

## **Serving As Senders**

*David Jones*

One of the impressions from the recent Coalition war in Iraq was the vast amount of supplies, food, water, and ammunition that were needed to support those fighting on the front lines. Literally tens of thousands of men and women were needed to support the front line troops and get the supplies to them. But most of the media attention focused on those actively engaged in fighting rather than on those conducting supply operations.

This is often the case with missions as well. We focus on the role of the missionary without taking into consideration all the different people who make it possible for the missionary to serve. Just as the soldier who fights depends on many others to keep him on the front line, so also the missionary depends on dozens of people to keep him “on the front lines.”

The privilege of participating with God in his redemptive plan for the lost is for all believers. But not everyone has the gifting, skills, and willingness to leave their home and to go minister cross-culturally. The very important and necessary role of sending and supporting missionaries sent out is available to those who don't go. The desire to spread the Gospel can be lived out in many ways. When we think about the missionary task, the focus of our attention must go beyond the role of the missionary at the front lines. It must extend to the role of support and supply as well. Both are needed in order to carry out God's redemptive plan.

In Romans 10, the apostle Paul quotes the prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (v.13).” He then goes on to say,

*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?” (v.14,15a)*

Paul understood the importance of “senders” in his own missionary work. He deeply valued his partnership with Philippian believers who acted as senders, backing his missionary endeavors with prayer, concern, involvement, and provision while they actively ministered at home (Phil.1:5; 4:15-16). He also wrote to the believers in Rome to enlist their help in sending him on to Spain (Ro.15:20-24). Without a team of committed senders, no missionary will be able to carry out the ministry God has placed him in.

So what do “senders” do? They can support the missionary in six specific areas:

**Moral support** is the very foundation of missionary support. Everyone in the body can be involved in this part of the ministry since it is basically just saying, “God bless you! We are excited with you in your missionary venture!” Missionaries face many difficulties and obstacles and need encouragement. They need to know that their work is valued and is considered an integral part of the church's ministry and outreach. They need to be listened to. They need to know they are sent by a body of believers who are committed to making them successful in their ministry. Often moral support is more of an attitude than an action.

**Logistical support** deals with handling the details of the home country responsibilities of the missionary. Some missionaries need help to manage their business affairs in the home country, dealing with money issues, taxes, insurance, and health issues. Often help is needed to purchase and ship items they can't find locally or to care for family matters. It could also involve helping to maintain accountability in ministry and encouraging spiritual growth. For some missionaries, their mission organization cares for some of these logistical needs, while others depend heavily on senders back home.

**Financial support** is probably the most talked-about of the six areas of support, and is what most people think about when missionary support is mentioned. Missionaries' work time is devoted to carrying out the ministry entrusted to them. Most missionaries rely on financial support so that they can give themselves full time to their ministry, in the same way that a local congregation supports pastors so they can be engaged full time working for the church. While it is possible for some missionaries to find employment where they minister, most "tent-making" missionaries use their "secular" work as an entry strategy to gain permission to live in a country that is closed to missionary entry rather than as a support strategy. And even in these situations the missionary depends on financial support in order to ensure that there is adequate time for the missionary task.

**Prayer support** may be the easiest to commit to and the most difficult to fulfill. But it is arguably the most significant support needed by the missionary. In his sovereignty, God has voluntarily linked himself to human cooperation. He has inextricably bound himself to the prayer of faith of his children. He merges his working with man's praying. We can pray against spiritual warfare. We can pray Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-12 for our missionaries. We can pray for an open door for the gospel. We can pray for the Lord to send more workers into the harvest fields. We can pray for God's kingdom to come in the lives of those the missionary is working with.

**Communication support** gives the missionary the assurance that she is loved and cared for and that she hasn't been forgotten by those back home. It is hard to imagine the importance of communication from home until you have been "out there." Communication can be in the form of letters, packages, telephone calls, and email. Say things that matter, share thoughts and feelings, express interest in the concerns of their hearts, ask questions about their lives and their work, and respond to things you have read in their newsletters to you. The ultimate communication would be a visit to them on the field! As the Bell telephone system used to say, "Reach out and touch someone."

**Re-entry support** helps the missionary deal with the shock in returning home for furlough. The longer the cross-cultural worker has been away, the more difficult this will be. The missionary has spent much time trying to adjust and adapt to a foreign culture and can suffer from reverse culture shock coming back. New technologies may have become commonplace, clothing and hairstyles may have changed, laws may have changed, and values may have shifted. The returning missionary will need help adjusting to these and other changes. There may be a need to help find transportation and housing. They can be helped by providing meals the first few days back and taking them shopping. They need to be given opportunities, both individually and in group settings, to share what has been their heart's work. They need help in integrating their global perspectives back into the home church.

One missions mobilizer has said that probably only one out of one hundred believers should be going out as a missionary. That's not to limit the number, but is a recognition that one who goes should be gifted for the work, have the ability to integrate into a different culture, and have a desire to leave home and go to a people he doesn't know. But that means that there are ninety-nine out of a hundred believers that can be involved in sending the missionary!

The PBCC Missions Council has begun to organize sending teams for our missionaries. The sending teams are composed of everyone who has committed to be a sender for the missionary and is supporting the missionary in at least one of the six support areas. The goal is for the missionary and the senders to consider themselves all part of a team. The goal of the team is to carry out a particular ministry which all are committed to. The missionary is the part of the team that goes, and the senders are the part of the team that ensures that the missionary has all the support needed to carry out the ministry.

For each sending team, about a half-dozen individuals are selected to form a "core group" that will provide leadership and planning for the sending team. The core group will keep in close touch with the missionary, and will meet as necessary to respond to the missionary's changing situation. The core group will evaluate and make plans to meet the needs of the missionary on an annual basis, plan periodic meetings for information-sharing and prayer for the whole sending team,

When a person makes him(her)self available to the Lord to be involved fulltime in missions, it is a commitment for a significant part of life (if not a lifetime), and usually involves a number of sacrifices (separation for long periods of time from family and friends, adjusting to life in a different culture, learning a new language, generally living at a very modest economic level, delaying or forgoing building any equity, increased personal risk because of life in a politically or economically unstable country, and so forth).

The call to serve as a sender is to rise to a commitment level on a par with that of the missionary; to commit to doing everything within your capacity, skills, and means to ensure that the missionary is resourced fully at all times. When a missionary returns home on furlough, it means to work together as a team to make the arrangements that he or she needs to make his stay comfortable and enjoyable. It means working to raise additional funds when support drops (by being their advocate, recruiting new donors to the team, increasing your own support, promoting them to others in the church, arranging speaking opportunities, and so forth). The sending team would be a self-sustaining, self-propagating group that will commit to sending as long as the "goer" is going.

Senders will see themselves equally yoked with the "goer" in cross-cultural ministry with the same sense of responsibility and commitment for the ministry.

For more information and/or to become involved as a sender, please contact David Jones, PBCC Missions Minister, at 408.366.6690 or [david@pbcc.org](mailto:david@pbcc.org).

*(The concepts outlined in this article are derived from the book, Serving As Senders by Neal Pirolo, Emmaus Road International (1991).)*