

# God-dependent missions

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In the late 1940s and the early 1950s, Mao Zedong and the Communist party came to power in China. At that time the church was well established in China. It was modeled after the churches in the West because of colonization and western missionaries. At this time there were approximately 700,000 protestant Christians in China and 2-3 million Catholics. One goal of Mao Zedong was to purge the Chinese society of religion. This purge of religion was filled with horrific persecution. Historians are still putting together what happened next, because of the secrecy of how it was done. First, Mao Zedong forced all foreign missionaries and ministers to leave China. Next all church property became government property. Mao then had many of the leaders tortured, imprisoned and many were killed. All other Christians were threatened with great persecution if they continued to meet together. At that point the door seemed to close on Chinese Christianity, and those on the outside thought that surely Christianity in China would cease to exist.

This persecution lasted until the end of Mao's reign in the late 1970s, and the door opened to missionaries again in the 1980s. It was at this point that it became known that in China there were now over 60 million Christians.

What had happened? God happened. There is no way that growth should have occurred, but yet it did. When God's people were stripped of the buildings, the programs, the security and the organized religion, all that was left was God, His Word, prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit. It was in this setting that the power of God was unleashed. God had left them with nothing else to trust in, but Himself, and that made all of the difference.

It was as if they had wandered out into the center of the rushing river of God's Spirit and been caught up in the movement of God.

This was not the first time that it had happened. We find a similar story in the book of Acts 1 and 2. After Jesus' resurrection, before ascending to heaven, Jesus ordered his followers to go to Jerusalem

and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told them that, *“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8)

Scripture tells us that there were only 120 of them who were to continue the legacy of Jesus. They were likely fearful, but yet they obeyed. They waited and prayed, and then it happened. The Holy Spirit came in a powerful way. They fearlessly preached the gospel, and by the end of the day, 3,000 people had put their faith in Jesus Christ.

It happened in China and in Jerusalem . . . but how about Madrid? Or your home or your school or your workplace?

The book of Acts in the New Testament is often referred to as the Acts of the Apostles, but you could argue that it could more rightly be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. The apostles, Jesus’ inner circle of followers, had walked with Jesus for 3 years. Jesus had been with them, but now the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, lived in them. He flowed through them. He guided them. He protected them. He convicted them of sin. He went before them. They now lived in a different reality, where the rules had changed and their eyes had been opened. They now saw everything from an eternal, gospel-explained, perspective. Against all odds, this new reality took a small band of fearful Jesus followers, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and used them to spread Christianity across the entire Roman Empire.

We see it time and again throughout church history. God uses people whose minds are committed to the scriptures, whose prayers are seeking holiness, whose hearts are fully devoted to Christ, and whose desires are longing that people from every tribe and tongue would know the glory of God. These people were tools in the hands of God, empowered by the Spirit of God, resulting in the works of God. These are not only stories of the past. This same Spirit and same power are available today, to those who will yield their lives to God.

As Christians we must understand that missions will only be accomplished through the resources of God. It has been said many times that, “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s resources.” This is a true statement, but our tendency is to read the word “resources” and only think about financial resources, when the resources of God include so much more.

In the last several weeks we have focused on missions. We first looked at the purpose of missions, which is the glory of God and the good of men. We next considered the method of missions, which is to make disciples. We then looked at the intentionality of missions that flows out of our missions identity. Today we conclude this series by focusing on God-dependent missions. This is merely recognizing the fact that without God working in and through us, being on mission with God will be impossible. In one’s own power, she may be able to give money to the poor, hand out Bibles, or go on a missions trip, but missions that glorify God and work supernaturally in the hearts of man can only be done through the resources of God.

It is only through the guidance and provision of God that missions will ever be accomplished. Because of this we must do missions in a way that completely relies on God. We must rely on His Word for guidance. We must rely on the Spirit to guide us into truth, to draw people to Christ, to convict the lost of their sin, to grow His church and to grant us wisdom. In the midst of being intentional, we must never forget that missions are only possible by relying on God from beginning to end.

Practically speaking, how does being dependent on God affect our church in regard to evangelism?

We believe that only God can draw people to Christ (John 6:44). We believe it is Christ who builds the church (Matthew 16:18). We believe that only God can reveal that Jesus is the Christ (Matthew 16:17). We believe that it is the Holy Spirit who brings conviction of sin (John 16:8). We believe that it is God's kindness that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). We believe that there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). We believe that Jesus is the Author and Perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:2). We believe the Bible when it says that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). We believe that grace through faith is a gift of God so that no man can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is God alone who brings one to salvation in Jesus Christ. Because of this we will pray for those who do not believe. We will love them with a Christ-like love. We will believe that God can save even the hardest of hearts. We will share the complete gospel instead of relying on marketing, gimmicks, diluting the gospel, or hiding in fear. We are a tool in God's hand. We are to be about prayer, care and share, but may we never be mistaken. Only God will bring people to salvation.

How does being dependent on God affect our church in regard to strategy and resources? As we discussed last Sunday, as followers of Christ, missions is our identity. We no longer ask if we are to be on mission with God, we merely ask when, how, who, and where. When asking these questions, we are dependent on God for guidance. We pray James 1:5, where we are instructed, ***"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."*** We pray Proverbs 3:5-6, which says, ***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."***

We understand that we are a small part of a much greater, divinely orchestrated plan. We turn to scripture to conform to God's character and to follow God's ways. As we trust in Him and obey His commands He will bring fruit in His time. We also rest in the fact that God will supply every need of ours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19), as we continue on mission with Him.

In John 5:17, 19-20 we read these words: ***"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working . . . I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing."***

Because God is always working and Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing, we will seek to do the same. Our goal will be to see and join God where He is working. We will not follow our own plans or the popular ministry models of the day, unless we clearly sense God is calling us to them.

Practically speaking, that means we will pay attention to what is God orchestrating. We will look for recurring themes in hearts and conversations of people. We will pay attention to outside circumstances, such as economic crisis, immigration, and social climate. We will be sensitive to needs that arise. We will try to observe who God is bringing our way. It could be certain careers, ethnic groups, ages, marital status, language groups, spiritual gifts, passions, talents, personalities, or life experiences. It could be that God is already showing us what direction to go. We just need to be close to God and be looking for where God is working.

Recently we have seen an example of this. A couple joined our church. They were experienced in Sports ministry. They asked if we had Sports ministry, and we said no. Based on that conversation, we began to look in the church and found one person who was now the volunteer coordinator of the sports program at his sons' school here in Madrid, and another person who works in a bank but is using his free time to get certified in coaching to use it as a ministry. In response, one Sunday we announced the Sports ministry idea and asked people to respond if they were interested in learning more about the possibility of Sports ministry. If no one showed interest, we would sense that this was not where God was working in the life of our church. If so, then we would seek more and follow God's leading. On that day, 21 people signed up wanting more information. We then held an interest meeting and have scheduled the first event, an outreach event, watching the final of the Rugby world cup. People will invite their friends, and a video will be shown during the intermission that will have several well-known Rugby players who will be sharing their testimonies. What is the future of the Sports ministry here at IBC? We do not know, but we are just trying to walk with God and join Him where He is working.

Individually we must also look for where God is working. God has given us spiritual markers that help us know better with whom to share. We must make note of those who show interest in the things of God. Romans 3:10-12 tells us that, ***"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*** No one can seek God on their own initiative. Because of this, if we see someone who is sincerely interested in the things of God, it must be God working in their lives. The human heart will have no interest in God unless God begins to draw them to Himself (John 6:44). Once we see God working in someone's life, we need to join God in that work. We then pray for them, care for them and share the simple God with them, trusting that God will bring them to salvation.

In order to see where God is working, our personal relationship with God is key. John 14:21 tells us that, ***"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show Myself to him."*** As we walk with Christ, we draw near to Him in such a way that we become familiar with His character, His way of working in our lives, and the Spirit's leading.

A heart for missions is birthed out of a heart for Jesus. We want to be a church that is on mission with God, but that means we must be a church that loves Christ. That does not mean that we will wait to do missions until our heart is perfectly in love with Christ, because that will not happen this side of heaven, but we will move forward towards missions while continuing to nurture our love for Christ.

As we grow more in love with Christ, He will reveal to us Himself, His will and what He is doing. If we seek to do missions in our own power and our own perspective, we will never be used as God desires. In 2 Kings 6, we see the drastic difference that seeing with spiritual eyes makes.

In 2 Kings 6:8-17, the nations of Aram and Israel were at war. The King of Aram would send out his soldiers for surprise attacks. God would reveal to Elisha where the soldiers from Aram would be. Elisha would then share the information with the King of Israel so that he could avoid those areas. The King of Aram was so aggravated that his plans were being exposed that he called together his officers. He wanted to know which one of them was sharing this secret information with the King of Israel. Once he was told it was Elisha, the prophet, who was supernaturally receiving and sharing the information, the King of Aram sent a number of his soldiers and chariots to capture Elisha. They came at night and surrounded the city of Dothan. In the morning, Elisha's servant went outside and was shocked by all of the soldiers. He ran back inside to tell Elisha.

***"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.***

There is a battle waging around us of which we are not even aware. We need to pray that our spiritual eyes will be opened and we will realize our dependence on Him. We need to come to know God's character and from scripture know the way He works in our world. As we love and obey Him, He will reveal Himself to us and reveal to us what He is doing so that we can join Him.

As we see from God's work in China, when we are totally dependent on Him, the stage will finally be set for the powerful working of God in our midst.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What do you feel or think about, when you hear the story of the Chinese Christians?
2. What in this lesson do you find most confusing or interesting?
3. What reasons do we find in scripture for being dependent on God, when seeking to share Christ with others?
4. In John 5:17, 19-20 we read these words: *"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working . . . I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing."* What might be ways that we discern where God is working and how might we join Him?
5. In what ways do you think some modern churches trust in the strategies of man instead of the power of God?
6. As we seek to be more dependent on God what might we pray?
7. What do you think God wants you to remember from this lesson?
8. What steps will you take in response to this lesson?