

**God's Heart for the Nations**  
**Steef van't Slot**

**Lesson 22**

**Part 1. Developing Missionary Practice**

*Introduction*

Paul's pioneer missions developed into church planting, and in these churches he developed missionary practices about which we can learn a lot. In this chapter we will look specifically at five issues of missionary church practice. These five are *firstly* the appointment of church leaders; *secondly* the encouragement of missionaries; *thirdly* the care for missionaries; *fourthly* the co-existence of different missionary ministries and *finally* the problems of second- and third-generation believers.

With regard to the appointment of *church leadership* by the missionaries who planted those churches, we learn that self-styled leadership will not work, because real leaders are called by God. Leaders become visible as leaders, because they lead, but before they do they should be tested in different relevant areas. Then they should be acknowledged and appointed publicly.

*Scripture reference*

**Then *they returned* to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith ... *Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church* and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust (Acts 14:21-23).**

*Comment*

The normal pattern in Paul's missionary ministry was that he first evangelized an area, and after some months or a year returned to see how things went with the new believers. By that time he could see who was still there since he came the first time, who took responsibility and whose life-styles had been changed by Christ. It was easier, that second time, to *see whom the Lord had called to assume leadership* in that new church. Such people were instructed further, blessed under prayer and laying on of hands and publicly installed as elders and deacons. Paul instructed Timothy and Titus to follow the same pattern. He gave them guidelines that they should use as criteria for new leaders.

These guidelines were meant to screen leaders on attitude, behavior, family life and spiritual experience. He calls them overseers, that is, elders, deacons and their wives. Although Paul speaks in the context of the local church, an overseer's function can also be denominational, regional, national or international. Paul's criteria apply also to leaders of denominations, mission agencies, bible schools and para-church organizations. Leaders should be tested. How can that be done? Here are some suggestions about what questions to ask: How do they maintain their spiritual lives, their marriage- and family life? Are they financially reliable? Are their economic dealings sound? What is their

reputation within the church and outside? Have they been trained for the ministry they desire to execute? Can they teach others? Are they morally acceptable and sufficiently knowledgeable? Are they given opportunities to minister, with mentoring and coaching? Are they reliable in small assignments? Can they be trusted with bigger ones? Do their lives present an example that is worth following?

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The *second* topic of this chapter deals with the necessity of mutual encouragement between missionaries. We see in Timothy for instance, that not all of God's workers move in their ministries with confidence. Therefore, bolder missionaries like Paul are privileged to encourage their more timid colleagues.

#### *Scripture reference*

**... fan into flame *the gift of God* ... God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a *spirit of power* ... do not be ashamed to *testify* about our Lord ... join me in *suffering* for the gospel ... endure *hardship*, do the work of an *evangelist* (2 Tim. 1:6-8; 4:5).**

#### *Comment*

Paul had been set free after his first imprisonment in Rome, and could travel around freely again. Sometimes he went with Timothy, whom he later left in Ephesus to serve the church there. At other times he was underway with Titus. They visited the churches they had planted, taught and encouraged them, and appointed leaders.

Some years later Paul is imprisoned in Rome for the second and last time. He then writes his last letter, the second to Timothy. These are Paul's last words. Timothy was very different from Paul, and before his death Paul wanted to encourage the younger man, seeking to establish him in his ministry firmly.

He encouraged his friend to use his spiritual gift and to not give in to timidity. He also warned him not to be ashamed to testify and join him in suffering. Timothy needed apparently much encouragement from his mentor. He was not as bold as Paul and may have felt inferior. The encouragement to do the work of an evangelist suggests that he lacked in that area. Was this because 'all ... in ... Asia had already heard the Word of the Lord', as we read in Acts, or because Paul had preached the Gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum, as we see in Romans? Did Timothy consider the Great Commission as already finished, like some do today? Did he forget that there were still 'regions beyond', that Paul mentioned in Corinthians, to evangelize – as there are today? All these things may have played a role in Timothy's thinking.

#### *Discussion & dialogue*

*As missionary, do you have a 'Timothy' in training? If so, explain to your group, without mentioning names, how you encourage that person in his or her weaknesses*

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The *third* topic of this chapter has to do with the care that missionaries need, from each other as well as from their churches. Being in the frontlines of spiritual warfare, missionaries need to be cared for spiritually, emotionally and physically. This is needed to avoid them to ‘burn out’ in ministry. Adequate member care helps to preclude that missionaries leave their field of service earlier than planned.

*Scripture reference*

**Onesiphorus ... often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains ... he searched hard for me ... You know ...how ... he helped me in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:16-18).**

*Comment*

Paul may not have had much vision for and ideas about how to care for missionaries in the beginning of his career, later he did. In the beginning he had not allowed John Mark to rejoin him, after the latter had deserted the team. At that time Barnabas had helped the young, fearful deserter to re-enter the ministry. Now, in his last years, Paul witnessed the wisdom of that decision. In the eighteen years that had passed since, Paul had been cared for by many people during his trips, and he himself had cared for many colleagues who had joined his teams. He had come to know the refreshing elements of being thought about, cared for, supplied with and helped along. One person in particular, Onesiphorus, blessed Paul and he praised the man for his ministry. When we look at what he did for Paul, we have a good picture of how church- and mission leaders should care for their workers, the members of either their churches or mission agencies. That is where the word ‘member-care’ comes from. What particular qualities did Paul appreciate so much in people who have the ministry of member care?

Onesiphorus may have been leader of an Ephesian house church, planted by Paul. He loved to bless missionaries with what they needed to keep going; physically, spiritually or emotionally. He provided refreshment when Paul was present, but even traveled as far as Rome to ascertain that Paul was well taken care of. These verses tell us that missionaries need member care (‘he helped me’); that the Lord rewards it (‘show mercy, because...’); that member care persons are not afraid to identify with workers (‘not ashamed’); that it should take place on a regular basis (‘often’); that member care people are willing to sacrifice for it (‘he searched hard’); that member care persons are persevering people (‘until he found me’) and that it costs time and money (because of travel, and maybe presents). In these few words Paul sums up the ministry of member care beautifully.

*Discussion & dialogue*

*How is care for missionaries being organized in your church or agency?*

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The *fourth* topic of this chapter deals with the given that in missions very different ministries exist and that these should respect, not despise each other. Paul gives three different analogies of professions that should be interdependent in their functioning. Full-time missionaries should not have to care for their sustenance. They should minister by God's rules, not their own. When they sow spiritually they are entitled to reap materially.

*Scripture reference*

**No one serving as a *soldier* gets involved in civilian affairs – he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an *athlete*, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking *farmer* should be the first to receive a share of the crops (2 Tim. 2:4-6).**

*Comment*

Paul compares the ministry of a missionary with other professions, to bring home its different certain characteristics. He paints a vivid picture of what missionary ministry entails. *Soldiers, athletes and farmers* are very different professions and such diversity also underlines the big differences that exist between missionary ministries. Different as missionaries are in their work, soldiers, athletes and farmers all need each other. They all live in the same Kingdom and serve the same King. They should under all circumstances honor and respect each other and no one has the right to despise the other or show contempt for what is considered inferior or of lower importance.

*First*, in the analogy with a *soldier*, he says that the latter should not be involved in civilian affairs, but be available to please his commanding officer. Too many missionaries do have to become involved in civilian affairs: they have to engage in a secular job, because their churches insufficiently support them. Paul gives here the general rules for missionaries, but we must not forget that *he* took the liberty to *not* use such a right, but provided in his own sustenance by making tents. His motive was to not put any stumbling block in the way along which the Gospel was spreading.

The *second* analogy has to do with *athletics*, 'competing according to the rules'. Many rules can be broken in missionary practice. We see for instance that some leaders start *building their own ministerial empires*, which to them become more important than the Kingdom of God. We see it in the attitude of Simon, formerly a sorcerer, now a Christian, who *wanted power*. He received a rebuke from Peter instead. Another example can be derived from Paul's words to the Philippians, where he speaks about people with *false motives* who 'preach Christ out of envy and rivalry'. In God's Kingdom there is no rivalry and when rivalry is seen, one can wonder whose 'kingdom' is being threatened. Other 'rule-breakers' are the many *people who take credit for ministerial success*, but forget that God does not give His glory to another. Then there are the people who *use the ministry for financial gain*; in other words: they *take* things inordinately instead of what is graciously *granted* by the Lord. All these compete according to their own rules, instead of according to biblical ones.

The *third* analogy is of a *farmer* who should be the first to receive his share of the crops. This is often understood as missionaries receiving a heavenly reward for souls saved – which is true – but in the Pauline context it also indicates a reasonable *material* reward.

#### *Discussion & dialogue*

*If you know of any, mention in what other ways missionaries can ‘compete outside the given biblical rules’ – and how that could be corrected*

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The *last* topic of this chapter has to do with the problems of second- and third-generation believers. Church history shows that with the progression of generations, spiritual quality usually waters down. Every generation of believers needs radicals to show the right way. Usually such radicals are ‘first-generation-believers’ themselves. We need to understand that God has children, not grand-children: spiritual birth cannot be inherited. Nobody is God’s child because he was born in a Christian family, and everybody has to submit to Christ personally, in order to be born again.

#### *Scripture reference*

**This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God (1 John 4:2,3).**

#### *Comment*

Only months after Paul wrote Second Timothy, his last letter, he died a martyr’s death under emperor Nero. His death ended over thirty years of ministry in which he exerted a tremendous influence for the God’s Kingdom. He evangelized, planted churches, installed leadership, wrote letters and recruited dozens of colleagues to continue the work. This was all true for a man of whom it was said in the beginning of his career, that it would be showed to him how much he was to suffer for Christ. And suffer he did, but the eternal fruit would be a million times more significant than his suffering ever was. He had learned to embrace suffering for the sake of eternal fruit.

Around the time that Paul died, Peter died also in Rome, sentenced by Nero. Then about twenty-five years passed, in which all other apostles who were still alive died a martyr’s death, except for one. The old apostle John still ministered in Ephesus at the time, where he wrote his Gospel. Later he wrote three letters and lastly wrote down the Revelation that he received from the Lord during his exile on the isle of Patmos.

John ran into a problem that his colleagues Paul, James, Peter, Jude and the author of Hebrews had encountered earlier. The latter group had been confronted with a ‘*second-generation*’ problem. The people that had believed during Jesus’ ministry and that of the early church had brought forth a new generation of believers, who had not seen as much of God’s power as the first generation had. They knew less of the intimacy with God that

comes from suffering. They were less radical. Now John in his later years was confronted with a *'third-generation' problem*. This was the generation that, almost without exception, knew Gospel truths from hearsay. They had less spiritual experiences, had been less radical still than the second generation and suffered less as a result.

All apostles that had faced second- and third generation problems saw themselves confronted with the need to address discipleship issues in their letters, rather than foundational dogmas, like Paul had done in his earlier epistles. This was also true for John, who had written his Gospel to arouse faith in unbelievers, but his letters to deepen the believers' assurance of faith. We will see now how that was true in John's first letter.

The *recipients* of his letters were congregations in Asia Minor, like those in the second and third chapters of Revelation. The main *reason* for his writing was – like Second Peter and Jude – the destructive work of false teachers. These errors had progressed considerably since these two letters were written. The *heresy* against which John writes denied that Jesus was the Son of God and the Messiah Who had come in the flesh. The false teachers stated that Jesus was no real man but just an appearance: He *seemed* human but was in disguise, they said, like sometimes in the Old Testament, when God (or the Angel of the Lord) appeared in the *form* of a man.

John's letters are practical and teach radical ways of following Jesus. After sixty years of church life, a revival of radicalism was urgently needed. Therefore, the *spiritual climate* of his first letter is very sharp: black/white, true/false, light/darkness, truth/lie, life/death, love/hate. There is no grey middle: his tone of writing leaves no place for compromise. John also exposes the world's false religions. The key test is how people react towards God's Son Jesus Christ. Although He loved the world enough to lay down His life for it, the world hates Him. Hating Jesus, denying His existence or separating the Man Jesus from His Deity, means hating God Himself. Much missionary fear is, that confrontation with adherents of hostile foreign religions may cost them their lives. End-time missionaries need a martyr's spirit if they want to reach the world's unreached!

This letter helps people to *test the quality* of their faith in theological, moral and social ways. Regarding *theology*, their faith in Person and ministry of Jesus needed testing: did they believe in the Deity *and* humanity of their Savior? With regard to *morality* the question was: you may *say* you are a believer, but do you *act* like one? Does your obedience to God prove your confession? The *social* dimension addresses the question: is your life based on and dominated by love in your words and actions? These three tests are woven throughout John's first letter.

### *Discussion & dialogue*

*Discuss with your study group what second- and third generation problems you run into in your church or denomination and how these can best be addressed biblically*



## Lesson 22

### Part 2. Missionary Security Measures

#### *Introduction*

We know that a spiritual war rages between God's Kingdom and Satan's domain. Therefore, there is a legitimate place for secret missions among God's soldiers. The latter should be careful with information and communication. Names, strategies and tactics should be kept from hostile observers; sometimes codes need to be used.

#### *Scripture reference*

**Then Joshua ... *secretly* sent two spies ... (Josh. 2:1).**

**I set out *during the night* ... I had *not told anyone* ... (Neh. 2:12).**

#### *The story*

The devil is called 'the prince of the world' by Jesus and 'the god of this world' by Paul. Since man handed his God-given authority over creation to Satan through his act of disobedience, the devil has occupied that position. When Jesus came and conquered the devil, the latter's power is being taken from him, bit by bit in a spiritual war that will eventually encompass the whole world. The followers of Jesus Christ are His soldiers, assigned to force Satan and the kingdom backwards and to establish God's Kingdom in the hearts of people that the devil keeps in bondage. Therefore, evangelism and missions are acts of war; a war that can not be lost, but where God's people can still be wounded and killed. Skill and caution are demanded to fight that war. Part of the mission will have secret elements: there must be caution with regard to finding information, deployment of personnel, communications, and the planning of strategies and tactics.

When *Joshua* sent his spies into the city of Jericho, he did so secretly. Certain missionary research tasks need to be performed without being noticed by enemy agents, before the main occupation force can move in, or the visible execution of plans takes place. *Nehemiah* did the same, once he arrived in Jerusalem, of which the city wall lay in shambles. He looked around for a few days and at night inspected the damage, in the presence of only a few people. After that investigation he proposed a course of action to the city leaders. All this was necessary before they could face their enemies' opposition.

When the disciples asked Jesus where they could prepare the Last Supper, He gave them a weird command 'Go into the city. Follow a man carrying a water jar into the house, speak to the owner and prepare the room he shows you'. Why such secret directions? Jesus could have been more specific, but it was important that somebody didn't know where that last meal would be used. Judas Iscariot might have disturbed that time of fellowship to have Jesus arrested. Jesus effectively avoided that by acting the way He did.

Years later, in Rome, Peter used some coded language in his first letter to the believers in Asia Minor. When he spoke about Rome, he called it 'Babylon' and the 'she' refers to the church in that city. In his second letter, John used the same analogies.

*Scripture reference*

**To the *chosen lady* and her *children* ... the children of your *chosen sister* send their greetings (2 John :1,13).**

*Comment*

In his second letter John *addressed a female person*. The 'chosen lady and her children' indicate a church and her members rather than a woman, otherwise John would have used a personal name. The greeting at the end is similar: John sends greetings from his own church and her members, probably in Ephesus. One reason to use a code is that of security; the church faced persecution. In his 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> letters John wrote to different churches; both are about *itinerant missionaries*.

Not all of these travelers could be trusted: some false prophets had made it their 'mission' to lead churches astray and John warns against them in his second letter. The good ones had been given hospitality by Gaius, for which John compliments him in the third letter. Missionaries are to be received by people as if they are Christ Himself, but not everyone is always in favor of them. Diotrephes made life difficult for the missionaries and for others who wanted to help them. We will talk about these men in the next chapter.

We should be aware of the vast importance of the security of fellow-believers. We need to do everything within our power to protect them. Many live in countries that are hostile towards Christians, because of their national anti-Christian ideologies. Caution needs to be taken in who is being visited and when; in all telephone- and written communications and in what one carries on his person. Of course calculated risks need to be taken – without risks there will be no success. Our motivation should not be one of fear for our own life or safety, but for that of the fellow-believers we visit, or contact in other ways.

*Discussion & dialogue*

*What precautions need to be taken to evangelize the population? How can one move about inconspicuously? What words can not be used in communication? What are the alternatives? What are the best times to contact believers? How can truth be spoken to authorities, without sharing sensitive information, on visa-papers, or during interrogations?*

*Discuss the dangers of carrying letters, manuscripts, photos, tapes, CDs and DVDs. If they really need to be carried, how can this be done in the safest possible way? What creative smuggling possibilities can you develop?*

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## Lesson 22

### Part 3. Partners & Predators

#### *Introduction*

Missionary ministry is not a business for ‘lone rangers’; several contributing parties have to cooperate to make missions possible. John’s partner-model includes senders, sent ones and facilitators; Jesus’ missionary model includes ‘church’, training and sending. Partnerships should never lead to financial dependence on foreigners.

Unfortunately, mission-loving churches may have mission-hating members or pastors, and sometimes help from outside is needed to sort such matters out.

#### *Scripture reference*

**To ... Gaius ... It gave me great joy to have *some brothers* come and *tell about your faithfulness* ... in *what you are doing for the brothers*, even though they are *strangers* to you. They have told ... about your love. You will do well to *send them on their way* ... It was *for the sake of the Name* that they went out ... We ought therefore to *show hospitality* to such men so that we may *work together for the truth* (3 John :1,3-8).**

#### *The story*

John’s church was a missionary-sending church. Brothers went out to preach the Gospel in other areas. When traveling, they visited brother Gaius and his church. In this way the missionaries maintained contact and friendly relationships between the two churches. News was exchanged between them: Gaius and his church became informed about what went on in John’s church in Ephesus, and vice versa. When the missionaries came back, they reported to John that Gaius had a healthy spiritual life, and that the members of his church had been very helpful to the missionaries. And so we see actually three groups who are dependent on each other’s help:

*Firstly*, we see the church in Ephesus, the *sending body* who took spiritual and material responsibility for the missionaries. The latter formed the *second* group, the *sent ones*. They were the voice of the church in Ephesus, preaching the Gospel where the church in its entirety could not go. Finally we see the *third body*, Gaius’ church, who helped the missionaries with hospitality and supplies. They were a *facilitating partner*, which made sure that the ‘arm’ of the Gospel could reach farther away.

In a way we see the same sort of partnership, although the role of the third, the facilitating partner, is usually played by the missionary-sending agency in our times. It is beautiful to see that this model is already as old as the practice of the church in the first century. In fact John had learned the model from the Lord Jesus Himself. Jesus participated with His disciples in ‘church-life’: they always ministered in synagogues. He was also the ‘bible-school’ because He taught them. Finally He functioned as ‘sending agency’, because He sent them, first as short-term workers and later as long-term evangelists and missionaries. This practice again underlines the necessity for similar models in today’s missionary enterprises.

### *Comment*

In John's third letter we see eight aspects of missionary partnership. The brothers were sent out from John's church in Ephesus and visited Gaius and his church on their way, thus keeping contact between both churches alive. These missionaries reported positively about Gaius' spiritual life and how he had helped them. This help consisted of hospitality and facilitation in travel, whether financial, practical, or both. Although these itinerant missionaries were strangers to Gaius, the latter did not feel they took his hospitality and help for granted. On the contrary, he counted it a privilege to take care of them.

John's expression 'you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers ...' indicates a habit that could be relied on. Whether hospitality was Gaius' *gift* we do not know, but it certainly was his *choice*. John encourages him to continue in it. These missionaries had gone out to preach the name of Jesus among the Gentiles, from whom they had received no help. Therefore they depended all the more on the help of God's people.

John is not suggesting that missionaries should not accept gifts from Gentiles. There are 'sheep' among the nations who will readily help missionaries when they encounter them, with no strings attached. Such gifts can be received with gratitude and should be refused only when the giver tries to manipulate God's workers by it – which of course does not include designation of certain gifts for specific purposes.

Finally, John includes the duty of the wider body of Christ in partnership development by using the word 'we'. *We* are supposed to *work together* for the truth. This includes the *missionaries* who are sent ones, John's church as *sender* and Gaius' church as local *facilitator*. If all three parties contribute to the best of their abilities, true missionary partnership has developed.

Partnerships do not have to consist of *only three* partners. There can be more, as long as there is unity of purpose and equality of contribution. Partnership may never have the form of 'one who pays and another who works'. Usually then, the one who pays comes from overseas and the one who works does so in a mission field, faraway from the donors. This is not partnership, but an employer-employee situation, of which the outcome is often that the rules are made by the one who carries the financial costs. Where the one who pays lays down rules for the ones that are being paid, there is no partnership but a work with a 'boss' and a 'laborer'. When a situation like that occurs, the danger becomes real that a situation of dependency comes into existence. The workers become dependent on funds or personnel from overseas to such an extent, that when these are being withdrawn, the local ministry dies. Where *foreign monies* are being *used structurally* the danger is real that a mercenary spirit starts to dominate: one works only when being paid, but not because one *owns* the ministry as a God-given privilege.

### *Scripture reference*

**Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church (3 John :9,10).**

*Comment, continued*

Strange but true: not all church members or leaders like missionaries. Gaius and many other church members had been helpful to John's missionaries, but Diotrephes hated them. Whatever his motives or background were that caused him to treat missionaries the way he did, we don't know. We gather from John's words that he displayed serious character flaws, in spite of the fact that he held a position of authority in the church. John concluded that it would be best to visit and deal with the issues himself.

Many churches have their 'Diotrephes': persons who resist missionary ministry. John describes a hostile situation: Diotrephes resisted his own church's missionary participation actively and openly. He 'loves to be first' is an attitude, incompatible with the servanthood that is required to send out missionaries. It also indicates a state of immature discipleship in his life, in spite of his apparent authority. He 'will have nothing to do with us' pictures him so in favor of local church autonomy that he spurned John's apostolic authority and considered the missionaries as a threat to his position and budget. Diotrephes loved his little empire more than God's Kingdom. He 'gossiped maliciously' about the apostolic movement. This proved his spiritually deteriorated state and the desperate attempt to hold on to a power that was not quite his. In contrast to Gaius' ministry, Diotrephes 'refuses to welcome the brothers'. The present tense indicates a habit of doing so. This may have been because the missionaries reminded him of mission tasks which he had left undone and their compassion with the lost that he himself lacked. Did he refuse to be confronted with his guilty conscience? His enmity and aggression was so big toward those who hosted missionaries, that he excommunicated them. Such hostility may have been because he could not accept foreigners of other nations or races as Gospel preachers. John decided to visit and deal with this ulcer, so that further damage to the church could be avoided.

*Discussion & dialogue*

*Discuss how partnerships can be developed within your missionary work. Use questions like 'what personnel is available? What prayer-force can sustain the work? Is help needed of literature-ministries? What material help can sending and facilitating churches/agencies offer?'*

*Discuss how to deal in a biblical way with mission-resisting Diotrepheses in a church*

*Which four themes of the ten reoccur in this chapter and how? (Answer is in the Teacher's Guide)*

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