



A GATHERING PLACE
FOR SHORT-TERM MISSION ARTICLES,
RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Age-Old Issue of Missionary “Support”

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The age-old issue of missionary “support” has an age-old solution. It is found in the clear words of Scripture. Paul, a missionary of the First Century, had been on a number of ventures. When he had “*fully preached in these parts*”, he heard there were “unreached” peoples in Spain. On his way there, he wanted to visit the Christians in Rome. So he wrote them a Letter. In Chapter 10, from his vast experience in missions (and prompted by the Holy Spirit), he states the simplicity of the *whole* missions process: The goal? The salvation of the lost. The rationale? Call! Believe! Hear! Preach! Then, the too-often neglected foundation question: *And how can they preach* (how can our missionaries be effective) *unless they are sent?*

Thus, those who go and those who send are partners in the missions process. Where do these “senders” come from? Who is suited to be a sender? What skills are needed to be a sender?

Again, God, the Holy Spirit through Paul gives us the answers: Paul is in prison...again. But his time he really did it! He appealed to Caesar! He is under house arrest in Rome. He has been before Caesar once. About to face him again. He cannot freely preach the Gospel. Some men are preaching to be an encouragement to him. But others are preaching to make Paul feel bad! Can you believe it? “Ha! Ha! Paul we can preach freely, but you can’t!”

Yet under those circumstances, he begins his Letter to the Philippian believers with the words: *I rejoice greatly...!* What? What does he have to rejoice over? Certainly not his circumstances. Listen further: “*I rejoice greatly for every time I pray for you it brings back to my remembrance how you have been PARTNERS in the GOSPEL from the very first day even until now.* (Philippians 1:3-5)

“Partners in the Gospel” he calls them. They never traveled with him. They were people in that local fellowship that he and Silas and Timothy had planted so many years before. Who were these people? You remember the story: On his second missionary journey, now with Silas, he tried going into Asia. The Holy Spirit prevented them. They tried going north to Bithynia. Again, the Holy Spirit said, “No”. They go west to Troas. In a night vision, Paul hears a man from Macedonia calling. Doctor Luke joins the team there. He continues to write, “*Immediately we endeavored to go...*” The “Macedonia man” turned out to be a merchant woman by the name of Lydia! She trusts in Christ. And her whole family. The jailor and his whole family! And a church was established. Now, these many years later, Paul is writing to them, thanking these people for being his *partners*.

How were they his partners? He goes on to address six areas of care for which he was thankful. *AND* that every missionary today would be well-advised to have. Let’s look at them:

He was **encouraged**. Yes, even in those difficult circumstances, Paul is encouraged at the knowledge of their care. In this brief Letter, he uses the words *joy, rejoice or rejoicing* fourteen times! His morale was high!

Today, every missionary needs encouragement. Surveys verify that depression is one of the main pitfalls of missionary work. Yes, they can “encourage themselves in the Lord” as David had to. But so much better for there to be a team of people providing the encouragement needed. And, this is accomplished more by the team fulfilling the other five areas of care than by just standing on the sidelines saying, “Cheer! Cheer!”

Paul was covered by their **prayer**. He says, *“I know this will work out for the good of my soul by your prayers and the Spirit of Christ. What will be worked out? His thoughts and feelings about those out there preaching the Gospel to “add to his grief.” In his spirit, he had the right answer: “Praise God, the Gospel is being preached.” But, in his soul, he is still struggling. He is confident that through their prayers it will “turn out for my deliverance.”*

Today, as much as ever, a missionary needs a team of people sustaining them in prayer...every step of the way! I returned from a very difficult four-week ministry trip to Asia. During the greeting time at church my first Sunday back, a lady approached me. She said, “This has been the hardest trip for *ME* that you have ever been on!” Why? Because even without email contact, she sensed the difficulty, and her battling in prayer took its toll on her!

Paul was confident of their care on his **reentry**. He is reasoning about living or dying. He decides that because of the great need, he would live. And that he would come back to them. There will be a lot of rejoicing. *“But,” he says, “let’s make sure our rejoicing is in the Lord!”* He no doubt remembered how well the church people allowed him and Barnabas to *“rehearse all that God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”* when they returned from their first journey.

Today, opportunity to share *all* is critical—on two levels: 1) The great stories of battles won and 2) how the missionary is different now. Helping them keep in balance the good and the not-so-good that happened on the field will more likely help them adjust to the good and not-so-good back home.

He was sure Epaphroditus would be careful with the **logistics** of getting this Letter safely to the people at Philippi. Paul had first thought of sending Timothy. When he found out that he was about to go before Caesar again, he wanted to keep Timothy with him.

Today, there is a plethora of logistical details that a missionary’s partnership team can fulfill. From feeding their pet “Nemo” while on a short trip to adopting their children if both parents die on the field!

Paul was thrilled that Epaphroditus was sent by the congregation to minister to his needs.

Today, there is no higher form of **communication** support than to send someone to bring the love of home to the field. Of course, with the many forms of communication today, a word of caution of what is said, is extremely important.

In Chapter Four, Paul is *rejoicing greatly* again. **Finances** have arrived. But, he didn’t say, “Hey, Epi, did you bring the cash? I want to buy a new sun dial watch!”

Today, what a lesson can be learned from what Paul *did* say: The attitude of a missionary: *“Not that I looked for the gift, but the fruit that abounds to your account.”* The attitude of the giver: Given generously and sacrificially as *“...a fragrant incense, a gift that pleases the very heart of God.”* And in that context, we need not worry, for having just given a sacrificial gift to missions, he adds, *“My God will supply all of your needs...”*

Whatever your gifting, ability, talent might be, there is a place for you to partner with a missionary in advancing the Kingdom of God. For His glory!