

Missions is Not About a Trip

I just got back from an interesting overseas trip. I had the privilege of visiting some of our people in Africa and the Middle East. Each trip I take God seems to confirm things He has been teaching me over the last few years. This trip was no different. As I spoke with missionaries and saw the work God was doing among our partners He confirmed to me that the greatest thing Liberty Baptist can do in missions is to stay the course with our strategy and to be consistently involved in the work with our overseas personnel.

I am sure some are saying, duhhh, you did not know that and you're the missions guy? Let me explain what I mean. When I talk to those in my line of work at meetings or other places, the talk seems to gravitate to answering a few key questions. Those questions are: How many trips do you take each year, and how much money do you give to missions? I even find myself tempted to join the little competition to the top, but God always brings me back to where He has us at LBC.

Now trips are important and money is needed to do missions. In and of themselves these two things are not the problem. The problem comes when churches hold trips and money up as keys to a good missions strategy. Some judge how well the ministry is doing by the number of trips they take and the amount of money sent to missions. I have heard pastors talk about their goal of having mission teams on the field every week out of the year, or the fact that they did 30,40, even 50 trips in a year. Somehow they think that having a lot of trips from the church proves the success of the missions ministry.

Yet, as I travel and meet missionaries, I see a much different point of view. Missionaries see churches come and go. Some even come back one time every year. The problem is few churches join them in the work and take on the burden of reaching their people with the gospel on a year round basis. Many ignore the pleas of missionaries to give ongoing help in establishing prayer networks, offering missionary care, developing stateside advocacy, stateside mobilization, producing web pages, or other things that take the church into full participation in reaching a people group.

When I travel I always ask missionaries what I consider a very important question. The question is, "Who owns you?" What I mean is: What church is deeply involved in your work? What church owns the great commission among this people group with you? Who can you call when there is a need? What church is a co participant in the on going work of starting a church in your people group? What church ministers to you and your family?

So far the overwhelming answer I receive is "no one". The follow up question is, "What about your home church? The answer is similar among many missionaries. "Oh they are building a building and have no money", or "They have had staff turn over and we do not know the new staff". Yet another answer is, "They give to missions but as far as participants in the work they are not involved".

These responses break my heart. While we are home bragging about how many mission trips we take each year, missionaries are out there looking for churches who will partner with them in the work of reaching those with no access, **year around**. They desire people who will love them, be there when they need, someone who will minister to their families, lead the prayer charge, and be a voice for them back home.

So if missions is not about a trip then what is it? Missions is about the Church taking ownership of the great commission and not passing it off to a mission board or a Para church agency. Missions is about us owning the mission field and becoming natives to it instead of being tourist. The great commission was given to the church and is to be fulfilled by the body of Christ.

For Liberty Baptist church that means we become deeply involved in a consistent holistic mission strategy. Consistently meaning that we are not a one-time visit but an ongoing participant. Holistic meaning we are deeply involved in all aspects of strategy with the missionary. Strategic in that we go where the need of the gospel is the greatest.

We the church must take it as our responsibility to get the gospel where there is no gospel. This cannot be done in one visit. We must invest ourselves in the work in an on going basis with those on the field. By developing partnerships with those on the field we become participants in the work instead of visitors.

Our tasks will vary from team to team. Some teams may be deeply involved in developing business seminars, developing English classes, taking care of the missionaries, translating materials, distributing materials, developing prayer networks and the list goes on. What it does not involve is one-time trips to places that do not need us and places that already have an indigenous church presence.

Liberty family that is why we do not take a lot of trips each year. **Our trips are designed to feed our strategy not our egos.** We have a holistic, focused strategy that works alongside our missionaries to see a church planted among those who have never had the gospel. Now let me clarify, I did not say building a church building. I said planting a church, which is a body of people who worship the living God. Those are different.

This is what Jesus did. He focused His energy on key people whom God later used to change the world. Jesus was a participant in their lives day-by-day walking beside them to teach, love, and encourage them until they understood what He was trying to say. That is what we want to do in our missions ministry, walk side by side with the missionaries trying to reach the lost till they see Jesus.

When we see that missions is not about how many trips or how much money we gave but instead about ongoing participation in the work, then we can brag on Jesus and the mighty deeds He has done instead of trying to convince others of the mighty deeds we have done.