

Motivations for Missions

By Nate Wilson

A. Great Commission Model

Matthew 28:18, the classic Great Commission verse, is a command to be *obeyed*. The key here is obedience. (Cross reference Mark 16:15 and Luke 24:47). We must be *obedient* to God if we love Him (John 5:3).

B. Resource/Responsibility Model

What is the responsibility before God of the Church? Worship of God, edification of believers, and evangelization of non-believers. God has given us resources and he has also given us responsibilities in each of the three areas. We can focus on one area (evangelization) and see this principle in Scripture. Look up Genesis 12:3, Psalm 67:1-4, Matthew 28:18, and 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; find this theme of God's blessings and our responsibilities in world evangelization.

Another facet of the resource/responsibility model is understanding our responsibility before man. We have heard the gospel, and yet there are billions of people who have never heard the gospel! We therefore have the great blessing of salvation, but with it, the great responsibility of telling other people about it too. (Romans 10:13-15). Those who have never heard the gospel are still held responsible before God through general revelation (Romans 1:18-21) and through their conscience (Romans 2:11-16), and if they do not fear God, they will be judged to a Christ-less eternity. When God says that no one comes to the Father but through Him, He means it. (John 14:6)

Because of our sin and rebellion against God, we all deserve the same judgment (Romans 3:9-12). Notice that it is not our fault that they are doomed to hell; the unevangelized deserve to go to hell just as much as we do. But we can be motivated to missions work because of the simple fact that we know the gospel and others do not, and that we are therefore responsible to tell them.

C. Compassion Model

Throughout the gospels, we see Jesus having compassion on physically and spiritually needy people (Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34). When we are at school or work, when we are in the shopping mall or in the inner city, when we go to people's homes or see people through the window of our car, are we moved with compassion? How can we NOT be moved when we see people in need? We should be moved with compassion by people's physical needs (I John 3:17) as well as by their spiritual needs (Jude 22-23) and seek to minister to both. Usually the meeting of a physical "felt" need can lead to opportunities to minister to a person's spiritual need. Remember that the priority of our concern should be for people's spiritual needs as they are what will matter for eternity.

D. Historical Model

Throughout history, God uses his people to build His kingdom. We see His involvement in the lives of Adam and Eve and faithful descendants who passed the fear of God on to Noah and from him to Abraham (Genesis 31:53 – Abram's father worshiped God). After God created the 70 family/nations at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), His next act was to call

Abram and give him a covenant: "I will bless you...and so you shall be a blessing...and in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Genesis 12:2-3) God chose to bless Abraham and use him to bless all the family/nations separated at the Tower of Babel! Paul confirms this meaning in Galatians 3:8, 29. God repeats this covenant to Abraham (Genesis 18:18, 22:16-18), Isaac (26:4), and Jacob (28:14). Abraham carried the knowledge of God to Egypt (Genesis 20). Before Israel entered Canaan, word had already gotten around to the nations about their God (Joshua 2: 8-11)!

- David (Psalm 67:1-4) The point of this famous blessing is not well-being, but for the world to hear about God!
- Isaiah longed for Israel to fulfill the covenant. (Isaiah 12:4; 49:6)
- Jeremiah 4:2 (If Israel obeys, the nations will hear.)
- Ezekiel 36:22-23 (God's purposes are for all nations!)
- Habakkuk 2:14 (How completely does God want the world evangelized?)
- Daniel 3-6 (The exile carried the Truth to Syria, Babylon, Persia, and Media!)

Jesus reminded the Jews that their blessing was for all nations; the kingdom he spoke of was intended for all peoples (Matthew 8:11; Mark 11:17). After Jesus' resurrection, Luke (24:45-47) tells us that he taught the disciples from the Old Testament (the N.T. hadn't been written yet) that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to *all nations*! The apostles at Pentecost understood that missions is an extension of God's covenant to Abraham (Acts 3:25), and the gospel spread from there all over the Roman empire (Acts 17:6). Tallying up to this point, the gospel had been proclaimed in the entire Middle East as well as Southern Europe and North Africa! Then the Barbarians invaded Rome and took the gospel into Central and Eastern Europe. 400 years later, the Vikings (Scandinavians) took over Europe, and the gospel went North. Later, in the 1600's, overseas missions and colonization began in earnest (Columbus, William Carey), covering much of the coastland of the world. In the 1800's, there was a push inland (U.S. West, Hudson Taylor). Let us join this glorious march of history!

D. Task Model

In this century, we are seeing the finishing off of God's mission purpose as missionaries concentrate on reaching people groups who were overlooked in history and have not yet heard the gospel. Jesus said that he would come back when the world is fully evangelized in Matthew 24:14. He wouldn't have given us the Great Commission unless He knew that by His Spirit we could do it. The "unreached peoples" are the final frontier of missions, and there is a great need for tens of thousands of new missionaries. We have the resources to complete the missionary task in our generation – if every evangelical church were to target one of these peoples, we could finish the task five times over!

We can end this model by looking at the fulfillment of the task of world evangelization at the end of time. God gave such a glimpse into the future to John in Revelation 5:9!

E. Partnership Model

As members of the body of Christ, God has uniquely gifted us to play an important role in the work of the Church (1 Corinthians 12-14). Our giftings and activities should contribute to the fulfillment of the responsibilities of the church – including missions. Perhaps 1% of the people in the Church have gifting and calling to cross-cultural church planting, but the spiritual gifts of the other 99% still have as much a bearing on missions as they have on worship and edification at home!

For instance, if you are gifted in helping other people, you can not only help friends and fellow believers but also non-believers and missionaries. All kinds of regular jobs are open all over the world – you could work in another country and also help plant a new church!

Are you an encourager? Missionaries need you to write them letters then!

Musicians are quite helpful on the mission field and in motivating other Christians to a commitment to missions.

Do you have a knack for making money? Consider financing people to take the Gospel to cultures which have never had a witness or a Bible! (1 Corinthians 9:14)

Are you a teacher? Part of teaching and edifying the body of Christ is to equip them for spreading the knowledge of God to others (2 Timothy 2:2).

Do you have the resource of time? Budget that time to get serious about regular prayer for missionaries and people in need of Christ (Colossians 4:2-4; 1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Do you see the big picture? Consider your own spiritual gifting and calling; how can you work in partnership with the body of Christ to participate in world evangelization?

Nate Wilson, now a pastor, served as a mobilizer with Caleb Project for many years, and spent many of them investing in the lives of mission-minded Christians and providing resources for them.

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