

**GO TO THE NATIONS: PRIORITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN MISSIONS**  
**SELECTED SCRIPTURES**

When I was in college I got a job working for a lumber supply company. I worked in the showroom selling things like plumbing and electrical parts, cabinets, and paint. To say that I was ignorant about the building business when I began is an understatement. When I graduated from college and moved about a year after I took the job, one regular customer who was known to be demanding said to me something like, “You’ve come a long way — when you started you didn’t know *anything* and now you’re actually pretty helpful.”

What helped me become helpful was that I figured out how all the various systems that I sold worked — what their function was and how they were to operate — and knowing that, when people came in with questions about how to repair things, I could help them piece together the right plumbing parts or assemble the tools they needed for a paint job or how to lay out their kitchen cabinets. Once I knew the purpose of a system, I could design a plan for it or figure out a solution to a problem.

That applies to many areas of life and ministry, including missions. One reason some churches struggle with missions is because they don’t understand the biblical teaching about missions and do not understand the biblical priorities and responsibilities of missions. Once we understand what the Bible teaches about these things, making decisions about how we will involve ourselves in missions becomes much more clear.

That is what drove us over the past six months to work on a philosophy of missions for GBC — while we’ve always loved missions, we needed clarity for the kinds of ministries we wanted to identify with in the cause of missions, and we wanted a document that would help guide us to developing missionaries in our church body. [Aside: we would love for many more missionaries to be developed and trained in and sent out from our church over the next few years.]

I said last week that I am excited about this series and about this document because GBC loves the gospel and loves missions. And then this week I again read this sentence in a book about missions: “Churches won’t extend themselves to commend the gospel [in missions] until they deeply cherish the gospel.” My immediate thought was, “I am grateful that GBC loves the gospel, and because it loves the gospel, loves missions.” We want this document and series to expand that passion. Just as we want to deepen the culture of evangelism in our church, in the same way we’d like to see the culture of missions deepened (which makes sense, because they are both related to evangelism).

How will we summarize our commitment to missions?

*THE GOAL OF GBC MISSIONS IS TO CULTIVATE A NETWORK OF MISSIONARIES THAT WILL EXPAND OUR GLOBAL INVOLVEMENT AND SEE PEOPLE FROM ALL THE NATIONS TRUST CHRIST, LOVE CHRIST, AND LIVE FOR CHRIST'S GLORY.*

To say it more simply, *our goal is to be involved in taking the gospel to other parts of the world so those who don't know Christ will come to know Christ.*

This morning we want to address two additional questions about missions: *what* are our priorities in missions, what are the responsibilities of missionaries in the missionary endeavor?

**1. What are our PRIORITIES in missions?**

- ✓ What we DO in missions is guided by what we believe missions IS
- ✓ Some options for cross-cultural ministry
- ✓ GBC's priorities in missions

**2. What are the RESPONSIBILITIES of missionaries?**

- ✓ What should missionaries BE?
- ✓ What should missionaries DO?

THE GOAL OF GBC MISSIONS 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.

## 1. What are Our **PRIORITIES** in Missions? (What mission tasks are most important to us?)

- What we **DO** in missions is guided by what we believe missions **IS**
  - ✓ **Missions is gospel-focused** — the commission of Christ to the church was to take the message of the gospel to the unbelieving (Lk. 24:46-49). And that is exactly what the early church did (**Acts 5:32; 8:35; 9:20-22; 10:38-43; 11:18; 13:38**).
  - ✓ **Missions is cross-cultural** — missions is sending people to another culture to go with the gospel. “Going” is inherent in missions. Cf. Mt. 28:18-20; **Acts 1:8; 13:1-3**. And the church is the sender of those who go (**Acts 18:27**).
  - ✓ **Missions is not compassion ministry or social justice.**
    - There is a place for compassion ministry; believers *should* be compassionate to the plight of the less fortunate and do what they can to alleviate the pain of the suffering (Gal. 6:10; **Tt. 3:14**).
    - But compassion ministry is not the fundamental task of the church as an organism — the church doesn’t mobilize itself to do missions for the purpose of offering temporal relief.
  - ✓ Anyone can offer physical help; only the church can bring the gospel.
    - “Unbelievers and NGO’s don’t preach the gospel and plant churches: only the church does that. While the work of social action is emotionally rewarding for missionaries and for the churches that send them, I fear that we’ll wake up one day and realise that we’ve not been helping the world *in the most helpful way.*” [Joel James, “[Acts and Answered](#)”]
    - So when Paul planned his trip to Rome, he was single-minded in purpose — **Rom. 1:15-16**.
  - ✓ Anything we do in missions will be oriented toward going somewhere in gospel ministry.
- **Some options for cross-cultural ministry.** We recognize there are numerous ways that churches have attempted to meet the spiritual needs of the lost in cross-cultural settings:
  - ✓ Traditional church ministry — like church planting and church ministry (worship, instruction, fellowship, evangelism) — “Missions is...ecclesiology armed with a passport.”
  - ✓ Church support ministries — e.g., Bible translation, theological education, evangelistic efforts
  - ✓ Church logistical helps — office/computer assistance
  - ✓ Relief endeavors — food and water, education, housing, and clothing
  - ✓ 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)

- **GBC's priorities in missions.** While all of these 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," [Johnson, *Missions*, 29] our goal is to prioritize the allocation of our mission resources to these kinds of ministries:
  - Church planting and evangelism
  - Pastoring local churches and developing leadership within the church context
  - Leadership development (theological education — pastor and leader training)
  - 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.

## 2. What are the **RESPONSIBILITIES** of Missionaries? (What kind of people do we want to identify with to fulfill the purpose of missions at GBC?)

- **What should missionaries BE?** As we consider the ministries of our potential missionaries, we are particularly interested in the character of their lives: is their character godly? And as we think about their character, that evaluation 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.
  - ✓ Consider **3 John 7** — Those who were faithful servants had one objective — the exaltation of Christ's name (*the name* refers to Jesus, who is the name above all names, Phil. 2:9-10; Eph. 1:21). So when John says they went out for *the sake of the name*, it means that their one purpose in going out to teach and preach was so that the name of Jesus Christ was honored and revealed (cf. **Jn. 3:30**; 1 Pt. 2:12; 3:16).

*Col. 3:17 "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."*

- This is always the task of ministry — not to draw attention to us, but point people to the only One who is the Savior and is able to address their needs for redemption.

- This was the very thing the teachers who were supported by the woman in 2 John did not do (v. 7); but it was what the missionaries sent by John did do.
- As we look to identify with other ministries and missionaries, one question we ask is, “do they get the gospel and Christ right? Is Christ first and pre-eminent?” Do they live for God’s glory?
- Further, passages like **1 Corinthians 10:31** are not just a trite saying to them; it is their passion. We want to send our best-equipped people — those who are consumed with Christ.
- ✓ As we think about spiritual character we recognize specifically that 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**).
  - Note that Paul left Titus in Crete to establish elders in the churches (missionary work was focused on the development of the church).
  - Then notice five primary characteristics of the elders:
    - ... The **overall quality of his life** — he is **above reproach** (v. 5). There is no legitimate charge that could be brought against him that would disqualify him from leadership. He is well known to have an unsullied reputation.
    - ... The **character of his family life** (v. 6) — he is faithful to his wife, and his children are faithful to him. The question isn’t just “is he divorced?” but “has he nurtured and cared for his wife in an exemplary fashion?” And his children should be faithful to his leadership — that is, **not wasteful and rebellious**. Even if not believers, they respect and follow him.
    - ... The **nature of what he doesn’t do** (v. 7) — in summary, he doesn’t live for himself. He is not prideful and arrogant and that is demonstrated in that he is not argumentative or combative and is not controlled by wine or money (for two examples).
    - ... The **nature of what he does** (v. 8) — he cares for people, is in control of his mind and emotions, and in summary is **devout** (holy and unstained by the world).
    - ... The **soundness of his teaching** (v. 9) — he believes and lives the Word and uses the Word to disciple and correct those under his care. His understanding of Scripture is healthy.
    - ... There is a sense in which these qualities are both extraordinary and ordinary. They are extraordinary in that who can attain these in an absolute or complete sense? And they are ordinary in that this should be the life of every man who is following Christ. This is the kind of work that the Holy Spirit does and this is what we should all be.
    - ... And this is the kind of leader the church should have whether it is here, or overseas. And if a missionary is going to do church leadership, this is the kind of man he must be.
  - 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 missions (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).

- And we 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 (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:11; **Tt. 2:3-5**; and also more general passages like Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 4:22-32; **Rom. 12:1-2ff**).
- Similarly, 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. (e.g., **Tt. 2:2, 6-8**; 1 Tim. 3:8-13; **Acts 6:3**).
- 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, 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).

- **What should missionaries DO?**

- ✓ They should be **prepared for ministry**. They must have spiritual gifting for their missionary task. And they must have adequate training, education, and preparation for the proposed ministry. 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.
- Spiritual gifting — E.g., their spiritual gifting should be evident to all (**Rom. 12:7-8**) and they use those gifts appropriately (**Rom. 12:3**). And whatever gifts they have should match the ministry to which they are being sent. (ASIDE: we ought to be having more conversations like, “You seem to be particularly gifted in this \_\_\_\_ area; have you ever considered using that gift in a missionary context?”)
- Adequate training — Disciples were with Jesus for three years and after his conversion, Paul was trained for three years in Arabia and Damascus before any public ministry (**Gal. 1:18ff**). Similarly, Timothy only became a leader after his gifting was bestowed & recognized by elders

- (1 Tim. 4:14). The point is that the missionary should be appropriately trained for his task.
- ✓ Pragmatically, each missionary should also 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.” Their passion and longing is to see people become lovers of God. They may not have the spiritual gift of evangelism but they are confident and competent evangelists.
    - They must be in agreement that the primary and principle task of missions is the work of evangelism and maturing the church and that meeting social needs is secondary. The missionary will not prioritize as part of his ministry things like job training, providing clothing or food, offering medical assistance, or similar services. They affirm that, “Evangelism is the most basic and radical ministry possible to a human being.” [Tim Keller]
  - ✓ They should be affiliated with the church.
    - Last week we noted particularly how it was churches that sent missionaries; missionaries didn’t go on their own. And that means that they missionaries must be connected with the local church. A missionary (whether they come from GBC or another church) should be actively involved in the ministry of the local church. One of our core values is “every member ministry” — every member has a gift and every member uses that gift in the context of the Body (1 Pt. 2:9). That should even more be true of the missionary.
    - Another implication of this is that the missionary (if not a GBC member) will need to come from a like-minded church and be in a like-minded ministry. 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).
    - And the missionary’s 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.

- We see an illustration of this in **3 John 8** — Because of the fact that these teachers and missionaries did not have outside sources of income (v. 7b), John makes the conclusion, **therefore, we ought to support such men.**
  - ... Notice that John includes himself in this obligation — **we**. This is the responsibility of all believers, from the apostles to every member of the church body.
  - ... The **support** John is talking about is the support of hospitality — transportation, food, lodging, and all other essential needs.
  - ... This is not new with John’s letter; this was and is the standing obligation of all believers — to care for those who preach and teach the gospel faithfully (e.g., Epaphroditus, who had worked hard and almost died for the Philippians, Phil. 2:29-30; 2 Cor. 8-9).
  - ... And then John states the blessing of supporting those missionaries — it makes the givers and the receivers **fellow workers.**
    - 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.
    - This suggests the different roles that different members in the church body have with their differing gifts (1 Cor. 12:12ff); when we all exercise our gifts, we will do so in different places and in different ways, but we all are working together to serve Christ (**1 Cor. 15:58**).
    - The giver and the receiver then are fully partners in ministry — not just “on the same team” in name, but in reality. And neither the giver nor the receiver is pre-eminent; Christ is pre-eminent.
  - ... So John is making the point in v. 8 that the church ought to support missionaries financially (more on that next week), but his point also is that there is an essential connection between the church and the missionary that binds them together as co-laborers. They are in different places with different roles, but they are engaged in the same task for the same purpose (the glory of God and the spread of the fame of God’s name to the nations).
- ✓ They should **build the church**. Building the church has always been the priority of God.
  - **Matthew 16:16-18** — Jesus came to establish the church
  - **Ephesians 4:11-16** — spiritual gifts were given for the provision of the church
  - **1 Timothy 1:3** — Timothy was left in Ephesus to protect and build the church
  - **Titus 1:5** — Titus was left in Crete in order to establish elders in the church
  - **Acts** — all the mission journeys focused on evangelism with the goal of establishing churches.
  - If building the church is God and Christ’s priority, then it should be our priority. And establishing and building churches should be the primary task of missionaries. It’s easy to become distracted by other tasks; most missionaries could do compassion ministry every day. But if we do that we are in danger of sending people to Hell with full stomachs. We want to make sure we are not sacrificing the important on the altar of the urgent.

**CONCLUSION:** What happens when people remember their priorities and responsibilities in missions? Historian and theologian Nathan Busenitz has noted the progression of the gospel through missions from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until today ([“The Contagious Chain of Missionary Zeal”](#)):

1. John Elliott (1604–1690) was a Puritan settler in New England who began evangelizing the native Americans. Known as the “apostle to the Indians,” he translated the Bible into their native language, helped to establish churches, and sparked a missionary zeal among Christian settlers in the New World.

2. That missionary spirit inspired men like David Brainerd (1718–1747) to similarly devote his life to reaching native American Indians with the good news of the gospel.

3. Though Brainerd died at only 29 years of age, his friend Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) was so impressed by the young missionary’s passion that he edited Brainerd’s diary and published it...

4. In 1785, an English shoe cobbler named William Carey (1761–1834) read a copy of *An Account of the Life of the Late Rev. David Brainerd* by Jonathan Edwards. The book had a profound impact on Carey’s thinking, igniting a passion in his heart to take the gospel to India. William Carey left for India in 1793 and the modern missions movement was born.

5. In 1802, a British preacher named Charles Simeon (1759–1836) was speaking about the good that William Carey was doing in India. Upon hearing that message, a young man in the congregation named Henry Martyn (1781–1812) determined that he too would go to India, rather than going to law school.

6. Martyn died young. Yet his memoirs influenced many in England. In particular, his biography had a significant impact on Anthony Norris Groves (1795–1853), who is considered by some to be the “father of faith missions.”

7. In 1825, Groves published a short booklet entitled *Christian Devotedness*, in which he encouraged Christians to live frugally, trust God for their needs, and devote the bulk of their income to evangelism efforts around the world. That book had a major impact on the thinking of men like George Müller..., and James Hudson Taylor... — significantly shaping the way they thought about missions.

8. Hudson Taylor was the first modern missionary to penetrate the interior of China. He established the China Inland Mission and recruited hundreds of missionaries to join in evangelistic efforts there. At one point, Taylor returned to England where he urged Christian young people to join him in China. A famous Cambridge cricket player named C. T. Studd (1860–1931) was among those profoundly affected by Taylor’s preaching. Studd left behind a life of leisure to serve Christ overseas. Six other students joined Studd and together they became known as “The Cambridge Seven.”

9. The publicity garnered by C. T. Studd and “The Cambridge Seven” in England—especially their influence in British universities—influenced the beginnings of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (started in 1886) in North America. Under the leadership of men like D. L. Moody (1837–1899) and Arthur T. Pierson (1837–1911) (the author of George Müller’s biography), hundreds of American students would join the volunteer movement and commit themselves to foreign missionary work.

10. The testimony of Hudson Taylor was also particularly influential in the lives of later missionaries like Amy Carmichael (1867–1951), Eric Liddell (1902–1945), and Jim Elliot (1927–1956).

And on it goes. The chain of John Elliott to Jim Elliott is a 350-year chain that was kept because churches and people remember the biblical priorities and responsibilities in missions. May we do the same.