority of this local church, their identification with it, their submission to the



Authority in the sending of missionaries

general leading of this church, and their commitment to be a true and faithful representative of this church. Without all this, how could this individual be a *true* ambassador of this church? A true ambassador fulfills all of these elements.

**A double representation.** Given this type of an authority structure, we have a double representation here. Based in the authority of Christ, the local church sends out its missionaries. And, in this sending, this church *represents* Christ (it is the ambassador of Christ in this sending). But it also is *represented* by these missionaries that it has sent (they are its ambassadors). Thus, this church needs to carefully monitor the faithful and adequate fulfillment of this double representation.

In the first place, this church needs to be careful that it is representing Christ with fidelity and precision. This church is His ambassador. But how does this church know if its representation is being accomplished with fidelity and precision? By analyzing God’s leading in its life as a church, and by then measuring its fidelity to this leading. The church is a body, a living organism, and much of what we have said with reference to God’s leading in the life of the individual missionary may be applied to the church as well, in kind of a “corporate” sense. Thus, it is possible to speak of a local church, as a living organism, receiving a “call” to work in certain missionary activities. This “call-

ing” will have many elements in common with an individual’s calling, but it will also have some differences as well (for example, I do not think that a local church is taken captive in the same sense as an individual is taken captive for missions).

Therefore, I believe that it is very important that the local church fulfill the requirements that we saw when we spoke of being in optimum conditions to receive or detect a missionary call. This church should *recognize the lordship of Jesus Christ*. Jesus has to be Lord of all this church’s resources. Jesus has to be the One who determines the general parameters and even specific details of this church’s plans and activities. This church also needs to *understand the general will of God revealed in His Word*. It is the church’s responsibility to obey God, so it needs to understand what His general will is for it. And this church needs to remember that God’s specific will will never contradict His general will. In third place, this church needs to *listen to the Holy Spirit*. He communicates missionary calls to the church, along with many other details. This church also should *possess a pure heart*, in order that it be in good communication and communion with the Holy Spirit. In fifth place, this church should *maintain an open mind*. It should be willing to do whatever God asks of it. It should not close its mind to options that are not sinful. It should not say “we cannot do this,” either because it does not want to do it or because it believes that it cannot do it. Furthermore, this church should be *occupied in the Lord’s work*. If it desires that God assign it additional ministry areas (and thus be able to extend itself), it needs to be faithful in the areas where it is currently working. Why should God assign additional work to a church that is not even fulfilling the tasks He has assigned to it right now? In seventh place, this church should be *willing to dedicate itself to this additional work*. This work will require concentration and dedication of resources. The church should be willing to pay the price. And, last of all, the church should *seek the confirmation of its own congregation and even of other Godly churches*. Remember, God’s calling seldom comes in a vacuum. Especially the members of this church, and possibly even other churches, should also be convinced that this activity is God’s will for this church.

And, being in optimum conditions to detect a “call” from God, I believe that God will guide this church, as a living organism, to understand what He wants it to do. Since this process is somewhat parallel to what happens in the life of an individual, I believe that this process could very well share

various similarities with what we have seen in the diagram about calls. Therefore, with some judicious adaptations and flexibility, I believe that this diagram can even be applied to a corporate entity like the local church.

In second place, this church also needs to be careful that its representatives (its missionaries) are representing it with fidelity and precision. As we have seen, this church has chosen these missionaries to be its official ambassadors, so that through them, this church can accomplish ministries in contexts where it would be impossible to work directly. In a very real sense, these missionaries literally are the hands and feet of this church in this context. Therefore, if the representation offered lacks fidelity and precision, how can this church even think of accomplishing this ministry that God has for it, *through these ambassadors*? It will be *very* difficult, and perhaps even impossible, if fidelity and precision are lacking. And, if the church finds it difficult or impossible to accomplish this ministry through these missionaries, then it will lose interest in keeping them as their missionaries, *because they are not representing this church adequately*. In other words, the situation is such that this church cannot accomplish the plans that God's has for it, *through these ambassadors*. When this happens, these missionaries cease to be productive for this church, and the church begins to lose precious resources. After all, it is making an investment in these individuals, but it is not perceiving its expected gains. *While there may be many justifiable reasons for not perceiving expected gains, lack of fidelity and precision in representation should not be one of them*. Just as in the political world, an ambassador always has to provide a "transparent" representation that allows the sending entity to achieve its will, its plans, its activities, and its message through its ambassador. *When it turns out that this is not possible, then this individual no longer is in condition to be the ambassador of this entity*.

**Crucial similarities and mutual responsibilities.** When we studied the meaning of the word "missionary," we saw a list of crucial similarities and mutual responsibilities that underlie a faithful, adequate, and precise representation. So, when a church understands what God wants it to do (His specific will for this church in the area of missionary work and in contexts where it will need to work through an ambassador), this church then begins to look for truly viable candidates to serve as its ambassador. In this search, this church needs to determine, among other things, if a sufficient base

exists to support a true representation through this individual. Thus, it analyzes, among other things, the degree of harmony that exists between it and this potential missionary with regard to these areas of similarity and mutual responsibility that we saw (for further information, please refer to the corresponding section in the chapter over the missionary).

Therefore, in first place, this church analyzes the degree of harmony that exists between the *basic missionary purpose* of this church and of this individual. If this church feels called of God to work in the evangelization of Muslims in Indonesia, it should not look to fulfill this responsibility through a missionary that feels that God is calling him or her to work in theological education in Russia. There is no harmony of basic purposes. If this church wishes to evangelize and plant churches in India, it is not going to be able to do this through a missionary that feels called to work in community aid in Africa. Once again, harmony is lacking in the area of basic purposes. Now, *this in no way means that these missionaries have incorrectly understood their callings*. It just means that God is calling them to one facet of missionary work, and He is calling this church to another facet of this same missionary work. There is no problem with this, as long as this church and these individuals do not try to achieve their goals by establishing among themselves a relationship of missionary-sending church. Due to their differences, they need to seek out other, more harmonious, entities with which to serve.

In second place, this church analyzes the degree of harmony that exists between its *basic missionary vision* for the future and the vision that this missionary has. If it, as a church, feels called to found a hospital in Africa in the future, it should not look to do this through a missionary that wants to work in Africa, but also wants to dedicate his or her life to printing evangelical literature. The church will not be able to achieve its future ministry through this representative. It will have to look for another. Or, it will have to broaden its missionary vision for the future to include a printing ministry, and wait for another opportunity in the future to develop a hospital. *But, if the church makes this change, it needs to be sure that it is changing its vision because God wants it to, and not simply responding to human pressures applied by a missionary that wants to get to Africa soon and sees in this church a chance to complete his or her lacking support*. God, and only God, provides the call. Yes, it is true that God many times works through other human beings, but the

*conviction and the calling must come from Him. Too many churches have “adopted” a missionary, many times abruptly and under significant human pressures, only to later greatly lament it.*

In third place, this church analyzes the degree of harmony that exists between the *doctrinal and theological position* of this church and of this missionary. It recognizes that if this individual is going to represent it in a faithful and adequate manner, with precision, then there will need to be a high degree of harmony here. Otherwise, it is running a great risk of finding out, some eight years or so later, that the ministry that it has developed through its ambassador really is not the ministry that it wanted to develop.

In fourth place, this church analyzes the degree of harmony between its *concept of ministry or philosophy of ministry* and that shared by this missionary. If they both say that they have been called to evangelize and plant churches in China, what do the words “evangelize” and “plant churches” mean to each one? *Similarities in vocabulary do not necessarily mean similarities in meanings.* This church needs a missionary that really understands what it is trying to express with regard to its responsibility to the commission that God has given it, and it needs one that also shares this same definition and desire.

In fifth place, this church analyzes the degree of harmony between its *priorities in the ministry (or its ministry focus)* and the priorities or focus that this missionary has. If the church wants its missionary principally to do evangelism and church planting, then it should not send out as its ambassador in this task someone who feels a calling to serve as a doctor in a Christian clinic. Both activities are very good and very necessary. But it is very difficult to *dedicate* yourself to both at the same time. Of course, a Christian doctor can and should share the message of the gospel with all of his or her patients, and strive toward their salvation and incorporation into a good local church. But, what this individual can achieve as a doctor is quite limited compared to what an evangelist and church planter can achieve. It is a matter of time and priorities. Now, as we saw before, God may very well broaden the ministerial focus of this church to include evangelistic medical work, but we need to be certain that it is God who is promoting this broadening, and not simply the mere human pressures exerted by a missionary who wants to get to the mission field as soon as possible.

In sixth place, this church analyzes the degree of harmony that exists between the *geographical and ethnic focuses* that God has given it (if God has

given it some) and those shared by this missionary. Obviously, a church that feels a calling or a special passion to work in the Middle East (for example) should have a good portion of its missionaries working in the Middle East. Sure, it may have other missionaries working in other places as well, but its total body of ambassadors should reflect the geographical focus that the church feels.

In seventh place, this church examines the degree of harmony that exists between the *desired employment arrangements* that both it and the missionary expect. Once again, we use the phrase “employment arrangements” to signify the type of work commitment that the missionary has with the mission work. If the church wants its missionary to work full-time in mission work, it is not going to be able to achieve this through a missionary who wants to go to the mission field as a “tent maker” or bivocational missionary (at least not without frustrating this missionary). Or, if this church desires that their missionary also have a secular job (serve as a bivocational missionary), it is not going to be able to achieve this through a missionary that feels called to dedicate himself or herself completely to the work. And, if this church desires that its missionary dedicate his or her life to the ministry (25 to 35 years, or more), then it should not look to achieve this through sending out short-term missionaries. These examples just lack harmony.

In eighth place, this church examines the degree of harmony that exists between its *expectations in areas like spiritual support, logistic support, and financial support*, and the expectations that this missionary may have. If it is really important to the missionary that his or her church pray for the ministry every week in its Sunday morning service and in prayer meeting, is the church willing to do this? If the church happens to think that it should only devote three minutes a month to pray for missions from the pulpit, is the missionary willing to accept this? If the missionary thinks that the church should print up a monthly missions prayer bulletin, with updated information about his or her ministry, is the church willing to do this? And if the church is willing to print a monthly bulletin like this, is the missionary willing to provide it with plenty of up-to-date information about the ministry? If the church wants to send a medical team to the mission field for three weeks a year to help the ministry of its missionaries, are these missionaries willing to set aside the time to make a team like this really work? These are only a few examples of expectations that missionaries and churches may have of each other.

And, in last place, this church analyzes the degree of harmony that exists between its *expectations in the area of communication* and the expectations that this missionary may have. If the church desires that its missionary write it every two or three weeks, is the missionary in agreement? If the missionary thinks that sending a letter every three months is enough, does the church agree? If the church desires that its missionary be in frequent contact with it via e-mail or phone calls, is it willing to help defray the costs of such communication (phone usage, internet café usage, a computer, etc.)? Is the missionary willing to set aside the time that all this will require?

*Remember, for a church to form an alliance with a missionary is very similar in many ways to getting married. Each is an intimate, deep, and serious relationship that should last for years and years. It is a big help in achieving this if both broad and deep similarities exist between the two members of the couple.*

**What degree of harmony are we looking for?** We have said that a broad and deep degree of similarities should exist between the sending church and its missionary. But, what degree of similarity are we looking for here? Are we looking for 100% similarity? Ninety-five percent? Sixty percent? I am afraid that there is no set answer to this question. What degree of harmony does a couple look for between themselves before getting married? Do they look for 100% harmony? Of course not. Do they look for 95%? I believe that only a very small percentage of marriages would enjoy this high a degree of harmony, where each person has almost identical expectations and desires with regard to life. Well then, what do we look for? *We look for a degree of harmony and similarity that is sufficiently broad enough to serve as a very firm base to underlie and support the degree of commitment that is being contemplated, and that will minimize the number of “surprises” that will come after finalizing this commitment.* And after finalizing the commitment? We seek the flexibility to work harmoniously within the commitment that we have acquired.

**Missionaries that come from within the church’s congregation itself.** Sometimes the sending church has the blessing of seeing one of its own members receive a missionary call. Since this person is from this church, and many times has grown up in this church, this ought to greatly facilitate the process of investigating degrees of harmony. Usually, in cases like this, we can expect

a significant degree of harmony between this church and this individual in areas like those mentioned above. But nevertheless, these areas must be investigated. We should never simply assume that a person raised in our church will automatically reflect the basic values and desires of our congregation. Many times, this individual *will* correctly reflect these areas, but we must examine them to be certain. Sometimes, the greatest differences might be in areas like geographical and ethnic focus, or the desired employment arrangement. But even these may be significant differences when it comes to a faithful, adequate, and precise representation. *When the Lord calls both the church and the missionary to the same basic goals (when there is great harmony in all these basic areas), then a missionary from the church’s own congregation tends to offer a better representation (they know the church better and understand better how to represent it correctly).*

Having said this, we must also recognize that the *majority* of the missionaries that represent sending churches are not members who have grown up in these same churches. The need for workers and the urgency of the harvest will not permit us the luxury of limiting ourselves solely to sending out “our own children” (missionaries that have grown up in our congregation). We must also “adopt” missionaries from other congregations. These “adopted children” ought to then become members of our congregation, as much as geography will permit, but they will not have grown up there nor will they have received their basic formation there.

**But we do not have a wide range of candidates to be our missionaries.** Some churches may be thinking this about now, in light of what we have mentioned above. Honestly, are we not asking too much when we speak of this degree of harmony and similarities? What if we cannot find any candidate to be our missionary that shares a high degree of similarities with us as a church? Allow me to answer this question with another. Would you marry a person with whom you only share a few things in common, simply because you apparently lack other possible partners? I believe not. And if you do, what can you expect from this marriage?

Now, if the church happens to actually be looking for too *perfect* a degree of harmony and similarities, then, yes, it may have problems in finding a viable candidate to be its missionary. But I have not seen this to be the case too frequently in actual life. If there are any trends to be noticed, I



believe that our churches have a tendency to “get married” with the first person that comes along, without seriously considering either their similarities or the consequences of their actions.

The Lord is raising up thousands of missionaries across Latin America. And He is also raising up thousands and thousands of churches to be their sending churches. Within this enormous possibility of different couples and different mixtures, some couples will be much better suited for “marriage” than others. The basic idea here is that each church and each missionary ought to choose their partner carefully, understanding the importance of this decision and its potential impact in this relationship that should last for years and years.

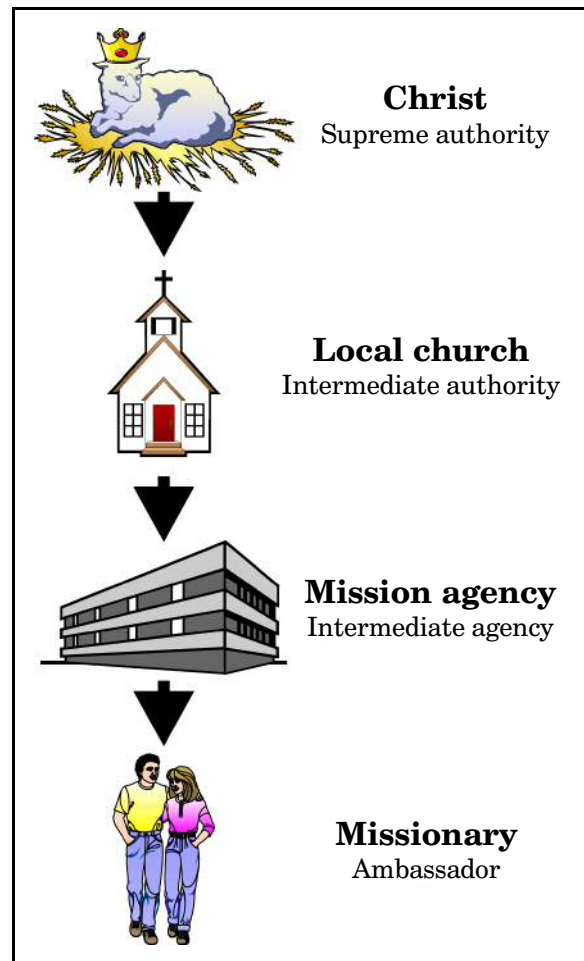
**What do we do now?** Now that, as a local church, we have achieved the optimal conditions for detecting and receiving a call (or the specific will of God for us as a church), now that we have defined what God wants us to do as a church in the area of missionary work, now that we have identified truly viable candidates to serve as our missionaries, and perhaps even officially and formally chosen them and accredited them as our missionaries, what do we do now? We send these missionaries to their respective mission fields, and through them as our ambassadors, we fulfill the responsibilities that God has given us with regard to missions work. And, as a vital part of assuring a faithful, adequate, and precise representation, we also supervise the activities done by our missionaries.

And here enters another problem. Although it is not so difficult to detect the will of God for us as a church, nor is it so difficult to find someone to represent us in fulfilling this will, it is difficult, as an individual church, to send out and supervise these missionaries. There are so many details wrapped up in sending missionaries internationally these days. And supervising these people, with them on one continent and us on the other, is quite hard. For these reasons, the second human sending entity now enters our discussion: the missions agency.

### ***Missions agency***

To facilitate the sending, sustaining, and supervision of its missionaries, the local sending churches frequently choose an entity to serve them as their sending *agent*. This entity is called a “missions agency” or “missions board.”

Since the local church, in its role as intermediate sending authority, chooses to use another entity as its agent in this sending process, this



Authority in the sending of missionaries agent then is located beneath this church (speaking of levels of authority) and above these missionaries. Therefore, our diagram of missionary sending authority needs to be modified to include this additional entity. The new diagram appears above. In this graphic, we note that Christ has the supreme authority to send missionaries, the local church is the intermediate authority in this sending, the missionary agency is the intermediate agency in this sending (between the church and the missionary), and the missionaries are the ambassadors of all three of these sending entities.

**The selection of a missions agency.** How does a church choose a missions agency? Really, the process is quite similar to its selection of a candidate to be its missionary. This agency is going to *serve* this church by facilitating the sending, sustaining, and supervision of its missionaries. It is going to be an *agent* of this church. It is going to be its *representative* in this process. In other words, the missions agency is going to serve as an ambassador of these churches in these administrative activities. Therefore, this church will look for the

same similarities with its potential missions agency as it looked for with its potential missionary. Since we have already treated this issue from the viewpoint of choosing a missionary, we need only present a very brief summary here.

*Does this missions agency share the same basic missionary purpose with this church?* A faithful, adequate, and precise representation will require a considerable degree of similarity here. If this church wishes to send a missionary to evangelize and plant churches, it would not be wise to send this missionary with an agency that only and exclusively worked in the area of community development. *Does this missions agency share the same basic missionary vision with this church?* A faithful, adequate, and precise representation will be much easier if these two are headed toward the same ministries in the future. *Is there harmony between these two with regard to their doctrinal and theological positions?* If this agency is going to represent this church in the sending, sustaining, and supervision of its missionaries and its ministries, then there should be a large degree of similarity here. *Do they have the same basic concept of ministry or philosophy of ministry?* Since the agency will provide the direct and immediate supervision of the missionary and the ministry, and also evaluate these activities, it is a big help if these two are in agreement in this area. *Is there harmony between the agency and the church with regard to their priorities in the ministry (or their ministry focus)?* Once again, the agency is chosen, among other things, to be the agent of this church in the supervision of its missionaries. There will probably be problems in this supervision if there is a lack of harmony in this area. *Are there similarities with regard to their geographical and ethnic focus?* It would not be very wise to attempt to send a missionary to Japan with a missions agency that only works in Africa. *Are they in agreement with regard to the desired employment arrangements?* It would not be wise to attempt to send a missionary who wishes to work full-time in missions work with a missions agency that only works with bivocational missionaries. *Do both entities have similar expectations in areas such as spiritual support, logistic support, and financial support?* For the well being of the representation, the agency and this church should be in agreement with regard to what each one expects of the other in these areas. The agency will have concrete expectations of its sending churches. Is the church in agreement with these? And the church will have concrete expectations of its agency. Is the missions agency in agreement with these? And finally, *do both entities*

*have similar expectations in the area of communication?* Once again, both the sending church and the missions agency will have expectations of each other in this area. Are they in agreement?

Just as we saw with the selection of the missionary, we should not insist in having 100% similarities here. But we should have a sufficiently broad degree of similarities to underlie and sustain the degree of commitment and representation that is sought here. This missions agency literally is going to take the place of this church on the mission field to help it achieve the sending, sustaining, and supervision that this church desires. Therefore, it is very important to choose the agency with great care.

Having said all this, we must also mention that the missionary is going through a very similar process in choosing his or her missions agency. This missionary needs to choose an agency with which he or she can work happily. Really, in a certain sense, the missionary's tie to the agency is even closer than his or her connection with their sending churches, because the missionary many times is considered an employee of this agency. Many times when the missionary visits a church to see if he or she might serve as one of the missionaries of this church, the missionary comes already with an affiliation with an agency. In cases like this, the church is not so much *choosing* an agency as *ratifying* an agency already chosen by the missionary. But even with this, this church should do a serious analysis of this agency because it is going to serve as this church's agent and representative, if it chooses this missionary, whether the church wants it or not. And if great differences exist between this church and this agency, then it would not be wise for this church to choose this individual as their missionary, *even though there may be great similarities between this church and this individual*. Due to the differences with the agency, the sending of this missionary by this church looks too problematic.

**But we do not have a broad range of candidates to serve as our missions agency.**

Some churches (or future missionaries) may be thinking this about now, in light of what we have seen. "We do not have that many options." "We do not have the luxury of finding the perfect partner." And, to a certain degree, they are right. But, once again, would you marry a person with whom you shared only few similarities, simply because it seemed to you that you did not have any other options with regard to marriage partners? To do so could be very risky. And this is especially true in

the area of missions agencies, when we realize that we have the right and the ability to form additional agencies when existing agencies do not adequately satisfy our needs. *We are not obligated to get “married” with an incompatible missions agency.* There are other alternatives.

Having said this, we must also underscore that this does not give us total freedom to start up thousands of additional missions agencies. It is a matter of balance. We do not need a missions agency that is 100% in agreement with our church in everything. There is room for some flexibility. But, there are certain areas where we ought not have too much flexibility, as well. So, we try to be flexible, but we do not have to concede critical points if we do not find an agency that agrees with us on these points. We have the right (and even the responsibility, before God) to join together with other like-minded churches and form a separate missions agency, tailored to our needs.

### ***Why use a missions agency?***

If missions agencies can be problematic, why use them? Why not just send our missionaries directly to the mission field, without an agency, and supervise everything directly through the local church? Paul never used a missions agency, why should we? The answer to these questions lies in the nature and difficulties of sending, sustaining, and supervising a missionary internationally these days. In other words, a sending church (or a missionary) chooses to use a missions agency because it facilitates the whole process of sending, sustaining, and supervising. And this is true. An agency can offer a lot of important services to its churches and to its missionaries. The following is just a *partial* list of some of the important things that an agency can do as sending agent for the church and for the missionary.

*In considering this list, please remember that not every missions agency will offer the same services, and that no agency is obligated to offer services like those mentioned below. Therefore, the sending church (and the missionary) should analyze which services are offered by the agency that is under consideration, and they should note well the importance of those services and the importance of services not offered. Thus, this list, together with a list of crucial similarities and mutual responsibilities can serve as an excellent starting point in the evaluation of any missions agency, to see whether or not it is a truly viable option to serve as sending agent for this church and missionary.*

### **Help in the area of beliefs and practices.**

A good missions agency can be of service to its sending churches and its missionaries by:

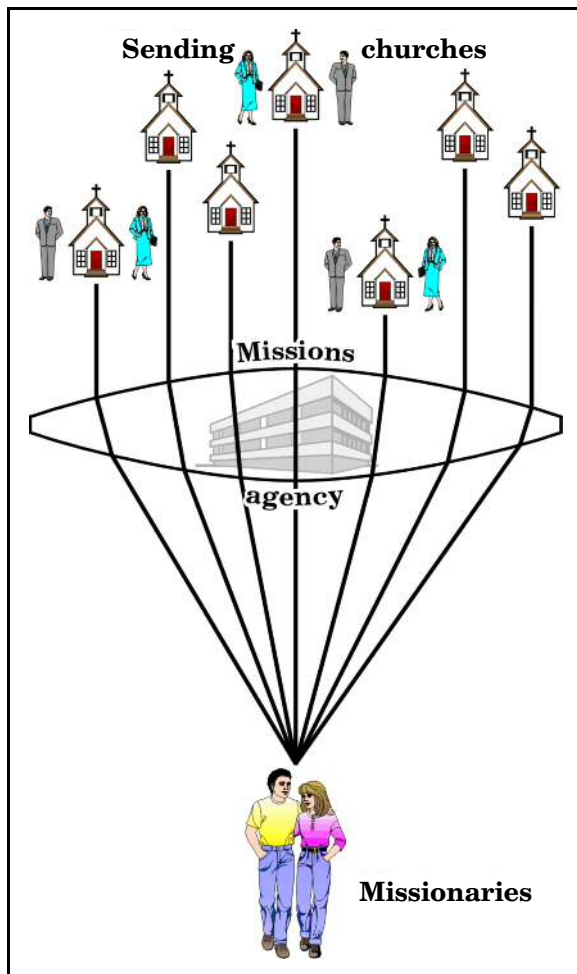
- ◆ Developing a solid biblical, doctrinal, and theological base for its missions work, and then firmly operating according to this base.
- ◆ Developing a good philosophy of missions and good missionary practices and politics.
- ◆ Studying the world of missiology (the study of missions work) and maintaining itself up to date with events and evangelical thinking in this area.
- ◆ Adapting its philosophy and practices when necessary, so that they better fit and better serve in different cultural contexts, without denying its biblical, doctrinal, and theological base. To accomplish this, the agency must be able to distinguish between its biblical base and its *applications* of this base, recognizing that these applications will change from context to context.
- ◆ Seeking to cooperate, as far as possible (or advisable) with the other missions agencies that work in its geographical or ethnic area.
- ◆ Investigating and developing working agreements that permit its missionaries to serve “on loan” with other like-minded agencies (similar theology, doctrine, priorities, philosophy of ministry, etc.). Thus, this agency increases the opportunities of service for its missionaries and churches, by using the structure and “machinery” already established by other agencies.
- ◆ Being a good steward of the resources that God and its churches have entrusted to it. The agency respects and honors the sacrificial spirit with which these resources were given.
- ◆ Providing a structure that facilitates efficiency in all its operations.

### **Help with regard to its sending churches.**

A good missions agency can be of service to its sending churches (and its missionaries) by:

- ◆ Recognizing that it exists as an agency to serve its sending churches. Therefore, it will establish ties that link it to these churches, enabling it to truly serve them instead of serving along side of them or being served by them.
- ◆ Cooperating with its sending churches. As far as possible, the agency works as a team with these churches. It is the sending *agent* of these churches.
- ◆ Operating in such a way that the missionary continues to be the missionary of his or her *sending churches*. The agency does not interrupt the connection between the sending church and its missionary. This is especially important when dealing with interdenominational or independent agencies.

- ◆ Stimulating a high degree of identification between the sending churches and the missionaries (and the ministries). It recognizes that it needs to do more than just not *interrupt* the connection between sending church and the missionary, it needs to *stimulate* this connection.
- ◆ Serving as a “magnifying glass” between the sending churches and the missionaries, by gathering together the various efforts, activities, and contributions of many churches, coordinating all this into a cohesive whole, and then focusing all this in the appropriate missionary and ministry. The diagram below illustrates this “focusing” or “concentrating” role of a missions agency.
- ◆ Accomplishing this focusing and concentrating task (the “magnifying glass” effect) as transparently as possible. An opaque magnifying glass is of little use. Nor is one that distorts or disperses the sun’s rays as it passes through it due to impurities or irregularities in the glass. Only a transparent lens will properly focus the sun’s rays. Thus, too, with a missions agency. It should *focus* the efforts, activities, and contributions of various churches



The “concentrating” role of a missions agency

with the minimum distortion possible.

- ◆ Maintaining the line of authority between the sending church and the missionary. The agency functions in such a way that the sending churches conserve their authority and exercise this authority *through* this agency.
- ◆ Serving as the immediate supervisory entity in the missionary work. As the agent of these sending churches, this agency represents them in the supervision of their missionary and the ministry. Thus, these churches, who could not *directly* supervise this missionary or this ministry (due to geographical, cultural, and/or linguistic distances), achieve this supervision through their chosen agent.
- ◆ Maintaining the sending church as the entity responsible for the support of this church’s missionaries. The agency, of course, may channel and keep track of this support, but it does not become the one responsible for supporting this missionary. The missionary is the ambassador of these sending churches, and it is their responsibility to support this representation. Thus, the agency promotes close, personal ties and responsibilities between the sending churches and their missionaries, especially with regard to support of the ministry.
- ◆ Linking up the sending church with other churches of similar purpose, goal, and vision, so that they may share the support of the same ministry and missionary (another example of the “concentrating” or “focusing” role of the agency).
- ◆ Determining its priorities, in consultation with its supporting churches, and then committing itself to these priorities. The agency determines what is most important for it to do, and then it concentrates on this.
- ◆ Providing information and materials to stimulate missions interest in the sending churches. It promotes missions, participates in missionary conferences, and offers or promotes missionary workshops.
- ◆ Maintaining the sending churches informed with regard to the life and ministry of their missionaries, the spiritual condition of the area where these missionaries work, and the condition of missionary work worldwide.
- ◆ Providing information and materials to stimulate the spiritual, moral, and financial support of its missionaries. The agency promotes its missionaries, links them up with interested churches, provides promotional literature, and helps the missionary to raise the support required for their ministry.
- ◆ Promoting and stimulating frequent contact and communication between its missionaries and their

sending churches. When necessary, it may also facilitate this communication. This is especially important when the missionary serves in a creative access context. In this case, the missionary is in the country as a secular worker, and fulfills his or her missionary activities in a more clandestine fashion. In cases like this, much care needs to be exercised with regard to the *content* of communication, because the government may monitor mail, telephone, internet, etc. for evidence of evangelical activity. A simple phrase like “God bless you” could mark an individual as a Christian and set him or her up for immediate deportation, prison, or even death. In cases like this, the agency advises its churches and its missionaries regarding the safest ways of communicating.

- ◆ Praying for the mission work, its missionaries, and its churches. The agency not only promotes prayer, it also participates regularly in it.

**Help with regard to its missionaries.** A good missions agency can be of service to its missionaries (and its sending churches) by:

- ◆ Promoting the recruitment of missionaries. The agency promotes its own needs for missionary workers, and it promotes the broader needs of the worldwide missionary task. When candidates come to it seeking service opportunities that it does not offer, it refers these people to other good agencies that do offer this type of service opportunity.

- ◆ Maintaining a good recruitment system or process, through which the agency selects its candidates *with great care*, and offers to channel to other agencies any worthy candidates that it cannot use. In its selection of its candidates, the agency carefully examines elements like missionary call, previous Christian service, theological and doctrinal position, general abilities, gifts, training, previous work experience (especially in the preferred area of ministry), academic performance, ability to submit to established authority, references from the candidate’s employer, pastor, and other leaders in the candidate’s local church, and many other similar items. The agency may also require medical testing to detect possible future health problems, and psychological or temperament testing to assist in achieving good interpersonal relations. *This last area is even more important when the missionary is planning on forming part of an international or multicultural team, due to the inherent cultural differences among team members, and the strong impact this may have in interpersonal relationships and team dynamics.*

- ◆ Determining, *with great care*, the amount of financial support required to live and work in a

certain country, among a certain people group, and within a certain social setting. The idea is to establish a *reasonable* support level, neither excessive nor insufficient.

- ◆ Recruiting teams that support its missionaries. The agency realizes that it is not enough to just recruit *missionaries*. It must also recruit support teams that will uphold each of these missionaries and their ministries.

- ◆ Offering assistance and advice to its missionaries in their process of raising their required support.

- ◆ Facilitating the sending of financial support from the supporting churches to the missionary. Here, the agency may offer donor receipting and bookkeeping services, where the offerings are received from the churches, properly receipted and entered into the agency’s bookkeeping, divided according to the support package of the individual missionary, and the salary portion is deposited into the missionary’s bank account.

- ◆ Maintaining the high quality of its missionaries. The agency may require that its candidates to be missionaries have a certain level of training and/or missionary formation *before* leaving for the mission field. When necessary, the agency may also facilitate continued professional training for its veteran missionaries.

- ◆ Investigating the desired qualities and abilities that its missionaries should possess, and offering or suggesting a good missionary training program that aims at providing these qualities and abilities.

- ◆ Offering an orientation program for its missionaries and its supporting churches. This is a very specific type of training or orientation, geared especially to working with this agency. For the sending churches, this orientation could include an introduction to the missions agency (its goals and how it functions), an introduction to missionary work in general, and an introduction to the country, people group, and specific ministry with which this church is planning on working. For the missionary, this orientation normally is a bit more extensive. It could include an introduction to the missions agency (its goals, how it functions, its philosophy, norms, rules, expectations, polity, etc.). It could also include an introduction to the country, people group, culture, language, and political situation in which the missionary plans on working. Many times it will include an introduction to the ministry in which the missionary plans to work (its history, development, key personages, and past, current, and future plans and strategies). It may also include suggestions with regard to correct cultural adaptations for this context, and how to

achieve them, along with suggestions with regard to language learning. And it could even include an orientation with regard to what the missionaries should bring with them to the mission field (equipment, appliances, clothing, etc.). For the missionary, a portion of this orientation will occur before leaving for the mission field, but most of it will occur on site, during the first several years on the mission field.

◆ Providing for the special needs of its missionaries (needs based in the nature of being a missionary). This could include facilitating communication and correspondence, helping the missionary get the correct type of visa, providing a safe and secure way of sending the missionary their financial support, and advising the missionary with regard to a number of practical “how-to” items like how to correctly register with the government, get a driver’s license (if needed), rent an apartment, open a bank account, find a good doctor, find a good fruit market, cook and prepare meals, and a host of other details necessary for daily life.

◆ Contemplating the future needs of its missionaries and making plans to help meet these needs. This could include elements like additional professional training, retirement benefits, some type of health insurance or health coverage, and a plan to cover the predictable costs of the missionary’s periodic return to visit their sending churches.

◆ Contemplating the educational needs of the children of its missionaries, and providing for these needs. For example, there are countries in the world where the quality of the public education system is not very admirable, or perhaps it is completely incompatible with the educational system of the sending country (which is the educational background of these children). Or maybe schooling is only for boys (and girls do not have access), creating a possible problem if the missionary has daughters. Or perhaps the school system is so completely intertwined with the country’s non-Christian religion that the missionary’s children will be taunted and persecuted for not participating in school-wide prayers and worship (such as may happen in Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and other similar contexts). For any one of a number of reasons, public schooling might not be the best choice for the missionaries’ children, and international schools tend to be very expensive. In cases like this, the agency may come up with other alternatives for its missionaries.

◆ Protecting the physical health of its missionaries. Here, the agency may provide information about the health and medical conditions of the country and people which whom the missionary

plans on working. It may provide information about common missionary health risks in the area, and make recommendations regarding preventative measures such as vaccinations, certain preventative medications, and the use of a good water filter. It may investigate the existing medical facilities in a country or region, and plan for secondary measures should these facilities not be adequate (flying missionaries back to the sending country or to an adjoining country to have major medical operations, obtaining special insurance to cover air ambulance service in the event of an emergency, etc.). Furthermore, given the possibility of civil or tribal warfare in many parts of the world, the agency may also contemplate and make plans concerning the possible evacuation of its missionaries in the event of a war.

◆ Protecting the spiritual health of its missionaries. There are many things that an agency may do to provide for the different aspects and needs of the spiritual life of its missionaries. For example, it may distribute devotional books to its missionaries, or maintain a library on the mission field with theological books, commentaries, and devotional books. Or it may offer spiritual retreats every year or two. It may promote prayer meetings among its missionaries, and strongly encourage them to become involved in the ministries and church services of a local church on the mission field. Activities like these are very important because it may be difficult for the missionary (and especially a new missionary) to maintain a healthy spiritual life in another cultural context. For example, the national believers with whom this missionary works are not going to worship God as he or she is accustomed to. Neither are they going to pray nor study and apply the Word of God in accustomed forms. This is a different cultural reality, and until the missionary becomes well accustomed to it (and this may take a few years), the missionary may feel a spiritual void, even when participating regularly in his or her local church on the field. And all of this is even more critical when the missionary is working on a pioneer field where there are few other believers and perhaps no evangelical church with which to congregate. *Cases like this will require special attention, or the missionary could end up going thorough a great spiritual desert while surrounded by and involved in God’s work.*

◆ Providing for the good structuring and organization of the missions field. Here, the missions agency develops realistic and challenging plans for the present, as well as a healthy vision for the future. It examines the needs on the mission field, and its priorities as an agency, and then sets

general parameters and formulates the types of activities that its missionaries will be involved in. This may include both geographical organization (where to work, which countries, which people groups, which social classes, which portions of a country, which cities, etc.) and ministry organization (in which types of work will it concentrate as an agency, which types of ministries will it develop, etc.). And having done this analysis and basic planning, the agency then formulates a general strategy to help it reach its goals.

**Conclusion.** In the light of these services that a good agency can offer to its sending churches and its missionaries, is it any wonder that the average sending church and the average missionary prefer to use a special sending agent to assist in the

sending of missionaries?

### ***The missionary “chain”***

These four missionary entities (God, sending church, missions agency, and missionary) form a missionary “chain,” with each entity being a “link” in the chain. As with any chain, the total strength of the chain cannot be greater than the strength of its weakest link. A chain will always break under the minimum stress necessary to snap its weakest link. Therefore, we need strong sending churches, strong missionary agencies, and strong missionaries. Missionary work is tough work. We all need to be in the proper shape to work at peak performance and with a very high endurance level.

# Chapter 6

## Summary



How can we summarize, in general terms, what we have seen in this study?

### *The missionary*

In the basic grammatical sense of the word, a missionary is a representative, an ambassador, that has the responsibility to faithfully, adequately, and with precision represent his or her sending entities. And in the person of this ambassador, these sending entities are able to go to places that would normally be unreachable for them, and accomplish ministries that would normally be impossible for them (due to the “distance” that separates these sending entities and these ministry contexts). Thus, missionaries are the hands and feet of their sending entities, working in contexts that are far removed from the reality of these sending entities.

The word “missionary” also has two basic senses, a general sense and a technical sense. What makes the difference between these two senses basically is the entity being represented. When a missionary basically represents Jesus Christ (and only Jesus Christ), we may say that this person is a missionary in the *general* sense of the word (missionary with a lowercase “m”). Every believer in the world is responsible to be a missionary in this sense. We are all ambassadors of Jesus Christ. We all have the responsibility to faithfully, adequately, and with precision represent Him. And Jesus, as our sending entity, determines the specific purposes and particular activities that go into this representation, and we are accountable to Him for the representation we give.

But, when we sum in other additional entities to this representation (such as representing Jesus and other local churches), then we may begin to speak of missionary in its more *technical* sense of the word (missionary with a capital “M”). In this case, this missionary is responsible to faithfully, adequately, and with precision represent not only Jesus Christ but also his or her sending churches and individuals. And these churches and individuals (as entities being represented) have the right and the responsibility to help set their missionary’s specific purpose and particular activities in this representation, and their missionary is accountable to them (along with being accountable to Jesus).

Furthermore, the missionary, in the technical

sense of the word, is *unique* in his or her position or office (not every believer represents these sending churches and individuals). This missionary also is *unique* in that he or she has been chosen by a very special, particular, and personal missionary call (not every believer has received this type of a calling). As we have seen, these missionaries (in the technical, capital “M” sense of the word) have been captivated by Christ and returned to the Church to dedicate themselves to a special missionary ministry. They are prisoners in the Lord, and can really do nothing else. This ministry is now obligatory for them. God has captivated them and set them apart for this purpose.

### *The missionary call*

The missionary call is a call that God makes with reference to the lives of certain brothers and sisters in the Church, setting them apart and destining them for a special ministry chosen for them. This call is special, personal, particular, and captivating. It is *special* because it is outside of the ordinary, day-to-day existence of this individual and of the congregation where he or she belongs (this type of a call does not come every day). It is *personal* because it clearly identifies the individual to whom it refers (there is no doubt to whom the call applies). It is *particular* because it refers to a very limited group, usually only one person (not everyone in the church receives this call nor this type of a call). And it is *captivating* because it is the result of Christ having taken this person captive for this ministry and having returned him or her back to the Church as a gift for this ministry (Ephesians 4).

The local church ought to be able to facilitate the reception of the call, detect it, recognize it, and respect it by setting aside this brother or sister for this ministry. Among other things, this call identifies future missionaries for the church, so that it knows who to set aside for this task, and it also provides the justification for reserving these individuals for this ministry (since they probably already are productive workers in other ministries). And this call gives the necessary evidence that God has gifted and prepared this particular person in a very special way for this ministry (as we saw in the case of Bezalel in Exodus 31).



### ***Missionary work***

Missionary work is the work or ministry of the local church that, due to the barriers between the context of this work and the context of this church, requires that the church use a representative (a missionary) to facilitate the accomplishment of these ministries by this church. This missionary work includes activities like worship, teaching, communion, evangelism, and service to our neighbor. All these activities need to be aimed at the different age and maturity levels found in the ministry context, and they should also be adapted so that they are pertinent and meaningful to these groups. And, of course, these activities should be contextualized according to the specific ministry context, so that they will also be pertinent and meaningful beyond the local Christian setting. Given this reality, missionary work will normally occur in the contexts entitled “similar” and “different” in the ministry cube (the last two rows). These are the two contexts where there is the greatest need to use an ambassador to accomplish the ministry.

### ***The sending church***

The sending church is a local church that has accepted its responsibility before the Great Commission to make disciples of all the nations. Not only this, it has also sought out God’s specific will for it with regard to what He would have it do toward the accomplishment of the Great Commission. It recognizes that it is not enough to just evangelize, because the goal is to make *disciples*. And it recognizes that it is not enough to just work in its own locality among its own people, because the goal is to make disciples *of all the nations*. It also recognizes that barriers exist between itself and the majority of the ministry contexts of the world, and it takes these barriers into account when it develops its ministries. When the “distance” between itself and the ministry context is sufficiently great enough, it creates the office of an official representative or ambassador, chooses this individual with care, formally accredits him or her as this church’s official representative, and sends him or her to this distant context. *It is this act of sending out this representative that makes this church a sending church.* And, through the representation achieved through this ambassador, this church accomplishes this ministry and fulfills its responsibility that God has given it through the Great Commission.

### ***The missions agency***

The missions agency is an organization whose principal goal is to help sending churches in the sending of the ambassadors of these churches to far away contexts. As such, it functions as a sending agent, representing these churches. Its contributions to the sending process may be multiple and varied, but they tend to fall in the field of administrative tasks such as organization, planning, supervision, and general facilitation of the missionary work. In all of its activities, it recognizes that it is operating as an *agent* of these sending churches, so it represents them with fidelity and precision.

### ***Why is there so much imbalance in the placement of harvest workers?***

We will close our study with this question, which is a fairly common question. Normally, it comes in one of three varieties, each one focusing on a sector of the work of the church. The first variety goes a little like this, “with all the spiritual need that there is all around our church, why do so many people want to go to other countries to work in missions? We have so much need here, and everyone wants to go work somewhere else.” This variety of the question usually focuses on the need to work in the context of the church itself or in a near context (to use the terms of our ministry cube). The second variety of this question goes a bit like this, “with all the spiritual need that there is in the world today, why are there so many people working in our local churches and in the contexts close to these churches, and so few want to go to the contexts that are far away? Everyone wants to work where there are already so many workers, and no one wants to go to the difficult, far away places.” This variety of the question usually focuses on the need to work in the contexts more distant and different from the church. And the third variety of this question goes like this, “there are a lot of people interested in going away to other countries and serving the Lord there, but why are so few interested in serving the Lord within their own country but in a more distant context? No one wants to stay and work in the isolated parts of our own nation.” As you can see, this variety of the question usually focuses on the need to work in the contexts that are *somewhat* distant from the church, oftentimes qualifying as “similar” contexts in our ministry cube.

And do you know the really interesting thing?

You can hear these three varieties of this question, coming from different persons, at the same general time, speaking of the same identical church, and describing the same sending context (but from different perspectives). In fact, it can be quite interesting if these three people happen to overhear themselves and then begin a conversation among themselves with regards to missions.

Although there is no set answer to these questions, I do believe that there are three possible answers that might be applied, according to the context and in differing degrees, to these questions. Therefore, it is probable that each church and each situation will require its own mixture of these three answers.

The first answer is that the apparent imbalance of workers is due more to the *perspective* of the speaker, and not so much to the actual *reality* of the distribution of workers. It always seems to us that the need for workers is greatest in the section of the harvest that we are most interested in. This is the lack that we feel the greatest. Actually, workers are lacking all over the harvest, but we note it most in the areas that are closest to our hearts. For this reason, these three questions can be voiced simultaneously, describing the same identical sending-church situation, without a contradiction being noted.

The second answer is that the apparent imbalance of workers actually *does* exist, but that it is what God has planned for our church right now. In other words, there are not many workers from our church in this section of the harvest because God is not calling people from our church right now to work in this area of the harvest. God is sovereign. God is the General of His army. God is the One who calls, and the church only recognizes and confirms these calls. So, if God wants 70% (to choose an arbitrary percentage) of the potential missionaries in our congregation to have a calling to work overseas in far away places, that is His business. It is not our responsibility as a *church* to either assign or distribute God's missionary personnel. And I do believe that this type of a

situation actually does happen. God does give certain churches certain special interest areas (I know of churches with a very heavy interest in Russia or India, for example). This does create an imbalance in the distribution of their missionaries (most going to Russia or India), but this is not a problem, *as long as it is what God wants for this church*.

The third answer is that the apparent imbalance of workers *does* exist, and that it is not the will of God for our congregation right now. Therefore, for some reason or another, our congregation is not understanding or obeying God's directions for it. Perhaps our congregation lacks the knowledge, the vision, and/or the perspective to be able to accurately detect and assess the needs of the four general contexts (as described in the ministry cube). Or perhaps the congregation does not understand their role in the Great Commission. Perhaps they lack knowledge with regard to how to carry out this role. Perhaps they are not in optimum conditions to listen to God. Perhaps, and this is even worse, the church *has* listened to God and it has not liked what it heard. Perhaps its mind is closed. Whatever the reason, this congregation is not fulfilling its responsibilities with regard to what God has asked it to do.

When this third answer is the correct one, or the predominant answer in a mixture of the three answers, we have problems. We are not participating in the harvest as we ought to be. In the terms of our fable at the beginning of this study, "The Farmer and the Tools," we are still sitting in the toolshed when we ought to be out in the harvest. When this is the case, God needs to awaken our church. A text like this one could form part of this awakening. And once this church is awake and obedient to God, there will be as many workers available for the harvest as God desires, and they will be enough. Until then, "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2).

# Appendix “A”

## Selected Missionary Sending Statistics



<b>The top 20 countries with the highest rate of sending out evangelical cross-cultural missionaries</b> (listing limited to those countries that have sent out more than 100 evangelical cross-cultural missionaries)		
Country	Rate: missionaries sent out per 100,000 believers	Total number of missionaries sent
Switzerland	509	1,712
India	316	82,950
Netherlands	279	2,000
South Korea	250	20,425
Canada	200	5,200
Singapore	184	693
Germany	181	3,144
New Zealand	159	1,250
China	159	120,000
Thailand	152	468
Norway	149	610
Finland	140	908
Sweden	136	873
Great Britain and Northern Ireland	117	6,405
Spain	111	512
Denmark	106	204
Australia	103	3,193
U. S. A.	102	93,500
Ukraine	92	1,599
Bangladesh	79	500

<b>The top 20 countries with the highest total number of evangelical cross-cultural missionaries sent out</b>		
Country	Total number of missionaries sent	Rate: missionaries sent out per 100,000 believers
China	120,000	159
U. S. A.	93,500	102
India	82,950	316
South Korea	20,425	250
Nigeria	6,644	17
Great Britain and Northern Ireland	6,405	117
Canada	5,200	200
Philippines	4,500	39
Australia	3,193	103
Germany	3,144	181
Indonesia	3,000	23
Netherlands	2,000	279
Ghana	2,000	34
Brazil	1,976	4
Switzerland	1,712	509
Ukraine	1,599	92
New Zealand	1,250	159
Finland	908	140
Sweden	873	136
Mexico	794	9

<b>Latin American countries with the highest <i>rate</i> of sending out evangelical cross-cultural missionaries</b> (listing limited to those countries that have sent out 15 or more evangelical cross-cultural missionaries)		
Country	Rate: missionaries sent out per 100,000 believers	Total number of missionaries sent
Jamaica	13	100
Paraguay	13	51
Costa Rica	12	84
Puerto Rico	12	116
Panama	11	77
Argentina	9	350
Peru	9	318
Ecuador	9	106
Mexico	9	794
El Salvador	8	165
Colombia	6	216
Venezuela	6	180
Chile	5	149
Honduras	5	79
Bolivia	4	71
Brazil	4	1,976
Guatemala	3	103
Dominican Rep.	2	15

<b>Latin American countries with the greatest <i>total</i> number of evangelical cross-cultural missionaries sent out</b>		
Country	Total number of missionaries sent	Rate: missionaries sent out per 100,000 believers
Brazil	1,976	4
Mexico	794	9
Argentina	350	9
Peru	318	9
Colombia	216	6
Venezuela	180	6
El Salvador	165	8
Chile	149	5
Puerto Rico	116	12
Ecuador	106	9
Guatemala	103	3
Jamaica	100	13
Costa Rica	84	12
Honduras	79	5
Panama	77	11
Bolivia	71	4
Paraguay	51	13
Dominican Rep.	15	2

# Appendix “B”

## Detection and evaluation of a possible special, particular, personal, and captivating call

### Basic Fundamental Questions

– Remember, the measurement of these conditions should always take into account the maturity (spiritual and physical) of the potential recipient

*With its confirmation of a special calling, the church is approving setting apart and dedicating this individual for this ministry, and it also is approving the activities contemplated by this ministry. This confirmation does not necessarily mean that this church will choose to support and send out this individual as one of its own missionaries. This decision depends upon numerous other factors.*

**1. Do they recognize and evidence the lordship of Christ?**

Christ ought to be the Lord of all of our life, and it ought to show.

**2. Do they understand the general will of God as revealed in His Word?**

The call will always fall within the parameters established by the general will of God, as revealed in His Word. Both potential recipient and those who examine the call ought to know this will.

**3. Do they listen to the Holy Spirit, are they sensitive to the Holy Spirit?**

The Holy Spirit communicates the call, so, both the potential recipient and those who are examining the call ought to be in excellent condition to hear Him.

**4. Do they possess a pure heart and apply the Word of God to their life?**

A pure heart facilitates communication with the Holy Spirit. Both the potential recipient and those who are examining the call need a pure heart.

**5. Do they maintain an open mind?**

The mind ought to be open to any legitimate (non-sinful) option. This includes even our concept of *who* we consider to be potential recipients of a call.

**6. Are they busy working in the Lord’s work?**

God wants *workers* in His harvest, not idle laborers.

**7. Are they willing to dedicate themselves to the work full-time?**

The special call captivates the person and returns them to the Church for dedication to the work.

**8. Are they seeking the confirmation of the local church?**

In the examination and evaluation of a possible special call, both the potential recipient and those who are examining the call should seek the confirmation of the local church (assuming, of course, that this church is in close communion with the Holy Spirit).

