

## **PROFILE OF A SENDING CHURCH**

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I grew up in a church that was very interested and involved in missions. At least we thought they were. Every few years, a missionary would come through and talk about his great exploits, the amazing works of God through his life. When he left, we all said, "Good-bye." So I grew up thinking that there were two categories of mission involvement: Those who go and those who say, "Good-bye." It wasn't until I was an adult and started reading the Bible on my own that I realized that Paul, a first century missionary did more than tell of his exploits. He asked for care. And he asked for care in six different areas.

### **Serving As Senders**

In Romans 10:13-15, Paul established the scope of the missions process. He first stated the goal of all mission endeavor: "*Whoever calls upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved.*" Then in a series of four questions, he brought a focus to both the missionary and those who serve as senders. "How can they call on Him unless they believe? How can they believe unless they have heard? How can they hear unless there is a preacher?" There is his appeal for the missionary, the cross-cultural worker, the one who goes. But in this sequence of questions, Paul asks one more: "*And how can he preach unless he is sent?*" This question opens up that whole other dimension of mission involvement: Serving as senders.

Paul appeals to those of us in the Church who believe that God has called us to stay home as clearly as He has called the missionaries to go. Both are to be involved in His global plan, that out of every nation, out of every tribe, out of every tongue, out of every people, there will be those before His throne worshipping Him for all eternity. He has allowed each of us to be part of that plan—not only those who go but also those of us who serve as senders. In that it was the final question in Paul's use of the Grecian gap-less linear logic form of reasoning, he was declaring that those who serve as senders are foundational to the missions process. In a book titled *Serving As Senders: How to Care for Your Missionaries*, thoughts on this whole other dimension of missions has circled the globe in many languages.

### **The Mission of the Church**

Jesus was a Master of simplicity. (He was not simplistic.) In His style of pulling simplicity out of the most knotty issue (See Matthew 22:17 regarding taxes.), I would suggest that the existence of the Church could be expressed in three phrases.

- The LIFE of the Church is WORSHIP—not only the hymns and choruses we sing, but all that is encompassed by the reality that our spirits are alive in God through Jesus Christ.
- The GROWTH of the Church is NURTURE—from the Sunday morning sermons to our personal meditation on every Word of God.
- The MISSION of the Church is OUTREACH—preaching the Good News and making disciples of all men.

Through Luke's record, Christ gave us His global parameters: In our hometown, joining with others in regional ministry, taking this Life-giving news to the "Samaritans", the "unloveables" of our world, and to the ends of the earth.

I believe that one of the reasons why God did not zap us into eternal glory the second we trusted in Christ as Savior is because He has given a mission to the Church. We are here for a purpose. He has privileged us to be part of His calling in those who are to be saved. In Psalm 46: 10 the Psalmist David spoke God's words, "Be still and know that I am God." And that is all some people remember of that verse. However, He goes on to express His sovereignty: "I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in all the earth." It is going to happen. But the question is: Are we going to be part of it? And that's the privilege that He has given us. As with Esther so many years ago, Cousin Mort said, "Esther, who knows but that for such an hour as this you have been called to the kingdom? Salvation will come. God will save His people. Are you going to be a part of it?"

And I believe that if we would listen carefully, we would hear those same words echoing down through the corridors of time: You have been called to the Kingdom for an hour such as this—to participate in God's great plan of bringing into His kingdom men and women from every tongue, tribe, nation and people. To fulfill this great commission—this mission of the Church—requires a missionary force made up of those who go and those who serve as senders.

### **A FIRST CENTURY MODEL**

There is a first century church that provides a model for becoming a strong sending church. We want to discover what was the nature of this church. What were its distinctives? How did the community view them? We will look at a checklist of 22 characteristics that were growing and developing in this church that produced such a strong sending church.

Now I realize that a few of the leadership of the Jerusalem church had had some short-term cross-cultural experience. Peter had been summoned to the house of Cornelius; Philip had had his Ethiopian eunuch experience. But it was not until the persecution that arose after the martyrdom of Stephen that longer-term missionaries left that church. In fact, numbers as high as 20,000 are thought to have been disbursed. Scripture says that only the Apostles remained in Jerusalem.

But I trust that your church and mine do not want to wait until persecution hits before we are scattered throughout the world! So, rather than using the church at Jerusalem as our model, we want to look at one of the churches that was birthed in that dispersion. Our study begins in Acts, Chapter 11: Stephen has been martyred. Saul, a zealous young Pharisee, is given letters by the High Priest to round up the followers of this Man, Christ Jesus—to bind them in prison or sentence them to death. Verse 19 tells us that some of those disbursed went as far as Antioch in Syria. However, when they got there they preached the Word to the Jews only. They sought out their own. They were planting a mono-cultural church.

Missionaries today can go to a foreign country and not be involved in cross-cultural ministry. They can seek out their own kind, remaining in a very mono-cultural environment. They can create a compound to which the nationals are not invited, nor welcome.

Evolving from such practices are the rumored horror stories of boiling the natives to use their oil to fuel the missionary's airplane.

### Local Cross-Cultural Outreach

But now look at verse 20: *“And when some other leaders came from Cypress and Cyrene, they preached Jesus Christ to the Grecians.”* There is only one message that will bring people to repentance: Jesus Christ is our salvation. We must make sure that whatever is our entrée to the listeners, we preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, buried and risen (I Corinthians 15:3-4). But to whom did they preach this message of Life? To the Grecians. They stepped across the distinctives of language and culture.

A church that is going to be involved in God's great plan needs to be involved in what I call local cross-cultural outreach ministry, where you have to deliberately cross cultural distinctives in order to minister the Gospel. Now when you're in the store and somebody from another culture who has only been here a week or so is in the line in front of you and they still haven't figured out how to deal with money, you're going to be kind to them, I trust, and not take their money but help them—show them that these are pennies, these are the nickels, etc. Unfortunately, we have seen clerks who have been just utterly nasty to them. What a sad thing. But your involvement there is just random, chance cross-cultural kindness. What we're talking about is deliberately getting involved in the lives of internationals who have moved into “your” neighborhood and are maintaining their cultural distinctives.

Do you know there are at least nine different categories of nationals that are living right among you? Whether you live in a thriving metropolis or if you are nestled in a sleepy hollow, God has brought the internationals of the world to the doorstep of every church, every neighborhood. And that's not nine different nationalities, but nine different categories of internationals that are living among you. Consider these and see if you might want to get involved in what we call local cross-cultural ministry. Who are these groups of people living among us?

1) **International Students.** You certainly have junior and senior high schools, junior colleges, community colleges and possibly universities in your community. Countries are sending internationals students even in junior high schools where you can have as little contact with them as just being friends all the way to hosting them in your home.

2) **International Visitors.** They may be in your sphere of influence for just a day, but how long does it take to sow a Seed of God's love?

3) **International Business People; Diplomats.** It certainly requires the creative genius of God to discover ways to influence these people with the Love of Christ, but it is possible.

4) **Illegal Aliens.** When we in America think of illegal aliens, the first groups of people that come to our minds are those who cross our southern border from Mexico and other Central American countries. And they do come through that very porous border. However, the largest group of illegals in America is not made up of those who risk their lives at that point of entry. The largest group of illegals who live among us are people who came in legally on a tourist or student visa and....they just didn't go home! They may be living in your neighborhood without your knowing they are here illegally. As long as

our government requires no exit visas and doesn't check up on them, they are here. What a ministry we can have to illegal aliens of all nationalities.

5) **Ethnic Communities.** Those who have come legally but still remain ethnically separated. They move into their own neighborhood, maintaining their language and culture. Shops and stores begin displaying their names and advertisements in languages foreign to us. We, the church, must deliberately build a bridge across those distinctives to carry the Good News of a risen Savior to them.

6) **Relocating Refugees.** Though the spotlight of media attention has been turned off, there are more displaced people in the world today than ever before. The inhumanity of people against people—from “ethnic cleansing” to persecution of Christians—yields stories of shattered lives. Only the healing salve of a merciful God will restore a hope in these people. And who better than the Church of Jesus Christ to do it?

7) **International Military.** Here for a very brief time, they are learning war. How great it would be to share with them the peace that only comes from the Prince of Peace.

8) **International Seamen.** They ply the seas, a lonely bunch they are. A rough bunch, too, for the most part, no doubt. But He came to rescue the lonely and rough. So can we.

9) **Missionary Kids.** Children of career missionaries might carry a passport of their parents' home country, but they are internationals. They were raised in another country, and when they come “home” they are expected to be like the kids who grew up here. But they aren't. And they can't! They are Third Culture Kids and they need the care of the Church when they come “home.”

People in each of these categories need a little bit different kind of ministry focus as they are living among us. (We wrote a 12-essay series on this subject titled, *Internationals Who Live Among Us*. It is available on our website: [www.eri.org](http://www.eri.org).)

Back to our Scripture, we find in Acts 11:20 that they began ministering cross-culturally in their own hometown. I believe that is one of the characteristics that helps us look at the Antioch church as a model for us today.

### **First Called “Christian” in Antioch**

In verse 26 of Chapter 11, we find a second characteristic: “*And they were first called Christians in Antioch.*” This one is more difficult to discern because it takes some real soul searching to know if this is true of me and true of my church. In the last several decades of the 20th century, the word Christian had kind of a respectable ring to it. But its acceptance is again on a decline. Christians are more and more facing unprecedented persecution. Those who gather such statistics say that more Christians died for their faith in the 20th century than in the previous 19 centuries put together. And already in the 21st Century the statistics are mounting at alarming rates. Though we may somewhat cherish the word as our identity, the word “Christian” was coined by the enemies of the cross. It literally means “little Christ.” They would say, “There's a Christian. There's another Christian.” It was an ugly word—a negative reference to the Followers of the Way.

Now how did the people of the world know that these people in Antioch were Christians? By the bumper stickers on their cars? By the Scripture T-shirts they wore? Or by the way they lived in the marketplace, in the community, in the neighborhood? Tough issue. Do those around us in our neighborhood, do those around us in our workplace, do those around us in the marketplace, do those around us in our community, know that we are “little Christs”—followers of the one and only true Savior?

### **Responsive to Physical Needs**

Verse 27 points us to another characteristic. Agabus, a true prophet of God, had come up from Jerusalem and prophesied that there was going to be a famine in the land. Thus, in the church at Antioch, each man determined in his heart that which he would lay in store so that they would be able to send gifts of food down to Jerusalem when this famine actually came. We can see clearly that from a willing heart, they were responsive to the physical needs of people. I realize that in the world of missions there are many different opinions. On one extreme: “Just give them Christ and everything else will work out.” At the other end of the continuum, there are some organizations that have become so focused on meeting physical needs that sharing Christ has been all but excluded. They have become strictly humanitarian. I personally believe that somewhere in the middle we find a balance. In this model church at Antioch, we find them responsive to physical needs as well as spiritual needs.

Chapter 12, then, takes us back to Jerusalem. James has been killed by Herod; Peter has been arrested and put in prison. Herod is going to kill him after the Passover. The all-night prayer meeting. Peter is released and he comes to the gate. Rhoda says, “Hey!” and runs back into the house. She was so excited; their prayers had been answered. “Peter’s at the gate,” she says. “No, Peter’s in prison, silly girl. We’re praying for his release.” Interesting thoughts about faith!

At the end of Chapter 12, the famine is now ravaging the land. Barnabas and Saul have taken those gifts of food down to Jerusalem. I am sure that they had a good talk with the Apostles. Remember that Barnabas had been active in the Jerusalem church. And had been sent to Antioch to check out how things were progressing in this new church. And he stayed on, getting Saul from Tarsus, where the Jerusalem church had sent him. I’m sure they heard the story of Peter going to the house of Cornelius; about Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch experience; about his four prophetess daughters in Caesarea. They heard the Apostles say that the enemies of the cross in Jerusalem had said, “You have filled Jerusalem with His message.”

So Jerusalem had been reached. Judea had been pretty well covered by the Jerusalem church’s dispersion. The Good News was spreading though Samaria. But as Barnabas and Saul went back to Antioch, I have a feeling that they were talking about the uttermost parts. They had both grown up in those regions beyond. And they brought back to their church a vision. (Now some of that is my surmising and is not in Scripture, but for some reason the church put five men forward at the beginning of Chapter Thirteen. I think it must have been because they got excited hearing about Barnabas and Saul’s report from the Apostles about the last words of Jesus. “Go into all the world. Preach the gospel to all people. Make disciples of all nations.”) Their motivation may have been other than I surmise, but as we look into Acts 13, they are ready to make a move to the uttermost parts. In the first four verses, we discover nine more characteristics that sets this church as a model for us today.

### **A Multiplicity of Leadership**

Whatever was their form of church government, there was obviously a healthy group of leaders. When Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem there were at least five men mature in leadership enough to be considered to be sent out. Again, we can surmise a lot about what Barnabas and Saul's feeling might have been that the church put five men forward when it was "their idea!" I believe that a church that is going to truly carry God's vision to the nations of the world cannot be a one-man show. Even if his capacity is large, ministry at some point will want to grow beyond what one person can control. There has to be a multiplicity of leadership as we find in this church at Antioch.

### **An International Leadership**

From the names of the five men put forward, it is easily noted that they were from five different nations. So when you are ministering cross-culturally in your own hometown, the internationals are allowed to become integrated into the church life and get involved in the leadership of the church. From verse 1, we gather that there was a multiplicity of leadership and an international leadership.

### **They Ministered to the Lord**

Verse 2 begins with the words, "*As they ministered to the Lord...*" The King James English leaves us wanting an explanation and the newer translations really haven't helped a lot. A minister (from the etymology of the word) is the lower oarsman on a slave ship! Let your imagination work through that position of work! This church was already involved in ministry. When this "new" idea came along they did not abandon their other ministry. In missions, unfortunately, this is so easy to do. There is an added excitement and intrigue in going to another country and culture. Caught up in the emotion of it, one could easily forget to call the Sunday School superintendent until the night before leaving and expect him to be excited with you as you tell him you won't be able to teach your class for the next three Sundays. Not so, in Antioch. As they were praying about this new arena of outreach, they continued to "minister to the Lord."

This point bears repeating. It is so vital for those of us who get really excited about international ministry. We need to be careful not to run roughshod over the other ministries of the church. I have learned this very difficult lesson. When we came home from Brazil, I was given the position of missions pastor. Needless to say, I was zealous for international ministry. If I barely heard someone say the name of another country, I was button holing them and talking missions to them. It got to the point where nobody wanted to talk to me because all I was talking about was missions, missions, and more missions! Gradually I came to realize that we are the Body of Christ. Now I knew that, but in this context I again had to realize that all parts of the Body are necessary. All are not just feet, and all do not send those missionaries out. The Sunday school teachers are important. The fellow or lady who comes early to turn up the heat or air-conditioning, the person who empties the trash cans. The preacher, the missionary, the evangelist are far more important, aren't they? No, we are the Body of Christ and all ministries in the Body are equally important—from God's perspective.

Paul had to deal with this problem in the church at Corinth (see I Corinthians 12). So that there are no divisions, so that there are no schisms in the Body of Christ, let's give higher honor to the custodians. Or whatever calling of ministry one would regard to be of lesser importance. Missionaries need to express moral support for the Sunday school teachers and all the other ministries that are going on. Cross-cultural outreach is a part

of the mission of the church; it is not the sum total of the church. We are the Body of Christ! Every part functions together at the direction of the Head, Jesus Christ.

### **Fasting and Prayer**

In verses 2 we find this church in Antioch providing a model in fasting and praying. The most, most Christians know about fasting and food today is fast foods. That's a tough one because we love our bodies and we love the food that goes into them. But this church knew when it was time for fasting and praying. They may have learned the lessons of fasting as they read of an angry God shouting to His people through Isaiah, "Is this the fast that I have chosen?" After chastising them for trying to manipulate Him, He goes on to relate the physical and spiritual benefits to fasting. (Read Isaiah 58.)

### **Sensitive to the Holy Spirit**

They were also a church that was sensitive to the Holy Spirit. They heard the Holy Spirit say, "I want Barnabas and Saul." However you as an individual hear the Holy Spirit speak; however you as a church hear the Holy Spirit speak; train your ear to hear His voice. As He guides you, as He leads you, as He directs you individually and corporately in the arena of missions it is vital to move at the direction of God, the Holy Spirit. Again, Isaiah speaks for the mouth of God: "There will be a voice behind you saying, 'This is the way. Walk in it.' when you would turn to the left or the right" (Isaiah 30:21). This church in Antioch, which is a model for us, was sensitive to the Holy Spirit. They were confident when they heard the Holy Spirit speaking. And they discerned His voice from among the myriads of voices vying for their attention.

### **Fasting and Prayer, Again**

In verse three, then, we see that Barnabas and Saul having been identified, they fasted and prayed some more. It can only be surmised that they were seeking the Lord for some sort of strategy: What to do? where to go? when? (Note our Lord's strategy given to the disciples when He sent them out in Matthew 10.)

### **Commissioning**

Still in verse three it says that "*they [the church] laid their hands on them.*" The church commissioned them. I believe that it is critical that there be the laying on of hands, or in some way acknowledging that God has set apart these for the work of the ministry. Paul in later years wrote two letters to a young missionary who was out on the field struggling, having some tough times. He was feeling bad that he was such a young person. Isn't that why Paul said, "Let no man despise thy youth"? And what did Paul remind him of? In both of the letters he said, "Stir up those gifts that were identified in you when we commissioned you, when we laid hands on you."

The missionary out there will remember those things that were done during the commissioning service; and if they don't remember them, you can write to them and say, "Stir up those gifts that were identified in you." I believe the commissioning of your missionaries is important. It is setting them apart for the work of the ministry. What a model of truth this church in Antioch is for us today!

### **Sent Out by the Church**

In verse three it also says, "*And so they [again, the church] sent them out.*" Now I agree there has to be some type of cooperative relationship between the church and the mission agency today. But we, the Church, are the Body of Christ. A mission agency

is not the Body of Christ. It is an agent—an organization that can help facilitate the Church's missionaries as they go out to the field. Your missionaries that you send out are not a part of the "body of mission agency XYZ"; they are a part of the Body of Christ. And so your Body, a microcosm of that Church universal, is being stretched to embrace the world as you send your missionaries to the uttermost parts of the earth.

### **Sent Out by the Holy Spirit**

Notice that verse four very quickly adds, "*So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit...*" We have to be careful that a church doesn't just get into its programs and say, "Okay, we sent out four last year, we've got to send out five this year to show that we're getting bigger and better." No, we also need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. So in verse four, the Holy Spirit sent them out. Everyone from your body that is sent out needs to be sent by the Holy Spirit, whether on a three-week mission or for a longer time.

### **They Sent Out Mature Leadership**

As we read these verses, we see that they sent out mature leadership. The church leadership did not look around for the appendix or the hangnail in the Body of Christ and say, "Well, they don't seem to know how to get along here, maybe they'd make good missionaries." Not at all. They chose five of their leadership. Can you imagine being in Saul's home fellowship group and hearing the Holy Spirit say, "I want Barnabas and Saul." Or, "No, not my favorite Bible teacher. I've been going to church here ever since Barnabas came up from Jerusalem. And he's just starting a new study in the Book of Daniel. Lord, You couldn't take him away!" I don't know what their feelings were. But I imagine they had to deal with feelings just as we do today.

### **What Determines Mature Leadership**

They sent forth mature leadership. What determines mature leadership? Saul, of course, was very highly educated. Raised in a Jewish home in Tarsus, he learned all that the Roman system could teach him. We find him in later Scriptures quoting Epimenides, as well as the poets of Crete. Then, of course, he went to Jerusalem and sat at the feet of Gamaliel where he became a "pharisee of the Pharisees!"

But when it comes to Barnabas, we find a different criterion. His name was Joseph. He was a farmer on the island of Cyprus. When he came to Jerusalem, they saw that his giftings were as a reconciler, as a maker of peace. They even changed his name to Barnabas, a name that speaks of reconciliation.

Going back to Acts 11:24, we find three very simple characteristics that clearly spoke of mature leadership. "*He was a good man, full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit.*" No, he didn't have a Ph.D. in Judaism. No, he didn't have a Ph.D. in the Roman system of government. But he was a good man, full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit. So, as you look among your leadership, it doesn't have to be a line of degrees after their names that will qualify them. (Though there is nothing wrong with degrees.) Maybe just "a good man, full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit." These qualifications may even be more difficult to earn than a Ph.D. in missiology!

### **They Preached the Word**

In verse five we find that they preached the Word. Again, when they had come to Antioch that is what they were doing. They were preaching the Word. What better thing can we do for the world than reveal Christ through the Word? On the road to Emmaus there

were two discouraged disciples saying, “Let’s go home. Evidently he wasn’t the Messiah.” Jesus comes along side of them, walks with them, hides His own identity, lets them tell their story of woe, and then what does Jesus Himself do? Levitate and prance around them saying, “Hey, look at Me! Here I am?” No! Rather, Jesus Himself, revealed Himself by the Word of God. It says that He went back to Moses, the Pentateuch, the Psalms and the Prophets, and revealed the suffering Christ that had to be. And so if Jesus revealed Himself by the Word, what better message do we have to carry today? As this church in Antioch realized, they went forth preaching the Word.

### **Big Mistake**

Also in verse five, we find what I believe to have been a mistake. They took John Mark with them. Again, it is a matter of interpretation, but as we read later in verse thirteen, he split when the going got tough. He had not been part of the commissioning. And then over in Acts 15:37 we find the big argument between Barnabas and Paul about not taking John Mark again. And then much later, Paul says to Timothy, “*Please bring John Mark with you. He’s now profitable for the ministry.*” All of those thoughts put together leads me to believe that they made a mistake in taking John Mark with them.

Why do I make a point of this? I believe that we don’t need to wait until we’re perfect before we send out a missionary. “Oh, we don’t have enough money yet. We’re just a new church. We aren’t big enough. We aren’t doing our ministries here yet.” None of these arguments (nor any other) can stand exposure to the commands of Scriptures. Jesus didn’t say, “First in Jerusalem, then in Judea, then in Samaria, then in the uttermost parts...” He said, “*Both in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and in the uttermost parts....*” “*As you are going, you will be witnesses of Me.*”

### **Reentry—A Most Difficult Time in a Missionary’s Life**

Every good church which knows how to send out their missionaries will also invest the time to learn how to bring them home! The most difficult time in the life of most missionaries is not when they go to the field, but when they come home. Yet it is the one area of the missions process that still remains “in the closet” of secrecy. Mission agencies, which are only too familiar with the problems, for the most part, either don’t know what to do or are so personnel-challenged that they don’t have time to do much about it. Further, the horror stories, which are locked in the closet of every agency, wouldn’t make good advertising for new recruits! Most churches, on the other hand, are just ignorant of what to do.

### **A Biblical Model for Reentry**

Well, the good news is that this young church in Antioch provides us with a tremendous model for bringing a missionary home. The process—yes, it is a process—is stated in five simple statements—not that they can be simple executed. There will be a lot of praying and crying and changing. But there is no alternative. Let’s look at those five steps:

1) **Time to Go Home.** In chapter 14 verse 26, they’re coming home after their two-year missionary journey. When they were commissioned, the Holy Spirit didn’t say it would be a two-year venture. But when they got to Attalia, somehow the Holy Spirit had made it clear that they were to go home. And every missionary today needs to know clearly that in God’s timing, it is right to be home. Now, they may be home physically, but if emotionally, mentally or spiritually they are still on the field, they are not

home! If all they can think about is “going back” or “things are so...carnal here”—they are not home. Until they know—sense—feel—believe that it is right to be home, the rest of the process cannot proceed.

2) **They Returned to Their Home Church.** Again in verse twenty-six, we discover that they returned to their home church, a point that pushes us back to the time before a missionary goes. It is vital that one going to the field has a church that is sending them. Yes, Saul (now, Paul) and Barnabas did go up to Jerusalem. And they no doubt stopped at other churches along the way on their return from Jerusalem but this was after they had spent time at their home church. We are the Body of Christ. In the truest form of this analogy, when a missionary leaves your Body, you do not “cut him off.” I liken the missionary to the feet in the Body of Christ (see Isaiah 52:7). When we want our physical feet to go somewhere, we surely do not cut them off. We let them carry our whole body to wherever we want to go. The analogy is clear: The decision of sending out missionaries should encompass the vision of the church, for they (the feet) are going to carry you, the whole Body, to wherever they go. Returning missionaries need to have that Body fellowship to assist them in their reentry process. The stretching has to get “unstretched.” The readjustment to them being home is necessary for them, but also for you. Yes, many churches may provide various aspects of a missionary’s support, but there needs to be one of which he is the “feet” of that Body.

3) **They Rehearsed All.** Verse twenty-seven tells us that they “*gathered the church together and rehearsed all that God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*” In this verse we have the most critical part of reentry care: Their debriefing. You will note that it was accomplished on two levels: 1) How God opened the door of faith to the Gentiles and 2) What God did with them. Yes, we want to hear the great and glorious things God did through our missionaries, the healings, the miracles, the churches planted, the hospitals built, the orphanages established, the Scriptures translated. But for your missionary’s sake, he needs to talk about what God did with him. About what is going on inside, how he is now different—changed values, new goals in life, broadened perspectives. This second level of debriefing is better done in small groups, or even in the confidence of only one. For some of the things your missionary will say (if given an environment where he can be completely honest) probably cannot be handled by the general public. And it is this second level of debriefing that is the more critical for your missionaries.

A second consideration regarding debriefing: Make sure your missionaries are given a great variety of venues in which to debrief. If they speak at seven young adult classes, they have to process all that went on in and through them only one time. And just repeat that talk seven times. Whereas, speaking to different age groups and different types of groups makes them rethink the good and the not so good of their experiences many times. It is that process that helps them reenter their home culture with less stress. As they rehearse the good and the not so good of their field experiences they are more likely to keep in perspective the good and not so good back home.

4) **They Abode a Long Time.** Verse twenty-eight then goes on to say, “*They abode a long time with the disciples there.*” It is interesting that of the twelve words in Greek that we translate, *abide*, the one they chose here has the meaning of “to wear through.” We would probably say, “They received the hospitality of the church until all the strangeness of being back home was rubbed away.” We don’t know how long it

took. It does say “a long time.” And today, experience shows that on one reentry the same person may experience a quick integration whereas on another, he may experience some difficulty. Different members of the same family will have a different rate of reentry. It is a very individualistic process. Sometimes the euphoria of their field experience or the excitement of their being home can stave off the reality of their reentry. Thus, the difficult issues may not show up for some time. These are a few of the reasons why, as good as the days or week of debriefing that an agency may provide, it does not take the place of what the local church must give to their missionaries. Reentry may take only days or, more likely, many months.

5) **Fully Integrated.** We move over to Acts 15:35 to discover the fifth step to the reentry process: They are again preaching and teaching in the church. They have again found their place in ministry. Do you see how this also points us back to the time before the missionary leaves? If he has been involved in ministry before he leaves, as Barnabas and Saul were, he will have an entrée back into ministry. If he has no church to call home, if he was not involved in any ministry in a church, he has nothing to look forward to upon return. This can delay (or totally preclude) the full integration of the reentry process. Yes, missionaries have been “home” for fifteen and twenty years and still do not feel like they are home.

But there is also a danger of trying to reenter ministry too soon after the missionary’s return. This does not allow him to process all that went on in his absence—to him on the field and to those back home. Without ample time (a different length of time for each person and each reentry) to sort through all the good and the bad of his missionary experience and to slowly adjust to the good and the bad of his home culture, relationships can deteriorate. In more cases than most realize, this degenerative process can lead to suicide! Or worse!

(As I was writing this very paragraph, I was interrupted by a one and a half hour phone call from a lady. Her fiancé has been “home” a year, but is still at a loss to understand what is going on. For example, just a few days ago, a lady from the country where he had been serving walked into the store where he works. Without warning, he burst into uncontrollable tears. So serious is this issue of reentry, I have written a companion book to *Serving As Senders*. It is titled *The Reentry Team: Caring for Your Returning Missionaries*. It is available from our website: [www.eri.org](http://www.eri.org).)

### **True to Doctrine**

In Chapter 15:1-34, we read that this church knew how to deal with false doctrine. Culminating in the First Church Council, Paul and Barnabas took the lead in defending the freedom in the spirit Christ won for them on Calvary. We too want to keep our relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ as pure and simple as possible. Unfortunately, with “itching ears”, many in the church today blindly follow the winds of doctrine blowing through the air waves and written in multiple titles. Our doctrine must be true to the Whole Counsel of God, not just a phrase or paragraph here and there.

Two corollaries to this thought: When your missionaries come home, it is good to do a “spiritual exam” on them. Are the new ways they are practicing just customs from their adopted culture? Or has the subtlety of syncretism brought some pagan practices into their worship? Further, closely examine the artifacts they bring home for “show and tell.” Are they harmless curios of another culture? Or do they have some spiritual at-

tachments seeking a curious novice's experimentation? A harmless clay doll head, I thought, as I purchased it. But to my wife's spiritual discernment, it seemed to have been used in some spiritual worship. It was discarded.

### **They Sent Others Out**

In Chapter 15:40, this church following the same process, commissioned Paul and a new missionary, Silas. Paul had developed a good perspective on his missionary experience. And he had reentered well. Not long after he was fully integrated, he said, "Hey, Barney, why don't we go out again. Let's check up on those churches we got planted." If one has had a good experience on the field and a good reentry, a changed person he is. And that restlessness of being unencumbered with the affairs of daily living, the freedom to focus on Jesus Christ and Him crucified causes one to want to go out again. And not only Paul, but also now Silas is commissioned by the church.

Later, in Chapter 16 of Romans, we read of one Lucius, possibly one of the original five, now ministering in Corinth with Timothy. A church that has sent out its first missionaries will not pedestal them and be satisfied with "our missionary," but will want to expand to the regions beyond. They will look for others within the Body of Christ that could be sent out. They will commission them and send them out.

And so there's our checklist. All twenty-two items. Characteristics of a sending church. We have only done a thumbnail sketch of each one. A whole volume could be written on each. Read them. Study them. Are they growing and developing in you? In your church? In your home fellowship? May the profile of your sending church be a modeled after the church at Antioch in Syria.

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