God’s Answers For Everyman’s Questions

The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.
Proverbs 15:28 (NKJV)

Personal “bent” / Prejudice – Affirming what I “already believe…”

Let us not affirm ourselves! In this series we have sought to study and reveal God’s answers to often-asked questions.

The Elders of Faith Fellowship Church
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Commitment to Missions

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1. Introduction

This booklet is the result of an Elders’ Panel discussion that took place at Faith Fellowship Church (FFC) in Clarence, NY on July 20, 2016.

The purpose of the discussion was for the Elders of FFC to explore ways to better equip those who have been called to the mission field. An effort was made to better define the differences that exist between foreign and domestic missions; and short-term versus long-term missionary endeavors. By better defining what it means to be a “missionary” and what is needed to be properly prepared to be a missionary, the Elders used the opportunity of the panel discussion to explain the biblical origins of local bodies of believers sending missionaries out to the missions’ field.

As with many other areas of worship in the modern North American church, there has been a blurring of the biblical definition of missions and the cultural definition of missions. The panel discussion and this booklet are meant to help clarify the biblical roles of church leadership, local church members, prospective missionaries, and missionaries that are already out on the mission field in the area of worldwide missions.
It is our prayer that you are blessed by this material and that it encourages you to participate more energetically in the sending out of prepared and equipped missionaries—or, being one of those well-equipped individuals who are sent.
2. What is a Missionary?

Faith Fellowship Church (FFC) is a local church that is committed to fulfilling the biblical role of a body of believers in our local community and throughout the world. The modern world in which we live has become confused with the role of the Church both at the local level and in relation to missions.

We find the appropriate view of missions within the words of the Bible. In the Book of Matthew, Jesus Christ commands his followers to go forth into all of the world and make disciples.

*Matthew 28:19-20—*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

As we see in the “Great Commission,” Christ has commanded all of his followers to preach the Gospel and to disciple those who become believers. Although this is the case, those who are called by God to be sent out by the local church to reach a certain community or people group with
the Gospel is what we commonly refer to as a missionary.

Romans 10 tells us why the work of missionaries is so important:

Romans 10:14-15 “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!”

The Scriptures tell us that the feet of a missionary are beautiful because they help in delivering the Gospel to those who do not yet know Jesus.

Delivering and sharing the Word of God with those who have not yet heard the Good News is the calling of every believer and is often referred to as the work of the evangelist. A missionary must fulfill the role of the evangelist as well as the role of a teacher as they disciple new believers.

With that being the case, the decision to become a true missionary is not a small or insignificant one. Although some may think of missions as an extended vacation during which you talk about the Lord occasionally, the biblical examples above show that a missionary journey is serious business and should not be taken lightly.

It has become commonplace to refer to week-long or month-long trips to foreign lands as “short-term missions’ trips.” Although it might be true that a shorter-term trip like these can be tremendous service opportunities, it is important to not confuse trips of this sort with the traditional and biblical meanings of missions and the role that they play in building God’s Kingdom.
3. Sending Out Missionaries

As we saw in Romans 10:14-15, missionaries are to be sent out by the local church. This is an important part of the missions’ process that cannot be ignored.

The biblical example of how the church is to respond to this command is found in Acts 13:1-3:

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

There are many elements of sending out missionaries that are evident in this passage of scripture.
First, the sending out of missionaries is a role of church leadership. It is an important decision that should be accompanied by prayer and fasting. Someone going to the mission field is not a lone wolf. They are someone who needs to be trained and equipped for the work ahead. The local church leadership is responsible for making sure the training takes place and that they are confident that the missionary is properly prepared.

Secondly, it is the job of the Elders of the church to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit in the decision-making process as to who to send out. The last recorded words of Jesus Christ were an explanation of where we will receive the power we need to reach the world with the Gospel.

Acts 1:8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Thirdly, the church leadership and the missionary are still held accountable to the authority over them through the Holy Spirit. The leaders of the Church in Antioch were referred to as “prophets and teachers.” Their roles as prophets and teachers did not cease whether they were those that were sending or being sent. They still fulfilled their responsibility to the office that they were placed within the body of Christ.

Finally, it is appropriate for a local body of believers to desire to send out missionaries from their ranks. The act of sending must be a focus on the part of local church leadership if they are to have the opportunity to impact the world through missions. It is part of the job of the Elders to evaluate the fruit and teach and train prospective missionaries before they send them out.
4. Answering the Call

The Holy Spirit “calls” certain believers for specific activities and ministries within the Church. Being called by God is not necessarily a “mystical” event that comes out of nowhere. The call to missions is a collective call to the entire local body of believers to reach the world for Christ. The local church should work together to make sure that those that are sent out are ready for the challenges ahead.

The Bible tells us that the missions’ field is a place for strong believers who are well-equipped and ready to serve. It is not a place for unbelievers or immature Christians.

As mentioned earlier, a missionary must be prepared and equipped to bring the Word of God to the people that they have been called to reach. There is a great deal of study and training that must take place in order for someone to be prepare for the mission field. A true calling should be recognizable to others. Future missionaries will show their faithfulness through work and service at home in their local church body. A calling to the mission field should be
consistent with the calling on a believer to evangelize and serve in their everyday life both at home and abroad.

It is also important to understand that a calling to missions should not be driven by romantic notions of exotic places, but is accompanied by a desire to be where the Lord places you. This understanding shows a maturity on the part of the prospective missionary and a true desire to serve the Lord sacrificially.

Knowing that an individual is truly called to missions is important to both that individual and to church leadership. It is a certainty that missionaries will encounter extreme difficulties. However, if they are called by the Holy Spirit, then they will be compelled by the Holy Spirit to carry on and be victorious in Christ.
5. Qualifications for a Prospective Missionary

All those involved in the process of sending and being sent must focus on DISCERNMENT. Both prospective missionaries and the Elders of the Church must know that:

- Missionaries must be kingdom-builders.
- Missionaries must build unity in the church.
- Missionaries must be equipped to teach the Gospel.
- Missionaries must be tireless workers.
- Missionaries must put other people’s interests and comforts above their own.

Scripture also tells us in Acts 18:24-28 of further qualifications and considerations for those answering the call to missions.
Acts 18:24-28 “Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

As a missionary is in the field and experiences those who challenge and refute Scripture, a fully prepared missionary will need to be:

- Mighty in the Scriptures
- Fully believing in the authority of Scripture
- Knowledgeable of the complete Gospel
- Able to teach about the sufficiency of Scripture
- Able to refute those who will challenge the Gospel
- Someone with a strong knowledge of:
  1. Theology
  2. Church History
  3. Apologetics
Missionaries must also understand that they are still required to be held accountable to the authority of the sending church. Submission to authority does not go away when a missionary goes abroad. Leadership of the sending church will still be accountable to God for those that are sent.

*Hebrew 13:17 “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”*
6. Preparing to Be Sent

Whether someone is seeking a long-term or short-term service, those seeking such opportunities need to collaborate with the Elders of the local church. If they are being asked to participate with a missions’ agency, then the missions’ agency would meet with the Elders along with the prospective missionary. The local church biblically leads the evaluating and sending process.

The missions’ agency must also be willing to articulate exactly what the purpose of the trip is:

• Is it an “educational trip”?
• Is it a “service opportunity”?
• Is it a permanent deployment to a specific location and people?

It is unbiblical for missions’ agencies to try and circumvent the local church and attempt to “pluck” a young believer out of their local church while using the local church as a target for fundraising. This should not be so. As stated earlier, if a young
person is called to the mission field, then their individual calling will be accompanied by the corporate calling of the local church to send that young person out.

If an individual and church leadership are in agreement that the individual has been called to be deployed to the mission field, then it is the responsibility of both to continue preparing the individual for the task ahead. The local church must design a program to teach the prospective missionary to:
  • Serve
  • Study
  • Train

The Elders of the church are eager to patiently teach and train the future missionary. The leadership at FFC has committed to take the time and effort to pour into the lives of young people the knowledge and understanding they will need to be successful in whatever life-ministry they have ahead of them. The future missionary will manifest desire and eagerness to serve and study. The leadership at FFC has developed an internship program and a discipleship program that are designed to mentor young people to equip them to serve the Lord wherever they are.

It is important that the program used to prepare the future missionary is structured and detailed. FFC provides the IABC certification process as part of equipping those that will be sent in the field. The IABC training is an intensive program that teaches the discipleship skills a missionary will need as they teach and train new believers.
7. On the Field

Once a missionary has been sent to the field, the responsibilities of the sending church do not end. The membership and leadership of the sending church must come alongside the missionaries that they have sent out.

The members of the sending church have a continuing call to pray for and encourage the missionaries that are sent out. The local church provides the members with opportunities to pray corporately for their missionaries. At FFC, these structured opportunities are provided through assigning family care groups a specific missionary to pray for and encourage on a consistent basis, and for mission reports monthly at large meetings of the body.

Church leadership has the added responsibility of keeping the missionary accountable to the sending church. In holding that missionary accountable, the Elders still retain the responsibility of advising and correcting missionaries as well as making sure that the missionary is aware of red flags that may be in front of them that could warn of difficulties.

Because missionaries are considered both a member of the body and an extension of the body, it benefits both the missionary and the local body of believers to maintain a close accountability relationship.
The leadership at FFC will hold missionaries accountable by asking them to report on:

- Who they are counseling?
- Who are they meeting with?
- How far along are they on their discipleship goals?
- Are they sticking to their teaching and training plans?
8. Conclusion

As followers of Christ, we are all called to share the Gospel and build God’s Kingdom. The process of local churches sending out missionaries to parts of the world that need to hear the Gospel is an extension of that calling.

This booklet is meant to help provide some prospective on the process of selecting, preparing, and sending missionaries from the local body to a world in desperate need of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the salvation only available through Him.

Although some churches may choose to go about training and sending out missionaries in different ways, the principles of working corporately to answer the call to reach the world for Christ do not change.

It is our prayer that each and every believer participates in the mission that Jesus commanded of ALL of His followers - to go forth and make disciples. Each and every one of us is both sending and being sent. Every Sunday morning needs to be a “sending” service. Whether we are being sent next door or to the other side of the planet, we need to be a working and serving member of the body of Christ who is eager to study, train and is willing to be held accountable as we carry the one message that all the world needs to hear.