IT'S STILL NOT ALL ABOUT YOU

Posted on November 14, 2014 by Eddie

There is not place for isolated individuals in the world of mission. Missionaries are sent out by churches and generally work in teams, with churches in their host country. It's all about Christian community.
Category: Observations

Yesterday, we talked about how mission is first of all God's work. It is about Him and what he has been doing down through history. He calls us to join him in what he is doing, but it is his work.

Today, we are going to concentrate on the way that people are involved in mission, rather than looking at the big picture of God's work. However, it still isn't all about you: mission is the work of Christian communities. Let me give two simple illustrations from the Bible.

In Luke 10, when Jesus sent out his disciples on a mission trip across Israel. He sent them in pairs; they didn't go alone. Missionary literature is full of stories of heroic individual missionaries doing amazing things, but the Biblical pattern is to work in teams. Jesus knew that his followers would need others around them for practical, emotional and spiritual support.

In Matthew 28, in the passage known as the great commission, when Jesus gives the command to his disciples to make disciples around the world, all of the commands are plural. He commanded all of his disciples and, by proxy, all of his followers to get involved in mission. This is not a thing for isolated individuals.

Let's look at the different communities that a missionary will interact with.

Your Sending Church: this is the most important relationship in the life of a missionary. It is your sending church, your home church, who are responsible for identifying your potential for missionary service, for commissioning you as a missionary and who will pray for you and support you financially and spiritually in the years to come. Christians are not free, independent agents, we are members of communities, churches and the church has a key role in ensuring that we are in the place that God wants us to be in.

Not every local church has the resources to provide all of the finance thatÂ a missionary or missionary family needs, butÂ this doesn't diminish the important role of your home church.

The Receiving Church: you probably don't know these people yet, but they will be very important to you in the future. Almost all missionaries end up working alongside a church in some capacity. Even those that go to unreached people where there are no Christians, eventually hope to be part of an indigenous church. That's the whole point of the exercise.

One important point is that missionaries rarely lead local churches and this means that whatever work you are doing, you are likely to be under the direction of local pastors and church leaders in one way or another.

The Missionary Team: Jesus sent out his disciples two by two and Paul travelled with a band of co-workers. In the same way, modern missionaries work in groups. Mission teams tend to be highly cross-cultural. You may well end up working with Americans, Koreans, people from the country where you are based and a handful of other nationalities. It is a huge privilege to get to know Christians from other parts of the world, but it is quite a challenge too!

Implications for You

- Start talking to your home church about what you see as your future in mission. You cannot have this conversation early enough. It is quite likely that your church leadership will encourage you to get more involved in the church, both so that you can be stretched in your spiritual life and so that they can take a good look at you so that they can help you with the next steps. It may be that they have to gently tell you that they don't believe that mission work is right for you. In that case, accept what they say, humbly and graciously, get stuck in to whatever the Lord has for you here and now and then talk to your leaders again in the future. Whatever you do, don't storm off and tell them that they are wrong and that you will go and be a missionary with or without them.
- Take a look at your own attitudes.Â You will have to work with others and under the leadership and guidance of people from other cultures and backgrounds. You need to think this through and be willing to accept situations which you might find difficult. If this is something you are going to struggle with, it is best to get some support and advice as soon as you can.
- Pray for the people you are going to be working with. This is difficult; you probably don't know their names or anything else about them, but pray anyway. Just imagine how it is going to be when you meet the pastor of the church where you will be serving in, say, Asia and you can tell him; "I've been praying for you for three years".

This is the second post in a series on preparations for Mission Service.