

10/20/19 The Power of Missions to Change Your Life & Your Church Acts 1:8
Pastor Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

At our Mission Team meeting the first week of October, I shared that I was going to be speaking at our TABCOM Mission conference about **The Power of Missions to Change Your Life and Your Church**. Members of our mission team who couldn't go said they wished I would share it here at the church sometime. So, I decided I would. This version will be different because it's just for us and not for other churches and pastors, and it's shorter.

How does a person develop a passion and interest in missions? For some of us it was part of the family we grew up in. For others, it's conviction from the scriptures or a Spirit-given leading. Sometimes it's an invitation from someone to participate in a project, a fund-raising effort, a mission trip or meeting, or hearing a missionary speak. It may be a combination of all those factors.

I grew up in a pastor's home. My dad was one of the pastors of the United Parish in Brookline when I was a kid. We often had people from other nations who stayed in our home for days or even months at a time. We had folks from Mexico, Vietnam, Cambodia—one of my childhood memories is never knowing who was in the bathroom. I can remember helping carry furniture and things up the stairs of three decker homes in places around Boston as we assisted people new to this country to move into a place of their own. These experiences helped shape my understanding of what Christians do.

I've been married to Jill for 30 years, and she has had a God-given passion and heart for the world and all God's people since she was a child. She has influenced me greatly in many ways and one of them is in having a passion for all God's children whoever and wherever they are. Jill has led the Mission Team at BBC for many of the years we've been here. As I've read and studied the Bible, it's clear that God sent Jesus not for any one nation or people, but because God so loved **the world**, and we need to love **the world** as well. God is not the mascot of any one nation. We're also given a strong Biblical mandate to be witnesses to and make disciples of **all nations**.

How about you? As I share these experiences from my life, can you think of what has motivated you to get involved in mission work and helping others from your family, church, relationships, and experiences? I think it's helpful to reflect on and be able to articulate "**why**" we're motivated to be engaged in missions. **If we can share with others how being engaged in missions has changed our life**, we'll be able to inspire other people to get involved.

All mission work is contextual and that begins in the church and the community where a church is located. It begins with the individuals God has placed in a church. At BBC, we believe in following the model of **Acts 1:8 (NRSV)**, "**But you will receive power**

when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Jesus emphasizes being witnesses **locally** (Jerusalem), **regionally** (Judea & Samaria), and **globally** (to the ends of the earth). Because of Jesus' call to be witnesses in all three of these areas, we strive for a balance of local, regional and global mission support both in terms of where we give money and in our personal engagement. This balance also increases interest in the congregation because every church has the same people—those who say, "We shouldn't send our money overseas when there are so many needs right here," and those who say, "The poorest among us in the US are so much better off than several billion people living in conditions of extreme poverty and hopelessness who desperately need our help." It doesn't have to be either/or; our approach is both/and.

Here's a key truth about churches, **Healthy churches tend to have a strong outward focus.** Inward focused churches tend to wither, shrink and die over time. For some individuals and churches, there may be a need to let go of a survival mentality and pursue a mission mentality. Anyone here like to go on vacation? Anyone ever been on a cruise? Cruises are very popular. If you were thinking about going on a cruise, how many of you would sign up for a cruise with the marketing slogan: "Come cruise with us and we'll try not to sink." Does that inspire confidence in you? Would you want to go on that cruise? Of course not. As silly as that sounds, we want to make sure that's not the message we're giving out as a church.

Most people would rather go on a cruise that pledges to take you somewhere interesting and enables you to meet people and see sites you otherwise would never encounter. That's why our motto at BBC for more than 20 years has been, "The Adventure of a Lifetime begins Here" with a picture of an abandoned boat and net symbolizing the disciples leaving their nets behind to follow Jesus. The adventure of a lifetime begins when we follow Christ. No one's motivated by an invitation to join something that's trying not to sink.

Missions at BBC

We have a Mission Team at BBC that oversees missions as one of the Core Ministries of our church. The Mission Team's responsibilities include overseeing mission education, increasing involvement in hands-on mission work, participating in the ABCUSA special offerings (AFC, OGHS, WMO, RMMO), communicating with IM Missionaries and partners and arranging for visits, and setting and disbursing the mission budget as part of the church's unified budget. The Mission Team seeks to make God's love real in practical ways—a guiding scripture in that regard is *Matthew 25:37-40* that we heard earlier in worship.

We follow the example of Christ. Christ didn't choose the path of self-preservation, he chose the path of service, surrender, generous love, pouring out his very life to the end. Part of

being mission-minded is being open to opportunities that might come our way. We all can be praying for the Lord to open our eyes to people near to us to whom we can be the instrument of Christ.

Support diverse programs and projects that are of interest to church members and friends. There's an overwhelming number of worthy missionaries and programs within TABCOM, the ABCUSA and beyond—we can't support them all. We receive appeals for help at church and home every day. A church's mission involvement should reflect the gifts, interests, passions, and relational connections of the church. For example, if we have several people who have a passion for helping the homeless, we work with those people to identify existing local ministries that help the homeless. We seek to partner with what God is already doing or identify a need that isn't being met. There's a good book called *Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits* by Heather McLeod Grant and Leslie R. Crutchfield. One of those practices is "Nurture Nonprofit Networks." There are many organizations in any community that are doing fine work that we can network and partner with to meet needs. The Homeless Prevention Council is one example. We can support and join in the good work that folks are already doing in our community. For most of the local mission organizations that we financially support, we also have church members who volunteer in their work. We will partner with other non-profits that do what we call *Matthew 25* ministry even if they're not expressly Christian because our people can bring the Christian witness and presence. Another scripture that informs our Mission Philosophy is the story of the Good Samaritan in *Luke 10*. Everyone who is in need is our neighbor to whom we may show mercy and God's love.

Each church is unique and a reflection of the gifts and passion of the congregation and God's unique calling depending on their setting, context and situation. Our Mission engagement flows from these factors. Supporting projects of interest to church members helps to get people personally involved in Mission. Hands on involvement and personal investment can change people's lives, deepen their faith, strengthen relationships, and increase their commitment to Christ and His work. We do this through our food pantry, preparing and serving a meal at two other churches, working on Habitat for Humanity Builds, and going on cross cultural or other mission work trips. **Going on mission work trips has been the single greatest thing we've done to increase people's faith, interest, compassion, and generosity as far as missions.** I'm not sure how many different individuals we've had go on trips but it's probably close to 200.

After Hurricane Georges hit Puerto Rico on September 21, 1998, the devastation was on the news for several days. One night late that week while I was sleeping, I had an experience like Paul's vision of the man from Macedonia saying, "Come over and help us." I remember replying that I didn't know anything about construction, and it was clear that didn't matter. I woke up and felt very strongly that we were supposed to go to Puerto Rico and help with rebuilding in some small way. I shared that experience with our church in worship that

Sunday morning and said, "If any of you feel led to do this too, talk to me and we'll figure it out." We emphasize using your spiritual gifts at BBC and fortunately, Bill Harwood, has the gift of administration and he offered to help oversee the details and organizing. We connected with the denomination, and meanwhile we had over 20 people say they'd go. In January we went and had a great experience working with a local church in Campo Rico. It was life altering for many people. Almost without fail, when we step out in faith to serve, people will say they got more out of the experience than they gave.

In the last 20 years, we've gone on 23 trips to many different places [BBC Mission Trips 1998-2008: 1998 Neon, KY (Students), 1999 Puerto Rico, 2000 Rocky Mount, NC, 2001 Anniston, AL, 2002 Northeast India, 2002 Ocean Park, ME, 2003 Puerto Rico, 2004 Northeast India, 2004 Dominican Republic, 2005 Dominican Republic, 2006 Biloxi, MS, 2007 Oakdale, PA (Students), 2008 Dominican Republic, 2009 Groton, MA, 2010 Ocean Park ME, 2011 Seattle, WA (Students), 2011 Springfield, MA (Students), 2012 Sofia, Bulgaria, 2013 Kodiak, Alaska, 2014 Alaska, 2016 Northeast India, 2018 Muskogee, OK, 2019 New Bern, NC.] I've only gone on about one third of those trips. Sharon Kautz has been on more of these trips than anyone else in our church. All these trips were life changing for people young and old. We've had teenagers on trips and people well into their 70's. We did several locally to support our regional camps at Grotonwood and Oceanwood. You don't have to go to Northeast India to do missions. People who have returned from these trips have grown in their faith, made stronger relationships with fellow church members that helps to strengthen the church, and tended to be more generous and supportive of mission projects going forward. Many of our people have gone on multiple trips. Other BBC members who haven't been able to physically go, have contributed financially to support someone who was making the time, but didn't have the money to go.

Michelle Scott went on her first mission trip with BBC last year to Bacone College and Murrow Indian Children's Home in Oklahoma, and this is part of what she wrote about her experience:

"Then it all came together for me. It was no longer about sheetrock and spackle and hammers and nails. It became so much more than that. It was about meeting and connecting with the children, students and staff who shared their stories of suffering and heartache, resilience and faith. The blessings were a thousand-fold. When you put together 16 people who barely know each other under challenging and rigorous circumstances for seven days, you never know what to expect. At least I didn't. I continue to be in awe of this experience and find it difficult to put into words. Whatever was required to get the work done, the team did it. Whatever extra mile had to be walked, the team walked it. The kindness and encouragement toward each other, the dig-down-in-your-boots strength to push it just a bit further to complete a project, it was all done.

We spent each morning and evening praying together, asking God for help in the coming day and offering our gratitude for what we had seen and done. We shared our joys and challenges and strategized how to tackle the day. I was humbled by our team, their faith, and their belief in me and each other. I know now that the strength and goodness came directly through God's hand and watchful eye over us. Miracles great and small happened every day for each of us. Our mission team began the week as strangers but ended as family."

Getting people involved makes our Christian mission real and brings the reality of our sister's and brother's situations to life. This doesn't always mean we have to go somewhere and have a hands-on experience. We had an example of this last year when we received a request to fund the completion of a Women's Hostel at Eastern Theological College in Assam, India. When we make missions real and increase interest and participation in mission work, mission giving will increase.

ABC Mission Offerings: What We Do. We give 50% of our budgeted mission giving to United Mission to support the work of our region and the denomination. We receive four annual offerings at the same time every year, so people expect them: AFC First Sunday of March, OGHS first Sunday of July, WMO in October, and RMMO Christmas Eve. The other first Sundays of the month we receive a **Deacon's offering** that we use to assist people in the church and in our community.

Be a part of creating or supporting large projects

We have done this both with The Partners in Progress Project with Eastern Theological College, in Jorhat, Assam, Northeast India, and we've also been part of similar projects with Sophia Baptist Church in Bulgaria with Teddy and Didi Oprenov.

Why is being involved in missions important? We're living in dangerous and divisive times. There are some who will not acknowledge truth or science. Honesty, integrity, compassion, and empathy are all increasingly difficult to find in people in positions of leadership and this is infecting the nation. Powerful forces inside and outside our nation have an interest in people living in fear and seeing those who look, speak, act, or believe differently or who even belong to a different political party as the enemy.

Those of us who are followers of Christ believe a different story and we need to share it. We believe in a God who calls us to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, **mind**, and strength. We don't check our brain at the door of the church. We believe in a God who calls us to love our neighbor, any neighbor, all our neighbors, especially our neighbors in need, as Christ has loved us. That same Christ has commanded us to go into **all the world to all people** to be witnesses of his love, mercy and grace, and to make disciples of **all nations**, not just our nation, not just of people who look like us, speak like us, or agree with us.

In *Revelation 7:9-12*, John tells us what heaven is going to look like: "After this I looked, and there was **a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!' And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.'"

John's amazing and grace-filled vision of heaven with "**a great multitude, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**" can only be fulfilled if we do the work of missions here on earth. God has given us the power to change heaven and earth—let's use it!

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. How are you involved in Missions at Brewster Baptist Church? Are you part of serving in some way, through financial support, participating in Mission trips, etc.?
2. What would you recommend we do to increase interest in Missions in our church?
3. Why is having an outward focus important for a healthy church?
4. In *Acts 1:8*, Jesus emphasizes being witnesses **locally** (Jerusalem), **regionally** (Judea & Samaria) and **globally** (to the ends of the earth)? Why is it important for us to do this as a local church?
5. If you have been involved in missions personally, how has it impacted or changed your life?
6. How does being involved in mission efforts with people of different cultures help to build unity and greater understanding?
7. What is a step you can take in the coming year to be more missional?