

# Member Care: The Scriptural Foundation

By **NEAL PIROLO**

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There is no doubt that the ministry of member care is multi-leveled and multi-faceted. Multi-leveled in the cooperation of mission agencies, churches, individual caregivers and crisis agencies; multifaceted in the diversity of need of each individual field worker in each of numerous ministry locations and situations.

## Scriptural Foundation

The Scriptural foundation for this most-needed and, unfortunately, still most-neglected aspect of the missions process, is found in the letter of Romans, written later in the ministry of Paul, the Apostle. He had heard of an Unreached People Group in Spain. After all, that was his life verse and working principle: *I have strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation.*

By the time Paul got to Romans 10, he was ready to spell out for us the whole missions process. Using the Gapless Linear Logic form of reasoning so well understood by the people of that day, Paul laid out his premise in verse 13. And because he had something very important to say, he established that premise in Scripture by quoting Joel 2:32: “*Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved.*” There it is!

Using all the varied and creative means available to us, the goal of all mission endeavors is the salvation of the lost. Certainly, as John Piper takes it one step further: “that worship for all of eternity will result.”

Now, Paul begins a series of four (not three) questions with each new thought directly (without a gap) connected to the previous thought. Thus, he must begin his reasoning with the thought of calling. Question one: *How shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed?* An easy concept to understand. No one is going to call on one in whom they do not believe. Next question, tied to the previous thought of believing: *How can they believe on Him of Whom they have not heard?* A third question: *And how can they hear without a preacher?*

## The Process Truncated

There it is! The question we have all been waiting for—so goes the average missions conference. And with all the passion of a skilled orator, the one making the appeal can work up the emotions of many. Even to misuse the Scripture in Isaiah 6. For, after Isaiah said those “famous” words, *Here am I. Send me*, God sent him to his own people, not into a cross-cultural ministry! But, not to be concerned

with such detail, to the front they come, making a “commitment” to be a “missionary!” Of course, many wake up the next morning, wondering what in the world did I commit to? This is one of the great tragedies in the Christian community. Whether it is in that appeal or just in the structure of a missions conference, disservice is done to those who could be mobilized into the ministry of serving as senders. Ninety per cent of conference attendees will never go to the field. Yet, without a clear understanding of all that is involved in Paul’s last question, they go home wondering “Why did I waste my time at yet another conference? I’ll never go to the mission field.”



But the beauty of timeless Scripture is that Paul didn’t stop at the third question. He asked one more. And it is pertinent to note that when one is using this form of logic, they end with the very most important point they want to make. So, here is his final question. It has to be tied to the preacher, the one who goes, the cross-cultural worker, the missionary: *And how can they preach* (How can our missionaries be effective.) **unless they are SENT?**

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## Full Circle

This final question then, draws our attention to the whole subject of “the rest of the team”—others than the missionaries that Paul is saying are vital to the missions process. But, again, in the beauty of the Holy Spirit-inspiration of Paul’s words, so that those who serve as senders (member caregivers) do not get to thinking that they are the focus of missions, in verse 15, Paul brings it back full circle to the missionary by quoting Isaiah 52:7: *How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.* Thus, *those who go* and *those who serve as senders* form the team for effective cross-cultural ministry.

## Missionary Care

I grew up in a church that believed in missions. Pictures of families in faraway places lined our foyer wall. Each had their names, country of ministry and the amount of money we were giving. When a missionary came to our church, he would tell of the great exploits being accomplished. For those of us not “called” to go, we thought the best we could do was to say good-bye.

As I became an adult and began reading my Bible, I was surprised to discover that Paul, a first century missionary, continually asked for care. By the time he wrote to the church in Rome, he had been on several missionary journeys. Yet, in chapter one and twice repeated in chapter 15, this seasoned missionary said he needed their encouragement.

He also received logistic support. Reading Acts 19 and 20, you can clearly see that *someone* had to find the ship to take them to the next port. Paul asked Timothy to come before winter. He had forgotten to take his coat with him. “Please bring it, Timothy. Also the books, but if you don’t have room for everything, at least bring the parchments.” “No man at war gets himself entangled in the affairs of daily living,” Paul told Timothy.

Financial support? Of course, money is a *part* of missionary care. For, “no man goes to war at his own expense,” Paul said. And what commendations he had for the church at Philippi! “You have been partners with me from the very beginning.” Later in the letter he said (in *response* to their generous financial gift), “My God will supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory!”

Paul’s continual request for prayer stands above all other expressions of need for care. Sometimes it was simply, “Pray with me...” Other times it became a passionate appeal, for prayer invades the spiritual. Daily, intercessory, maintaining the “hedge of protection” prayer is needed by every missionary.

Without the aid of computers and cell or satellite phones, Paul maintained an amazing degree of contact with people and churches. And today, as culturally adaptive as a missionary may be, he needs contact with his home culture.

When Jesus stood on the Mount of Ascension and said, “As you are going...” He never said anything

about coming home. However, His men came back to Him. And most missionaries do come home. Again, the Bible gives us our model for helping a missionary through this difficult transition. Acts 14:26-28 and Acts 15:35 give us the five steps to a healthy re-entry. Because the missionary is going through the stress, he needs a team of people to help him.

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In Romans 10, Paul was describing the missions process. In a beautiful sequence of thought, he ended by saying, “And how can they preach (how can missionaries be effective), unless they are *sent*?” With that question, he lays at the feet of those who serve as senders an equal (though different) responsibility to those who go. MF

