

OPERATION 4:12:
EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY

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Before the foundation of the world, God chose a people that he would call and bless. Sinners would be redeemed and made holy and blameless before God through the redemption of the blood of Christ. It is God's plan that, in the fullness of time, all things will be untied in him, things in heaven and things on earth.¹ Until Christ returns there is much work to do. Billions of people do not know Christ and march toward their eternal deaths in rebellion against their Creator. These people range in attitude from mild apathy to bloodthirsty killers of anyone who exposes their consciences to the true light of the gospel. God has called a people to himself and he commands and commissions them to take the gospel to a lost and dying world.

The work of missions is simple in one sense: speak the gospel to someone who does not know it and call him or her to repentance and faith in Christ. On the other hand, missions is one of the most complex of all endeavors. We are faced with Satanic attack, spiritual warfare, our own sinful flesh, and a host of religious, cultural, and linguistic issues that all seem to oppose the work of missionaries. If the gospel is to go forth, missionaries must be trained to face these issues.

The theme of this paper is the training of missionaries, the equipping of the saints to do the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and

¹Based on Paul's introduction to the Ephesians in Eph. 1:3-10.

carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. The task is not a light one, it is war, an assault against the kingdom of Satan. The task of missions must be treated like an operation, with strategy and objectives.

A Working Missions Philosophy and Methodology

There are many approaches one can take when introducing a philosophy of missions. In light of space constraints and in line with my personal ministry experience, I will focus specifically on a practical philosophy of missions consisting of four interrelated stages. They are entering, evangelizing, equipping, and sending. The first stage, entering the mission field, will overview cultural anthropology and ethnographic research as techniques for understanding a new culture. The second stage, evangelizing, will focus on presenting the gospel holistically by considering social contexts and literacy levels. The third stage, equipping, will focus on the mentoring and discipleship aspect of training leaders. The final stage, sending, will detail the selection, commissioning, and sending of national pastors and missionaries to new locations.

Stage One: Entering the Mission Field

Missionary anthropologist Tom Steffen went to the mission field lacking tools to analyze a people group, particularly tools that would help identify basic cultural values and create an appropriate church planting strategy. Consequently, Steffen and others came to believe that one basic strategy for church planting would fit any people group in the world.² In recent years, the fields of cultural anthropology and ethnographic research are being increasingly applied to missionary endeavors. Anthropology does not supplant biblical wisdom and mandates but it compliments Scripture and aids the missionary to more quickly and more effectively

²Tom Steffen, *Passing the Baton: Church Planting that Empowers* (La Habra, CA: Center for Organizational & Ministry Development, 1997), 91.

discern the target culture and develop a contextualized church planting strategy. These two social science fields will be more closely examined and applied to missiology.

Cultural Anthropology

Cultural anthropology is not a cure-all for missions strategy. It is only one tool available to the missionary. God has created an underlying order to human behavior. Cultural anthropology helps the missionary understand, enter into, and communicate with a new culture.³ Basic training in cultural anthropology will greatly benefit any missionary, Western or otherwise, in gaining the needed skills to enter a new culture. Lingenfelter's book, *Ministering Cross-Culturally* is a good introduction to the cultural values continuum.⁴ The book addresses cross-cultural perspectives on time, judgment, handling crisis, goals, status, and willingness to expose vulnerability. There are a host of other books that also address cultural values and are helpful for those preparing to enter a new culture.⁵

In addition to basic training in cultural values, it is helpful for the missionary to gain an understanding of the different kinds of societies in the world. One of the best books on this topic is Hiebert's *Incarnational Ministry*.⁶ Hiebert looks at societies from an anthropological perspective and provides information on the function of various structures and

³Stephen Grunlan and Marvin Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1988), 20-21.

⁴Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

⁵Several examples include Sarah Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot and Cold Climate Cultures* (Hagerstown, MD: McDougal Publishing, 2000); Richard D. Lewis, *The Cultural Imperative: Global Trends in the 21st Century* (Boston: Intercultural Press, 2007); Craig Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Intercultural Press, 2007); and Craig Storti, *Figuring Foreigners Out: A Practical Guide* (Boston: Intercultural Press, 1999).

⁶Paul Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).

roles in societies. A missionary will benefit from clearly understanding key issues such as polygamy, headmen, shamans, socialism, and authority. In summary, cultural anthropology better equips a missionary to understand and enter a new culture.

Ethnographic Research

Once in the culture, the missionary needs to be able to do research to find out what values are present, who makes decisions, how social structures work, and what worldview the people adhere to. Ethnographic research helps the missionary accomplish these tasks.

Ethnographic research is simply a holistic description of a culture, written from an insider's perspective.⁷ Basic ethnographic training helps the missionary know what questions to ask, how to ask them, and whom to ask them of. A key component of ethnographic research is participant observation. The research is both a process and an outcome.⁸ As a process, the researcher gets to know individuals in the society and begins building crucial relationships and finding persons of peace. The time spent researching is not wasted, as these relationships will lead to the future church plant. As an outcome, the finished ethnographic write up is a useful training tool for new missionaries or mission teams coming on short-term trips. My experience reveals that many church planters do very basic cultural research and attempt to plant a church far too quickly. More in depth research will lay a solid foundation for an effective, contextualized church.

Entering the mission field properly equipped is crucial to a healthy church plant. Missionaries and missions agencies should take advantage of the recent increase in missions

⁷David Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step by Step*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998), 1.

⁸John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998), 58.

focused anthropology and ethnographic research. These tools compliment theology and ministerial training and help the missionary learn and adjust more quickly to the new culture. Once the missionary has a good understanding of the peoples' worldview, he or she can then begin to think about the next stage: Evangelizing the people.

Stage Two: Evangelization

A goal of any missionary must be to preach the gospel. A certain tension must exist, however, because if the gospel is not preached in a culturally understandable way, no one will really *hear* the message.⁹ Some missionaries are instructed to memorize the Roman's Road or the *Four Spiritual Laws* in the local language and begin sharing the gospel immediately, even before the missionary knows what he or she is actually saying.¹⁰ Communication of the gospel is such an important matter that attention must be given to the manner in which it is communicated. First, the social context must be taken into account and then the literacy level of the people must be accommodated.

Consider the Social Context

Most people in the world operate in a collectivistic society. Individualism is not prized and is often squelched. Hiebert notes that strong group-oriented societies often make decisions corporately. Young people do not choose their spouses, living quarters, or vocations. In such societies, choosing one's religion is not seen as a personal right. If individuals are allowed to leave the group's religion, the cohesive nature of the society is in danger. Therefore, strong pressure and even persecution occurs when individuals stray from cultural norms. In

⁹ION, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (Lima, NY: Elim Publishing, 2005), 3.

¹⁰From an actual field report given by a new missionary.

these societies, the gospel should be presented to the group as a whole, or at least to those who are responsible for making decisions on behalf of the group such as tribal elders.¹¹ Conversion may take place in a mass or “multi-individualistic” manner. Of course God saves individuals but in group cultures, he often decides to save many individuals at once. Presenting the gospel to the youth or to individuals only, as is custom in a Western setting, can do more harm than good. Unnecessary persecution and hardship may follow. As stated previously, proper research will inform the missionary on the cultural dynamics such as who makes decisions in the culture. There is no reason to work against the cultural structure when working with it may lead to more people coming to Christ. Equally as important as the societal context is the learning and communication style of the people.

Consider Literacy Issues

Two-thirds of the people on Earth prefer an oral style of learning and communicating, yet ninety percent of Christian workers present the gospel in a highly literate communication style.¹² A missionary must identify how the people best receive new information and ideas and present them in a matching manner. Since the majority of those who do not know Christ prefer an oral style of communicating, missionaries must be trained to face the corresponding complexities.

Oral learners have difficulty grasping logical arguments and linear reasoning. They are more familiar with what they have experienced and respect words from those they know and trust more than they accept truth from an outside source, even if that source is a book written by

¹¹Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 326-27.

¹²ION, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, 3.

a renowned Ph.D holding author. David Sills often notes that oral peoples see truth as experience plus relationship. The story above that relates the new missionary who has memorized a logical four-point gospel presentation brings neither relationship nor experience to an oral culture. Recently, Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) has become a widely used method to reach oral peoples. CBS is simply presenting Bible stories in a chronological fashion in a culturally appropriate manner that develops a biblical worldview regarding God, creation, sin, sacrifice, and salvation.¹³ Understanding orality is much more involved than simply employing CBS. CBS, however, is a key tool when evangelizing an oral society. CBS takes time to work through the Scriptures, laying a foundation, and then presenting Christ and the cross. Some missionaries feel CBS just plain takes too long and they begin sharing the gospel short hand through logical tracts. There is a middle ground, however, that allows a relationship to be built all the while laying a biblical foundation for the gospel.

New missionaries must learn the local language to be effective. A good strategy for learning language is creating a language route in the neighborhood. The route links a dozen or so people or shops and the missionary can walk it everyday and practice new phrases. The repetition of the route provides not only practice for the missionary but also builds a relationship between the missionary and the people on the route. Conversation will be brief in the first days and weeks. Perhaps all the missionary can say is, “Hello. My name is Bill and I’m learning your language.” Over time, though, the missionary can begin to tell a Bible story to each person on the route. Again, the route provides a relationship and time to build a biblical foundation for the gospel. If the missionary thinks of all the Scriptures as gospel, in a sense, then he will not feel he is waiting too long to call the person to faith and repentance. Over time, the relationship is built,

¹³David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 183.

the hearer gains a foundation for the gospel, and the missionary improves in language skill. The language route allows several important tasks to be fulfilled simultaneously.

One benefit of CBS is that it is useful for both evangelism and for discipleship. The same stories can be revisited with a bent towards leadership training, sanctification, and a host of other post-conversion teaching topics. If evangelism must be tailored to the social context, so must the next stage: Equipping the new believers.

Stage Three: Equipping Believers

Paul makes clear in Ephesians 4:12 that believers must be equipped for the work of the ministry. Improper equipping results in a host of plagues in the church, from splits and division, to syncretism and false gospels. Some mission agencies propose a rapid transition to the next people group after a church has been founded in the first. This approach, when done too hastily, reaps awful consequences. Some amount of discipleship and equipping is needed. The first point to consider is what style of discipleship works best for the target people at a grassroots level. The next point is to give attention to the increasing need for accredited theological education around the world.

Apprentice Style Discipleship

The majority of discipleship tools available today are print based. Large mission agencies like Campus Crusade for Christ and the International Mission Board have their own publishing divisions and produce a variety of discipleship materials. One benefit of print based materials is reproducibility. Campus Crusade staff can carry on years' worth of discipleship just working through the materials given to them and then hand the booklets off to their disciple so he in turn can disciple others. This reproducibility is not as effective as it initially seems,

however. There is a danger of producing disciples who cannot think for themselves and who cannot address issues not covered in the written material. Too many printed materials can actually produce a biblically illiterate disciple because there is no need to actually pick up a Bible and read when everything is written in the booklets.

A better approach is what I call apprentice style discipleship. Apprentice discipleship simply means that a more mature and a less mature believer walk through life and ministry together, finding teachable moments in the midst of life rather than in a formal and artificial setting. Increasing institutionalization of training practices has separated the training center from the local church. Nationals are not being effectively trained because they are not being trained in a way that is familiar to them and transferable to their people. Even Western missionaries are asking for more specific, non-formal, experiential, and cross-cultural training.¹⁴

A brief history of missionary training reveals that discipleship has not always been institutionalized. Robert Gallagher reviews the Moravian training practices common in the 1600's. The early Moravians, led by Count Zinzendorf, were effective cross-cultural missionaries. Their training was thorough yet simplistic so the group could easily travel to escape persecution.¹⁵ Zinzendorf implemented a type of training that was similar to the apprentice practice common in his day. If one were training to become a blacksmith, one would not receive the training in a classroom setting. An experienced blacksmith would take the trainee under his care and show him the ropes. This is still the method many cultures are using to teach younger generations how to hunt, fish, weave, and do business. Missionary Tom Julien suggests

¹⁴Darrell L. Whiteman, "Integral Training Today for Cross-cultural Mission," *Missiology: An International Review* 36 (2008): 8.

¹⁵Robert L. Gallagher, "Zinzendorf and the Early Moravians: Pioneers in Leadership Selection and Training," *Missiology* 36 (2008): 241.

that missionaries would be wise to teach nationals the fundamentals of the faith and ministry in a similar style. Julien describes a series of “seed truths” that are best taught in a personal mentoring approach.¹⁶ This shadowing learning style provides not only teaching but also encouragement and character development. Nationals are not the only ones desiring an apprenticeship approach, however.

Western missionaries new to the field are finding their classroom training inadequate for the tasks at hand. Seasoned missionary John DeValve proposes that every new missionary be assigned to the care of a veteran for intentional mentoring. This is more than simply sitting down and passing along information. DeValve suggests the veteran living life with the new missionary in everything from going to the market to getting a tire fixed. DeValve draws a connection between a lack of mentoring of missionaries and a short life on the field. He believes that if new missionaries were mentored apprentice style by older missionaries, the work would be more successful and the field life would be much longer.¹⁷

The Increasing Need for Formal Theological Education

There is a great need for grassroots, apprentice style discipleship. Paradoxically, there is an increasing need for formal theological education as well. Simply stated, the purpose of formal theological education is to train leadership for churches and to train professors who can then teach future leaders.¹⁸ More and more countries are requiring churches to be registered in

¹⁶Tom Julien, “Training Leaders by Planting Seed Truths,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 44 (2008): 509.

¹⁷John DeValve, “Mentoring New Missionaries: A Neglected Ministry,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 44 (2008): 24-29.

¹⁸Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 151.

order to operate. In order to be registered, the pastor of the church must have some form of theological education from an accredited school. The problem is that there are very few theologically sound, accredited Bible schools in many countries. While there are large pockets of oral peoples in the world who would never step into a classroom, globalization has brought literacy and technology to remote parts of the world. One of the most common requests from Chinese church leaders is for formal, accredited theological education.¹⁹ It is one thing to impose an outside strategy on a national church. It is quite another to respond to their pleas for help.

For the time being, it may require Ph.D holding professors from outside countries to travel into countries needing theological education. Many times, a bachelor's level Bible school is needed for basic training. Next, these same professors can offer more advanced degrees. In time, enough nationals will earn Ph.Ds of their own so they can establish and teach in schools in their homelands. Many will object to this strategy, crying that it leads to inevitable dependence on outside funding. This critique is undoubtedly true. In some cases, dependence cannot be avoided, however. Until enough nationals have the academic credentials to teach, there will be dependence. Rather than looking at it negatively, we should see it as the body of Christ in action.

There are several models of formal theological education in existence today. A few include courses via radio or internet, physical schools which pastors must travel to, and cases where the professors travel to those needing the education. This last method is often called Theological Education by Extension or TEE. Any or all of these methods may be suitable for a particular area. Mission agencies should not try a one-size fits all approach. In a large city like

¹⁹Ibid., 153.

Buenos Aires, a physical campus may work well as pastors can take bus or rail and come to campus. In more remote areas, however, TEE may work better. If the majority of pastors are farmers and cannot travel for periods of time, the professor might come to a central village and hold classes. The point is that there is a need for formal theological education in some parts of the world. Equipping believers is a vital stage in fulfilling the Great Commission. A combination of apprentice style discipleship and formal theological education is necessary to produce healthy, mature Christians who can plant healthy and biblically faithful churches. Such equipping should naturally lead to the final stage: Sending.

Stage Four: Sending

New leadership should arise within any healthy church. It should be the expectation of every missionary that national leaders will become pastors and missionaries to their own and to surrounding peoples. The sending process should occur naturally, an extension of the apprentice style of discipleship. The sending process can be broken into three parts. The first is who should be chosen for pastoral leadership. The second is how does the ordination process work? The final step is sending teams of nationals out as cross-cultural missionaries.

Selecting Leadership

The Apostle Paul often had travel companions with him as he ministered – his apprentices. Men such as Barnabus, Luke, Aquila, Tychicus, Timothy, Titus, Apollos, Silvanus, and a host of others were trainees, not mere pack mules, and many later became pastors and evangelists.²⁰ Many Western churches do not pray for, expect, or prepare for pastoral leadership to arise from within their own ranks. These churches look to the outside when hiring new staff.

²⁰Eckhard Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies, and Methods* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 248.

A pastor may come from thousands of miles away and have no connection to or knowledge of the congregation. There are instances when such a model may be necessary but it should certainly not be the standard. Paul appointed elders from within the congregations he founded. As Roland Allen notes, “The elders were really *of* the church to which they ministered. They were at home. They were known to the members of their flock.”²¹

In collective cultures where relationship is key, leadership must be selected from within. Allen notes that most of the elders in the early church were not young. They were selected because they were men of high character and were respected and listened to among the congregation.²² Western missionaries must resist the urge to choose leadership who fit the Western mold: High energy, highly literate, and quick to make decisions. The cultural context must guide the choosing, along with leadership qualifications from 1 Timothy and Titus.

Ordaining Leadership

It must be noted that Paul ordained elders in every city to lead and govern the churches. These elders had immediate authority to baptize new converts and to ordain future leaders.²³ There have been instances on the field where the Western missionary was the only one with authority to baptize for many years. This should not be so. As local leaders arise, they should be ordained and given immediate pastoral responsibility. The missionary can be available for advice but the nationals should function fully in their capacities as pastors. Whether to and how to pay national leadership is a deep issue. There should not be a one size fits all model. Certain contexts call for a completely unpaid pastor while other contexts call for a fully

²¹Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, Reprinted 1997), 100. Emphasis in original.

²²*Ibid.*, 101.

²³*Ibid.*, 100.

supported pastor or missionary. The main point is that leadership should be chosen from within the community if at all possible. Once leadership has been ordained the church can send out missionaries to plant new churches.

Sending Leadership

One might wonder how to persuade nationals to carry the gospel cross-culturally. Oftentimes, the Holy Spirit so urges the new believers that they will evangelize on their own. Steffen suggests planting the seed in the leaders' minds by way of suggestion. The missionary might ask, "Who lives over there? Are there any believers there? What should we do about that?"²⁴ The documentary *Ee-Taow* notes that the nationals were eager to share the gospel with surrounding tribes. James Fraser, English missionary with China Inland Mission in the early 20th century reached the majority of the Lisu people with the gospel. A natural desire for missions has since resulted in the Lisu planting churches in over twenty-three different people groups. Here the four-stage mission philosophy comes full circle. These Chinese believers need the skills to cross cultures, avoid ethnocentrism, and plant effective and contextualized churches. Mission agencies tend to offer very little cross-cultural training to national believers but every person in the world is prone to think all cultures are similar to their own.

Conclusion

Missions is a complex discipline. Books abound with competing and conflicting strategies for planting reproducible churches. Many authors attempt to cite the Apostle Paul's mission strategy and duplicate it. The trouble is, there are more views on Paul's strategy than can be listed. God has graciously allowed a diverse approach to church planting. Cultures are

²⁴Steffen, *Passing the Baton*, 169.

different around the world. There is no one strategy that is guaranteed to work. Any helpful missions strategy will be vague to some degree to allow for a contextualized approach.

The four stages presented here have focused on the practical steps for church planting. Entering, evangelizing, equipping, and sending believers are things that every missionary must do in order to carry out the Great Commission. I have examined each stage and provided concrete steps but also raised questions that must be considered and answered by church planters. This four-step process is not a finished house that looks Western or Eastern. Rather it is a foundation and framework from which to build from. God, in his wisdom, has allowed for great cultural diversity and a biblically faithful church should reflect the creative diversity of the people it is composed of.

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