

Simple Steps

Remember when your first child took a few baby steps?

Remember when you accepted your first paid job?

Remember when you first led someone to a personal relationship to Christ?

Were these simple steps? Perhaps they were; simple, yet necessary. In a similar way, simple steps are what it takes to understand and to do mission God's way.

I'd like to use a simple framework from the Book of Acts to outline simple steps your church or bible study group can take to evaluate your current mission work and to intensify it. We've used these already in the Witness 6.7 newsletter, (see the paper **Sharpening our focus** presented by Bishop Patrick Yu

http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/ecgi/resources/sharpening_our_focus_on_evangelism_and_church_growth.pdf and **Evangelism Resources** <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/ecgi/resources/index.cfm> on the ECGI web pages) but I'd like to return to them in a more literal sense. These steps could form the basis for a bible study, a discussion or prayer group that wanted to understand the biblical standard for mission.

Acts 1:8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth"

Step 1: The gospel was preached first in Jerusalem (Acts 1:1-5:42). The word of God was preached (Acts 2:14-36, 3:11-26, 5:12-16, 6:8-7:53). The result was that many people believed (Acts 2:37-46, 4:4, 5:14, 6:7-8). Yet, on account of the word of God, there was persecution (Acts 4:1-22, 5:17-42, 7:45-8:3, 21:27-36, 22:12). The Lord, however, did miraculously intervene and rescue some of His people (Acts 4:23-30, 5:19-21).

Step 2: The gospel was preached in Judea (Acts 6:1-8:3).

Step 3: The gospel was preached in Samaria (Acts 8:4-11:26). We see the word of God proclaimed by Philip (Acts 8:4, 26-39), by Cornelius (Acts 10-11), and at Antioch (Acts 11:10). Some believed like Simon (Acts 8:9-13), the eunuch (Acts 8:39-39), and Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48). Yet, there was persecution on account of the word of God (Acts 11:1, 12:1-5). The Lord, however, did rescue the persecuted (Acts 12:6-19).

Step 4: The gospel was preached to the ends of the earth (Acts 13-28). We see the word of God proclaimed in Antioch (Acts 13:1-13) by Paul and Barnabas, in Psidian Antioch (Acts 13:13), and further out away from Jerusalem (Acts 14:7, 24-27, 16:11 (Philippi), 17:2 (Thessalonica), 11, 16-31 (Athens), 18:4 (Corinth), 11, 24-25, 19:8-10 (Ephesus), 20:17-38, 28:17-31 (Rome).

So what? Simple steps from the book Acts, I think, have much to help us in our mission today. Each step shared certain similarities. There are four discussion questions and action steps we can focus on:

Question 1, We can ask ourselves, What type of gospel is our church preaching?

Application: Listen to last week's sermon from your church or print out a hard copy of the transcript of the most recent sermon from your cathedral or place of worship.

As you re-look at its content, bear in mind that the context will be quite different from sermons in the book of Acts. Then take a look at some sermons preached from Acts. What do you notice about the similarities or differences with the sermon you heard last week?

Question 2, We can ask ourselves, What types of people are believing the gospel of Jesus Christ in our church today?

Application: Next time you are in church or at your mission outpost, take a look around at the people who are participating. Who are the new believers? What types of background do they come from? What is their story of coming to repentance and faith in Christ? If we don't know, can we find out and ask them?

Question 3, We can ask ourselves, What type of persecution or challenges have been experienced because the gospel has been preached in our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth?

Application: In our context today, whether it's a Jerusalem, Samaria or ends of the earth scenario, we can ask the Lord to help us face and even overcome the major challenges that lie in front of us in advancing the gospel. Once we have named the major challenges, then we are in a better position to ask Jesus for His wisdom and grace to face them.

Question 4, We can ask ourselves, How has God supernaturally intervened in our mission to the ends of the earth or to Samaria, etc?

Application: In our bible study or prayer groups, we can share stories of Jesus' extraordinary ways of intervening and of rescuing His people. Real stories like these can add excitement and energy to people who are flagging in their attempts to evangelize their neighbors. They remind us of God's presence with us even in the toughest circumstances.

Simple steps, perhaps, and simple discussion questions and applications, but simplicity can ensure our mission and evangelism is consistent with what the Holy Spirit does when the gospel is preached. One pastor commented that our message is basically repulsive to the world. It says Jesus is Lord and we aren't! And nobody really likes that! However, the gospel is to be backed up by beautiful lives. Our lives are to be radically pleasing to God. One without the other leads to hypocrisy or to powerlessness. We need both a repulsive message and beautiful lives.

Our natural inclination is to complicate matters. Keep it simple. Keep your mission and evangelism rooted in the simple steps of the Bible!

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