

A Philosophy of Missions and a Process for Selecting Missionaries

The purpose of missions at Grace Bible Church is to introduce (shepherd) the gospel of grace to the unbelieving in foreign countries so that they will respond in belief in such a way that they will come to love God and His glory and be reflectors of His glory.

While every believer is to be engaged in evangelistic endeavors, we affirm that missions is both related to and different from evangelism. It is related to evangelism in that both are attempts to proclaim the gospel to unbelievers. It is different from evangelism in that it is conducted in cross-cultural settings (generally, foreign countries, though occasionally different cultural settings within one's home country).¹ We affirm the statement, "A missionary, like an apostle, may be seen as an ambassador *sent on a mission* for the King."² Further, every missionary endeavor involves no less than two aspects: 1) someone is sent (to another place)³ by the church; 2) the one sent is given a specific task with the gospel.⁴

So, the goal for missions at GBC is:

to cultivate a network of missionaries that will expand our global involvement and see people from all the nations trust in Christ, love Christ, and live for Christ's glory.

WHAT IS MISSIONS?

Because so many are now using missions with a variety of emphases — the social gospel as missions, social justice as missions, outreach as missions, and missional ministry — we want to articulate what we mean by missions.

When we use the word "missions," we are thinking of two aspects of the missionary endeavor. First of all, missions is gospel-focused. The primary task of the church is to take the gospel to the unbelieving (Lk. 24:46-49; Acts 1:8). And the missionary's fundamental task is to be a witness/testimony to the truth of Christ and the provision of forgiveness through Him. This is what the first church did (Acts 5:32; 8:35; 9:20-22; 10:38-43; 11:18).

Simply said, the missionary is someone who is sent with the message of Christ and His forgiveness and freedom. Missions is evangelizing the nations. Consider the great commission statements: Matthew's gospel⁵ emphasizes that Jesus' command was to make disciples and teach the converted to obey Christ; and Luke records⁶ that the responsibility is to testify to the work of Christ on the cross to provide forgiveness for those who repent; and at His ascension,⁷ Jesus again emphasizes the responsibility to testify to His person and work.

¹ With this statement we are attempting to draw a more precise distinction between what has traditionally been called "foreign missions" and "local missions." Since "going" is fundamental to missions, gospel endeavors in one's local community is not missions, but evangelism.

² Spitters and Ellison, *When Everything is Missions*, Kindle location 954; our emphasis.

³ Going from one's home region to a different region, culture, and/or country is implicit in Jesus' Great Commission in both Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8.

⁴ Adapted from DeYoung and Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?*

⁵ Matthew 28:18-20.

⁶ Luke 24:46-49.

⁷ Acts 1:8.

And the primary task of missions is further to take the gospel to the unbelieving nations, as all three Great commissions passages in Matthew, Luke, and Acts affirm. Disciples are to be made of all the nations (Mt. 28:18-20) and repentance and forgiveness is to be proclaimed to all the nations (Lk. 24:46-49), and the testimony is to go to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

And this pattern was also evident in all Paul's missionary journeys. In all three of Paul's journeys, the preaching of the Word and the gospel was central.⁸ Mission expansion was about the proclamation of the gospel and the development of the biblical church in those places. This is even true of Paul's imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:23, 28-31).

So, as we think about missions, we are thinking particularly about the spread of the gospel to the nations. And by that statement, we are also intentionally excluding things like social justice from missions. Social causes might be compassionate and the legitimate work of individual believers, but they are not the task of the church (as an entity) and they are not missions. Missions is always about the gospel and the development and growth of churches.

Secondly, missions is cross-cultural. The word "missions" does not appear in the New Testament but is derived from the Latin word *mitto*, meaning "I send." And as we have considered how missions began in the NT, we have come to see that "going" is inherent in missions (Mt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Missions is not what we do when we stay; missions is what we do when we go. While we do ministry locally — that is distinct from missions. Ministry to the body of Christ is what we do inside the church and evangelism is what we do outside the church and missions is evangelistic and church-building work we do outside the borders of our culture.

And further, the sending and going of missionaries has always been under the authority of the local church. We agree with the writer who said, "a missionary is not one who has *gone* out, but one who has been *sent* out."⁹ In other words, the church has identified, equipped, charged, and sent the missionary to his task. He does not operate alone, but under the authority of the local church.

The sending of qualified men to do the work of the ministry in cross-cultural settings dominates the early church history, as recorded in Acts. Consider again the three missionary journeys of Paul. On his first journey, the Spirit and church sent the men on their missionary task (Acts 13:1-3). And that is repeated on the second journey (Acts 15:22, 33). And notice that the men were sent by the church only after the church had identified them as being equipped and able for the task.¹⁰ And on the third journey, Paul notes his desire to go to Achaia, but he only left after the church confirmed his desire, wrote a letter on his behalf, and then sent him on his way (Acts 18:27).

So, missions is both related to and different from evangelism. It is related to evangelism in that both are attempts to proclaim the gospel to unbelievers. It is different from evangelism in that it is conducted in cross-cultural settings (generally, foreign countries, though occasionally different

⁸ See the records of his First journey (Acts 13:5, 32-39ff, 46-47), his second journey (Acts 15:35; 16:4; 17:22-30), and his third journey (Acts 18:28; 19:1-5, 8, 20; 20:25, 27). It was even true of his imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:23, 28-31).

⁹ George W. Peters, "Let the Missionary be a Missionary," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October, 1965, 346. In another place, he succinctly summarizes, "There are at least three essential qualities of a missionary: (1) he is a believer sent forth—a messenger, a herald; (2) he is sent forth with a message—he is a message bearer; (3) he is sent forth on a specific mission—he has a definite assignment and a specific purpose." [344]

¹⁰ See also Acts 16:4, on the same journey.

cultural settings within one's home country).

In summary, every missionary endeavor involves no less than two aspects: 1) someone is sent (to another place) by the church; and, 2) the one sent is given a specific task with the gospel.

WHAT ARE THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MISSIONS?

God is a missionary God (Is. 19:19-25; Rev. 7:9-10). From His salvation of Adam and Eve to His final redemption of the redeemed (Rom. 8:28-30; Rev. 21-22) and condemnation of the unredeemed (Rev. 20:11-15), God has been exalting His name in the nations so that men will be saved from His wrath and out of their sin and learn to delight in Him.

Even when God identified and called His chosen people Israel to be His own covenant people, He still had a passion to reach the Gentiles with salvation and called the Israelites to be His ambassadors to the nations (Gen. 12:3; Jer. 1:5; 3:17; Lk. 2:31-32; Rev. 5:9; 14:1-6; 22:2).

Christ's fundamental call to the apostles to take the message of salvation to the nations is a call that is for all believers (Mt. 28:18-20; Eph. 6:19-20; Col. 4:5-6; 2 Tim. 4:5).¹¹

Hell is horrible and eternity is long (Mt. 13:41-42; Lk. 16:19-30; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2 Pt. 2:9; 3:7-8). And though God is glorified in the condemnation of the wicked unbelievers (Dt. 32:4; Ps. 99:3-4; Rom. 1:18-19; 2:1-4; 2 Thess. 1:6), He does not delight in the death of the wicked (Ps. 81:13-14; 103:8; Is. 48:9, 17-18; Ezk. 18:23, 31-32; 33:11; Mt. 23:37; 2 Pt. 3:9). And because we desire to see individuals from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev. 5:9) delight in God, we are committed to taking the gospel message to them.

There is only one gospel and only one means of eternal salvation from God and His wrath — Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:1-6; Acts 4:12; 17:30-31; Rom. 4:1-5; Eph. 2:8-9). And because there is only one gospel and only one means of salvation, how will the unregenerate of the nations hear unless believers go and tell them (Rom. 10:12-15)? This evangelistic and mission endeavor is not only a command for the believer (Mt. 28:18-20), but it is also a joy for the believer (Rom. 10:15).

WHAT ARE OUR PRIORITIES IN MISSIONS? (What mission tasks are most important to us?)

We recognize there are numerous means to meet the spiritual needs of the lost in cross-cultural settings, like church planting, church ministry (equipping local bodies of believers in traditional church contexts), support ministries (e.g., Bible translation, theological education, evangelistic efforts), logistical helps (office/computer assistance), various relief endeavors (providing items like

¹¹ We affirm that the command of Christ to go to the nations (Mt. 28:18-20) was not just for the Twelve disciples, but for all believers, perhaps given on the occasion of Christ's appearance to more than 500 (1 Cor. 15:6). We also agree that even if that command is not for contemporary believers, we would still be obligated to carry out the task of missions: "But if these particular words had never been spoken by Him, or if, having been spoken, they had not been preserved, the missionary duty of the Church would not be in the least affected....The supreme argument for foreign missions is not any word of Christ's, — it is Christ Himself, and what He reveals and signifies....It is in the very being and character of God that the deepest ground of the missionary enterprise is to be found." [Speer, quoted by Peters in "Missions in Biblical Perspective," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January 1979), 3.]

food and water, education, housing, and clothing), and social justice (working within cultural and political realms to attempt to right social wrongs and injustices (e.g., abortion, slavery, sex trade, and racial inequities). While all of those have differing roles in the purpose of building God's church globally, at GBC we have a desire to prioritize our missionary efforts on ministries that will directly build the church of Christ.

We believe in the priority of the local church because Christ said He would build His church and because the church was the single entity Christ created (Mt. 16:18-19). Christ died to redeem the church and He lives to sanctify the church and the church is His bride (Eph. 5:25-27). Christ's priority is the church and we thus believe that the church should be our priority in missions.

Because we affirm the statement, "the mission of missions is primarily spiritual,"¹² as we allocate resources to missions and train people to send to the world, we prioritize these kinds of ministries:

- ✓ Church planting
- ✓ Pastoring local churches and developing national leadership within the church context
- ✓ Leadership development (theological education)
- ✓ Bible translation and resource development

Because we believe in the priority of the local church and the training of believers to do the work of the ministry, we place a low priority on relief endeavors or working in roles that have no direct evangelistic or equipping emphases.

WHAT ARE OUR RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE MISSION ENDEAVOR?¹³

Just like Paul's desire for the Ephesians was for them to pray for him in the proclamation of the gospel (Eph. 6:19-20), so a fundamental responsibility of the church is to pray for those who are sent. We will accomplish this through regular corporate prayer and by encouraging personal, individual prayer through the regular communication of missionary needs.

Paul also did not hesitate to ask for resources to fund his missions efforts (e.g., Phil. 4:10, 15-18; 2 Cor. 8-9). He even wrote to a church that he had not visited, asking them to fund his next missionary venture, an endeavor he hoped would take him to Spain (Rom. 15:22-29); thus the book that we think of as one of the most theological — Romans — was written to raise funds for missions. John also affirms the priority of caring financially for those who are taking the gospel to foreign lands — in fact he says it is an obligation of the church (3 Jn. 8). So we are committed to giving both intensively (significantly and generously) and extensively (to as many missionaries and ministries as we can give at an intensive level).

We have a responsibility to train missionaries. We are committed to being intentional in cultivating members who will give themselves to cross-cultural, foreign missionary labors. Part of cultivating missionaries will be through (though not exclusively through) short-term missionary opportunities. Through short trips (one week to three months), we desire to expose members to the different kinds of opportunities that exist in missions and to begin to evaluate¹⁴ their readiness for missions

¹² Andy Johnson, *Missions: How the Local Church Goes Global*, 29.

¹³ We find Johnson's chapter, "Healthy Missions Partnerships" particularly helpful on this subject (pp. 75-86).

¹⁴ Whether through short-term mission events or other training venues, one critical aspect of evaluation will be to determine their calling to missionary labors. We believe that calling is fundamentally revealed through biblical desire to serve regardless of burdens and hardships (like elders, do they long for and aspire to the

work.¹⁵ Other means of training might include things like theological training and discipleship, evangelism training and observation, cross-cultural exposure in our local setting, biblical character development, and various church ministry opportunities.¹⁶

As with any ministry task, training doesn't end when ministry begins. Even as the NT authors wrote to established churches and elders to further equip them for the work of the ministry (see especially books like 1-2 Corinthians, 1-2 Timothy, and Titus), we also understand the ongoing privilege of helping missionaries to evaluate their ministries and their fitness for those ministries. This may include things like periodic evaluations of their ministry work (what they do), ministry effectiveness (how well they do what they do), and ministry resources (how they are allocating things like their time and finances).¹⁷

Because the church is the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15; Jude 3-4), we have a responsibility to protect the integrity of the gospel preached, exposing and disassociating from false teachers (2 Jn. 7-11; 3 Jn. 9-10) and affirming those who teach the true gospel well (3 Jn. 5-8, 12).

WHAT IS OUR COMMITMENT TO OUR MISSIONARIES?

We commit to praying regularly for each of the missionaries, and communicating prayer needs to the church body regularly.

We commit to supporting them financially as substantially as possible (consideration for increased support will always be given to current missionary endeavors before adding new missionaries or opportunities).¹⁸

We commit to providing necessary resources (both spiritual and temporal) to encourage and equip them for greater personal maturity and more effective public ministry. We are available, as much as possible to be a resource and equipping center for our missionaries.¹⁹ We heartily affirm that because they are going out "for the sake of the name," it is *our* joyful obligation (not the world's responsibility) to care for them through helpful financial support (3 Jn. 7-8), biblical discipleship, and ecclesiological oversight and accountability.²⁰

We commit to providing regular and consistent communication so that they are aware of the

task? 1 Tim. 3:1; 1 Pt. 5:2) and spiritual giftedness and character for the task (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:2-7; 1 Pt. 5:3). See the next section below for a more complete explanation.

¹⁵ See Andy Johnson, *Missions: How the Local Church Goes Global*, 87-99 ("Reforming Short-Term Missions").

¹⁶ Our intention in developing missionaries is helping them to meet the requirements we articulate below for the kinds of people we want to identify with to fulfill missionary endeavors.

¹⁷ See Johnson, 65-73.

¹⁸ See 3 Jn. 5-6; also the sermon "Go to the Nations: Our Responsibilities in Missions" (June 24, 2018).

¹⁹ John clarifies that both the sender and the one sent are "fellow workers" (3 Jn. 8). The sense is that when a missionary is supported physically it is as though the giver is present with the missionary as the missionary carries out his ministry. Thus, the giver and receiver are full partners — they are not merely "on the same team" in name, but they are together in reality. And neither the giver nor the receiver is pre-eminent; they are co-laborers of the One who is pre-eminent, Christ.

²⁰ To that end, our desire is always to increase our missions giving proportionate to or greater than the expansion of our growing annual budget. And our intention is that the missions budget will be as close to or beyond 25% of the total church operating budget. Further, decreasing missions giving will always be a last resort to reducing the budget, just as reducing local staffing would be a last resort to reduce the budget.

growing ministry of GBC (e.g., weekly newsletters, prayer needs, and any other church-wide communication). The goal of this communication is to foster an attitude of “team ministry” with them.

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE DO WE WANT TO IDENTIFY WITH TO FULFILL THE PURPOSE OF MISSIONS AT GBC?

As we consider the ministries of our potential missionaries, we are particularly interested in four areas of their lives: personal character, ministry preparation, ministry effectiveness, and church affiliation.

An evaluation of personal character begins with their internal desires: the focus of their lives and hearts is the glory of God. They yearn above all else to reveal His name and character in all they do. Passages like 1 Corinthians 10:31 are not just trite sayings to them; they are their passion.

Further, they must exhibit spiritual character in keeping with the mission ministry in which they will be engaged. So those who are called to church leadership roles like church planting and pastoring will fulfill the requirements of elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).²¹ Others who will be going in other kinds of roles will demonstrate the kinds of spiritual maturity appropriate to those roles. For instance, we recognize and are grateful for the historic role of women in missions²² and want to continue to equip and send women as missionaries. While they cannot fulfill the requirements as elders because of their gender, neither will they fulfill pastoral roles either in their sending church or on the mission field. Yet they can still have significant roles and influence in missions even as they do in their home church: personal evangelism and discipleship, teaching and training women, and discipling and counseling children, young adults, and women. Thus, all women missionaries will have the spiritual character fitting for those responsibilities.²³ Likewise, men who are going in non-pastoral roles may not be held to the strict standard of elders, but they should be “elder-like” and fully equipped spiritually for their roles as evangelists, teachers, translators, etc.²⁴

Of further importance to us is that in accordance with 1 Timothy 3:4 and Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Timothy 3:4, 12, if they are married their marriages must be stable and growing in maturity and their children must be in clear submission to the parents (if they are still living at home). They must be exemplary in their homes and their wives must be fully committed to the ministry task they are embracing.

And because ministry is inherently about relationships, and because there is so much potential for misunderstanding and conflict in relationship, they must demonstrate a desire and increasing ability and effectiveness in resolving conflict in a Biblical manner. They do not run from conflict,

²¹ Men who are going to those kinds of ministries will be encouraged to interact with our elder development process to help evaluate and prepare them for those responsibilities.

²² Women have always been a part of the missionary endeavor, beginning in the New Testament church (e.g., Acts 16:14; 18:2ff; Rom. 16:1ff).

²³ See passages like 1 Tim. 3:11; Tt. 2:3-5 for tests of spiritual maturity particular to women, as well as passages like Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 4:22-32; Col. 3:16-17; Rom. 12:1-2ff; 3 Jn. 7 as measures of maturity for all believers and missionaries.

²⁴ In addition to the general passages mentioned in the previous footnote, men will demonstrate qualities like those listed in Tt. 2:2, 6-8; 1 Tim. 3:8-13; Acts 6:3. They will be known in the congregation for being particularly mature.

but they resolve it in a biblical manner. The testimony of others must affirm their ability to work with all sorts of individuals, being patient with all men (1 Thess. 5:14-15). Their love for others in the body of Christ is a clear testimony of the power of Christ's gospel (Jn. 13:34-35).

A second primary consideration is their ministry preparation. They must have spiritual gifting, and adequate training, education, and preparation for the proposed ministry. Training and preparation were always a requirement for ministry in the biblical church. Consider Jesus' three-year preparation of the Twelve and Paul's three-year training in Arabia and Damascus before he began any public ministry (Gal. 1:18ff). Similarly, Timothy only became a leader after his gifting was bestowed and recognized by elders (1 Tim. 4:14). While we are not expecting the same degree of training for every missionary, we do expect that each missionary will be theologically, biblically, and technically equipped for the task he is going to do.

Thirdly, each missionary will have a background of proven ministry experience in the local church (e.g., active involvement in evangelism and discipleship) and ideally have some previous short-term overseas experience and/or cross-cultural experience in the U.S. Their ministry experience will testify to their readiness to embrace the task of the foreign missionary.

And because they are taking the gospel to the nations, they must have an obvious and demonstrated love for the unregenerate. They passionately affirm what John Piper succinctly says, "Missions exists because worship doesn't."²⁵ Their passion and longing is to see people become lovers of God.

Our final consideration is their church affiliation. By this we mean, first of all, their affiliation with us. Like any other member of GBC, they must be in agreement with the doctrine and philosophy of GBC. And their sending church and organization must also be in substantial agreement with the doctrine and philosophy of GBC. By that, we mean that there should be no areas of *significant* theological or philosophical disagreement (e.g., GBC would not support a missionary being sent by a charismatic church or organization, even if the missionary was not charismatic).

By "church affiliation" we also mean their affiliation with their own church. They must have an active membership and involvement in their sending church. And their missionary ministry must be in relationship with the local church — i.e., their missions ministry is not disconnected from the local church in the country where they serve, but either is a part of or works directly with the local church. We cannot conceive of a missionary who is disconnected from the local church (either at home or abroad). Every missionary must be in active submission to a local church and elder board (or equivalent) and actively involved in the ministry of that local church. One of GBC's core values is "every member ministry" — every member has a gift and every member uses that gift in the context of the church Body (1 Pt. 2:9). That should be even more true of the missionary.

Because of the priority of the local church, preference will be given to missionaries who have an existing relationship with GBC — either through membership or previous support relationship. Additionally, preference will be given to those who are directly involved in efforts like church planting, pastoral and leadership development, evangelism and discipleship, teaching (college and seminary training) and translation over those who are involved in support roles like construction and administration.²⁶

²⁵ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed., 35.

²⁶ See "Career Missions Policy" from Bethlehem Baptist Church (especially the section on "Types of missionary outreach") for a more complete discussion.

They must be in agreement that the primary and principle task of missions is the work of evangelism and that meeting social needs is secondary. Meeting physical needs is not fundamentally the responsibility of the church but of individuals within the church (see article by Dever, below). The missionary will not prioritize as part of his ministry things like job training, providing clothing or food, offering medical assistance, or similar services. We affirm that, "Evangelism is the most basic and radical ministry possible to a human being." [Tim Keller]

We also expect that the missionary will have a clear line of accountability that is in accordance with the theology, ecclesiology, and philosophy of GBC.

In choosing new missionaries, priority will be also given to candidates whom we know: those who have been trained and equipped at GBC as their home church. Because we believe the work of the global expansion of the church is the responsibility of the local church, we want to cultivate those who will both go and give from within our own local church. We will then give secondary priority to those with whom we have had a close working relationship in other ministry contexts.

WHAT DO WE EXPECT FROM OUR MISSIONARIES?

We expect regular communication. We expect to hear from them at least quarterly with either emailed or printed updates. We desire to know about the progress of their ministry and their personal lives (as if they were present and functioning in our local church body).

We expect to know of any changes or plans for changes in their theological and biblical priorities, their ministry, their philosophy of ministry, or the location of their ministry. We expect the missionary to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pt. 3:18), maturing in Christ (Col. 1:28-29), but we also expect that growth and maturity to be consistent with the theological foundations of this church.

Because there are some things that need to be said face-to-face and not in letters (2 Jn. 12; 3 Jn. 13-14), we expect and desire our missionaries to visit as often as is feasible (understanding that every 4-6 years may be as frequent as is reasonable). We would like to know as soon as possible about these visits so we can maximize their time with us and expose them to as many people as possible. Likewise, we desire to provide regular opportunities for our church members to visit and participate in appropriate ministry endeavors with our missionaries.

HOW WILL WE EVALUATE OUR MISSION EFFORTS?²⁷

Missionaries can expect annual queries about the nature and needs of their ministry (so we can both evaluate and help). These evaluations will be on spiritual character and maturity, ministry faithfulness and fruitfulness, biblical and theological orthodoxy, and church affiliation.

²⁷ See also above, under "What Are Our Responsibilities in the Missionary Endeavor?" and Johnson, 40-49. Additional tools for evaluation may be developed to assist in the evaluation process.

WHAT RESOURCES HAVE WE FOUND HELPFUL IN CULTIVATING THIS MISSIONARY PERSPECTIVE?

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