

Finding Your Role in World Evangelization

By Todd Ahrend

Ingrained in the minds of many Christians is the idea that to be involved in mission work means one thing only: living overseas long-term. This is an unhealthy way to approach missions because it excludes most people. Even those that go long-term will eventually come home and need to appropriate their vision in another way. If it is an attribute of God to desire the redemption of all nations, then it must be cultivated into every one of His followers as an attribute. That is why it is vital to the Church that other avenues of involvement are explored. The following five habits are not to be viewed in terms of "which one is for me?" The idea is that a person who prioritizes God's global plan will do all or most of them.

The main habits are:

1. Going
2. Praying
3. Sending
4. Welcoming
5. Mobilizing

Going: This habit is most commonly associated with missions. In the past and even still today when someone thinks about missions this is the most natural association. A definition of the goer is the person physically present, laboring on the mission field. Going may mean a short-term trip or an extended amount of time. Ultimately, the goer is willing to completely immerse themselves in an unfamiliar culture with the intention of furthering the gospel in that culture. They are innovative, low maintenance, steadfast, and persevere with little fellowship. In Exodus 3:7-10 God mentions nine different times to Moses that He is concerned with the Israelites and their condition as slaves and is getting ready to bring them into the promise land. During this discourse, God has one reference to Moses. Look at Moses' reaction, "But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Ex. 3:11). Sounds like us sometimes doesn't it? Our temptation is to focus on ourselves and our insufficiency! We think there is no way God could want us involved and so many of us never enjoy the blessing of participating. Look at God's reaction; He puts the focus back on Himself in the next verse, "I will be with you" (Ex. 3:12). Before Robert Morrison left to be the first Bible translator in China someone asked if he really thought he could change the 2,000 year problem of idolatry in China, his response, "No I don't, but I expect God can."

As you begin to consider going on a short-term trip, it will be natural for you to look at your abilities (or inabilities) and become discouraged. It is at this point that you must be reminded that "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). In light of this truth we are all overqualified!

Praying: If you could ask Jesus to teach you anything what would it be? Personally, I think I would want to learn how He multiplied the bread to feed the 5,000! Can you imagine? Well, in all of the scriptures we see only one time when the disciples ask Jesus to teach them something. The request, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Isn't it interesting that after knowing and living with Jesus, their desire was to pattern His prayer life. Maybe after following Him around for a few years they realized that when Jesus prayed things happened. Listen to Christ's response, "This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." (Matt. 6:9-10). Jesus was saying that when you pray, you should ask God to bring the activity of heaven down to earth. In other words, pray that what is going on up there, would go on down here. Well, what is going on in heaven? Right now in heaven all eyes are on Jesus, as a multicultural worship service is being held. Sound like your church? This is what Jesus asked his disciples to pray.

Another passage that challenges us to pray for the world is found in Matthew 9:36-38, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" Jesus saw the vastness of lost souls compared to the scarcity of the laborers and He looks to the disciples and says, "Ask." What a powerful image! Not go, or preach, or have a conference, but ask. It's hard to read this passage and not get convicted about your prayer life. Let's evaluate our own prayer lives and see if we come to God with our desires or if we are concerned with His. Obviously, we need to pray for ourselves and yes, we need to lift up our family and friends, but God also desires that we join together and intercede on behalf of all nations and beg Him to send forth laborers into the field.

Sending: Paul the Apostle has an interesting observation, "And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:15). The unreached do not have a chance at hearing the gospel if there are not people on the home front funding and praying for those that are going. It is like asking the question, "which is more important the rescuer who goes down into the well to save a life or the man at the top holding the rope?" You can't have one without the other. There was a principle in Israelite warfare, "The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike." (1 Sam. 30:24-25). Why? Because they are equally important in God's army. In our culture we think we are entitled to live at whatever standard matches our income. Our reasoning is that since a person makes \$60,000 a year they should live at \$60,000. When a person gets a raise, their standard of living gets a raise too! But the World Christian should have a different mindset. Maybe when a Christian gets a raise or comes into unexpected financial gain God intends that person to be a resource for someone else! This thinking is so contrary to our culture.

The role of a sender is not only integral, but diverse as well. The most obvious aspect of sending is giving of one's financial resources to support a missionary. But this is certainly not the only facet of sending. A sender may work in one or all the following specialized roles: logistics, prayer coordination, communications, research, finances, or re-entry coordinator. A specialist in logistics deals with the practical side of sending. They deal with packing the missionary's goods, travel plans, cost and acquirement of items needed on the field. The prayer coordinator can find specific prayer needs based on research, missionaries in the field and missions societies. They are also needed to enlist others in intercessory prayer for the team and organize special prayer meetings. For prayer needs to be known, a communications specialist is enormously helpful. It is their responsibility to open lines of communication to the team so that prayer requests and equipment and other needs are known. The role of sending is neither glamorous nor easy. The task of dealing with the day-to-day, behind the scenes tasks of mission work may even seem thankless, but it is not without reward.

This is a seemingly difficult habit for college students to develop because they always feel broke! But the point is not the amount that is given. The point is that they are building a habit of sacrifice.

Welcoming: America is hosting the largest number of internationals of any country and the world is at our doorstep! Over 650,000 international students and scholars are studying here from 188 countries of the world. What a perfect opportunity to extend God's grace and love to the world! And you don't even have to leave. The Welcomer gets his name from the idea that he welcomes those from other countries to his country.

The foreigner is close to the Lord's heart. Over forty times in the Old Testament alone we are commanded to care for the foreigner in our land,

"The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God" (Lev 19:34).

"He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt" (Deut 10:18-20).

God reminds the Israelites of their past exile in Egypt so that they will be motivated to love the foreigners, for they once were foreigners. Similarly, we should be reminded of our past, how we were foreigners to God and yet he had mercy on us.

Sadly, as available as this ministry is to college students, it is going sorely overlooked. Did you know that 80% of the internationals on your campus will never be invited into an American home? With high hopes they come to study, but soon realize that the hospitality they are used to is just as foreign to America as they are. So they live in their isolated community with fellow internationals and eventually return to their homeland. I wonder what they tell their friends about this renowned Christian nation.

Everyone can be a welcomer. All it takes is a little time, energy and a willingness to say hello. There is no reason that Christians on campus shouldn't have 2-3 new international friends each semester. Can you imagine how the gospel would spread if that were a reality? At the college where I worked, there were 80 students from Saudi Arabia who hung out in their corner of the Student Center. I can remember the first time I took two guys from my Bible study to meet and get to know them. After a few weeks of just saying hello and making ourselves available we became part of the group. We shared the gospel with about 10 of them over the next year. Its amazing to think of the hardship I would face should I go to Saudi Arabia and try to do the same thing! Yet here we have complete freedom to share with otherwise unreached people!

The need for welcoming is great. Brainstorm ideas to show love to the foreigners among you. A simple beginning step is to initiate conversation with an international on your campus. There are tons of questions you could ask to get to know them:

- Where are you from?
- How do you like the food?
- How do you like it here?
- Is English harder than you thought?
- How is it different from your country?
- Are you finding your way around?
- Can we help you in anything?

You might choose a specific group of them to focus on. Here are some suggested ways to serve them:

- Run errands for them or be willing to take them on errands.
- Invite them over for holidays.
- Practice English with them.
- Invite them to Bible study.
- Invite them just to hang out with you and your friends.

The one who welcomes is willing to serve them and reach out to them in the hopes that Christ will be glorified. They will see how easy it is to get involved and soon they will be loving internationals and this strategic ministry.

Mobilizing: A mobilizer is a normal, everyday Christian who walks with God, yet has a global perspective and stays on the home front to rouse others to action. Anyone who has a vision for the world has at one time been mobilized. Whether someone asked them to go on a short-term trip, invited them to a missions conference, took them to a Bible study on the topic or introduced them to a missionary, somehow they were recruited. And that, in a nutshell, is a mobilizer, a recruiter. Mobilizers are out

looking for others to enlist in God's agenda with their entire life. Their focus is Christians who are unaware of God's global plan and they consistently seek to raise the missions awareness in creative ways whether it is in a small group or large group setting. Like Habakkuk, they "Write down the vision and make it plain on tablets so that the one who reads it may run" (Hab. 2:2).

A friend of mine has a saying that I have adopted. "Every Christian a World Christian and every World Christian a mobilizer." Think about the awesome potential in that statement. Every Christian is orchestrating their life around God's heart for the world and fulfilling the Great Commission and at the same time passing on that vision to the new believers and next generation. Unbelievable!

So what exactly are the characteristics of a mobilizer? Bill Stearns and Bob Sjogren lists 10:

1. Needs to be able to be a servant.
2. Desires to see laborers raised up to finish the task of world evangelization.
3. Possibly has the gift of encouragement and exhortation.
4. Is "apt to teach" but may be more effective in recruiting others to teach.
5. Speaks in front of groups without (too much) fear.
6. Leads others well.
7. Has a general heart for the world, possibly focusing in on one people group.
8. Sees the priority of waiting and mobilizing others as well as going.
9. Is part visionary - seeing what can happen as God matches empowered believers with key opportunities of ministry.
10. Is part implementer - driven to see a vision become a reality.

Whether it is just the right missions book or a short video, magazine, agency, prayer profile, etc. you need to be able to show others resources. I can remember when I was in college gathering my own collection of tools. I labeled a manila folder "Mobilization Resources." Now it fills two filing cabinets! Part of being equipped with resources is being a networker. You will need to know what God is doing and who He is doing it with. I challenge anyone trying to cultivate their mobilization skills to help others collect and learn how to use the resources and material available in missions. As they are collecting and learning this material they are building a confidence that will enable them to teach others.

The mobilizer is a key player in the process of raising up laborers. It takes a burning heart for the world and yet a willingness to stay. It has happened to every World Christian and every World Christian can do it!

Follow-Up Questions

1. What role do you identify with the most and why?
2. Which role scares you the most and why?
3. How can you apply these roles from where God has you now?