

PRINCIPLES AND METHODS



Principles for Selecting Mission Methods

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

“To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.” I Corinthians 9:22

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

“...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be My witnesses...” Acts 1:8



QUOTES

The early disciples sought “to endeavor by all possible methods to bring over a lost world to God.” –William Carey

“We have literally no time to sit down and ask ourselves whether so-and-so is our neighbour or not. We must get into action and obey, we must behave like a neighbor to him. Perhaps this shocks you. Perhaps you still think you ought to think out beforehand and know what you ought to do. To that, there is only one answer. You can only know and think about it by actually doing it. You can only learn what obedience is by obeying. It is no use asking questions; for it is only through obedience that you come to learn the truth. ... With our consciences distracted by sin, we are confronted by the call of Jesus to spontaneous obedience.” –Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“The forms and patterns of the missionary task are changing and will change as the consequence of the fact that the Church is now worldwide. But the missionary task is still fundamentally the same—to go forth outside the frontiers of Christendom and make Christ known among all the nations.” –Lesslie Newbigin

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“Over the past century, however, the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Already today, the largest Christian communities on the planet are to be found in Africa and Latin America.” –Philip Jenkins

“... properly speaking the mission is the mission of the Holy Spirit.” –Lesslie Newbigin

“... it is the persecuted or martyred Christian in whom the pattern of the Master is most unambiguously realized.” –C. S. Lewis

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As a result of the readings, discussion and activities in this lesson, the candidate should be able to:

- Understand the necessity of principled methodology in mission work
- Discern the best manner in which to employ methods for mission work
- Discover the new reality and role of the worldwide church
- Develop a framework which will define the goal of methods
- Think critically about what types of methods are appropriate for a particular situation.

The aim of this session is to provide a framework by which one can decide what methods to employ that will allow for faithful cross-cultural witness and indigenous church planting. It seems that for many people called to missions the point is to get to a new place, adjust to their surroundings, and then to live life. In the context of proactive missions, it should be obvious that this perspective is hardly adequate. We must act with intention and do the kinds of activities that are appropriate and productive. Also, we must consider what role is appropriate for us to take in those activities. If we want to be part of God’s mission, our aim must be higher than arriving and surviving, and more than keeping busy with activity.

Arriving and living must become principled doing. Means and methods initiate and sustain the processes by which the gospel is communicated, people are discipled, churches started, and leaders trained. The end is much more than just getting somewhere and surviving culture shock. The end is announcing God’s Kingdom and gathering disciples of Jesus into churches. Appropriate methods are the means to these ends.

Employing appropriate means is more than just a matter of doing what works or mimicking what another person or group does. The manner in which we act and the methods we employ need to be principled and theologically informed and formed by the Holy Spirit. If not, we may be extremely active but actually working in a manner counter to our stated end. We may end up trying to do activities meant for someone else to do in some other place. Thus, in this session, we will explore the **means** by which mission work is to be done, the **manner** in which **methods** are to be employed, and **who** is to do them.

CASE STUDY: RESISTANT PEOPLE

Steve and Sally arrived in Morocco approximately three years ago. After years of service as a successful church planter in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, they sensed a call to plant churches among the Rifi Berber people of Morocco. While Steve definitely felt the need for new church starts still existed in the Northwest, he was moved by the overwhelming challenge of church planting in North Africa. Steve explained to his wife – “There are others in Seattle who can do what we are doing, but few are willing and able to go to Morocco to plant churches. We can just do what we are doing in Seattle in Morocco.”

After arriving, Steve and Sally spend a reasonable amount of time adjusting to their new surroundings and learning the basics of the language. Steve is anxious to get to work but decides to hold off for a full year before even trying to do any church planting. Of course, he thinks constantly about what he will do and rehearses over and over in his mind what the first steps will be. He and Sally stay with this plan, faithfully attending language classes and practicing their Arabic with people in the market, social situations, and chance encounters. Both make steady strides in acquiring the language and soon are able to function in most basic situations. Because of their adventuresome spirits, both like living cross-culturally and are excited by the challenges that Morocco presents.

*WHILE SCRIPTURE DOES NOT
PROVIDE US WITH AN EXACT
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IT DOES GIVE US A CLEAR
INJUNCTION TO LOVE.*

Steve feels fairly confident as he comes to the end of his first year and prepares to launch into his ministry of planting churches. He is reasonably adjusted to his surroundings and feels comfortable in most social situations. He is ready to get to work. So, he implements his first steps as a church planter.

Two years later, Steve sits across from a friend with his chin in his hands, unloading his frustrations. Steve goes through a list of different initiatives and activities that he has tried in multiple locations. With each round of initiatives, he explains to his friend, methods were refined and “tweaked,” and yet, after two years of effort, no new churches are to be found. He tells his friend that he just does not understand why he has failed. He has done all the right things – followed proven church planting methods, diligently taught the methods to the “nationals,” created logistical and technical support, etc. Steve tells his friend, “These same methods were quite effective in Seattle. I also know of missionaries in Indonesia and Taiwan who have had good results with them.”

Thinking aloud about why results had been so meager, Steve blames the Moroccans. “They are just lazy and are not concerned about the salvation of their own people. Also, as much as I have explained and taught our strategy, they just never get it. I don’t think they are capable of understanding what I am trying to do.”

In addition, Steve cites the fact that the political situation worked against him. “If the Moroccan President had not declared a state of emergency, we could have traveled more and people could have attended our meetings. Fear kept everyone off the streets and in their homes.”

Steve finally declares, “I just don’t think these people are ready for the Gospel. They are resistant.” With this declaration, he gets up, smiles at his friend, and heads home.

REFLECT #1

1. In your opinion, what are the factors that contributed to Steve’s “failure”?
2. Describe what you think was actually happening when Steve perceived the local people being resistant?
3. What is the difference between unresponsiveness and resistance?
4. How common do you think Steve’s experience is among newly assigned missionaries?

A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Before we talk about the use of methods for mission work, we need to form a framework for understanding what hinders us in pursuing God’s mission. Mission work is not the same as performing a surgical procedure, wiring a house, or running a business. It is a spiritual activity and thus, ultimately a mystery. We do not stand outside of or above God’s mission, we stand under it. We do not control it, it controls us. We do not manipulate it as we would an object; it is a subject that acts upon us. And yet, somewhere along the way, most of us have been taught that we can produce specific results if we will discover the correct missiological formulas, or employ a silver bullet methodology, or discern what methods are truly “right.” These kinds of notions hinder rather than help us in discerning appropriate and productive methods and strategies in the work of missions.

SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF MISSIONS?

In order to give missions a measure of respectability and to put missionaries and the work of missions on par with other academic disciplines, missiology was established as part of the university and seminary curriculum in the later part of the nineteenth century. Missiologists have since that time produced tremendous amounts of information and studies that are helpful to the work of missionaries. It is important that the various aspects of missions be studied (history of missions, theology of missions, missionary anthropology, etc.) and that those who do missions be aware of the latest thinking regarding mission work. With the establishment of missiology, however, some began to approach mission work as if it were a science, like biology, chemistry or physics. A scientific approach to missions looks to establish a cause and effect understanding of mission methods. The reasoning goes like this: as scientific theorems or laws can predict outcomes for natural and human phenomena, we should be able to predict certain missions outcomes when particular methods and activities are used.

The fallacy of this approach is that the activity of God is categorically different from science. In fact, we need to realize that scientific thinking is a recent development, beginning only several hundred years ago. Was God not at work before that time and through other means? God certainly uses logic, reason, efficiency, and effectiveness to enhance his work; however, these must not define, determine or limit what God does. God’s ways are beyond the dynamics of cause and effect, logic and science. We can find plenty of examples in Scripture and from history in which God’s ways are contrary to our ways of thinking and operating. The Lord declares, “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways*” (Isaiah 55:8). Thus, we must do more than approach mission work using scientific method.

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SILVER BULLET?

Modern culture has taught us that every problem, dilemma or situation has a solution. In fact, people have sold a lot of books and products by claiming that these contain the answer to problems that all of us face: weight gain, marital strife, unruly children, depression, yellow teeth, etc. They tell us if we will try their product or use their method for a particular period of time, we will lose those unwanted pounds, have a great marriage, see our children straighten up, overcome anxiety and depression, or have white teeth. Guaranteed! They promise a “silver bullet” – a solution that provides a “sure-fire,” simple solution.

Even though we purchase the book or product (and in most cases do not see the promised results), we are ready to buy another book or product from the next person who comes along. We find it hard to let go of the notion that silver bullets exist. The reason we are susceptible to those who come hawking silver bullets is three-fold. First, because we long for simple solutions to the problems and challenges of life, we latch onto anything that seems to offer us a quick solution. In the second place, we know deep inside the alternative to a silver bullet is the hard, difficult solution that may require a great deal more time and effort from us. We like the ease of a shortcut or a simple solution. Third, a “silver bullet” promises to work across every situation, location and time. Thus, its attraction lies in the fact that we do not have to exert much effort in applying it. We can immediately use it wherever we are, with no risk of personal failure or loss.

Faithful witness requires more than finding the one right method or performing correct activities or taking a simple path. On numerous occasions, Jesus rebuked His disciples for wanting to take an easy path or asking for simple solutions (see Matthew 8:18-22; 12:39; John 6:53-66). Instead, He called them to costly solutions, which require prayer, fasting, sacrifice, and love. Thus, the ‘silver bullet’ approach may actually cause us to miss God’s approach completely.

BIBLICAL METHODS?

One assumption which causes us to look for silver bullets is that we assume the Bible teaches one right divine methodology. Our job becomes discerning what the ‘biblical method’ is and then following it in every situation and for all times.

On the contrary, what we find in the Bible is not one eternal method or even a few special methods but a multitude of methods used by various people in different situations. There is not one sacred method in Scripture that we are meant to discover and then employ for all times and in every situation. Rather, Scripture provides us with an array of methods and approaches. The Book of Acts is a good example of the variety of methods we see in Scripture.

REFLECT #2

1. Describe the methods being used in the following passages from Acts:

Acts 2:1-42, 10:1-48, 16: 14-40, 17:16-33

2. From the Scripture above, what patterns of methodology for giving witness are consistent throughout?

3. Contrast the differences and similarities of the methods suggested in these Scripture passages.

LOOKING IN FOUR DIRECTIONS

Our intent in mission work is not to find a formula, a silver bullet or a shortcut. Rather, our aim is to identify how God is at work and to do our part in His work through the means and methods which are appropriate and at hand. We do this by looking in four directions:

- directly in front of us
- behind us
- right next to us
- inside of us

LOOKING IN FRONT OF US: CONTEXT

The context in front of us should define what methods we use and the manner in which we employ them. The context in front of us includes person, place, and the point in time in which we find ourselves.

Person. You are not the Apostles Peter or Paul – nor are you Betsy, Bill, Sally, or Steve. You are uniquely **you**. You have gifts, talents, abilities, experiences, and a personality that are distinctly, providentially you. This ‘you’ that you are should inform the process of deciding what methods are to be used and how they are to be used.

Many times we try to cram ourselves into a role or method that is not us and may even end up violating who we are as a person. Who we are is not a mistake or something to overcome; rather, it is the key to how God wants to work in the lives of others. We have to believe that if God has called us to a place, then who we are as a person is needed for that particular situation. We have to understand who we are, find the place to which God has called us and then discern how these fit with various methods and strategies.

EVERY PLACE IS UNIQUE.

The other person in front of us is the **local believer**. He or she is uniquely formed with gifts, talents, abilities, experience, and personality.

Who local believers are should inform the process of deciding what methods are employed and how they are done. The local believer is more than auxiliary to what we do. If they are true partners, they need to be part of deciding on methods rather than methods being decided on for them.

In many cases, the methods we bring from America and Europe are counter-intuitive and culturally inappropriate for local believers. Most of these methods require huge outlays of money, technical expertise, or a Western orientation – all of which disqualifies the local believer from full and enthusiastic participation.

To act as though we do mission alone or that we control the means by which others are involved is either a sign of arrogance or ignorance. It is arrogant to think that educated Americans from a particular branch of Christianity alone are the qualified or elected ones who know best how to do mission work in a context outside of America. Likewise, it is ignorant to be unaware of what local believers in places all over the world are doing. Koreans, Ghanaians, Indians, and Brazilians also offer vibrant witness to Jesus today.

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Below are articles and posts to read and an NPR program to listen to which highlight the shift that has taken place – read, listen, and then respond.

Read about world Christianity by the numbers (<http://www.merehope.com/world-christianity-numbers/>).

Read facts about the state of Christianity around the globe excerpted from *The New Shape of World Christianity* by Mark Noll (<https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2009/07/the-new-shape-of-world-christianity/>).

Listen to Phillip Jenkins, Professor of Biblical Studies at University of Pennsylvania and author of *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, being interviewed on NPR radio about cultural differences of northern hemisphere compared to southern hemisphere beliefs with an emphasis on Christianity and its practices (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6188150> – 15 minutes).

Place. Every place is unique. Bangkok is not Chicago. Nor is Bangkok, Thailand the same as Chiang Mai, Thailand. Nor is Bangkok's old city area of Thonburi the same as Sukhumvit Road. Nor is one side of Sukhumvit with its hotels and retail shops the same as its industrial side. It is imperative that we look with discernment and respect at the place directly in front of us so that we understand it as it is, and approach it as unique. Broad, generalized, and unchecked assumptions about terrain and people, powers and customs, social patterns and business practices can be fatal to our witness.

Rather than treating a particular place as just a place where every missions methodology should fit, we should instead treat methodology as something to be shaped distinctively by place. This requires a significant commitment to understanding place, as well as requiring the skill to gain a proper understanding. (Skills necessary for understanding place are introduced in the session on Ethnographic Research, which provides an introduction to reading a city, neighborhood, or social situation so that we are better equipped to think about types of methodology for specific place).

To take seriously the place in front of us means we affirm the coming of the Son of God to a specific place known as Bethlehem. God did not just come to us, but He inhabited places – Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee, and Jerusalem. He acted within the context of His Jewish, Roman-occupied, first-century context.

Point in Time. Current events, both secular and religious, are givens which cannot be dismissed and should not be seen only as barriers to missions. We need to ask theologically informed questions about these events in these places and the times in which we live. Such questions might include:

- What events are giving definition to peoples' lives?
- Who is being oppressed, abused, slandered, or dislocated by these events?
- What kind of change is underway?
- How might God use these events to prepare people to respond to Him?

For example, the post-Gandhi twenty-first century India of today is quite different than even one year ago. To take seriously the point in time and events in front of us means to

acknowledge that God is the Creator of all that is and the Sustainer of life. If He is Lord over the whole of creation, then all peoples, war, famine, tsunamis, elections, and changes of governments are not beyond Him and His purposes.

REFLECT #3

1. Who are you? What unique perspective, gifts, and abilities do you bring to the mission task?
2. Think about the last time you spent time in a new place – on vacation, relocating to a new city, changing jobs, newly married, going off to college, etc. What assumptions did you take with you to the new place that made it difficult to adapt?
3. What lifestyle methods did you take with you and assumed would “work” in the new place?
4. How did your perspective, which was framed in your former place, slow down your growth and effectiveness?
5. What did this experience teach you?

LOOKING BEHIND US: PRINCIPLES

A principle is a general and fundamental truth that may be used in deciding conduct or choice. Principles are not methods but are truths that inform our choice of methods. By nature, principles are broad rather than narrow. They are usually formed by consensus rather than by formal vote or decree. A principle is not a law that rules us or a command that must be obeyed; rather, a principle is a truth that guides our decisions about what methods are appropriate.

Most principles are developed from the cumulative experience and wisdom of those around us and those who have come before us. Principles stand behind us like wise old sages, speaking to us at appropriate moments in our decision-making processes and advising us in the middle of our activity.

Where are we to look for principles? We can glean principles from a number of sources:

Scripture. We have already indicated that the Bible does not give us methodological rules to follow, but most certainly it provides essential principles. Both Old and New Testaments should be read with an eye toward discovering guiding principles. For example, while we cannot do exactly as Paul did – go to the synagogue and preach, speak to philosophers at Mars Hill, travel by ship – we can glean timeless principles from these encounters and activities.

Biographies. One of the most impactful books on my life has been *To the Golden Shores: The Life of Adoniram Judson* by Courtney Anderson. I have read it several times and often refer to it. In doing so, I am not seeking to replicate Adoniram Judson’s method or to act as he did. This would be nonsensical since he lived from 1788 to 1861 and worked in Burma. However, the way in which he made decisions and the truths that guided the manner in which he lived and ministered say much to me.

Mentoring Relationships. Living and working alongside an older brother or sister offers us a wonderful opportunity to hear and observe important principles. It is the wise young woman who seeks to place herself in the life of seasoned veterans in order to ask questions about why they do things as they do, about their life experiences, and about the lessons they have learned. A mentoring relationship can provide a goldmine of hard-earned wisdom and principles.

Local Brothers and Sisters. As outsiders, we have so much to learn from those with insider knowledge and wisdom. Brothers and sisters in Christ living under duress, as a minority

community in a pluralistic society, can add so much to our understanding of how God works and what God is doing only if we will ask the right questions and if we are willing to listen. For many of us, this will require looking beyond such things as clothing, poor education, little to no technology and style. Sometimes we see these things as substance when they are only surface. If we are willing to look beyond surface, we can learn much about wisdom gained through hard experience, faith acquired by way of suffering and character developed over the long haul.

What are the enemies of principles? The following actions and attitudes will keep us from living and operating per principles:

Whim. In the midst of a decision or dilemma, we might be tempted to make a decision about what to do without much thought or counsel. In the end, we do whatever strikes our fancy or suits our mood at the moment. When possible, principled action seeks to take time to reflect and measure actions rather than to jump too quickly acting on a whim.

Expediency. If we want to get something done as quickly as possible, we might be tempted to ignore or violate principles we know to be true just for the sake of seeing something done sooner rather than later. In the end, even though things may happen based on our timetable, they may be unprincipled and wrong.

Effectiveness. If we make a decision out of a desire to produce what we deem to be a success or a positive result, we might be tempted to dismiss principles which would take us in a different direction. In the end, we may look successful and be able to talk about results, but the decision may not be best for the long-term or may ultimately produce unwanted consequences.

Manipulation. If we do not trust those around us or the processes through which decisions are made, we will be tempted to “take charge” or even manipulate people and processes in order to do things in a way that we think is best at the time. Even though it is human nature for all of us to desire to control, acting according to principles means that we resist this tendency. Even though we are absolutely sure we are right, we must acknowledge that we are only men and women and admit we are often wrong. The principle that God works collectively through people and processes should warn us against unilateral decisions and controlling actions.

The best decisions concerning methodology are those made on principle rather than mere whim, expediency, effectiveness or manipulation. God’s ways do not operate per our fancy. God does not always act as quickly as we would like for Him to act. Many times God’s measurement of success does not match our idea of success. And often we do not know what is best, even though we think we do. It is exceedingly important that we gather, cultivate and develop principles. And it is equally important that we live by them.

*PRINCIPLES ARE NOT ETERNAL LAWS
NOR ARE THEY INFALLIBLE.*

Principles are not eternal laws nor are they infallible. Principles will change and modify over time as we gain experience, talk with different people, and spend time in Scripture. Thus, while always qualified and somewhat relative, principles stand behind us as trustworthy and steady guides.

REFLECT #4

List three principles from Scripture which would be helpful in determining methods of mission work.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List three principles you have learned from or observed in others which would be helpful in determining methods of mission work.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

LOOKING RIGHT NEXT TO US: TOOLBOX

We study methods not so that we might know what the best methodology in every situation or so that we might replicate what others are doing. We study methods in order to collect tools for our missions toolbox. We want to understand and evaluate methods so that various method-supporting tools can be placed in our toolbox for future use. This does not mean that they must be used or that they are necessary, it means that they are beside us, close at hand, and available should we deem them appropriate.

Most tools are designed for a specific use. A hammer serves the purpose of driving nails into wood. It is of no use if you want to remove a nut from a bolt. In fact, if you use a hammer on the nut and bolt rather than using a wrench, you end up causing a lot of damage. Thus, just because a method is in our toolbox does not mean that we are to use it. Discernment of what is needed and the appropriateness of a particular method should determine what tool we use.

For example, we know that the translation of Scripture into the heart language of a people is essential. Throughout the history of missions, people have labored at translation work, doing whatever is necessary to translate Scriptures in ways that make them available to the widest number of people. The tools used to do this have been varied and have changed per the language, location and times. The end is a heart language translation of the Bible. The means and methods have included grammars, dictionaries, language informants, back translation, pen and paper, typewriters, recorders, computers, etc.

Just because a particular method is appropriate for Chicago or California does not mean it is right for Lagos or Chiang Mai. Just because radio broadcasts are used in Guatemala does not mean the same method is right for Tibet. When we think that a familiar method is universally applicable, it becomes the end rather than a means to the end. Methods are tools beside us in our toolbox, to be selected and used as God leads us.

Not only are we to look in front of us, behind us, and beside us, but we must look to the Spirit who lives inside of us.

LOOKING INSIDE OF US: THE SPIRIT

Much of what has been said in the previous sections must be prefaced by, informed by or conditioned by the fact that the Holy Spirit must guide us in the selection of methods, the use of those methods, and the shaping of who we are as we live out those methods. Without the

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work of the Spirit, all that we do is for nothing. Lesslie Newbigin, missionary to India for many years, notes, “It is not that the church has a mission and the Spirit helps us in fulfilling it. It is rather that the Spirit is the active missionary, and the church (where it is faithful) is the place where the Spirit is enabled to complete the Spirit’s work.”¹

The question is, ‘What is the Spirit leading us to do?’ rather than, ‘Does this method work?’ Just because a person was led by the Spirit to act a particular way in one situation does not mean that we should act the same way in our context. We must do the work that is the most difficult of all – submit to God our will to control, our desire for success and our tendency to just react or act quickly.

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus instructs His disciples to wait on the Spirit and to be empowered by the Spirit for witness of Him throughout the world (Acts 1:4, 8). Elsewhere Jesus says it is the Spirit who testifies of Him (John 15:26), convicts “*the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment*” (John 16:8), and glorifies the Son (John 16:14). Jesus instructs His disciples that when they are arrested and handed over to the authorities not to worry beforehand what they are to say, “*for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit*” (Mark 13:11; also Luke 12:12).

In Acts, we see the Spirit give Peter and the disciples the ability to communicate “*the mighty deeds of God*” to people from all over the world who were present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11), speak through Peter, Stephen, Paul and others (Acts 4:8, 31; 6:5; 7:55; 11:28; 13:9), tell them what to say (Acts 11:12), and instruct them as to where to go and what to do (Acts 8:29, 39; 13:2-4; 15:28; 16:6-7; 20:22-23; 21:4, 11). Peter states that it is the Spirit who gives witness to Christ (Acts 5:32) and told him to go to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:19).

The apostle Paul exhorts us to set our minds on the Spirit in whom we find life (Romans 8:6), to be led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14), to act in the power of the Spirit (Romans 15:18-19; Eph. 3:16), and not to quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). The Spirit shows us all things (1 Corinthians 2:12; Hebrews 10:15), produces good fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:16-25), and testifies to the truth (1 John 5:6).

Truly, mission is the activity of the Holy Spirit working in and through human lives. Methods void of the Spirit’s guidance and empowerment are merely actions determined and executed by clever and resourceful men and women.

THE GOALS OF OUR METHODS

What purpose should methods serve? For sure, they are not to be ends in themselves; rather methods should serve as a way to move from one place to another. So, in order to select and use methods correctly, we need to ask, “Where is it we want to go?” and “Where do we want to be?”

I believe the mission to which God has called us has purposes similar to those of Jesus’ mission. Thus, our methods in this mission should move us closer to people, move us to speak about Jesus and move us to love.

Promoting Presence

The methods we employ should promote our presence with others. In other words, method should never become a substitute for us and our presence.

While many contemporary methods are media-based and technology-driven and may be considered efficient or produce an impact, they have a tendency to remove us from people and their lives. God could have used any kind of media or technology to communicate His message and yet, He used means that placed Him personally and directly into our history. In Scripture, we see Jesus using means that put him face-to-face with the woman at the well, in the home of Zacchaeus, in conversation with a prostitute, in the press of the crowd, touching diseased and crippled people and talking with children. His methods were a Roman census, a manger, Joseph and Mary, human flesh and blood. Likewise, we should determine to use methods that move us closer to people.

Proclaiming Jesus

The adage, “the medium is the message,” can be certainly true of mission work. There are methods that speak loudly of who we are, what we are able to do, our culture, our wealth, our In the end, no matter how loud we may say, “Jesus,” all they hear is us. No matter how vividly we show the gospel, all they see is our technology.

As a young missionary, I remember going to villages to show the *Jesus Film*. In order to do this, I had to transport a film projector and generator in my vehicle. All three of these – project, generator, and vehicle – were technologies new to most of the villagers who were viewing the film. Many of those who showed up to see the film were so interested in the medium that they did not see or hear the message.

Technology has a place, but it should, like anything else, be used with care. Just because we have the resources and technology to do certain things does not mean we should do them, especially when they become larger than the message.

Providing a Chance to Love

While Scripture does not provide us with an exact methodology of mission work, it does give us a clear injunction to love. We are to “*abide in love*” (John 15:10), lay down our lives for another in love (John 15:13), “*through love serve one another*” (Galatians 5:13), and “*speak the truth in love*” (Ephesians 5:14). Love “*is the fulfillment of the law*” (Romans 13:10), “*the love of Christ controls us*” (2 Corinthians 5:14), “*love is to abound more and more*” (Philippians 1:9). We are to have the same measure of love as Christ, who laid down his life for us (Philippians 2:5-8).

“*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.*” God acted out of His love for us. The act of sending Jesus was not God’s technique to get us to do something, a strategy to motivate us toward good behavior or His way of manipulating us. Because God loved us, He gave his Son. God is love and thus, as His children giving witness to who He is, we are to love (1 John 4:8).

The constant temptation before any of us is to rely upon our use of methods and principles rather than sacrificing our lives and love for another human being. Instead of loving the other, we perform some action toward them. Rather than giving our lives in love, we do something

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for them or give them something. If we are to imitate the ways of Jesus, then the motivation for our actions, the rationale for our methods, and the aim of our missions must be love.

Bishop V. S. Azariah of the Church of South India in his address to the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910 did not plea for better methods or more resources. Instead, he called those present to love.

Through all the ages to come, the Indian Church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labours of the missionary body. You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for love. Give us FRIENDS!²

The Apostle Paul tells us that even though we might do worthwhile activities with great results and do not have love, we have majored on lesser things and neglected the greatest. A missionary's paraphrase of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13, might read as ...

If I preach with great style and technique, but do not have love, I have become a rattling can or honking horn.

If I have knowledge of all methods and have the skill to do them all with great effect, but do not have love, I am next to nothing.

And if I am able to start hundreds of churches, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Love is not in a rush; love does not become jealous of the success of a colleague.

Love does not brag about its deeds or speak in a high or superior manner, does not act inappropriately or seek its own way, is not easily offended, does not keep a record of offenses or failures, nor is it OK with evil stuff and lies but is thrilled with the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

Love never fails; but if there are methods and strategies, they will be done away with;

If there are five and ten-year plans, they will one day come to an end;

If there are strategists and missiologists, they will be unemployed.

For we really know only a fraction of what is going on around us, but when Jesus' reign is established, our temporal methods and strategies will be done away.

When I was a missionary, I used to speak like a missionary, think like a missionary, reason like a missionary; when I became a martyr I did away with missionary-kind of thinking and reasoning.

For now we see in part what God is doing, but one day we will see fully the extent of His love and actions.

But for the time, all we have are faith, hope, and love, but love rules.

The goal of methods should be:

- to move us closer to people, not create distance
- to proclaim clearly who Jesus is, not who we are and what we can do
- to provide us an opportunity to love.

REFLECT #5

Go back to the case study about Steve's mission work experience. If you were the friend he was sharing with in the story, what advice would you give to Steve?

METHODS, METHODS, METHODS

In many of the PANORAMA sessions that follow, you will be introduced to a number of mission methodologies. The intent of these writers is to introduce you to tools so that you might first understand and evaluate them and then put them into your toolbox for future use. None of these methods are the ‘silver bullet’ or the answer for all situations. They are tools. They have been used by various people for a variety of situations in different places. They are only a sampling of methods that are available. Many more could have been included and there are certainly methods yet to be innovated. Hopefully, this session has provided you a perspective from which to pick and choose with the principled framework that should guide the use of any method.

Points to Remember

- The following are key points highlighted in this session that should provide direction regarding what missions methods and processes you use.
- The choice of method(s) is not just a matter of what works but should be principled and theologically informed.
- There is no universally applicable ‘silver bullet’ method.
- Person, place, and point in time are essential considerations in determining what methods are to be used.
- The goal of methods is to move closer to people, to proclaim Jesus, and to allow us to love well.
- Love rules and triumphs.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES ~ BEFORE YOU GO

Moving to another country, learning a language, and surviving the shock of culture are worthy goals, but none of these is the end or ultimate aim of being a cross-cultural witness. We must learn how to determine what methods are appropriate for what situations. The following activities will help you to actively and intentionally construct a framework from which to do mission work. As you try these activities, record your difficulties, insights, and successes. Or if you have already done these either in your home culture or cross-culturally, recall the difficulties and successes you encountered and the insights you gained. Commit to being a lifelong learner.

Persons

Self-awareness is an essential first step in determining methods and strategy.

What special gifts, experiences, etc. has God given you for the purpose of missions? What weaknesses might God want to work through?

Who has God placed around you?

With whom has God blessed you?

Place

Where has God placed you?

What does it look like?

PANORAMA

Who lives or works there?
What are the challenges of this place?

Point in Time

What are the defining events of the time in which you live related to the place where God has placed you or is placing you?

Principles

In what specific ways are you availing yourself of the sources that will allow you to daily discover and develop principles to live by and to serve by?

Love

In what specific ways are you pursuing love over methods and strategies?

What currently prevents you from love?

What might prevent you from love in a future point in time in a new place with new people?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR *PRINCIPLES AND METHODS*

We have barely opened the door on this huge topic. Sessions that follow will provide tools for your toolbox, point you toward important principles and give you additional skills for determining which methods are appropriate and useful. Below are resources that might be helpful as well.

Allen, Roland. *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and What Hinders*. Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 1971.

This short book is a classic that should be read by everyone who does mission work. Allen emphasizes the role of the Spirit in missionary work and the need to respond to one's given context. In addition, Allen addresses the appropriate role of the missionary, so that he or she does not hinder the spontaneous expansion of the church.

Allen, Roland. *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* by Roland Allen. Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 2001.

Allen highlights the simplicity of the Apostle Paul's methodology. The fact that Paul did not enjoy any particular advantage is discussed from various angles in order to demonstrate that the same kind of work should be done today.

Anderson, Courtney. *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1987.

The story of Adoniram Judson's life and call forms the context in which we are able to see various methods used among the Burmese. Anderson provides us with an honest appraisal of Judson's life and methods.

Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

PRINCIPLES AND METHODS

Jenkins gives a summary picture of the shift of the center of Christianity to the Southern hemisphere. The shift is not just in terms of raw numbers but also in terms of vitality and witness. This book is instructive as we consider who is in front of us.

NOTES

¹Leslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way: A Gift, a Command, an Assurance* (Friendship Press, 1988), 20.

²V. S. Azariah, cited in Jonathan Bonk, *Mission and Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem ... Revisited* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 58.

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