

"WHY DIDN'T PAUL STAY IN TROAS?"

(Goal: Establish reproducing churches)

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Many excellent missionaries and many worthy missions enterprises desire our support. Which should you support? How will you and how will we all make such a decision? If you don't have enough time to pray for every missionary and you don't have enough money to support every missionary - how do you decide which ones to support? During the next 10 years it is very likely that the people of Southern Gables will spend up to \$3 million dollars and a great deal of energy in supporting missionary efforts here and around the world. How will we spend that money responsibly? How do we know where to invest it best to accomplish the most for the Kingdom of God? During the next 10 years we hope that over 40 young men and women will go out from our church as missionaries - We have nearly 20 of them in preparation right now - our number may be too low. We may not often think about it but somebody decides where missionaries go and what they do? God has given the responsibility for the great commission to his church - that means to the local church - to us also.

Church leaders working with knowledgeable missions' leaders are responsible for planning and strategizing to do the best job possible with the resources God gives us. On what bases are such decisions made?

Do we just say to anyone who wants to be a missionary - "You go and we will support you?" It doesn't matter what you want to do or where you want to go - you just go and we will support you? To help answer that question let me tell you briefly about two people groups in the world.

SPAIN

Like Mexico many people think of Spain as a vacation spot not as a mission field. Spain has roughly 40 million people of which less than 1% are evangelical believers and a majority of those believers are found among the Gypsy people group. This is a country that claims to be 94% Christian. Of 8,000 towns and cities in Spain fewer than 500 have any evangelical church. There is a great need for cross-cultural missionaries to go to Spain and help equip and mobilize the 65,000 - 75,000 evangelicals there. The church in Spain needs encouragement, strategies, leadership development, theological education, - It needs help from the outside to get strong enough to reach Spaniards with the good news of Jesus.

Let me tell you about another people group: SOUTH KOREANS

35% of the population calls itself Christian and only 28% Buddhist. 21% are identified as evangelical and affiliated with a local church. 40,000 congregations in a population of 45 million. They have 283 theological institutions. Since 1960 the evangelical church has doubled in size to over 10 million. The largest church in the world is in Seoul, South Korea - over 600,000 active members. And 10 of the 20 largest congregations in the world are in Seoul. The South Korean church now has nearly 3000 missionaries sent out to other parts of the world. The church has not

only been established in Korea but the Korean church is well on its way to evangelizing all of its own nation. The goal of the Korea church is that over 50% of the population will profess Christ by the turn of the millennium - 2001. The point of all this that the missionaries that penetrated Korea in the 1880s and since have done a spectacular job. It is hard to imagine that South Korea is any longer a mission field in the sense that it needs cross-cultural missionaries from the U.S. or anywhere else. South Korea stands side by side with other Western nations in shouldering the responsibility to reach the rest of the world with the good news of Jesus.

NOW, If these were the only two people groups in the world to which people group would we want our missionaries to go? Some of you might say well that is obvious - we'd want them to go to Spain - they need so much more help. But I ask you since the population of Korea is larger than Spain and since 75% of them are not yet Christians wouldn't it make more sense to send our missionaries to where the need is greatest? To answer the question of where should our missionaries go I must refer to the article entitled "Principles That Guide World Evangelization". In that article the foundation is set for this article. Looking at the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 I showed you two principles that should affect the way we strategize to accomplish world evangelization.

The first of those was that the Great Commission is very specific about who we are to go to. It is not just a general command to tell as many people as possible about Jesus. Now it is true that we want everyone to hear about Jesus but that is precisely why I think the Great Commission is so specific about the task it sets forth. The commission is to go to all "nations" and I demonstrated from the Scriptures that "nations" means every people group in the world. It is not enough to just tell as many people as possible, God has said that he wants disciples out of every people group in the world. The first principle from the Great Commission is that we are responsible to getting the gospel to every people group.

The second principle from Matthew 28 was not only who we are to go to but what we are specifically to do with those who trust Christ - we are to "make disciples". That means we are to establish and strengthen local churches in every people group in the world. And so the task of the great commission is specifically to establish a healthy reproducing church and churches in every people group so that they can reach out and let everyone in their people group know about Jesus. Now, if establishing a strong reproducing church in every people group is the goal to which people group should we send our missionaries - South Korea or Spain? "Well," you say, "we picked Spain the first time, didn't we?" Yes you did, but why you picked Spain is very important to understand if we are going to continue to make biblically based decisions in the future about where to invest our resources to accomplish the great commission.

Let me give you a picture of the world that will help us further as we answer the question of what strategy do we use in fulfilling the Great Commission.

1. "Who has Heard?" In God's world the least evangelized live in North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia and China. They have little chance to hear the Gospel without someone from outside of their people group coming to them. Those who have heard the good news but have not responded live in 75 other countries surrounding the

least-evangelized. In those countries the majority of people have heard the Good News, yet less than 15% identify themselves as Christians.

2. "The World by religion" In the year 2000: 2.1 billion who identify themselves as Christians.

1.2 billion Muslims

1.0 billion who identify themselves as non-religious

Nearly 1.0 billion Hindus

360 million Buddhists and

240 million animists or folk religion

and 250 million who call themselves atheists.

3. "The Changing Church"

Not all who call themselves Christians necessarily are Christ-followers. Of the 2.1 billion Christians many are included in that number who are "Christian" in name only.

For example: Bosnia-Herzegovina of which I will speak later identifies itself at 42% "Christian" - meaning 42% of the population would say they are not Muslim or Atheist but they would have no understanding of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through faith in him and his work on the cross.

4. "Who Needs to Hear?"

In this least-evangelized part of God's world: 1.3 billion people live who have little chance of hearing the Good news of Jesus Christ. There are 500 completely unreached people groups. The Christian church is devoting only 3,150 of its 285,000 foreign missionaries and a scant 1.2% of its foreign mission funding to the evangelization of these people.

5. "Dividing the Resources"

In God's world: Only 1% of the Scripture distribution and only 3% of the languages for which Scripture has been translated is directed toward the least evangelized world. Over 90% of the foreign missionaries, 87% of the missions funding and over 94% of the full time Christian workers are directed toward those countries where 60% or more of their people identify themselves as Christian.

If the GREAT COMMISSION is to establish the church in every people group in the world - then something needs to change. We need a strategy. How will we invest our resources in the next 5 to 10 years? Before we talk about reaching out beyond our own people group - Americans - I must say a word about our responsibility to OUR OWN PEOPLE GROUP: We have a special responsibility to the people within our own culture and language. We more often refer to that as evangelism - it is witnessing within our own culture. Our efforts at evangelism in our community, at the planting of churches in our city, state and country, our participation in military ministries to our own armed forces whether stationed here or abroad, our involvement in evangelistic crusades etc. are all appropriate efforts on our part to reach our own people group with the gospel.

But our focus this morning is not on evangelism within our own people group but on "World Evangelization" - spreading the gospel to every people group in the world -

and establishing the church. And when we discuss world evangelization we need to determine where best to invest our resources to accomplish the task.

In the next paragraphs we will discuss the world in three broad categories: The unreached, the unevangelized and the evangelized.

GET YOUR BIBLE OPEN AND WORK WITH ME AS WE LOOK CAREFULLY AT HOW THE APOSTLE PAUL LIVED OUT A STRATEGY FOR WORLD EVANGELIZATION.

Acts 16:8 "Why didn't Paul stay in Troas?"- for that matter why didn't he stay in Antioch or Jerusalem? Acts 2-7 Evangelization among the Jews of Jerusalem and those who came to the city. (The church is established in Jerusalem) Acts 8:1b The church is scattered to Judea and Samaria: Samaritans respond (There was no church yet in Samaria) Philip evangelizes the Ethiopian. Acts 9:15 Saul commissioned to the Gentiles

13:2 The church sets Paul and Barnabas apart for their Gentile work

13:13 Paul goes to Perga (there was no church in Perga or that area)

13:44-49 Paul reiterates his commission to the Gentiles.

14:1-7 Preaches in Iconium, Lystra, Derbe (There was no church in that area) Paul and his co-workers are the evangelists - because there are no others. When they entered a new area they evangelized.

16:8-10 Paul goes to Europe. WHY? Why not stay in TROAS? Because there was a church established in Asia but not in Europe.

16:13 Paul evangelizes in Philippi then Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth (1 1/2 years to establish this church 18:11), (There was no church and he established one)

19:1 Paul goes to Ephesus 19:8-10 Paul stays two years. Why? Because there was no church there. He evangelizes and establishes the church.

Where is our Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi today? Where are the people groups that need the church established?

THE UNREACHED: (few Christians, no or very few churches and no potential access to the gospel by nearly all the people)

Bosnia/ Herzegovina

Only 400 or 500 believers in a country of nearly 4 1/2 million people - Evangelicals making up less than 1 1/100 of one percent of the population with as few as a dozen congregations. And among the Muslims of Bosnia there are no known churches. Where are the Paul's and Barnabas's who will establish the church?

MONGOLIA

In a country of nearly 3 million there are fewer than 1000 believers in 7 congregations. The majority of the Mongolians are Animists - fearing and appeasing the spirits of the natural world - rocks, sky, trees, etc. Where are the Paul's who will go?

IRAN

10,000 believing Christians in a land of 65 million with only a score of congregations

and no known missionaries. Over 99% of the population is Muslim.

Into these people groups and others in the world we need cross-cultural missionaries who will evangelize, establish churches, translate the language, translate the Bible into those languages - Someone needs to do the basic pioneer work of establishing a beachhead in the people group. Like Paul, we can't stay in TROAS - we must get to other people groups of the world. But just winning converts in each people group is not enough to fulfill the great commission: We must establish and strengthen the church to equip it to evangelize its own people.

Look at the next category:

UNEVANGELIZED: (An established church exists in this people group and the people have potential access to the gospel but because the churches are so few and so weak there is no real access to the gospel.)

SPAIN is reached but fewer than 500 towns have an evangelical witness. The gospel is in the people group but most of the people have no real access to the gospel.

In these people groups some have been won to faith in Christ, a church has been established - the gospel has taken root. But these are young, relatively weak, untrained leaders and churches. While the gospel has been planted in those people groups - the church is unprepared to reach out to its own people.

After Paul won converts to Christ what did he do? ** Paul's example: 14:23 established leadership
15:36,41 strengthening **result: 16:4-5 strengthened and grew
18:23 again he went strengthening the churches.

So how do we deploy our missionaries in people groups where a church exists but it is not strong enough to reproduce itself yet? We send missionaries who will teach, equip, and train those churches to accomplish the task God has called them to do: to evangelize their own people group and join the rest of us in reaching the yet unreached peoples of the world.

Let me illustrate with some "unevangelized" people groups: The first one I will mention is probably borderline "unreached":

ALBANIA

Within 18 months of the fall of communism in that country in 1989-90 16 mission agencies entered that country and had established over 19 churches with over 1000 believers. But evangelical believers still number less than 1/10 of 1% of the population and the church is fledgling at best.

The greatest need is for cross-cultural missionaries to help the emerging church to mature, expand, and grow in sufficient size to effectively evangelize its own people and think in terms of reaching still other people groups. I would consider Albania barely "reached" - it is a fledgling work.

TARTARSTAN

In the Southeastern part of Russia is a state known as Tartarstan with no known history of Christianity. Carl and Angie Brown of the Eaton EFC and supported by us as well are now working in that barely reached people -

There is now an established and growing church movement. But it has no completed New Testament yet and I suppose no Old Testament. There are only a handful of churches and they need great help from the outside to disciple them, train them and deploy them to reach their own people.

Speaking of strategy, we want missionaries who will go to these and other fledgling churches and strengthen them - help them gain the maturity and strength to reach out effectively to their own people.

Are there any people groups in the world where missionaries are not needed any longer?

EVANGELIZED or REACHED

People groups where there is a strong healthy reproducing church planting movement. (The Evangelized people groups of the world) This doesn't mean that all of these people have become Christians but that these people have real access to the gospel. There are Christian radio stations, literature, Bibles in abundance, churches within reasonable driving distance, trained leadership, strong theological education, specialized evangelism among subsets of the people group - prisoners, incapacitated, children, youth, military, etc.

Let me illustrate:

In KENYA in 1900 there were fewer than 2000 Christians out of a population of over 20 million - today over 6 million people identify with evangelical Christianity.

ZAIRE (Democratic Republic of the Congo)

In 1880 two Protestant missionaries opened up Zaire - by 1900 only 1.4% of the population was Christian of any kind, now 115 years later over 96% of the population identifies with Christian religion.

Evangelicals make up over 35% of the population and number over 12 million. I asked missionary veteran Hank Griffith who served in Zaire to describe the health of the church in that country. He said that God has done phenomenal things in that country over the last 40 years. Most, if not all, of the churches now being planted in Zaire each year are being started by nationals not by outsiders. There are now enough true Christians to form the critical mass necessary to keep the movement going and evangelize the rest of the country. The Zaire church now has its own leaders, preachers, style of preaching, hymns and songs unique to its culture, church government unique to its culture - the church is not a transplant of a western church but is deeply rooted in African soil - owned by the people of Zaire. I asked Hank what made the missionary work so successful in Zaire. He said, The missionaries focused most on developing national leadership rather than on doing the work of the ministry by themselves. After the initial planting of the first churches - missionaries no longer did

the church planting but trained the nationals to do it. Today the Evangelical Free Church Mission and others are disengaging from that people group - they are reached and they are evangelized - the church is strong enough to complete the task.

GREAT BRITAIN : over 6 million evangelicals , 46,000 congregations sending out over 6,000 cross-cultural missionaries.

SOUTH AFRICA: over 6 million evangelicals (17% of the population) and 31,000 protestant congregations and nearly 3000 missionaries sent out by those churches.

In these people groups, Zaire, Great Britain, South Africa, Kenya, South Korea and others, the church is strong, healthy and reproducing. It is reaching not only in its own people group but now it is reaching outside to others through cross-cultural missionaries.

God has given us a mission - to establish the church in every people group in the world. To accomplish that mission we must think strategically. We must respond with Spirit-dependent planning. We must respond with Spirit-led deployment of our missionaries. We must respond! We want to raise up, equip, send out and support men and women who will help us reach into every people group in the world and establish a strong reproducing church movement. To accomplish that we need Bible translators, evangelists, church planters, theological educators, pastoral trainers, literature specialists, and support people of many kinds to keep the others on the field. The truth is we need some of you.