

Missionary Training for the Twenty First Century: Biblical Foundations

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Christ’s instructions have not changed; the church still has the responsibility and privilege of sharing the gospel with all nations, making disciples who will be obedient to everything that Christ commanded. The instructions are clear; we must cross the boundaries of cultures to make such disciples. The message of the cross must reach all nations and all peoples. The church must enter new contexts, making disciples among people of different languages, foods, forms of government, social norms, histories, relationships with the environment, and most important, different worldviews.

Although the goal has not changed over the last 2000 years, contemporary cross-cultural missions are incredibly dynamic. Especially important, missionaries from all the nations of the world are beginning to go to all the nations of the world.¹ In a similar way, technology has changed the way we do missions. We could also note that the economic basis of missions and missionaries is changing; it is no longer assumed that cross-cultural messengers are being supported by a denomination or missionary agency. Many missionaries receive their “daily bread” by working in their profession or running businesses.²

Considering the changing context of missions, one must ask, “How can we train new missionaries for the 21st Century?” Considering that cross-cultural missions are unpredictable, how do we train new ministers from all over the world to be fruitful all over the world? This article seeks to explore some of these questions. The first question deals with the biblical foundations that guide the preparation of missionaries for cross-cultural ministries. There are many biblical principles and passages that talk about the preparation of cross-cultural

¹ An illustration of this is the title of the book written by Samuel Escobar: *The New Global Mission; From Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003).

² Victor H Cuartas, “Las Implicaciones y Los Desafíos de los Negocios Como Misión en Países de Acceso Creativo,” <http://www.globalmissiology.org/Espanol/PracticaContemporanea>, (accessed Dec 18, 2009).

ministers. This paper deals with a “case study,” – the story of a veteran missionary named Paul, and his training of younger missionaries.³

Paul – Missionary Trainer

When we read the book of the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Epistles we notice that Paul had two goals: Preaching the gospel (and by doing so, planting churches); and discipling a new generation of cross-cultural missionaries.

Three passages confirm that Paul was a trainer of missionaries as well as an evangelist: Acts 16:1-3, Acts 20:4 and 2 Timothy 2:2

Acts 16:1-3

In this text, Luke describes the beginning of the second missionary journey. Paul left Antioch around the year 50 AD to visit and encourage the churches that he had established on his first missionary journey.⁴ He clearly did visit the established congregations, but he also visited unevangelized communities (Acts 15:35-41); that is, his goal was to enter new territory and at the same time, encourage the brethren in known areas.

When he arrived in the region of Derbe and Lystra, he met a young man named Timothy (Acts 16:1). Paul invited Timothy to become a part of his missionary team (Acts 16:2).

The important thing for us to notice is that Paul took the initiative to invite certain youth to accompany him; it was part of his plan to train new missionaries. Timothy is an example of one young man who was chosen and invited.

Acts 20:4

In Acts 20 we find more evidence that Paul deliberately recruited and trained new cross-cultural missionaries. This passage tells us that Paul was accompanied by Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus. It is important to notice that this team comes from a variety of places: Berea, Thesolonia, Derbe and Asia.

³ Mark Hedinger, *Towards a Paradigm of Integrated Missionary Training*. <http://www.globalmissiology.org/resources>. (Accessed Dec 18, 2009, pp 75-95).

⁴ Homer A Kent Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome; Studies in Acts* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1972), 106. Other authors agree with these dates.

The diversity of this mission team is important. Paul had founded churches in those places. It appears that Paul would go into places where the gospel had not been preached and preach the gospel. When Paul had trained a group of disciples he would choose one or two of them to accompany him. His ministry did not end with the planting of new churches; he also identified new missionaries and trained them by taking them to practice in the field.

2 Timothy 2:2

The final passage we are going to mention is 2 Timothy 2:2. As he approached the end of his ministry, Paul encouraged his colleague (Timothy) to continue to be active in the ministry, and also to continue training new ministers. The specific words, “To faithful men who will be able to teach others also,” indicate that the baton that Paul passed on to Timothy involved more than simply sharing the gospel and making disciples; it included the work of training faithful men. It appears that Paul understood ministry as a chain: Paul handed on to Timothy an understanding of the Word of God and cross-cultural ministry; Timothy was now responsible to share both elements with other faithful men. Paul was as much a missionary as a trainer of missionaries. Timothy was likewise to both evangelize/disciple and train new missionaries.

Paul – Training Methods

Paul writes letters to two different audiences: the majority of his epistles were written to the church and/or all the believers in a specific region. But a few of the letters were written to his colleagues Timothy and Titus. The three books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are considered “Pastoral Epistles” because they deal with leadership in the local church.⁵ That being the case, it is also appropriate to call them “missionary epistles” and so expand their scope outward from only being directed to the local church. That is, these books contain significant instruction about missionary work; consequently some people have suggested that the title, “missionary epistles” is much more appropriate than the title “pastoral epistles.”⁶

Having accepted that Paul’s intention was to instruct Timothy and Titus in their work as missionaries, the author of this article studied the Bible to see what themes Paul included in missionary training. I found six principle themes in Paul’s “missionary letters:”

⁵ A history of the phrase, “Pastoral Epistles” is found in D. Edmond Heibert, “*An Introduction to the New Testament, vol 2, the Pauline Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 307

⁶ Dr. D. Jim O’Neill of Tennessee Temple University, for example.

Theme One: A Focus on the Truth of the Scriptures

Paul's epistles instruct the missionaries to know and apply the truths of the Bible in their own lives. It is not simply a question of cognitive knowledge or understanding of these truths; it is a question of application of the teachings of the Word of God in everyday life. Note the emphasis in I Timothy 4:15, 16, for example:

“Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

Which truths must be understood and applied in the missionary life? A few truths that Paul mentions in the “missionary epistles” are:

- The gospel (Titus 3:1-7; 2 Tim 1:8-10; 2:8-13)
- Wholesome words (1Tim 1:3; 2 Tim 1:13-14)
- The Danger of falsehood (1 Tim 4:1-5; Titus 1:10-16)
- The depraved condition of the human heart (2 Tim 3:1-9)
- The primacy of good teaching in the development of a good character (Titus 2:1-15; 2 Tim 3:10-17).

Theme Two: The missionary as a person

The “missionary epistles” deal with the activities and attitudes of missionaries in various places.

Missionary Activities:

- Teaching (1 Tim 1:3)
- Correcting false teaching (1Tim 1:4)
- Prayer (1 Tim 2:1-8)
- Wise conduct (1 Tim 3:14-15)
- Self-Control (1 Tim 4:6-8)
- Personal growth (1 Tim 4:15)
- Accepting difficulties (2 Tim 2:3)
- Pastoral care of the church (1 Tim 5:3)
- Healthy and wise interpersonal relationships (1 Tim 4:12)
- Appointing of church leadership (Titus 1:5)
- Personal health care of the missionary (1 Tim 5:23)

Personal morality (1 Tim 6:11)
Ministering according to the God given gifts of the missionary (1 Tim 4:14)
Fleeing evil (2 Tim 2:22)
Knowing the content of the Bible (2 Tim 3:1-17)
Being a faithful witness for Christ (2 Tim 4:5)
Maintaining sound doctrine (2 Tim 1:13)

Attitudes of the Missionary:

An attitude of love (1 Tim 1:5)
An attitude of purity (1 Tim 1:5)
An attitude of a good conscious (I Tim 1:5)
An attitude of firmly grounded faith (1 Tim 1:5)
An attitude of justice (1 Tim 6:11)
An attitude of piety (1 Tim 6:11)
An attitude of perseverance (1 Tim 6:11)
An attitude of meekness (1 Tim 6:11)
An attitude of peace (2 Tim 2:22)
An attitude of healthy communication (Titus 2:8)
A sober attitude (Titus 2:7)

Theme Three: The missionary as a teacher

The epistles to Timothy and Titus say a lot about missionaries as teachers. This emphasis is visible in a few of the direct instruction (for example, 1 Tim 4:11; Titus 2:15); and in the instruction on how to confront specific problems (for example, how a young person should teach an elder 1 Tim 5:1,2; how to teach the wealthy 1 Tim 6:17,18; and how to teach in the context of false doctrine 2 Tim 2:25, 4:2).

An especially important passage for our purposes is 2 Tim 2:2. Paul instructs Timothy to share everything he had learned from Paul to faithful men who could teach others also.

The fact that Paul refers to “everything you have heard from me” makes us think about what specific teachings would fall under this heading. That is, in light of these words, which teaching was Timothy to hold on to? What ideas were in Timothy’s mind that he was responsible to share with others?

Paul wrote this last letter to Timothy in the year 67 AD.⁷ Paul and Timothy met for the first time in the year 50.⁸ What lessons were shared during those 17

⁷ Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Walk Thru the Bible, vol Two* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 432.

⁸ Kent, op cit

years? A review of the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul indicates that Timothy had received, and so was responsible to teach, in the following areas:

- Cultural sensitivity (Acts 16:1)
- The church as a multi-cultural center (Acts 16:5)
- Church growth (Acts 16:5)
- How to discern the guiding of the Holy Spirit in missionary work (Acts 16:6)
- Evangelism and Baptism (Acts 16:15)
- Recognition and confrontation of demonic activity (Acts 16:16)
- Persecution (jailed, beaten and suffering for the gospel) (Acts 16:22)
- Strategies of who should go and who should stay to disciple new believers (Acts 17:14-15)
- Preaching under difficult circumstances (Acts 18:5)
- Missionary economics (Acts 18:5)
- Formation of missions teams (Acts 20:4)
- Doctrine and its application to daily life (Romans 16:21; 1 Cor 4:17; 1 Thes 1:1; 2 Thes 1:1; Philemon 1:1)

Based on the phrase, “What you have learned from me,” we see a full curriculum of life, doctrine, ability and wisdom. Paul taught this curriculum to Timothy, confident that Timothy would continue the chain and teach others also.

Theme Four: The missionary and his/her ministry of leadership training

Paul emphasized leadership training in the church. We find that Paul focuses on three things in his letters: the selection of ministers for God’s work, the characters of those leaders, and the characteristics of false leaders. Issues of character receive more attention than questions of academic preparations, though in our environment it is more common to focus on intellectual issues than character issues.

This discrepancy is very important in the 21st Century. From one side, we are children of modernity; we truly believe that a good understanding of theory will allow us to develop good churches and strong disciples. On the other hand, it is relatively easy to teach people knowledge (theory, academic formation). The class room lends itself well for such teaching. That is, it is easy to teach academics, and it is a product of modern culture. Despite this, the missionary books show us that it is not always adequate for the task. Questions of character

can only be seen in the daily life that was the basis of Paul's training. Missionary training in the 21st Century must focus on these same themes.

The Missionary and Local Church Leadership

The selection of church leaders (1 Tim 2:12; Titus 1:5)

The character of leaders (1 Tim 3; Titus 1)

False Leaders (1 Tim 4:1-5)

Theme Five: The missionary's response to opposition

Ideas on how to face opposition are important themes in the "missionary epistles." Paul writes about how to confront false teachers, how to react to abuses from those in power (whether in government or simply people of influence); and how to confront people who actively oppose the gospel. A few of the passages that teach us how to face opposition are: 1 Tim 6:3-10; Titus 3:9-11, 2 Tim 2:14, 3:1-9, and 4: 9-22.

Missionary training for the 21st century must take opposition into account. Paul encourages us to understand that opposition is real; and he models for us what it means to teach young missionaries how to face these obstacles.

Theme Six: The missionaries relationship to their community

The final theme found in the study of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus requires us to consider interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal Relationships and Missionary Training

Men and Women (1 Tim 2:9-15)

Youth and elders (1 Tim 5:1-7)

Slaves and Masters (1 Tim 6:1-2)

Missionaries and disciples (Autobiography of Paul) (2 Tim 1:1-5)

The congregation and its leaders (1 Tim 5:17-22)

The missionary's relationship to God (1 Tim 1:12-16 indicates that God creates this relationship on the basis of His grace. 1 Tim 1:17 indicates our response: adoration.)

Paul – Modern Applications

It is worthwhile to observe and copy the work done by experts. In the case of missionary training, an expert named Paul gave us instructions and examples of how to train the next generation of missionaries. The six themes identified in 1

Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus open our understanding of missions in our era. They are themes that must be included in our missionary curriculums as well: the missionary must know and apply the Bible, understand themselves (including the activities and attitudes that are part of their role), be able to teach (both theory and practical applications), be faithful and wise in their ministry with the local church, know how to confront opposition, and how to have healthy and appropriate relationships with God and with people. Beyond this we can identify a few basic concepts that will help us train a new generation of cross-cultural workers:

- 1) The fact that Paul was active both in training missionaries and in doing missionary work is instructive. Those who are now working as missionaries should consider the idea of training new missionaries, even as they are involved in cross cultural work.
- 2) The fact that Paul included knowledge, practical ministry, an emphasis on character, many years of working together, and question of adoration and worship of the Lord also helps us. For decades theory and pedagogy have emphasized knowledge; but Paul gives us an example of a trainer who considered his students as whole persons. He didn't limit himself to academic knowledge; missionary training must include an integrated focus; an emphasis on the soul, heart, mind, interpersonal relationships, abilities, and wisdom, while taking into account academic knowledge.
- 3) Paul demonstrates that God is no respecter of persons: there is no perfect race or nation. In fact, Paul worked with a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-ethnic team. Paul offers a healthy and practical example for our generation of missionary team leaders. He allows the very missionary team itself to reflect the diversity of our Triune God and His church.
- 4) Finally, Paul's example allows us to focus on the right goals. Missionary training programs often put the emphasis on the participants of the training. Paul gives us an example of how to focus on the entire chain: certainly his main focus was on Timothy; but he was not limited to his "students," he encouraged Timothy to think about the next generation; the next link in the chain. Those who work in missions must take an interest in their own disciples and in the ability of those disciples to "teach others also."

Conclusion

The message of the gospel continues to extend from nation to nation, and we live in days when traditional “missionary fields” are becoming “missionary forces.” This reality forces us to be wise in how we select, prepare, and send a new generation of cross-cultural missionaries. This series of articles ask the question of how we do missionary training. Certainly there are other biblical lessons that are valuable in this theme: the example of Christ in His preparation of the twelve, or the example of Moses preparing Joshua. There is no doubt that the Bible itself is our fundamental instruction on how to make disciples of all nations. What we see in the example of Paul is that the missionary also needs to prepare other missionaries, including missionaries from the host cultures where the missionary is working. In short, reviewing Paul’s missionary training strategy, we find that missionary preparation requires:

- 1) A focus on the Holy Scriptures
- 2) A focus on developing the correct abilities and attitudes
- 3) An integrated pedagogy that is presented in practice
- 4) A focus on the character of leaders that is not limited to intellectual preparation
- 5) An emphasis on how to minister during persecution and opposition
- 6) A focus on healthy relationships with God and men

In future articles, we will consider other issues in missionary training based on biblical foundation.

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