

A MISSIONS IMPERATIVE: DEVELOPING A MATURE CHURCH

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Global missions has a unique place in the life of the Church and should not be deemphasized or confused with other Christian activities. Regrettably, even when the distinctness of the missionary calling is maintained, the importance of helping local churches develop to maturity is often overlooked. It is imperative that missionary candidates and their sending churches grasp the value of helping national churches become mature. However, not all who are called to overseas ministry will be suited to this unique and challenging role. Those who desire to minister to the local church and assist her in becoming healthier need to plan and prepare well. The missionary who can serve as a professor-pastor may be uniquely positioned to contribute to the development of mature churches.

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Introduction

Since her inception nearly 2,000 years ago, the Church has been about missions. The true church cares about missions because God cares about missions. A church that overlooks, or de-emphasizes, the missions mandate of Matthew 28:19–20 is a church that has misunderstood God’s priorities.² God has not called the Church to be a merry band of believers consumed with the ins and outs of their daily lives who enjoy getting together to worship once or twice a week. Rather, God has called His people to be focused on bringing the light of the gospel to a dark world. Thankfully,

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² Here I have introduced missions as a ministry of the local church. However, God’s desire for His people to be a light to the ends of the earth predates the establishment of the church in the first century. The OT abounds with passages that demonstrate this desire. For example, see Isaiah 41:10–12. There is some scholarly discussion on whether OT Israel had an “active” role or a “passive” one in living out their role as witnesses. For further discussion see Grisanti’s chapter, Michael A. Grisanti, “The Old Testament: God’s Heart for the World,” in *Biblical Missions: Principles, Priorities, and Practices*, ed. Mark Tatlock and Chris Burnett (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2025), forthcoming.

many churches today are seriously embracing their God given mandate to go to the ends of the earth.

The importance of missions is rarely questioned.³ However, emphases in missions are often wrangled over and disagreed upon. Individual churches and missions agencies sometimes have priorities that are unclear and confusing. Unfortunately, this lack of clarity can result in missionaries being “busy in ministry” but frequently spending their energy on tasks that are misaligned with biblical priorities. One important aspect in missions that is often overlooked is the importance of building a mature church. World missions today would be stronger, more effective, and more closely aligned to biblical priorities if more missionaries intentionally gave themselves to helping local churches become mature.

The What and Why of Missions

Understanding priorities in missions becomes harder when the “what and why” of missions are misunderstood. Therefore, a proper understanding of missions is in order. “Missions” as a term can be misleading in today’s modern world. Businesses and churches have mission statements that define their goals and purposes. Of course, such statements are not wrong; they can be valuable in helping a variety of institutions function better. However, world missions is distinct from a mission statement because missions is not the goal or purpose of the Church. Rather, missions is the Church’s calling; glorifying God is her *raison d’être* (Eph 1:12, 1 Pet 2:9). As John Piper aptly put it, “Missions exists because worship doesn’t.”⁴ That is, missions exists because people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation do not yet know and worship the one true God. Until all hear, the Church seeks to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. World missions is not the Church’s goal. Rather, it is a *means* to achieving her goal of glorifying God.

It is crucial to remember that missions is a means to an end and not an end unto itself. It is equally important to define what missions is and what it is not. In some contemporary evangelical circles, the idea of Christian missions has become so diluted that it has lost its particular uniqueness and weight. Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellison deftly argue that a poorly defined concept of missions is impeding the Church’s global missionary efforts.⁵ They are pushing back against a trend in modern Christianity that labels many types of Christian activities as “missions.” For example, Christopher Wright proclaims that “If everything is mission ... everything

³ The importance of missions is rarely questioned in theory. However, it would be a fascinating study to compile data and develop objective criteria to see if/how churches are living up to their own stated commitments to missions.

⁴ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 11.

⁵ “We contend that many churches do not do missions well because they don’t think about missions well.” Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellison, *When Everything Is Missions* (Bottomline Media, 2017), 19. “Biblical mission definitions can have a gigantic effect on how local churches will make disciples of the nations—or if ‘the nations’ emphasis of Jesus’ command will even be acknowledged or embraced.” Spitters and Ellison, *When Everything Is Missions*, 107.

is mission.”⁶ He goes on to state that although everything is not cross-cultural evangelistic missions, everything a Christian or church “does should be missional in its conscious participation in the mission of God in God’s world.”⁷ Wright is correct in that everything a Christian says, thinks, or does should accord with God’s will. However, when global missions is reduced to merely being another label for intentional Christian living, we have lost something important.

Missions cannot simply be used as a catchall phrase to define every activity of the local church. Spitters and Ellison make an excellent point:

If every Christian is a missionary and reaching people with the same language and culture as our own is indeed missions, then crossing cultures to share the gospel would naturally be a low priority. In fact, if everything is missions, then the goal of the Great Commission might not be to make steady headway in reaching more nations, tribes, and tongues, but to win as many people to Jesus as possible. This may explain why the overwhelming majority of the Church’s resources are spent at home and not on extending the gospel into new frontiers: If the Great Commission’s goal is merely to win as many people to Christ as possible, then we should identify the places where the most spiritual new births are taking place and give it our all.⁸

If everything counts as missions then cross-cultural gospel centered missions loses its prominence as one of the Church’s great callings.⁹ But, to de-emphasize missions is to deny the importance of our Lord’s words: “Go therefore and make disciples of *all the nations*” (Matt 28:19).¹⁰ The mandate is to make disciples of all the nations;

⁶ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 26. Wright is responding to the oft quoted Stephen Neill who, in 1959, pronounced that, “If everything is mission, nothing is mission.” Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension* (London: Edinburgh House, 1959), 81.

⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 26.

⁸ Spitters and Ellison, *When Everything Is Missions*, 103. E. D. Burns would agree that not every Christian is a missionary although every Christian is called to evangelize. E. D. Burns, *The Missionary-Theologian: Sent into the World, Sanctified by the Word* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2020), 51–52.

⁹ Some writers use the word “missional” to describe a variety of church activities that are distinct from world missions such as leadership development, worship, and preaching. Gelder and Zscheile credit the book *Missional Church* with bringing the term “missional” into common church parlance. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 1. See Darrell L. Guder and George R. Hunsberger, eds., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). While some, like Gelder and Zscheile, maintain “missional” is flexible enough to be used in a variety of contexts, others have criticized the word and believe it has become “vacuous and lost its definitional value.” Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 1–3. While not a bad term in and of itself, I maintain that the frequent use of “missional” and its application in contexts unrelated to world missions has contributed to a weakening of the (Western) Church’s understanding of, and commitment to, cross-cultural missions. Again, Neill is helpful. He wrote, “If everything that the Church does is to be classed as ‘mission,’ we shall have to find another term for the Church’s particular responsibility for ‘the heathen,’ those who have never yet heard the name of Christ.” Neill, *Creative Tension*, 81.

¹⁰ “All the nations” is πάντα τὰ ἔθνη which, while it can be used to mean political entities with defined borders and government (e.g., Acts 13:19), can also be translated as “people” or “Gentiles.”

faithful churches must send missionaries to the ends of the earth with a view to God's adoption of sons and daughters from every people on earth. The objective is not to identify where our deployment of financial and human capital might bring the most return on investment. Rather, the goal is to glorify God by fulfilling the Great Commission as He has given it to us.

The Church has a long history of seeing missions to the nations as distinct from daily Christian living. Paul the apostle embodied this understanding. He left the comforts of home, exposing himself to danger, "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake" (Rom 1:5).¹¹ Paul was not content to stay home and labor to bring the gospel message to his Jewish compatriots, but was burdened to bring the salvific message of Jesus Christ to peoples and cultures who had not yet heard the Good News. This is world missions. Gratefully, many generations have understood world missions and departed to foreign shores for the sake of His name.

The Biblical Emphasis of a Mature Church

Missions is not less than bringing the message of salvation in Christ alone to all peoples, but is it more? Put differently, can the church legitimately have other priorities in global missions beyond evangelism? More to the point: Is there clear biblical evidence that helping local churches grow to maturity is a legitimate priority of global missions? I answer in the affirmative.

Jesus' Charge

The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19–20 reads, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." The imperative phrase "make disciples" takes pride of place as the main clause in these verses.¹² Thus, it supplies the foundational context upon which the other secondary clauses rest. Christians go to the ends of the earth so that they can make disciples. Christians baptize new converts as part of their public identification as followers of Jesus. Christians also teach each other what Jesus commanded as part of a life of increasing maturity and devotion to the Savior.

Despite the traditional translation of "all the nations" the textual idea is best expressed with "all peoples" or "all people groups." Unless otherwise specified, all Bible references are to the New American Standard Bible, Updated Version (NASB) (La Habra: Foundation Publications, 1995).

¹¹ In Romans 1:5 Paul is specifically speaking about his apostolic credentials and the grace he received in order to minister to the Gentiles. His commitment to preaching the gospel to them is evidenced in the missionary journeys he embarked upon as detailed in Acts. "Gentiles" translates ἔθνος, the same word as in Matthew 28:19.

¹² It has been oft discussed that "make disciples" is the only true verbal imperative in this sentence. The other three key verbs ("go," "baptizing," and "teaching") are participles. However, they do share the imperatival force of "make disciples." If one is inclined to be even more precise, "go" could be categorized as a participle of attendant circumstance, while "baptizing" and "teaching" as participles of means. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1996), 645.

Notice the depth of Jesus' concept of discipleship.¹³ His concern was not merely that one become a convert or believer. Rather, His expressed desire was to make disciples. That discipleship is more than mere conversion becomes clear by the addition of two activities: baptizing and teaching. Baptism cannot be an entrance requirement for heaven. Jesus' own words to the unbaptized and newly regenerate thief on the cross next to his makes this clear: "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Baptism is not a condition of salvation, but it is a matter of obedience for all who would live as His obedient disciples.¹⁴

As important as baptism is, it is but one step of being on the path of discipleship. Jesus charged His followers to teach the next generation of disciples *all* that He had commanded. To fulfill the Great Commission, missionaries must evangelize but they must also be faithful to pass on the full spectrum of Jesus' teachings. Craig Blomberg gets it right:

Teaching obedience to all of Jesus' commands forms the heart of disciple making. Evangelism must be holistic. If non-Christians are not hearing the gospel and not being challenged to make a decision for Christ, then the church has disobeyed one part of Jesus' commission. If new converts are not faithfully and lovingly nurtured in the whole counsel of God's revelation, then the church has disobeyed the other part.¹⁵

To not evangelize is to disobey, but to not carefully teach the whole counsel of God is also disobedience. The implications for mature churches on the mission field should be clear. If churches and missionaries do not see discipling to maturity as an important priority, then they have missed the basic thrust of Jesus' charge in Matthew 28.

Paul's Emphasis

Jesus' charge to teach future disciples all that He commanded is clear. The apostle Paul's emphasis on mature believers is equally clear.

In Colossians 1:28–29 he writes, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." Paul, the quintessential missionary, did not move on from Colossae once a small body of converts had been gathered. Instead, he continued to care for them from afar and was concerned about their spiritual wellbeing.¹⁶ His goal

¹³ It is outside the scope of this study to develop a full definition of what constituted a "disciple." Most simply, a disciple is a "follower" or a "learner." See Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 11; and Oswald J. Sanders, *Spiritual Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 8. A disciple was more than just a pupil; he was not seeking to merely obtain a body of knowledge, but rather he sought to actively imitate his master.

¹⁴ For more on this topic, see Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn Wright, eds., *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006). Especially helpful are chapters one and three.

¹⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 432.

¹⁶ Paul did not found the church at Colossae. Most likely Epaphras did while Paul was in Ephesus (Col 1:6–7; Acts 19).

for the Colossian believers, as with others, was that he would be able to present each one complete in Christ.

The word τέλειον is variously translated as “complete” (NASB), “perfect” (KJV, NIV), or “mature” (ESV, HCSB). Of the last two translation options, Moo argues that “‘perfect’ is too strong, ‘mature’ too weak. He continues, “‘Mature,’ on the other hand, is too relative, inviting us to think that we are *teleios* as long as we are doing a bit better than some other Christians we could name.”¹⁷ Ultimately, Moo agrees with Schweizer who has given the sense as the “complete and undivided way in which a person, with all one’s positive and negative attributes, is oriented toward God or toward Christ.”¹⁸ In modern parlance, the NASB’s “complete” veers too close to the meaning of “perfect.” Although mature may be too weak of a word according to Moo, it fits our purposes well.¹⁹ Paul desired to see the saints at Colossae mature in their faith. He was under no illusions that they would be perfect this side of heaven.²⁰ Although they would not be perfect, Paul expends himself for them that they would be mature in their faith.

The Expectation in Hebrews

Jesus charged His followers to disciple others to maturity. Paul labored to see believers realize this maturity. The writer of Hebrews seems to take it for granted that long-time Christians would be mature disciples. He writes, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food” (Heb 5:12). The verse should not be taken to understand that all believers have the gift of teaching or the responsibility to assume an official teacher role in a local assembly.²¹ However, the verse does communicate the expectation that believers who have been in the faith for a significant period should understand the deeper things of the Christian faith and be able to instruct others in them.

The author of Hebrews viewed it as a significant problem that the recipients of his letter were still children in the faith when they should have already become mature.²² These immature Christians were not able to teach others because they were too “dull of hearing” to understand the weightier doctrines of the faith. They could not pass on what they did not know. Although the author assumes that they should have been mature by this point in their Christian walk, he does recognize that such

¹⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 161.

¹⁸ Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary*, trans. Andrew Chester (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 112.

¹⁹ Schweizer also dislikes the term “mature.” Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 111.

²⁰ Some argue that Paul is referring to an eschatological presentation of the saints to Christ in Colossians 1:28. If this view is true, a translation of “perfect” may be more accurate. However, Paul’s use of τέλειος in Colossians 4:12 is discussing the contemporary state of the believers at Colossae. Further, Paul’s use of τέλειος in Ephesians 4:13 also refers to the present state of believers as a result of the faithful work of individuals that God has gifted for the ministry. Even if Paul has the eschatological state in mind, his personal labor (Col 1:29) indicates his goal of maturity in the lives of those he taught.

²¹ David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, NAC (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 335–36.

²² Interestingly, William Lane contends that the addressed believers had regressed from their previous level of maturity to which they had attained. William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 145. His view is a minority one.

maturity does not merely come with the passage of time, but involves effort and training. Indeed, “solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Heb 5:14). Spiritual maturity is not a given, it takes sustained labor. Moreover, this labor should not only characterize church leaders, but the entire community of saints gathered into a local church.²³

Mature Churches Can Be Developed in Any Culture

Our brief review of pertinent biblical texts has reminded us that Jesus and His apostles emphasize the importance of a mature flock. The Church's mandate of teaching and discipleship with the goal of spiritual maturity is too plain to miss. This maturity is not divorced from the idea of missions but is congruent with it. It is fair to say that the work, whether abroad or at home, is not complete when someone comes to faith in Christ; ongoing discipleship must follow.

Biblical discipleship and spiritual maturity are not the exclusive purview of any one church or culture. Jesus made this clear in Matthew 28 when He commanded His followers to make disciples of all nations. Disciples of every people group need to be baptized and taught. Jesus' command to teach all that He had commanded to all peoples makes clear that Christian doctrine, standards, and practices are transcultural. The measure of a mature believer or a mature church will be universal because the standards are biblical, not cultural. With that in mind, it is helpful to list out the characteristics of a mature church that a missionary can assist in developing.

Mark Dever's well-known *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* is an excellent summary of the defining characteristics (“marks”) of a mature church.²⁴ They are important enough to reproduce here in full. A healthy church will be marked by:

1. Expository Preaching
2. Gospel Doctrine
3. A Biblical Understanding of Conversion and Evangelism
4. A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership
5. Biblical Church Discipline
6. A Biblical Concern for Discipleship and Growth
7. Biblical Church Leadership
8. A Biblical Understanding and Practice of Prayer
9. A Biblical Understanding and Practice of Missions²⁵

²³ Due to space constraints, I have focused my attention on the overall concept of maturity and not on the maturity of the local church per se. That the church as a whole should be mature is obvious for at least two reasons. First, if every Christian is called to maturity, then it naturally follows that the churches in which those believers gather should be mature. Second, the Scriptures elsewhere teach the idea of corporate maturity. See for example, Ephesians 4:11–16 where the apostle explains that the Lord has given various categories of leaders to the Church so that the saints might be equipped, and the body might be built up.

²⁴ Dever employs the term “healthy” whereas I often use the term “mature.” Although the terms have some difference in meaning, in the context of this article they can be used almost interchangeably as they are getting at the same idea.

²⁵ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 4th ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021). It is worth noting that the list of nine marks was updated between the third and fourth editions. In the fourth edition,

Certainly, a local church may look slightly different in various contexts because of the influences of culture and language, but the essential marks of a healthy church are universal because they are biblical. On the field, a missionary should strive to help a local church grow to maturity according to biblical standards, not become Western in its orientation and practice.

The Missionary's Role in Developing Mature Churches

Developing mature churches should be a significant priority in world missions. Healthy churches are not only a goal in missions work, but they are also a means to greater and more effective missions. As such, missionaries, churches, and missions agencies would do well to re-focus on this too-often neglected emphasis: intentional development of mature local churches. Missionaries can contribute to the development of healthy churches on the mission field by carefully considering their purpose, plan, preparation, posture, place, and eventual passing of the baton.

Purpose

Unfortunately, missionaries frequently lack clarity and purpose in what they are being sent to do. "Building God's kingdom" is a great slogan, but one that translates poorly to actual ministry efforts. *Before* they ever get sent to the field, missionaries need to ask themselves this question: What exactly am I being sent to do? Of course, on the broadest level, the missionary wants to glorify God. But how exactly does he expect to do this? Does he purpose to preach the gospel among a particular people group? Does he intend to translate a portion of the Scriptures? Is his goal to train a new generation of church leadership?

In order to contribute to the development of healthy churches, missionaries need to be intentional. There are countless ways that missionaries can fill their time, so it is vital that they agree with their sending churches and agencies on why they are being sent to the field. If those sending out the missionary are most concerned about seeing large numbers of converts or baptisms, they will likely be disappointed if he spends a significant amount of time discipling others to maturity. Defining missionaries' purpose narrowly enables them to know how they should be investing their time and effort.

Jesus understood why He came: "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). Jesus' goal was not to spend His time distracted by those who obstinately refused to admit their need for a savior.²⁶ Rather, Jesus had a purpose: to call sinners – those who acknowledged their need to be saved. Note that Jesus had

several marks have been combined, leaving room for the addition of the chapters on prayer and missions. I find the updated list of nine marks to be excellent. Although some may argue that even more marks could be added to this list, Dever has gone on record stating that these are not the "only marks of health that a church should have." Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 12.

²⁶ I am not suggesting that Jesus deliberately ignored groups of people or that some did not need to respond to His invitation. Edwards puts it well: "The saying is a defense of Jesus' outreach to the disreputable, not a suggestion that there are some who are exempt from his call." James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 86.

great clarity: “I did not come to do this, but I came to do that.” His purpose was so clear, that He could confidently assert what He came to do and what He did *not* come to do.²⁷

Purpose informs priorities. Missionaries who lack clearly defined purposes will not be able to confidently say “yes” to ministry that aligns with their priorities and “no” to ministry that does not. No one missionary can do everything. Purpose is needed; sending churches, missionaries, and agencies must work together to achieve this clarity.

In the case of developing mature churches on the mission field, purpose is sorely needed. Missionaries are often pulled in many directions. If the missionary does not intentionally purpose to spend time to help the Church on the field mature, it is likely he will be distracted with other noble but less important goals. The apostles recognized the need to keep first things first. In Acts 6, they refused to be distracted and pulled away from their primary goal of ministering the Word. They did not undervalue other types of ministry. Quite the opposite: they instructed the Church to identify godly individuals who could be specifically dedicated to those areas of service. However, the pressing physical needs of the fledging church could not override the twelve’s commitment to giving the saints what they needed for growth and maturity: the Word of God. Unless more missionaries intentionally purpose to play a significant role in developing mature churches, there will be a noticeably smaller number of healthy churches on the mission field.

Plan

Once a missionary has a clear purpose, the next step is developing an actionable plan. Unfortunately, the idea of planning is sometimes looked down upon because some believers wrongly maintain that planning does not leave room for the Spirit of God to work. An anti-planning mindset unintentionally sets itself against Scripture’s teaching on the matter.²⁸

The concept of appropriate planning can be found in both Testaments. The author of Proverbs wrote, “Prepare your work outside and make it ready for yourself in the field; Afterwards, then, build your house” (Prov 24:27). This short verse is not a missions verse per se; rather, it is an admonition about how to work well. The writer is reiterating to his readers that certain work priorities need to be attended to first in

²⁷ Of course, Jesus’ purpose in coming to earth was to glorify His Father in heaven. As He considered His death on the cross, He considered His purpose and fervently prayed that the Father would be glorified (John 12:27–28). Later, as He prayed, He confessed that all that He had done was to glorify the Father: “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4). Jesus’ chief objective of glorifying the Father was accomplished through specific, tangible purposes in ministry.

²⁸ I have personally witnessed how a lack of planning can create large challenges on the field. For example, I remember meeting with an enthusiastic missionary who was leading a team of numerous young families in a difficult country located in the 10/40 Window. The team’s overall purpose was simple and clear: win people to Christ. Although their purpose was clear, how they intended to accomplish their goal was less so. When I inquired how he and his teammates planned to accomplish their goal, he replied with three steps: pray, live for Jesus, and share the gospel. Although, none of these steps is wrong (in fact, they are all biblical!), they did not represent an actionable plan. As foreigners in a difficult country, there had been no real thought into what was needed to accomplish their team’s goal. Such lack of planning does not bode well for long-term kingdom impact.

order to achieve the desired outcome. Waltke notes that “the saying offers no validation for the pattern of work it admonishes because *common sense validates* the pattern.”²⁹ Simply put, working well requires evaluating the task at hand and formulating a plan to carry it out.

In the context of faith and discipleship, Jesus also introduces the idea of planning. “For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it” (Luke 14:28)? In this statement, Jesus is challenging those who might be His disciples to carefully consider the cost of being His disciple. Jesus does not defend such careful consideration. He takes it for granted that His listeners understood the need for careful planning.³⁰

Paul frequently made plans for various ministries. Paul told the Roman church about his plans to visit them (Rom 1:13). He further shared with them about his plans to go to Spain (15:23–28). He also planned to go to Corinth after passing through Macedonia (1 Cor 16:5–7). In God’s sovereignty, not all of Paul’s plan came to fruition (cf. Acts 16:6), but that did not stop him from pursuing ministry by way of careful planning.

Missionaries whose goal is to help local churches become healthy and mature churches need a plan. There are many questions. Where will the missionary serve? In what local body of believers? Exactly how will he contribute to the church’s spiritual development? Will he run a discipleship program? Does he intend to preach and teach? Does he need to learn a foreign language to effectively communicate?³¹ In answering these questions, missionaries should not assume that their goals and labors will be immediately desired and embraced by nationals on the field. To imply that their church is weak and in need of outside help may be offensive to the local leadership. Early and clear communication with national church leadership is a crucial part of planning. Their trust and support are vital.

Having an actionable plan does not mean that the missionary is so rigid that he cannot be flexible to adapt to the needs of the people he is serving. Nor does an actionable plan imply that a missionary already knows everything about the church or country he is moving to. A plan is simply a clear and reasonable path that leads to the desired outcome.³²

²⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15–31*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 293. Emphasis mine.

³⁰ This is so, because as Marshall has bluntly stated, “anybody who undertakes a task without being ready for the total cost involved will only make a fool of himself.” I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 593. Obviously, counting the cost does not represent the sum total of careful planning, but it is certainly part of the equation.

³¹ High-level planning naturally precedes working out the finer details. As high-level planning influences how a missionary prepares for the field, I have treated “planning” before “preparation” in this essay. However, I readily admit that many aspects of planning will be worked out during or after the missionary’s preparation. In all cases, the wise missionary should plan in partnership with his sending agency and home church.

³² As one who is living and raising his family overseas, I am aware that plans do not often turn out exactly as they are laid down. This is to be expected when serving in difficult places where the unexpected often occurs. However, the fact that plans often change does not mean that planning is wrong or unhelpful. God often changes man’s carefully laid plans. However, God’s providential intervention in our planning

Preparation

Once a missionary has an acceptable plan, there needs to be an honest assessment. Does the candidate have the necessary preparation to serve well in this role? Does he have the appropriate education, training, and gifting to carry out his plans? Individual gifting is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 12:7); spiritual gifts cannot be created by individual human need or desire. However, a missionary's gifting should be identified and developed before he embarks on his missionary service.

Paul urged Timothy to not neglect his spiritual gift but to kindle it afresh in God's service (1 Tim 4:14, 2 Tim 1:6).³³ Peter teaches his readers that although each one possesses a spiritual gift, it is something that must be put into service. "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet 4:10). Commenting on this text, Peter Davids helpfully states that "spiritual gifts are not autonomous entities outside a person's control, but abilities that the Spirit gives and that a person must grow in and use, putting them into service."³⁴ No one is ready to help a church to grow to maturity who has not already identified his gifting and begun actively employing it in faithful, God-honoring service.

A knowledge and development of personal spiritual gifts is essential, but the missionary who intends to help develop mature churches will usually need specific training that prepares him for the task. Although they may not serve as the pastor in their local congregation, missionaries helping churches grow to maturity will be sought out as teachers, disciplers, and counselors. In order to serve the immature church well, therefore, the missionary will need rigorous theological training.³⁵ Even the learned Apostle Paul took significant time out to prepare for the ministry which God had called him to (Gal 1:15–18).³⁶ If the missionary aims to see a healthy mature church of local believers, he will need to have a robust theology so that he can fulfill Jesus' commandment of teaching new believers all that Jesus commanded.

should not be a cause for undue stress. "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Prov 16:9). Kidner reminds us that "God has not merely the last word but the soundest." Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1964), 112.

³³ Although some might understand Timothy's gift in 1 Timothy 4:14 as his "call to ministry," the best interpretation maintains that Paul was speaking of Timothy's spiritual gifts that enabled him to perform the ministry to which he had been called. So, Yarbrough: "Timothy's 'gift' (*charisma*) that he should not 'neglect' suggests a divine bestowal through the Holy Spirit of competencies essential to his ministry." Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 250.

³⁴ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 160.

³⁵ Tan and Brooks embrace the same philosophy: "Theological training is a necessity for missionaries themselves since they must share the gospel, disciple people, and equip local believers for healthy church formation." Sunny Tan and Will Brooks, "Theological Education as Integral Component of World Mission Strategy," in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 179. The exact kind and level of theological training will vary according to ministry contexts and specific ministry goals. For a compelling argument on the importance of missionaries being theologically astute, see Burns, *The Missionary-Theologian*.

³⁶ I agree with Timothy George who has argued that although Paul almost certainly engaged in ministry during his time in Arabia, this likelihood "should not obscure the fact that even so brilliant and well-trained a thinker as Paul would also require a period of intensive preparation for the life work to which he had been called." Timothy George, *Galatians*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 125.

Beyond theological training, missionaries who purpose to help churches mature will also benefit from practical training. They will acquire part of this training as they exercise their spiritual gifts in serving the saints. However, the importance of personal mentoring from mature pastors and church leaders is vital as well. Jesus spent countless hours with the men to whom He first entrusted the Great Commission. Titus, Timothy, and John Mark all benefited from spending time with the Apostle Paul. The missionary who will serve in an immature church with underdeveloped leadership should learn all he can about practical aspects of pastoral ministry and church leadership before he is thrust into a situation where he might be depended upon to help lead the church to greater health.

Posture

Well-trained missionaries with a clear purpose and a well-defined plan to serve in local churches overseas are a great start. However, even well-prepared missionaries will be ineffective on the field if they come in with the wrong posture. In other words, missionaries need to possess the right attitude. Although many characteristics of a biblical attitude could be mentioned, two are most important: love and humility.

Too often missionaries have an unbalanced view of love in world missions. Many missionaries have a strong love for the lost and a desire to see them come to Christ.³⁷ However, those same missionaries sometimes have less evident love for the local churches that God has raised up in the locations in which they serve. This simply will not do. “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph 5:25b). Christ did not die *merely* so that people could escape eternal punishment in the life to come. He died so that redeemed sinners could also live for God’s glory in their temporal lives on this earth.

With unfortunate frequency some missionaries choose not to join local churches, preferring smaller missionary gatherings or even online church. Although there may be a variety of reasons for such a decision, in many cases such an avoidance of the local national church manifests a mindset that is contrary to our Lord’s attitude toward His bride.³⁸ Further, such an attitude makes it nearly impossible for a missionary to help a local church become healthier if he does not love it enough to be committed to it.³⁹ Missionaries whose purpose is to help develop mature churches on the field must possess a sacrificial love for the local church in their context.

³⁷ As well they should! Missionaries who lack a love for the lost will be poor servants indeed.

³⁸ This does not mean that there are *never* legitimate reasons for eschewing a local indigenous assembly. Depending on the circumstances, it may be the wisest choice. Nonetheless, I am convinced that far too often the decision to eschew a national local church is the wrong decision.

³⁹ I recognize that some churches on the field are so unhealthy that missionaries may need to “supplement” their spiritual diet by additional sermons, Bible study, or fellowship. The challenge of being committed to a weak church may be especially acute for those with children. Mark Borisuk maintains that, “For many missionary families, where to go to church will be one of the most complex decisions they face.” This is certainly true. However, Borisuk is correct when he adds that this “decision must be based on the individual family’s *spiritual and ministry goals*.” Emphasis mine. Mark Borisuk, “Shepherding the Family on the Mission Field,” in *Biblical Missions: Principles, Priorities, and Practices*, ed. Mark Tatlock and Chris Burnett (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2025), forthcoming. If a missionary family has the goal of

The first vital characteristic the missionary will need is love. The second characteristic is humility. This spiritual trait is important for all believers (Eph 4:1–2, 1 Pet 5:5), but is an especially important quality because most missionaries leave for the field when they are younger and eager to put into practice all they have learned. If a young theologically trained missionary arrives on the field and unwisely communicates that he knows better than the pastor and local church leaders about how to nurture a church to maturity, it is not hard to imagine that he might not be well-received by the nationals. He may actually be more educated than the national pastor. Further, he may even know how to help the church become spiritually healthier. However, if he does not demonstrate humility, his sincere efforts are more likely to be met with hostility rather than be embraced.

First Peter 5:5–6 is vital to bear in mind: “You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.” Younger men might have a tendency to buck leadership or offer their opinions too quickly. This tendency is likely exacerbated when young men become convinced that they are “right” and their leadership is “wrong.” Peter’s admonition to younger men does not rule out the need for all to embrace humility, but there is a particular need for it among the young.⁴⁰ Schreiner is on point when he argues that the elders are those who occupy a position of authority in the church while the younger men are those who are “literally younger, perhaps because younger people would be more apt to act rebelliously.”⁴¹ Younger missionaries who want to effect positive change in a national church must be especially mindful to be humble if they want to see their goal of a mature congregation realized.

Persistence

The previously mentioned considerations are important and offer a greater likelihood that the missionary can genuinely contribute to the development of a local healthy church. However, even if all those facets are present, there is yet another piece of the puzzle that needs to be considered: persistence. Unfortunately, too many missionaries do not persist on the field long enough to make a significant impact on a church’s health. Certainly, some kinds of missionary service do not require longevity on the field.⁴² However, missionaries who are committed to helping a local church grow to maturity need to be prepared to invest many years of their life.

strengthening the local church, they will need to be committed to a (likely) weak national local church while working extra hard to ensure that the family is spiritually shepherded and nourished.

⁴⁰ Some, like Karen Jobes, argue that the distinction is not between older men and younger men, but between those who hold the position of elder/leader and everyone else. See Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 307.

⁴¹ Peter’s use of πάντες shows he is distinguishing between the younger group and the rest of the church. Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 237.

⁴² Project-based missions might naturally require shorter lengths of service. In general, reliable statistics on lengths of service for any kind of missions seem elusive and/or conflicting. A report produced over 20 years ago by the World Evangelical Alliance claimed that the average length of missionary service

While spiritual birth is wrought by God in a moment, spirit growth takes time. Believers are not perfect this side of heaven; God constantly matures them until they see Jesus (Phil 1:6). This idea is implicit in Paul’s instruction regarding elder qualifications in 1 Timothy 3. An elder should not be a new convert (1 Tim 3:6). Yarbrough notes that “Paul knows that new believers are untested and unsuited for the responsibilities the overseer faces.”⁴³ Men who are too quickly elevated to positions of spiritual authority are a danger, both to themselves and others, because they have not had the appropriate time to grow and demonstrate spiritual maturity.⁴⁴ Maturity takes time.⁴⁵

If the Church must be cautious and remember that even their most promising spiritual leaders need time to grow, how much more patient must she be with the rest of the flock? Missionaries can be especially prone to impatience. After spending years preparing for service, they are eager to see results once they are on the ground. Often, they are giving reports to donors who want to see some kind of return on their investment. For these reasons, and a myriad of others, missionaries need to cultivate the long view and remember that spiritual growth takes time.⁴⁶ Practically, this means a missionary needs to be prepared to serve for many years before a mature church will exist. Too often, missionaries’ lack of long-term commitment can undermine their goal of a mature local church. In summary, a missionary can help develop a mature church by staying put and faithfully serving in a local congregation for years.

Passing the Baton

If a missionary is fortunate enough to spend years in a church helping it develop to maturity, he will undoubtedly have assumed some level of leadership in the church. Although such a situation is natural, it brings with it its own set of challenges. Ultimately, missionaries should not be focused on developing Western churches, but on developing healthy churches in foreign cultures.⁴⁷ Most local

is twelve years. Jim Van Meter, “US Report of Findings on Missionary Retention” (US ReMAP II, December 2003). However, recently Nations Outreach claimed nearly 50% of missionaries serve five or less years. Jeremy Koering, “2024 Christian Missionary Statistics,” *Nations Outreach* (blog), March 1, 2024, <https://nationsoutreach.org/stories/christian-missionary-statistics/>. More trustworthy published statistics on missionary retention would be a boon to missions agencies and churches.

⁴³ Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 201.

⁴⁴ Paul gives two reasons that the elder should not be a new convert: so that he will 1) not become conceited nor 2) fall into condemnation. Philip Towner argues that “maturity should help leaders avoid” these two dangers. Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 257.

⁴⁵ Other scriptures also indicate that spiritual maturity takes time. For example, that older women are to train the younger (Titus 2:3–5) demonstrates that maturity is more typically found in those who have had more time to grow in their faith. Above, we briefly examined Hebrews 5:11–14 where the author also relates the idea of time to spiritual maturity.

⁴⁶ Many western missionaries were fortunate enough to grow up spiritually in a healthy church environment. This means that they have never experienced how long it can take for a local church as a whole to mature together.

⁴⁷ Refer to the section above entitled “Mature Churches Can Be Developed in Any Culture.”

churches will be best served by leaders from their own culture and context.⁴⁸ So, while a missionary may have assumed many responsibilities in his local congregation as he labored to see it mature, it will not become a truly mature indigenous church until it can stand on its own.

Missionaries can play a critical role in developing mature churches, but they can also get in the way of their own goal if they are not willing to give up their roles to national believers when the time is right. The final stages of developing a mature national church occur when a missionary is no longer needed as an essential part of the church's leadership. In order for mature *independent* churches to be established on the field, the missionary needs to give "permission" to others to shoulder the responsibilities that he has previously held.⁴⁹ The church's spiritual growth that the missionary has worked so hard to foster can actually be hindered if he does not pass the baton when qualified nationals are ready to serve. Jesus set the example for us of preparing the next generation. He taught and prepared His disciples, knowing that He would not always be with them, at least in the way they anticipated. In contrast to many leaders who cling to power and avoid talking about any future "successor" for fear of losing influence in the present, Jesus was the one who initiated conversation about the "day after" (e.g., John 13 and following).

Paul also modeled the kind of servant leadership that intentionally raised up younger believers to mature that they might be ready to assume the privilege and responsibility of shepherding God's flock at the appropriate time. For years, Paul had been preparing Timothy to assume greater and greater responsibility in the ministry. Going even further, he commanded Timothy to follow the same model of raising up qualified leadership: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2). Note that the idea of "entrusting" biblical teaching to others does not happen quickly or without effort. As Towner has pointed out, this entrusting "was not simply a matter of a tap on the shoulder; it would require Timothy to teach and to model the faith" as well.⁵⁰ This passing on of the baton is not something that should occur right before the missionaries are approaching retirement age or preparing to leave the field. Rather, this entrusting involves a long-term vision to identify and invest in faithful men who will continue in sound doctrine and practice.

⁴⁸ There is not space here to develop this idea. However, it is a generally accepted missions principle and accords well with the biblical data. Benjamin Merkle notes that even though Paul founded churches, "He did not let the first converts become dependent upon him as a missionary." In fact, much of "Paul's work through his visits, his letters, and his co-workers was primarily focused on enabling the local believers to do the work of the ministry." Benjamin L. Merkle, "The Need for Theological Education in Missions: Lessons Learned from the Church's Greatest Missionary," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9, 4 (2005): 58.

⁴⁹ By giving permission, I do not mean to imply that a local church belongs to the missionary and that he has the absolute right to decide what goes on. Every church belongs to the One who has bought it with His blood. However, the reality is that some missionaries on the field (and pastors, elders, Sunday school teachers, etc. at home) can feel very possessive about "their" ministry roles and become reluctant to bring along others to maturity who might one day replace them. To see healthy churches established, missionaries need to think less about their ministry and more about God's glory and plan.

⁵⁰ Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 491.

The Professor-Pastor

The missionary will be more helpful in the development of healthy churches if he carefully assesses his ministry according to the six considerations above. We examined these six aspects of missions on the principle level. Now we will briefly examine how these considerations can apply more narrowly.

If a missionary has a passion to serve only one local church and help it grow to maturity, “it is a fine work he desires to do” (1 Tim 3:1). Essentially, he desires to fulfill the role of an elder. However, due to the large need on the mission field and the many opportunities for service, some missionaries may be called to help multiple churches simultaneously. How can this be done well?

One viable option is for some missionaries to serve as professor-pastors *on* the missions field. Clarity is needed here. A professor offers formal training in theology and ministry skills within an established structure.⁵¹ To develop healthy churches by teaching pastors and leaders, the professor will certainly require prior theological training. Tan and Brooks are correct that “coming alongside local believers and training them to ... [lead the church] requires a commitment to providing *rigorous* theological training.”⁵² Rigorous training is required because the task of training other church leaders is a large responsibility with far reaching impact.

A pastor serves in the local church by shepherding and discipling. Although missionaries may sometimes serve as pastors, it is often preferable for a national to be the pastor and the missionary to assist him in caring for the flock. Thus, the “pastor” aspect of the professor-pastor missionary is best understood as one who plays the role of an elder. While he engages in formal training that might benefit multiple churches, the missionary should be committed to one church in which he can serve, teach, disciple, and model the faith. His commitment to a local assembly serves at least two purposes: 1) The missionary can play a significant role in developing one healthy church, and 2) that church can then serve as a model for how good theology and ministry skills look in practice.

World missions would benefit from more professor-pastors because more healthy churches would result from their labors. How do the six general principles that we considered above look when applied to the missionary professor-pastor? The first three principles are pre-field considerations while the last three principles are applicable to life and ministry in the destination country.

Purpose, Plan, and Preparation

Before the missionary candidate arrives on the field, there is much to consider. It is unlikely that the prospective missionary will become a professor-pastor if he did not have such a goal before going to the field. Opportunities to teach in a reputable school or seminary are not plentiful. However, such positions provide the opportunity

⁵¹ An established structure differs from personal discipleship or mentoring. In many cases such personal training will precede the introduction of formal training. Formal training, at minimum, involves a curriculum, standards of evaluation, and a specific timeline. Formal training is not inherently better than informal discipleship but does serve a somewhat different purpose. Each has a place in the life of the Church.

⁵² Tan and Brooks, “Theological Education,” 179. Emphasis mine.

to train multiple leaders who can help churches grow to maturity while a concurrent pastoral role (e.g., elder, discipler, etc.) provides for greater impact in one local congregation. If the missionary candidate desires to be a professor-pastor to assist churches in becoming healthy, he and his sending church will need to have this as a clear goal and understand its implications.

A missionary candidate's purpose, plan, and preparation go hand in hand. If one desires to teach and prepare others in theology and pastoral ministry, he will need to be adequately equipped himself. Missionaries cannot skimp on their own theological preparation because they need to be prepared to "tirelessly labor to ensure national believers receive the highest quality training in the word of God that is possible."⁵³ Nationals deserve the highest quality training possible because they are shepherding the church of God which He purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28). The Church, no matter in which country or culture it exists, deserves well-equipped pastors and elders. Healthy churches require capable leaders. Capable leaders require quality training. Quality training comes from those who are already appropriately theologically and ministerially qualified.

A professor-pastor needs specific places to serve. He needs an institution in which to instruct and train as well as a local assembly in which he can teach and disciple. In almost all cases, the candidate should have an agreement with both the seminary and a local church before he goes to the field. That a seminary needs to agree to a professor's employment is obvious; no one would presume to appear at an educational institution unannounced and demand a teaching post. However, something similar can happen on the mission field between a missionary and a church. Some missionaries simply turn up at a local church and expect to be welcomed with open arms into a leadership or teaching role. This behavior demonstrates an unwise, and perhaps even arrogant attitude on the missionary's part. Pre-field communication with an established local assembly is important. The elders and leaders of the church should understand and agree to the missionary's desires and goals before he comes to their church.⁵⁴

One final aspect of field preparation for the professor-pastor missionary is making decisions about language acquisition. On both fronts, fluency in the local language enables one to be most effective in ministry. Although it is possible to use English in some contexts, it is preferable to teach and disciple in the local language as much as possible.⁵⁵ Scott Callaham states that "crossing the bridge of language and culture is rightly the duty of the missionary far more often than it is the burden" of the national in the host nation.⁵⁶ Because the missionary is communicating God's

⁵³ Tan and Brooks, "Theological Education," 180.

⁵⁴ Remember that the missionary professor-pastor has a different role from the church planter. He is coming alongside a local church to join it and strengthen it. This cannot be done effectively if he finds himself in opposition to the local leaders (no matter how "right" the missionary may be in his doctrine and practice).

⁵⁵ Scott Callaham has offered a fresh and compelling argument about the need for language learning in world missions. He even advocates for the importance of missionaries knowing the biblical languages in addition to the local language of the community which they serve. See Scott N. Callaham, "Language and World Mission," in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 207–38.

⁵⁶ Callaham, "Language and World Mission," 227. Callaham's statement comes in the immediate context of communicating the Word of God to unbelievers on the mission field. I believe his argument is also applicable to theological instruction in a foreign country.

Word, it is imperative that he do all he can to remove barriers to learning God's Word.⁵⁷ This applies equally in the academy as well as the church. Although it will take years and countless hours of hard work, professor-pastors need to plan to joyfully give themselves to this labor in their early years.

Posture, Place, and Passing the Baton

Once the missionary has relocated to his host country the real work begins. From the outset, his posture (attitude) will set the tone for his ministry of training and discipleship. His early years of language training afford him a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate his humility and love for the church. Before his language develops sufficiently, the professor-pastor missionary will be severely limited in his ability to communicate the Word. After years of preparation before departing for the field, this additional time of "limited" ministry might feel frustrating. Despite the temptation to discouragement, this time should be seen as a blessing because it will give the missionary the chance to get to know the people and develop his love for them on a personal level. It is one thing to love the church in general and another to love the sometimes-difficult individuals that gather together each week. It is especially important that the missionary work hard to demonstrate his submission to his church's leadership. Although the leadership may have areas in which they need to grow, the missionary's submission to imperfect leaders demonstrates his love for God, His Word, and His people. This period of relationship building and brotherly love will help lay a foundation upon which the missionary will be able to build for many years to come.⁵⁸

At this juncture it may seem pedantic to repeat the importance of being committed to a local church, but its significance can hardly be overstated. On the professorial side the missionary may see a quicker response to his labors, but on the pastoral side, much more time is required. While understanding that longevity is important, the wise professor-pastor will bear in mind that a church will be healthiest when it is led by mature believers from the local community and culture. The missionary should seek wisdom from God, even from his earliest days of ministry, to identify those faithful men to whom he will one day pass the baton.

⁵⁷ Although English is often used in many countries in higher education, the missionary should not default to English as his primary language of teaching and discipleship without good cause. Theological education is quite different from secular education. For example, learning computer programming in English is fundamentally different from learning theology and Bible. A computer programmer needs to do a job in a field that is English dominated. Although his work might be in English, the rest of his life need not be lived in that language. In other words, many non-native English speakers use English in their workplaces to earn a living. Theology is different because it is not a job. Petrus van Mastricht has well said that "theology is nothing less than the doctrine of living for God through Christ." Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Prolegomena*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 1:98. In essence, believers need theology because they need to know and live for God. Thus, most theological learning (whether formal or informal) is best accomplished in the language in which that person will live for God. So, in order to best meet the needs of the learner, the missionary professor should teach in the language of the people whenever possible. With that, it must be noted that some languages have so few theological resources that advanced education may necessarily need to be in English or another more common shared language.

⁵⁸ It might feel trite, but the old expression applies here: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Conclusion

After centuries of missions work, the task is not yet complete. Until the Lord comes back and calls His people to glory, the work of world missions will continue. An important part of faithful missions work is the sending of missionaries who are committed to coming alongside local churches and helping them become more spiritually healthy. This ministry is not easy, but it is worth the price. Christ laid down his life for His Church. May God raise up more missionaries who are willing to follow their Savior and lay down their lives for His people. If this were to occur, the global Church would undoubtedly be more mature.