



## Editor's Note

Some time ago, I heard this statement: “Christian leaders can become more pragmatic than principled.” What do you think of that? Principled means committed to truth even when it’s not popular. Pragmatic has been described this way: “We need to get the job done, so we use what works.” This latter has often become the guiding star in business and politics. How about in the church? Elders can become so busy that pressures to compromise increase. This is just another reason

to stay in the Word!

As Moses told Joshua, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Joshua 1:8 KJV) We might paraphrase the first part of the verse, “This book of God’s principles.” Yes, we need to get the job done, but not at the expense of truth!



## Biblical Principles: Elders & Missions

### Step 6: The Person Perspective of Missions by Jim Fleming

This short series is designed to reignite a mission vision in our assemblies, encouraging you elders to not only obey the commission of the Lord (Matt. 28:18-20), but also to continue to expand what the Brethren are best known for in this world: our inordinate impact on world missions in comparison to the size of our sending church force. Compared to our relatively small size in numbers of congregations, the Lord has chosen to use our mission force to do a work that is recognized on the international mission scene as very significant, for His glory. The world is changing, and our prayer is that the Brethren mission impact continues to grow and offer the world what it needs: salvation in Jesus Christ!

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*. Step 5 discussed *The Missionaries & Their Elders* and Step 6 flipped the coin to the topic: *Caring for your Missionaries*. In Step 7 we will conclude our short series on elders and missions by bringing us back to the basics and fundamentals of missions. Shouldn't the title be “The Personal Perspective of Missions”? The concept of *personal* is correct, but the thesis of my concluding step in this series focuses on three persons paramount in mission work.

#### Person 1: Jesus Christ the Lord

Cliché as it sounds, Jesus is paramount to all of missions. He is the purpose for missions. He is the commissioner of mis-

sions. He is the miracle of missions. He is the enabler of missions. He is the reason for missions. He is the completer of missions. Without Christ central in our mission mandate and strategy, we have no fundamental purpose for what we do.

Elders, all of this is encompassed in the reality that Jesus is the Message of our Mission Mandate. Paul practiced it: “For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:22-23 CSB) There are innumerable distractions in the spiritual milieu of ideas and discussions. For the Jews in the first century, they were “signs.” For the existential Greeks, “wisdom.” But Paul kept his message focused on the only answer there is to all of life’s spiritual dilemmas: “When I came to you, brothers and sisters, announcing the mystery of God to you, I did not come with brilliance of speech or wisdom. I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:1-2 CSB).

Nothing—except Jesus Christ. His message was not a super-hero series. No, it was focused on Who Christ is, based on What He did for us: “and Him crucified.” Those three words summarize the multiplicity of subjects that come out of the centrality of preaching Christ crucified. The subjects of sin, human nature, the deity of Jesus, the substitutionary death of Christ, His resurrection from the dead to bring us regenerative life, just

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Many Christian churches are small, and some are dwindling. Some have closed their doors. Others seem alive and well, and some are growing. But most would admit that they'd welcome growth by seeing more people come to the Lord, rather than just transferring in from other groups. It's a healthy desire! What is your church doing to reach people?

Let's spend a few minutes thinking about this word *outreach* as it pertains to winning lost souls in the world for Christ. Before we proceed, let me challenge you to check your ability to hear something that may be new to you. Are you like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), who searched the Scriptures to see if what they had been told was true? Or are you better described by the old saying, "My mind is made up; don't confuse me with the facts"?

The dictionaries offer some helpful definitions for the word *outreach*—that is, beyond the obvious meaning, "to reach out." I like this one: "Outreach: an effort to bring services or information to people where they live." Simply stated, reaching out involves effort, and brings what's needed to people rather than waiting for them to come looking for help. If you're thinking of the gospel, you're on the right track. But let's go a little further.

I'd like to suggest that the word *outreach* is a very useful word for four reasons, and therefore we might need to be talking more about it in our local congregations. We'll follow a simple outline, showing that "Outreach" is a good word because it:

- Follows God's example
- Follows the example of the earliest Christians
- Includes all believers
- Safeguards a precious doctrinal truth

#### Outreach Follows God's Example

We don't have to read far in Scripture before we encounter lost people. Adam and Eve sinned and found them-

selves separated from God. According to Genesis 3:8-9 they were hiding, but God took the initiative and came looking for them. As the first outreach in the Bible, it must be more than simply an historical note. Actually, it gives insight into all future forms of outreach; namely, that the lost don't go looking for salvation. They hide. And in keeping with the definition, the one who takes initiative to seek them expends effort and goes to where they are.

When the Lord Jesus came to "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21) He described His mission this way: "The son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), a fitting parallel to the Genesis 3 record! Would this same mindset be passed on to His followers, the disciples? Indeed! Appearing to them after His resurrection, He told them, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). That is, "In the very same way that the Father sent me, that's the way I'm sending you."

*"Outreach: an effort to bring services or information to people where they live."*

Thus, we see that our efforts to bring information out to those in need is following the pattern established at the beginning and carried on by the Lord Himself. This is outreach. Are we expending any effort in following what has been called, "The missionary heart of God"?

#### Outreach Follows the Example of the Earliest Christians

Before He returned to heaven, the Lord gave His disciples clear instructions or marching orders. The accounts in the gospels use slightly different wording, but a common thread runs through them all using words like "go" and "sent." In Matthew we read, "Go

ye therefore and disciple all nations" (Matt. 28:19). Mark says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15). This command became known in the church as the Great Commission. Within the word *commission* is the word *mission*, and *mission* means "sent for a purpose."

Continuing into the book of Acts, we find something interesting. While Acts 1:8 extends the commission out to "the uttermost part of the earth," the disciples at first seemed content to remain in Jerusalem, and the church grew mightily. But God allowed persecution to break out so that we soon read, "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

That is, the early Christians quickly learned that a key word in the Great Commission, "Go," was to be taken literally; and the gospel would be spread through outreach rather than by guarding it in a place of personal comfort, hoping that people in need would come looking for it. That highlights the "effort" part of outreach.

#### Outreach Includes All Believers

The word of choice to describe those who have a personal testimony is *witness*. It's a noun, something you are, rather than a verb, something that you do. The Greek word is linked to the word *martyr*, because many paid with their lives for the word of their testimony. It's interesting to note the emphasis on this word in the early chapters of Acts, occurring in every one of the first 7 chapters. Since every believer has had a personal encounter with Christ, all are witnesses, all have a unique story—their personal testimony. The real question is not so much, "Are you witnessing?" but, "Is your testimony active or dormant?"

So what does a witness do? It would be hard to find a better explanation than 1 Peter 3:15, where all believers are admonished to be ready to give an answer to everyone that asks a


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reason of the hope that they have. This is illustrated today in a court of law where a witness is called on to provide information in the case being tried. So we can say that in general, a witness responds when questioned.

Some believers, though certainly not all, have a gift called “evangelist” (Eph. 4:11). We see this illustrated by Philip in Acts chapter 8. Philip goes to a desolate area, encounters a man riding along in his chariot, and skillfully initiates a conversation. This is in

notable contrast to the witness. The witness responds; the evangelist initiates. Of course these are not hard and fast rules, but only helpful ways to understand the difference. Anyone may “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5), but the point is: either way, Christians have a mission or commission, and a good word to describe what they do is *outreach*. Everyone can participate.

So far, we have seen that this word *outreach* follows God’s example in reaching out to those who are lost; it

follows the example of the earliest Christians as they went everywhere bringing good news from God to those who were lost. And then we found the word useful as a general term to describe what all who are involved in mission do, whether they answer questions as witnesses or initiate conversations as evangelists. Next time, we’ll conclude with a fourth way this word is useful, by helping to safeguard a precious doctrinal truth. 

## Missions (continued from page 1)

scratch the surface of all the doctrinal truths Paul teaches his audiences to this day, focusing on that paramount Person of missions—Jesus Christ!

Elders, it is your responsibility to profoundly prepare your future missionaries to know the Message, and to know what your current missionaries have as their primary message based on the focus of their mission work. Is there perhaps a need to facilitate further theological education for your mission workers to improve their ability to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified?

### Person 2: The Missionary

Jesus Christ can only do His work, build His church and glorify Himself if He has spiritually healthy body parts: person two, the missionary. Paul knew this, so he dedicates two letters, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to focus on the person who was to replace him, Timothy. Among Paul’s multiple instructions and injunctions, this one is key: “But have nothing to do with pointless and silly myths. Rather, train yourself in godliness. For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Tim. 4:7-8 CSB). Elders, train your workers what to avoid (4:7). Check on your workers overseas to make sure they are not getting caught up in what Paul calls “limited benefit” (4:8). Do they have a self-disciplined regimen

of spiritual growth practices? Are they godly? Are they growing in godliness? What does that look like? What “holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” in their personal, family and ministry lives? Is their doctrine biblical? Every interpretive practice of Scripture does not need to be a clone of what is practiced in the commending assembly, but are the elders aware of these differences and accept them as such?


Spiritual worker, Paul’s exhortation continues for you at the end of the same chapter: “Pay close attention to your life and your teaching; persevere in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4:16 CSB). If Person 2 is not spiritually sensitive and mature, Person 1 does not have “a worker who doesn’t need to be ashamed” (2 Tim. 2:15). That takes us back to *Step 6: Elders, Care for your Missionaries*. Thank you!

### Person 3: The Group in Focus

Jesus really only gave us one thing to do in His mission strategy: “go and make disciples” (Matt. 28:19). Yes, these four words also precipitate innumerable other issues, topics, strategies, methodologies, investment, and even the extreme of martyrdom. But the point of the Lord Jesus is that the focus of our mission mandate is the person. Jesus Christ died for each and every person ever born. He does not want any person to be lost (2 Peter 3:9). So, hav-

ing accomplished our great salvation, having saved us, He now sends us out with His message with one clear focus: the salvation of each person.

In the “how to” of making disciples, there are many different practical aspects that utilize the talents and spiritual gifting of the whole Body of Christ. But whether you are the missionary pilot, the correspondence school office manager, the digital technician for the mission center, or the wife raising children on the mission field, Person 3 is the focus of your reason for being on the front lines. All that is planned, imported, built, developed, invested in, requiring teams and expertise and huge human effort should have Person 3 as the reason, the focus, the end goal. If our team effort does not produce disciples, what are we going to tell the Lord about our life mission on the day our life’s work gets tested by God’s fire (1 Cor. 3:5-15)?

Person 1—Jesus Christ—regenerates Person 2—you and me—to make disciples of Person 3. Missions is that simple and it is that complicated. Elders, you have the joyful responsibility of keeping missions alive and active both in the local congregation as well as to “all nations” (Matt. 28:19). It takes a whole lot more spiritual investment than these seven Steps, but maybe they will be a match in the hand of God to ignite a brighter flame of world mission vision in our assemblies, for His glory. 

## Wives' Corner

**Priorities** by Marsha Blair

I have often struggled with setting priorities in my life, and I don't think I'm alone. When I was younger, it was my husband, our son, our jobs. Now that my husband and I are retired and our son is married and has a family of his own, those priorities have shifted.


Sometimes it's hard to find time to spend with the Lord in the midst of all the busyness of this life. It seems that life is getting more complicated instead of less so, with many more distractions than in times past. My phone and other such devices can be a stumbling block for me, and perhaps for you as well. While it is a very helpful tool, especially in my quiet time as I listen to Alexander Scourby read the Scriptures, I have to be careful not to let it distract me from my main purpose, which is to take time alone in the Word and with the Lord.

A verse that has been a great help to me in setting daily priorities is "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). When I do this, it makes it easier for me to keep my focus where it belongs. When interruptions come, I try

*When interruptions come, I try to evaluate them in light of this verse: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness"*

to evaluate them in light of this verse, and set aside those things that don't need immediate attention. I keep a note pad with me as I have my quiet time, and when thoughts intrude I write them down to address later. It doesn't always keep me from getting distracted, but it does help. I have a quote from Hudson Taylor in the front of my Bible, and have found it to be so true: "Satan will always find you something to do when you ought to be occupied with the Lord, if it is only arranging a window blind."

I also need to be open to the Lord's "interruptions" in my day. Whether in my quiet time or as the day unfolds, there are times when He brings people or situations into my life that need my attention. Sometimes it is a "still small voice," or

what I call a nudge, that directs me to contact someone or do something that wasn't on my priority list for the day. Will I obey, or will I be so focused on my own plans that I disobey His voice? I have learned that I need to listen and respond with alacrity to Him. I well remember one day when I was prompted to go help a young mother with a new baby and several other young children get ready for the ladies' Bible study that morning. I made all kinds of excuses in my head, even after another nudge to go, and eventually I decided not to go. When I arrived, the lady who led the study was absent, which surprised me because she was always the first one there. When I asked where she was, I was told that she was helping the new mother get herself and her children ready for Bible study. I had disobeyed, and missed the blessing that the Lord meant for me, and also missed out on blessing that new mother in her time of need. I have not forgotten that incident, and have asked the Lord to help me remember, and to obey, and to have—not *my* priorities—but the priorities that *He* has arranged for me. 

### THE SMALL PRINT

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Note: All words referring to God have the initial letter capitalized. While the original languages of the Bible do not use capitalization, this is the convention in some translations but not in others. So at times there may be inconsistencies in usage in ESN articles.

"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers" 1 Peter 5:2a NKJV