

# SIMPLE, REPRODUCIBLE METHODS

2024 GFA MAT Retreat  
Timothy W. Berrey

Since the church we know is what we have grown up with, we forget that church may look very different in different places and still be a New Testament church. For example, we assume that a church should have chairs but in some cultures, the congregation sits on the floor. We show reverence by wearing our best shoes on Sunday; other cultures remove their shoes in order to show the same reverence. The purpose of this session is to make us think about the methods we are introducing into our mission work. I am relying heavily in this session on Roland Allen's *MISSIONARY METHODS: ST. PAUL'S OR OURS?*, a book that has greatly impacted my thinking. Allow me, though, to affirm that I do not agree with everything I have written here. My goal is to stimulate thinking on this subject and provide seminal, hypothetical examples that will stimulate each of us to realistic applications that fit the specific context in which we minister.

## Allen's thesis:

### 1. Paul's Work as a Missionary

- a. Ten Years, Four Provinces, Multiple Churches
  - i. AD 47—No churches
  - ii. AD 57—Churches in the provinces of Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, Asia
- b. Luke, under inspiration, records so many details because God intended us to follow Paul's example and model. At the very least, it is an inspired example.

### 2. Paul's Success Not Due Entirely to Exceptional Circumstances

- a. Strategic centers available in his day are not in our day.
  - i. His destinations became "strategic centres because he made them such" (p. 16)
  - ii. "Concentrated missions at strategic centres, if they are to win the province, must be centres of evangelistic life. In great cities are great prisons as well as great railway stations" (p. 17)
- b. His ability to appeal to a special class of people.
  - i. His mission work among the Jews was largely unsuccessful.
  - ii. His converts from the Gentiles were largely from the lower strata of society.
- c. The prevailing moral and social conditions of his day.
  - i. Paul fought such evils as prevalent belief in demons, uncleanness and superstition among pagan religions, the amphitheater, and slavery.
  - ii. Moral and social conditions were just as bad in Paul's day as in ours.
- d. In summary, Paul's success lay not in his exceptional circumstances but in his exceptional methods and practices.

### 3. A Summary of Principles Based upon Paul's Missions Model (according to Allen, p. 151)

- a. All teaching must be intelligible, understood, and usable by the nationals.
- b. No organizational structure shall be established that the people cannot understand, maintain, and carry on themselves.

"Our modern practice in founding a church is to begin by securing land and buildings in the place in which we wish to propagate the Gospel, to provide houses in which the missionary can live, and a church, or at least a room, fitted up with all the ornaments of a Western church, in which the missionary may conduct services.... So the externals of religion precede the inculcation of its principles" (pp. 52–53).

- c. The financial arrangements should be such that the people themselves can and will manage their church business independently of any foreign subsidies. Paul's financial practices:
  - i. "he did not seek financial help for himself"
  - ii. "he took no financial help from those to whom he preached"
    - 1. "That one church should depend upon another for the supply of its ordinary expenses as a church, or even for a part of them, would have seemed incredible in the Four Provinces" (p. 52)
  - iii. "he did not administer local church funds" (p. 49)
- d. The whole church community should feel the mutual responsibility "for the proper administration of baptism, ordination, and discipline."
- e. "Authority to exercise spiritual gifts should be given freely and at once."

## **Toward application:**

### **1. All teaching must be intelligible, understood, and usable by the nationals.**

- a. Teaching must be in language clearly understood by the nationals.
- b. Teaching should be simple, focusing on the basics of the Christian faith and walk. Adjust your curriculum to suit your audience.
- c. Teaching should be in a format (and perhaps include material) that can be easily propagated by the nationals.
- d. Publicly assume their responsibility to teach the next generation.

### **2. No organizational structure shall be established that the people cannot understand, maintain, and carry on themselves.**

- a. Some American church officer positions can be foregone in some settings (e.g., trustee).
- b. Some standard American formats may need adjustment to fit national ability and practice (e.g., holding Sunday early-afternoon services, group meetings on Wednesday nights, Sunday school after morning service).
- c. Involve nationals in the worship service (selection of hymns, Scripture reading, planning and performance of special music, etc.).
- d. Training institutions should be run without unnecessary red tape and without requirements, stipulations, and products impossible without foreign input.
- e. A training institution may even need to alter its schedule or exist without its own building.

### **3. The financial arrangements should be such that the people themselves can and will manage their church business independent of any foreign subsidies.**

- a. Avoid providing buildings or renting/buying facilities that exceed the financial ability of the people.
- b. Ideally, seek the initiative of the people in choosing and financing a building.
- c. Publicly assume that the church will shoulder ministry expenses (e.g., salaries of national pastors and church workers, charitable contributions for poor members, etc.).
- d. Teach the church financial stewardship.
- e. Allow the people to make decisions regarding church moneys—adopt an advisory role.

**4. The whole church community should feel the mutual responsibility “for the proper administration of baptism, ordination, and discipline.”**

- a. Involve the congregation and/or its leaders in church decisions (e.g., baptism).
- b. Allow the church to select its own leaders (with your biblical guidance).
- c. Publicly assume God will raise up leaders from their congregation.
- d. Involve the church in discipline issues.
- e. Teach them to lean on the Spirit of God for wisdom and guidance.

**5. “Authority to exercise spiritual gifts should be given freely and at once.”**

- a. Expect service and participation from your converts.
- b. Delegate, Delegate, Delegate—A job done by a national is better than a job done perfectly!
- c. Publicly assume the Spirit of God will burden people for specific ministry.
- d. Allow freedom for growth and involvement while providing accountability and guidance.
- e. Be cautious of exalting someone to a *position* too soon. Allowing someone to exercise their spiritual gifts and appointing someone to a position are two different things!
- f. Create avenues for evangelistic ministry and outreach for your people.

**Allen’s quotable quotes:**

**On Finances**

“It is sad to sit and watch a stream of Christian visitors calling upon a missionary, and to observe that in nearly every case the cause which brings them is money. They [the missionaries] are the financial agents of the mission” (p. 53).

“By the establishment of great institutions, the provision of large parsonages, mission houses, churches, and all the accompaniments of these things, we tie our missionaries to one place. They cease to be movable evangelists and become pastors” (p. 57).

**On Preaching**

“St. Paul expected his hearers to be moved. He so believed in his preaching that he knew that it was ‘the power of God unto salvation.’ This expectation is a very real part of the presentation of the Gospel. It is a form of faith. A mere preaching which is not accompanied by the expectation of faith, is not a true preaching of the Gospel, because faith is a part of the Gospel. Simply to scatter the seed, with a sort of vague hope that some of it may come up somewhere, is not preaching the Gospel.... The air of expectation pervades all the accounts of St. Paul’s preaching. Everywhere we are made to recognize, not only that St. Paul expected to make converts, but that others expected it also.... Further, he always contrived to bring his hearers to a point.... Our idea of ‘sowing the seed’ seems to be rather like scattering wheat out of a balloon. We read, in our reports, of missionaries on evangelistic tours visiting village after village, talking to little crowds of hearers, telling them the good news; but very little seems to be expected to come of it.... St. Paul did not scatter seeds, he planted” (p. 74).

**On Teaching**

“It is the training of the first converts which sets the type for the future. If the first converts are taught to depend upon the missionary, if all work, evangelistic, educational, social is concentrated in his hands, the infant community learns to rest passively upon the man from whom they receive their first insight into the Gospel.... The fatal mistake has been made of teaching the converts to rely upon the wrong source of strength. Instead of seeking it in the working of the Holy Spirit in themselves, they seek it in the missionary. They put him in the place of Christ; they depend upon him” (p. 81).

“One other effect of St. Paul’s training is very clear. His converts became missionaries.... This surprises us: we are not always accustomed to find our converts so zealous. Yet it is not really surprising. Christians receive the Spirit of Jesus, and the Spirit of Jesus is the missionary spirit.... The reason of our failure is, I believe, largely due to the fact that we quench that Spirit. We educate our converts to think, as we, accustomed to a long-established and highly-organized church, naturally think, that none but duly appointed ministers may preach. We dread the possible mistakes of individual zeal. The result is that our converts hesitate to speak of religion to others” (pp. 93–94).

### **On Candidates for Ministry**

“We have set up a purely artificial standard of learning as the necessary qualification for the ministry.... The young men so educated are sometimes, by that very education, out of touch with their congregations.... The grave men of the church, the natural leaders of the village life, and the natural leaders of the church are silenced.... The natural teacher, the divinely gifted preacher, is silenced” (pp. 104, 106).