

Understanding Missions

Maybe your story is different than mine, but when I heard the term “missions” I immediately had an image of a people group living in the middle of the jungle where there’s no running water and everyone eats bugs. I’m not sure where I got that image....maybe it was because of watch too much Lion King. But I mean, if you have attended youth group “missions” became synonymous with something you do in the summer once a year. “Missions” was building houses, vacation bible schools, inner-city camps, etc. And for most of us, missions became that once a year type of thing. One week of doing missions and...done.

Where we have gotten off:

Although I think you can say that building houses and whatever counts as a “mission” project, I think we’ve missed the main idea of why we go/do missions. So if you would let me lay some foundation, I’d like to help you restructure where we’ve veered off.

1. **Gospel:** When the Holy Spirit finally unveils our spiritual eyes (Acts 26:18), we finally see that we are broken, hopeless people that continue to chase temporary things rather than the eternal (Ro. 1:21ff), most beautiful, awesome God of the universe. And in a moment of panic and complete desperation we fling ourselves to the foot of the cross of Jesus and ask him to save us. And the crazy thing is at that moment he doesn’t go, “Get away from me you nasty, dirty, rotten piece of garbage...go clean yourself up first and then come to me.” Rather He takes us as we are and saves us (Luke 15:20ff). And what’s crazy is that all the punishment that was meant for us has now been diverted and pour out onto the one and only perfect man – the Son of God, and Jesus absorbs the wrath of God and satisfies the punishment (2 Cor. 5:21). So that now we are no longer bound to chase useless things, we no longer live in fear and guilt and our lives are changed as we now follow Jesus who brings us the best possible life.

I mean, this changes everything for the believer does it not? The one who finally submits their life to this can’t live the same any more. The way they spend their time, their money, what they pursue...it all changes. This is the foundation for understanding missions.

2. **Lifestyle vs. Event:** According to Acts 17, God has ordained the places and times in which you and I live. And if that is the case and we understand our role in the world is to reconcile it to the cross of Jesus, then missions isn’t an event, it’s a lifestyle that we take on. Alright...what in the world am I talking about? So now wherever we go and live, that’s our mission field. So like your table at lunch, your 3rd period English class, your local Starbucks...those are places were God has placed you to be the light of the world. You see? The problem with making “missions” a one-time deal is that all it does is reinforce the idea that missions is just an event. I mean, you can go and check it off the list but have you really understood what Jesus was talking about living missionally? No! I think that’s why we LOVE going on mission trips...because they make us feel good about ourselves. “Look at me...I helped some poor people. I feel great!” But we don’t want to just “do” missions...we want to always be “on” missions.

3. **The Light of the World:** Both of these lead to us being the light of the world. Imagine if we finally took time to understand who we're supposed to be, finally just man-ed up quit making excuses for us not obeying the Holy Spirit....and we finally did it, imagine what our world might look like. If everyone just lived consistently you could see lives finally changed. And I'm not talking about immediate change (although that could happen), but little by little...we start inviting our friends to dinner and instead of talking about sports and the latest movie, we talk about how their life is really going. And we start building some deep relationships and it gets to a point where we ask them where they're at spiritually – what they're ultimately living for. Maybe we start selling some of our gadgets so that we can start adopting from orphanages. Or if we're not old enough, maybe we can find a job and give what we earn to someone who has a ministry in your area. Is this starting to make sense? It's just living out what we believe...being consistent. We get on the same level as people instead of looking down on them as if we're better (see #1 if you think you are). We start doing life with people and we stick it out too when it's hard. Why? Not because we have to or else Jesus won't like us...but because our hearts have been changed and so we show the love of Jesus to the world and in doing so, we grow into the fullness of the one we follow.

4. **So what do we do about missions as events?** Go on them! Go do World Changers, Living Water, Yugo...go do those things. Why? Because we have resources that the rest of the world doesn't have...go and faithfully steward those gifts that God has blessed you with. But didn't you say we shouldn't do these things because it's a lifestyle? Yes I did. But understand that you don't hold these one-time mission trips as THE thing. It's just one thing that we do...(as we live a life of missions). These one-time mission trips with your church help fuel your soul, they allow you to do a little bit more than you could on your own. This is why I would always encourage you to attend overseas mission trips. Because you see what God is doing in other parts of the world. You get to be the hands and feet of the Gospel to people who may have never experienced his love. You get to fly to places where you get to work hand-in-hand with people who don't speak your language, but because of the Gospel...you are brothers and sisters with them. They're good things. But they're not the only things.

Can I be honest about missions though? It's hard! I mean whether you're at home trying to talk to that dude at Starbucks or sleeping on a dirt floor under the African sky...it's hard. It'll challenge you more than you're comfortable with. It'll expose that you're a selfish being and ultimately, your life is inconsistent. But praise God that He allows people like us to join him in his work. It's so true that God DOES NOT NEED YOU. But according to Ephesians 3:10, God has decided to use the broken, addicted, prideful sinners who have been redeemed by his Son to BE the agents of change in this world. That is some good news. And what will blow your mind is that you can't save people. God is the only one who saves...so it's our job to be faithful to his command and we go and allow God to change hearts. And in the end, we receive the joy of being changed ourselves and seeing others changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. May the grace of God and the passion of Jesus Christ along with the guidance and perseverance of the Holy Spirit be with you as you live our your faith.

