

**“Called to Serve”**

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The role of Christian mission has changed over the years. When I started out in ministry, I was in seminary, and I was taking a course from a professor who had spent 40 years in China as a missionary. He said, “When I started out in ministry, we - as missionaries - thought of ourselves as the ones who were superior. We had the superior religion. We had the superior culture, we thought. We thought we had the superior wealth - which we did - and so when missionaries went out to places many of them actually had servants of the indigenous people of the places of which they were serving.”

“But,” he said, “since about the 1960s, things started to change in what it meant to be a missionary, thankfully. Now, from the 1960s and slowly moving forward, people began to realize that that was not a model for ministry that was appropriate. Rather than having people serve you, they were finally reading their Bible enough to recognize that we were there to serve, and having servants really wasn’t that beneficial to that model. To begin to see people, to live and become part of that community - not as an outsider - but to strive to be part of the community in such a way that they saw you as one *with* them. That kind of immersion into the culture is the way in which the missionaries began to realize that real impact and change that could occur. Because, if you are not seen as part of one, if you’re not seen as one who cares deeply, and sweats and bleeds *with* those in your community, then you haven’t earned the right to preach the Gospel.”

Before that period, and in some of our churches even today, the idea of mission is to pay missionaries to proclaim the Gospel to those who haven’t heard it yet, and now, all of a sudden, we see places like South Korea, where they are sending missionaries to the United States, because so few of us believe and affirm Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The shoe is on the other foot.

Now, all of a sudden, we do not have that authoritative voice in the communities in which we are going, because we don’t have that authoritative voice even at home. The way in which we have changed, because of that, may be beneficial, because we can’t act proud and haughty anymore. We have to see ourselves as a mission field - not arrogantly having the right way or superior understanding of the world and faith, and everything else. Now, we have to recognize that we are one with, to immerse ourselves and to share with others - not as a separate people coming in - but as one more brother and sister of the God who created us as one, sharing a mission of hope, of truth and of love.

That is so vitally important - this idea of helping people and fulfilling their needs. Mission work has changed from something where we save souls, to having to earn the right to have a conversation about who Jesus Christ was and is, and will continue to be.

We begin by caring for the physical and emotional needs of those people who could use our help, and we do that because this world has somehow become so unfair in the way in which we have received our money. The power differentiation between certain parts of the world and others, has created an environment where some have so much and others have so little.