

On the Field, On the Sidelines

Have you ever watched a professional football game? To play at that level of expertise requires a lot more than 11 people taking the field to play against 11 other people. Look at the sidelines. They are packed with people, some in uniform waiting to take the place of those on the field, some supporting all the players. There are coaches, trainers, equipment managers, water carriers, towel handlers, and more. And behind the sideline people are those in the offices: the general manager, people doing publicity, caterers, security, ticket sellers, and even more. Of course, we should not forget the fans in the seats who bought the tickets. Without all those people doing their parts, there would be no players on the field to play the game.

Missions is like that. A lot goes into just one person going out on the mission field. Let's take a look this week at what God's word says about all the rest of us doing our parts to make that happen.

Monday – From First to Last

"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6

1. Please read Genesis 12:1-3. What did God call Abram (later renamed Abraham) to do? What is the conclusion of verse 3?
2. Now look at Revelation 7:9-10. How is God's promise to Abraham fulfilled in this passage?
3. How would you explain to someone God's purpose for his people from beginning to end?

Making it Personal: Pray, asking God to give you the opportunity and strength to share with someone else his plan for his people.

Tuesday – The Ends of the Earth

"Because it's there." George Mallory, 1923, on why he planned to attempt to climb Mt. Everest

1. Please read Acts 1:6-14. What instruction did Jesus give his followers? How would you have responded to him? What did the disciples actually do?
2. Now look at Acts 7:54-8:4. What did it take to get Jesus' followers to leave Jerusalem and preach elsewhere?
3. When Jesus spoke of going to the ends of the earth, his followers may have been reminded of Isaiah 40:28-31. How might that passage encourage them in the work Jesus gave them?

Making it Personal: Pray, asking God to show you how you should respond when hard times come to you, and for God to use those times to further his purposes.

Wednesday – Outsiders

"As soon as a man has found Christ, he begins to find others." Charles Spurgeon, 19th c. American preacher

1. Please read Acts 11:1-18. What was going on between Peter and the other apostles?

Text Insight: Gentiles were any people who were not Jewish. Some Jewish Christians felt that only by observing Jewish laws and customs could someone then also become a Christian through belief in Jesus.

2. Now look at Galatians 2:11-16. What happened to Peter? How did Paul address this?
3. Do you find it hard to reach out to those who are different from you? What is Paul's point at the end of verse 16?

Prayer Focus: Pray, asking God to use his people (you, me and all believers everywhere) to reach out to those who are different from us.

Thursday – Built to Send

"The Church is the one institution that exists for those outside it." William Tyndale, 16th c. Bible translator

1. Please read Acts 13:1-5. What positions did Paul (then still called Saul), Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen have in the church at Antioch? How do you think the church's members felt about losing two significant members of their top leadership?

Text Insight: Saul was a common name in Israel, but Paul would have been a more familiar name to people in other areas. Some writers suggest that Paul changed his name in order to reach more people.

2. Now look at the other end of Paul's missionary work found in Acts 20:13-24. What is the central point of Paul's effort, according to verse 21? How easy was Paul's work of spreading the gospel, according to verse 19?
3. What work does Paul pass on in Acts 20:25-38? How can you carry on this work today?

Making it Personal: The work of the church in sending out people (Acts 13) and building upon their work (Acts 20) is still required today. Pray, asking God to show you how you can be part of his work.

Friday – Faithful Philippians

"God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supplies." Hudson Taylor, 19th c. missionary

1. Please read Acts 16:11-15. Why do you think they stayed in Philippi for a while, but not the other two cities? Who were the first members of the church in Philippi?
2. In Philippians 4:10-13, what insight does Paul give us into the lives of those who have been sent out as missionaries?
3. Now look at Philippians 4:14-20. How did the Philippians share with Paul in his ministry? How can you support those who are carrying on Paul's work today?

Digging Deeper: Take a look at Acts 16:16-40 where we find the rest of the Philippi story. How did the Philippian believers react to seeing Paul and Barnabas jailed and beaten? How might you have reacted?

For the Weekend: Re-read Genesis 12:1-3, Revelation 7:9-10 and Philippians 4:14-20. What role can you play in God's plan for the world?