

Dear friend,

Does God want you to be a cross-cultural missionary? Does he want you to go live in a culture not your own, probably in a country other than the U.S.A. in order to assist, in either a direct (church planting) or support (managing the field office for a mission agency, flying missionaries and supplies around, etc.) role, in establishing an indigenous, reproducing church?

The reason I'm asking this question is because I think a serious reading of the Bible requires each of us to ask ourselves this question. It is for this reason we have made the sending of missionaries from among us a part of our church's core values. Our tenth core value says, "We believe it is God's will that people from every tribe, language, people and nation know and love Christ. Therefore, our church will fully participate in God's global mission, which is to plant churches in every 'people group' on earth." We mean by "fully participate" that we aim to use the resources God has given to us as a church to be directly involved in this work. Some of the resources he has given us are our people.

Jesus says in Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." The apostle Paul states in Romans 10:12-15, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile; the same Lord is lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him for "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But how shall they call on the one they have not believed in? How can they believe in the one they have not heard? How can they hear without someone preaching to them? How can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news."

There is no way for any human being to be a part of God's church, to be forgiven of sins and given eternal life without an explicit faith in Jesus Christ. There is no way for anyone to have this faith apart from knowing the gospel. The means that God has appointed for spreading the knowledge of himself throughout the earth is for Christians to go to where there are no Christians and preach the good news of God's grace through Christ in culturally relevant ways in order to establish an indigenous church so that all the elect from all the nations of the world are brought into the church.

Not all Christians are called to go but every Christian and every church is called to care about and be involved in the gospel being proclaimed among all the nations so that the church is established in every people group (Matthew 28:18-20). God calls some individuals from within the existing church to go assist in the establishing of the church in locations and cultures where the church does not currently exist. The question is "how do I know if this is what God wants for me?"

While I don't have the space to give an exhaustive answer to that question I want to set forth a few principles from God's word. The first step in the process is an unshakable certainty that to have my sins forgiven and to be guaranteed eternal life with Jesus in the new heavens and the new earth is the best thing that could ever happen to me and cannot be taken from me by anyone or anything. The only person who can reasonably consider

the possibility that God may want him or her to serve in cross-cultural ministry is the one who can say with the apostle Paul: “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain... I count everything loss compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things and consider them rubbish in order that I may gain Christ...”

The second necessary characteristic is a passion for the glory of God to be known by others. This passion must be visibly expressed in your life by your own pursuit to know and be satisfied with all that God is for you in Christ and by your regular involvement in telling and teaching the glory of God in Christ to others. This entails a passion to know the Bible and to understand theology. It requires a growing involvement in prayer. There must be a seeking out of opportunities to talk with non-believers about Christ and to help believers to grow in Christ.

A third characteristic is a love for and acceptance of people who are different from you. Only those who like being with people and like being with people who are different from themselves should be considering whether or not God wants them to serve cross-culturally. Granted, especially in a fairly monolithic culture like Janesville, it may be difficult to actually experience whether or not this characterizes you, yet you can tell by how you relate to people who are different even within your own culture whether or not you have what it takes to accept people who are vastly different from you. Also, there are many opportunities through our own short-term missions work and service opportunities in Janesville such as the Literacy Council to experience what it is like to relate to people from different cultures.

Finally, but not exhaustively, those whom God is calling to missionary labor are recognized by the local churches of which they are a part. Based on Acts 13:1-3, 16:1-3, 1 Timothy 5:14 and other passages it seems clear that one of the primary ways God calls people into cross-cultural ministry is through the local church recognizing and affirming God’s call upon the lives of individuals. It is part of our responsibility as a church to encourage those among us who seem motivated and gifted to consider and pursue preparation for cross-cultural missions. Parents in particular ought to keep the call to missions in front of their own children and be willing and, dare I say, eager to see their children embrace cross-cultural missionary service as a good thing. Christian parents should not be a stumbling block to their children going, but willing participants in helping their children discern if this is God’s call on their children’s lives. In addition we should not be afraid to encourage older, apparently more “settled” individuals among us to consider a “second” career as cross-cultural missionaries. It is not only the young who should be thinking about such things.

Until all the sheep are found,