




Editor's Note

This past week my wife has been in the hospital recovering from hip surgery. Yesterday, three dear friends appeared at the door of her room for a visit. They brought hugs, a smile, a rose, and the question, "How can we pray for you?" I mentioned the need for a sister to sit with her for an hour now and then. After a short prayer they left. What a blessing!

Later, one sent me a text saying, "I have some time; I'll sit with Ruth tomorrow."

She is there with Ruth now, which frees me up to write for ESN. I smiled as I thought that the Lord was there in the room with us when those friends arrived. If someone asked them about their visit, they might say, "Oh, we visited the Lord Jesus...Ruth was also there!" "I was sick and ye visited me..." (Matt. 25:36). Do you know someone who is sick or lonely and would love to see a smile? Visit the Lord Jesus...and them. It's part of elders' shepherding work (James 5:14). 

Biblical Principles: Elders and Missions

Step 6: Caring for your Missionaries

by Jim Fleming

This series of articles is designed to stimulate our leaders to reignite a mission vision in our assemblies, based on biblically-based practical applications of missions in this third millennium. Step 1 was "Elders, Keep Missions on your Radar." Step 2: "Sending out Missionaries the Bible Way," from Acts 13. Step 3 introduced "The Mission Mandate Morphing." Step 4 illustrated "The Jungles of Missions are Different Today," and Step 5 discussed "The Missionaries & their Elders."

In Step 6 I want to emphasize the biblical relationship of the elders to their missionaries now that they are trained, commended and on the field. Some of your missionaries are in their first term and going through "teething" experiences in their new culture. Others have been on the field so long that they struggle to relate to the American culture now. The missionary has been "commended to the grace of God" (Acts 14:23). A significant part of that grace is extended to the missionary by the Lord through the care, counsel, and guidance of the commending elders and assembly body.

Caring for material needs

One of Paul's purposes in writing the letter to the Philippian believers was a thank-you for their material support. Philipians 4:10-19 starts with, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity." Verse 18 concludes, "But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you

have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God." But there is another side to giving. "Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account" (v. 16). "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (v. 19). Giving is biblical. Giving is needed to support the worker. Giving is an act of worship that ultimately does the giver as much spiritual good as the receiver.

Caring for the young missionary

Care starts before commendation by challenging your young people to consider missions from the time they are in middle school. Then, sense who the Lord might be calling into missionary service, and give them opportunities for service, practically and spiritually, in the assembly. Training, encouraging, counseling, helping them get the right schooling and making sure they are prepared before being sent out are all part of the preparatory care.

Reread Step 2, "Sending out missionaries the Bible Way," for the next stage. But once on the field, the young missionary needs extra care. They are suddenly facing some of the biggest changes and challenges of their lives, and if quite young, without the experience and maturity to handle them well: culture clashes, language study discipline and fatigue, home-sickness (perhaps with pregnancy adding to hormone swings), nagging illnesses until their bodies grow the necessary anti-bodies, new food, new driving habits, new paperwork demands, new, new, new...!

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In any setting, a contented Christian is a work of grace. Scripture tells us, “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6). Money cannot buy it! Contentment begins in the heart, and a person who is discontent in their private life will never be a contented saint in the assembly. So how does a Bible-based Christian church encourage the development of heart-contentment in the life of its people? Good question!

We can be tempted to say that because it’s a work of God’s grace, we must wait for God to bestow it. But like most other Christian virtues, it’s really a matter of balance between God’s work and human responsibility.

One dictionary defines the word *content* as, “a state of satisfaction.” Another says, “pleased and satisfied.” The Greek word used in 1 Tim. 6:6 literally means “self-satisfied.” Not satisfied with self, but rather in a good sense as satisfied with its lot; satisfied with who we are, and what God has given us. Albert Barnes says the word “refers to a state of mind; a calm and satisfied feeling; a freedom from murmuring and complaining...a mind acquiescing in the allotments of life.”

How important is it?

Most people experience feelings of discontent on occasion...so are we making too much of the subject? Here’s a thought question. How many dissatisfied saints does it take to sour the fellowship of a local church? In 1 Cor. 12, Paul compares the body of Christ to the human body. “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it” (v. 26). Think of your own body. Does it take more than one finger or toe crushed, more than one tooth aching to disturb the harmony and function of your body? Isn’t it true that all the healthy parts join in the hurt of the one that’s affected? Maybe some work is still getting done, but usually both the quantity and quality are lowered, and both the joy and satisfaction of fellowship are disrupted.

The Basics and Beyond

One could make a long list of all the contributing factors to a contented life, what we call the basics of Christian living. Getting to know our spiritual family requires knowing the saints in greater detail than we might know our next-door neighbors. Has one been born from above and now indwelt by the Spirit of God? Is time spent regularly in the Word and prayer? Is fellowship with other like-minded believers a priority? Are folks living in obedience to God’s commands? Do they view those in spiritual authority as “God’s appointed ministers”? Do they believe and rejoice in God’s sovereign work in the world and in the lives of His people? How committed are Christians to the truth of Romans 8:28? These and many other factors are involved in becoming a truly contented believer, and hopefully the place where we enjoy regular fellowship is encouraging us in all the above.

But speaking more directly to elders and Christian workers for a moment, the thought on one hand that I am responsible to make all the above come alive in every person in the assembly...well, that’s daunting, and quite frankly unrealistic. But on the other hand loving leadership would want to do more than just “keep the meetings going,” or as one old brother put it, “if they get it, they’ll grow, if not they’ll probably leave.”

What, then, are some of areas to which elders can give diligence to cooperate with God’s work of building contentment in the hearts of those under their care?

Speaking Practically

To begin with, church elders must be convinced of the importance of this subject, that it affects every area of church life: how teaching is received; the joy of fellowship; the warmth of Spirit-led worship; the unity necessary for answered prayer; the Lord’s blessing on witness and outreach in the community. If true, then practical steps can

follow. Let me suggest several areas for reflection and thoughtful prayer, not as rules or legalism, but only some broad areas to stimulate discussion.

(1) The Christian assembly is a Christ-centered, living body. It doesn’t just reap the benefits of contentment, but contributes to it as part of growing spiritual maturity. Honoring NT assembly principles is not optional; these things were written for our learning.

(2) Elders must know the state of their flock (Prov. 27:23), which means knowing the people in the flock. Hospitality (them in our homes), and visitation (we in their homes) are the crucial ingredients.

(3) Practice clear communication. This is especially important for those who lead. Young people and visitors will naturally have questions about the Bible ministry and why do we do what we do. Why do we exist? What’s our mission? Listening skills, approachability, openness should all have a place.

(4) The importance of solid Bible teaching; the goal of Bible ministry is spiritual maturity, not entertainment. Faithful exposition of the Scriptures and doctrines are food for the inner man. Even difficult subjects like clearing up relationship problems (Matt. 5:23, 18:15) must be covered at appropriate times.

(5) Be careful of age or culture barriers: it is normal for people to develop relationships with others with whom they share things in common. But cliques can form and mar the healthy interactions between older and younger and between those from other cultures.

(6) Identify and deal with bitterness. Hebrews 12:15 is emphatic that this is not a subject to be treated casually. A person with a bitter root can trouble an entire assembly and draw many out of fellowship. Diligence on the part of elders is required!


(7) Model and celebrate contentment. The Lord Jesus was a contented Person (John 14:27), and Paul the

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Contentment

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apostle who suffered much learned this grace (Phil. 4:11). Elders and mature saints can set an example here, and blessed is the assembly where contented believers and their deeds are honored as worthy examples.

What joy it must bring to the heart of the Savior when a new believer is told by a friend: “Now come...you must meet the family!” All the evangelistic programs and methods will not succeed if the bitterness of the world also characterizes the church. May we seek refuge in the God of peace, and manifest the Lord’s contentment to others in the church. 

Missions (cont’d from page 1)

Care suggestions: (1) Assign one elder per missionary family to be their key caregiver. Video call regularly every two weeks. Listen to their hearts. Ask probing questions. Make sure they have the practical, emotional, and spiritual support they need for that month and stage. Encourage, but also exhort. It’s biblical: “And we exhort you, brothers and sisters: warn those who are idle, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” (1 Thes. 5:14).

(2) Additionally, get the missionary family on a projected video call with the whole assembly every 2 or 3 months; alternate Sunday mornings for 3 minutes during your service; Wednesday evenings at the missionary evening; at-home Bible studies; and other creative times and ways to keep the relationship vibrant with the assembly. Yes, they may have to get up at 1 a.m. to match your time zone, but they are young, and the relationship benefit makes the hours of lost sleep well worth it.

(3) Build it into the church budget to send one elder and his wife, or another mature couple, to visit at least one of your missionaries every year. Ideally, each missionary gets a visit each year, but that may not be practicable.

Caring through crisis

If you elders have a loving relationship with your missionaries, they will have the confidence and openness to come to you when there are crises over the years. Missionaries face the same challenges as your assembly’s families.

Teenage rebellion may be even more common for missionary kids. If Satan cannot bring down the mission work or get at the missionaries’ marriage, then he goes after the children. Are you elders alert to that with your workers? Is your relationship honest and intimate enough for the missionary to share the struggles they are having with their children at all ages?

Mid-life stagnation—or it could be a full-blown mid-life crisis—is not uncommon. Missionaries are not immune. Are you sufficiently in tune with them to diagnose the symptoms? What will you counsel in these cases? How will you go about it? What happens if sin is involved?

Broken relationships with fellow workers or the national leadership disrupt the work. You need to think through a process of how to find the balanced truth. You cannot only hear the perspective of and take the side of your worker. Missionaries can be wrong too.

Discipline—now there is an outmoded word. But biblical discipline is positive. It is the application of biblical truth that keeps us on the right path, the path of righteousness. “No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way” (Heb 12:11 NLT). Discipline includes helping your worker in areas in which he or she may be struggling: good use of time, budgeting finances (no, you don’t fly back to the USA 2–3 times a year for family events), child rearing issues, control of their digital devices, dealing with helicopter parents who are not letting them go. (I know young married women whose mothers call them three, four, five times a day!) That’s not healthy, especially for a young couple

struggling to love and adopt their new culture while fighting homesickness.


The list above is just the tip of the iceberg of the missionary crisis and hurt list. The rest is your homework to know and help your missionary through.

Caring over the long-haul

The long-haul may comprise 50 or 60 years of care! It may span two or three generations of elders! The missionaries may be older and far more tenured than the commending elders in the latter years of their career. That could create some frictions or withdrawal of care by newer, intimidated elders. But it should not. If the care has been constant and committed over the years, the elder-veteran missionary relationship will transfer and continue to be a delightful friendship that is now more like a son-father closeness, where the missionary may be supporting and assisting the elders emotionally and spiritually more than the assembly is to the missionary.

A relationship of that depth makes dealing with the older-missionary issues much easier: who decides when the missionary transitions back to the homeland, or can they live out their life on the field? Is the assembly just as committed to the elderly couple who can no longer “produce” but still have financial needs? They may not have any retirement program if the elders didn’t help them think through that 40 years ago!

Caring Conclusion

Elders, you are privileged and responsible to care for your commended workers as much as—and maybe with more investment of time and digital contact than those who attend the Assembly. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and its inhabitants just before His death, crying: “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matt. 23:37). Elders, may your loving concern for your missionaries be of that depth. Missionaries, the last word is for you. The Jews would not respond to Jesus’ care. Will you respond to your elders’ care? 

“Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name.”
—Psalm 29:2a

I am enamored with the topic of the glory of God. It is a topic greater than I can understand and deeper than I can fathom, yet I am fascinated by it and want to continue to learn more.

Glory is the shining forth of the Person and character of God. The beauty of His being and the wonder of His works are all wrapped up in His glory. Vine says the Hebrew word *kabod* is “honor; great quantity; multitude; wealth; reputation [majesty]; splendor.” It refers to the great physical weight or “quantity” of a thing. Strong’s definition for *glory* in the New Testament is “giving a good opinion concerning one, resulting in praise, honor, and glory.” John 7:18 tells us, “He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.”

The Old Testament speaks of the glory of the LORD in the cloud that followed Israel through the wilderness (Ex. 16:10 and rested on Mount Sinai at the giving of the law (Ex. 24:16).

Moses asked to see the glory of the LORD, (Ex. 33:18-23), yet the Lord would only allow Moses to see His glory from His back after having passed by Moses, “for you cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live” (Ex. 33:20).

The book of Ezekiel opens with the prophet falling on his face having seen the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD (Ezk. 1:28). Near the end of the book, he again falls on his face having seen the glory of the LORD fill the house of the LORD (Ezk. 44:4).

In the New Testament we see God’s glory in the person of the Lord Jesus. John tells us, “we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Though the multitudes rejoiced in all the glorious things that were done by Jesus (Luke 13:17), still the Savior, the Lord of glory, was crucified by the rulers of this age (1 Cor. 2:8). Now the “glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim. 1:11) is preached throughout the world calling all mankind to repent and believe.

All these things amaze me. But I am deeply humbled when I read that man is the image of the glory of God

and that woman is the glory of man (1 Cor. 11:7). Likewise, God has given women our own personal glory in long hair (1 Cor. 11:15). Yet these glories are not to be exalted above the glory of God. Rather, as we cover our heads (v. 5), we symbolically cover the glory of man as well as our own personal glory (v. 15).

In these obedient actions God’s glory alone is seen in the local church and the angels see that we are willing to do what Lucifer himself was not willing to do as the covering cherub (Ezk. 28:14,16). This is an honorable and blessed position for women to have. We may not be called to speak in the local church (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11) but we have been called to silently speak this message of obedience to the angels (1 Cor. 11:10) who marvel and learn from us the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 3:10).

LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells.
— Psalm 26:8 —



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