

IX **9Marks** BUILDING HEALTHY CHURCHES

MISSIONS

HOW
THE LOCAL
CHURCH GOES
GLOBAL



ANDY JOHNSON

Foreword by David Platt

"I am grateful for Johnson's wise, sensitive, and practical insights for the local church committed to going global. While written by a North American, this book is neither culturally bound nor ethnocentrically blind. The issues addressed apply to any healthy local church anywhere in the world. In other words, *Missions* is thoroughly biblical. And for this reason, those like me who minister in another culture will find its lessons doable. I heartily recommend it, praying that God will grant it a wide readership, for his global glory."

Doug Van Meter, pastor-teacher, Brackenhurst Baptist Church,
Johannesburg, South Africa

"I love this book. I love the way it begins and ends with the glory of God in the gospel. I love the way it places the local church at the center of both sending missionaries and the task of mission. I love the way it's driven by biblical principles yet full of practical advice. All the ingredients are here to transform the place of world missions in your congregation. World mission is our responsibility, your responsibility."

Tim Chester, pastor, Grace Church, Boroughbridge, United Kingdom;
faculty member, Crosslands; author, *Good News to the Poor* and *Mission Matters*

"Johnson has given the church a gift in this practical guidebook for launching, sending, and sustaining missional endeavors in your local church. Every believer should read this book!"

Robby Gallaty, lead pastor, Long Hollow Baptist Church,
Hendersonville, Tennessee

"In an increasingly post-Christian society, you may feel the mission pinch. How can we give our time, energy, attention, finances, and personnel to global missions when the needs are so great, and growing, here at home? If you feel buried in local needs, this short book may be exactly what you need to lift your head to God's international work and glory, open your eyes to the global cause in which we minister, and expand your heart to be more like his. Perhaps what your busy and bruised church needs is precisely a vision and passion for what God is up to around the world and not just around the corner. Cultivating a heart for God's global glory and sending our best people and resources into his cause will not detract from ministry at home. It will make it powerful and real."

David Mathis, executive editor, desiringGod.org; pastor, Cities Church,
Minneapolis, Minnesota; author, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines*

"Andy Johnson has given us a doctrinally sound yet highly practical blueprint to guide the local church in going global in the twenty-first century. I pray that this volume will be widely circulated among pastors and lay leaders."

Al Jackson, pastor, Lakeview Baptist Church, Auburn, Alabama

"As a pastor, I could not be more thankful for this book by Andy Johnson. Although books on missions abound, this one fills a void felt by any local church trying to discern how best to be involved in taking the gospel to the nations. Not only does it lay a much-needed foundation and framework for missions; it also answers the practical questions that inevitably arise. Both challenging and helpful, particularly for local church leaders, it is the book I've been looking for since I first began my pastoral ministry. I will make it available and encourage every member to read it."

J. Josh Smith, lead pastor, MacArthur Blvd. Baptist Church, Irving, Texas

"A seasoned missions pastor, Johnson gives insightful, practical guidance to help churches reshape their missions strategies more biblically and faithfully. Especially valuable is his emphasis on the role of the local church, too often underplayed in missions circles today. I will eagerly hand this book out to all our church leaders and missionaries."

John Folmar, senior pastor, United Christian Church of Dubai

"The church has been tasked with the mission of making disciples of all nations. Too often the local church is pulled in several directions without a clear guiding vision for its mission efforts. As a pastor, I am grateful for Andy Johnson's book because it helps church leaders to develop a plan for their mission pursuits that is well-intentioned instead of ambiguous and proactive instead of reactionary. I highly recommend this book to all church leaders who desire a well-thought-out vision for engaging the nations with the gospel."

Afshin Ziafat, lead pastor, Providence Church, Frisco, Texas

"In *Missions*, Andy Johnson argues that the church glorifies God not only in working to gather true worshippers from all peoples, but also in using the means he has outlined in Scriptures to fulfill those ends. Because there is much debate about what missions is, how to do missions, and who is a missionary, Johnson spends a great part of the book helping us find answers that are rooted in scriptural commands, examples, and principles. If you desire to do missions in a way that only God gets the glory, you'll want to read this book and pass it around to others who love God and love to see unbelieving people become followers of Jesus Christ."

Juan R. Sanchez, senior pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas; author, *1 Peter for You*

MISSIONS

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BUILDING HEALTHY CHURCHES

MISSIONS

HOW
THE LOCAL
CHURCH GOES
GLOBAL

ANDY JOHNSON

Foreword by David Platt

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To my wife, Rebecca,
my best earthly partner in our joyful labor for
the spread of the gospel to all peoples

Answers can be given solely on the basis of Scripture. For the work of missions is the work of God; it is not lawful for us to improvise.

J. H. Bavinck, veteran
missionary to Indonesia¹

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SERIES PREFACE

Do you believe it's your responsibility to help build a healthy church? If you are a Christian, we believe that it is.

Jesus commands you to make disciples (Matt. 28:18–20). Jude says to build yourselves up in the faith (Jude 20–21). Peter calls you to use your gifts to serve others (1 Pet. 4:10). Paul tells you to speak the truth in love so that your church will become mature (Eph. 4:13, 15). Do you see where we are getting this?

Whether you are a church member or leader, the Building Healthy Churches series of books aims to help you fulfill such biblical commands and so play your part in building a healthy church. Another way to say it might be, we hope these books will help you grow in loving your church like Jesus loves your church.

9Marks plans to produce a short, readable book on each of what Mark has called nine marks of a healthy church, plus one more on sound doctrine. Watch for books on expositional preaching, biblical theology, the gospel, conversion, evangelism, church membership, church discipline, discipleship and growth, and church leadership.

Local churches exist to display God's glory to the nations. We do that by fixing our eyes on the gospel of Jesus Christ, trusting him for salvation, and then loving one another with

Series Preface

God's own holiness, unity, and love. We pray the book you are holding will help.

With hope,
Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman
series editors

FOREWORD

Over a hundred years ago, George Pentecost said, “To the pastor belongs the privilege and responsibility of solving the foreign missionary problem.”¹ Pentecost maintained that mission boards play important roles in missions: devising methods, fueling movements, and raising money. But it is the responsibility and privilege of pastors to feel the weight of the nations and to fan a flame for the global glory of God in every local church.

I believe he was right.

Let me be clear that I am *not* saying pastors should neglect ministry to people in our local churches. I know there are people in our churches who are hurting, whose marriages are struggling, whose children are rebelling, and who are walking through cancer and tumors and all sorts of other challenges in this life. We should not neglect local ministry to the body of Christ.

Nor should we neglect local mission in our communities or cities. We have been commanded to make disciples, and that command will most naturally and consistently play out right where we live, in the context of our immediate surroundings. Every church member ought to ask, “With the unique gifts God has given me and the Spirit of God who lives in me, how can I make disciples today right where I live?” In this way, there ought

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to be disciple-making and church-planting efforts where we live and across North America. Local mission is totally necessary.

At the same time, global missions is tragically neglected.

I was near Yemen not long ago. Northern Yemen has approximately eight million people. Do you know how many believers there are in northern Yemen? Twenty or thirty. Out of eight million people—the populations of Alabama and Mississippi combined. There are likely more believers in your Sunday school class or a couple of small groups in your church than there are in all of northern Yemen. That is a problem. It's a problem because millions of people in the northern part of Yemen have no access to the gospel. They join millions and millions of other unreached people in the world who are born, live, and die without ever even hearing the good news of what God has done for their salvation in Christ.

It's not primarily the job of missions organizations to address that problem. This is primarily the job of every local church. Specifically, it's the primary responsibility of every pastor of every local church to love people in that church and to love people in that community, all toward the ultimate end that the name of Christ might be praised among every group of people on the planet. That's what the Spirit of Christ wants, so that's what every Christian, every pastor, and every local church should want.

When we read through the book of Acts, we see a clear priority within the roles of the local church: the priority of spreading the gospel across the globe. In Acts 13, we see the church at Antioch worshiping, fasting, and praying, and in the context of that local church with its leaders, the Spirit sets

apart Paul and Barnabas as missionaries. The church prays over them and sends them out, supporting them as they go. Twice Paul returns to Antioch to encourage that local church, and then on his third missionary journey, he writes a letter to another local church, at Rome, to ask for their support in helping him get to Spain, where Christ has not yet been named. In this way, we see local churches sending, shepherding, and supporting men and women on global missions.

For this reason, I want to encourage every pastor and every leader of every local church to take up this mantle of global missions—to see the unique Antioch-type role God has given you and your church in the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth. But you may wonder, “Where do I begin?”

That is why I am so grateful for the simple, significant book you hold in your hands. Andy Johnson has done a great service to local churches and global missions in the pages that lie ahead. Grounded in God’s Word from start to finish, this book draws from experience in both the church where Andy serves and churches across the world he has worked alongside. As a result, it offers a treasure trove of wisdom available to leaders and members in churches of all sizes. After I finished reading this book, I thought, “I wish every pastor and leader of every local church could read this!” For if they did, I am convinced it would radically change not only the shape of local churches in our communities but also the cause of global missions in the world.

For this reason, I wholeheartedly commend this book to you, prayerful that God might use it to fan a flame for his global glory in your life and your local church.

David Platt

INTRODUCTION

Missions at a Crossroad

Beth stopped for a drive-through espresso on her way home from the church missions committee meeting. She hoped a shot of industrial-strength caffeine might tone down the headache throbbing in her temples. While she waited, she kept replaying the meeting in her mind. Everyone on the committee seemed to love Jesus and care about missions. So why were their meetings so frustrating? Another evening had been spent in misunderstanding and cross-purposes, with nothing finally accomplished. Despite their obvious concern for “missions,” Beth was beginning to wonder if they actually meant the same thing by that word.

Dave began the meeting chastising the committee for its “myopic” focus on evangelism. “What about the poor, the hungry, the oppressed?” he asked. “Isn’t it the mission of the church to care for all their physical needs too?”

And Olivia again suggested it would be so much better (and cheaper) to pay local pastors than to send out Western missionaries.

Then there was Harold’s comment. He had just read some

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study describing a new method that some missionary organization used to produce “87 percent more decisions for Christ among Muslims” than merely preaching the gospel from the Bible. Was a statistical study really the best way to decide what methods to employ? And what exactly were those Muslims deciding?

Patricia pressured the committee to stop supporting full-time missionaries altogether and instead focus on sending people overseas with their jobs. “The old model of churches sending supported long-term workers is just outdated in our modern, global economy,” she asserted. “Business as missions is the only way to go.” Beth agreed this could be a good thing to encourage, but she was pretty confident the apostle John’s command that we “ought to support” church-sent missionaries “that we may be fellow workers for the truth” still applied (3 John 8). But when Beth read that passage out loud, Patricia just rolled her eyes and encouraged her to stop looking backward and embrace the next wave of missions.

And, of course, Clarence concluded the meeting by encouraging them (again) to focus more on short-term trips rather than funding more long-term workers. “Short-term trips can be life changing for our people,” he reminded them, just before launching into the familiar story about his trip to paint a community center in Guatemala and how it had transformed his faith. But Beth wondered if those kinds of trips were really the best use of their missions funds and a missionary’s time.

The click of the drive-through window startled Beth out of her reflections. As she drove away nursing her double shot, she had a growing sense that there must be a better way. Surely

God must have given more direction about what the mission is and how we should pursue it. But she couldn't think of where to find that direction or where to start.

Sadly, I don't think Beth is alone.

In many of our churches today, well-meaning people seem to struggle with the concept of missions. They want to see Christ glorified and honored. They care about the needs of people. But in practice their pursuit of missions often devolves into a frantic hunt for new ideas, competition over church resources, and disagreements over method.

The good news of this little book is that it doesn't have to be that way.

Imagine a local church where the congregation's mission to the nations is clear and agreed upon. Elders guide the congregation toward strategic missions. Missions is held up as a concern for all Christians, not just the niche "missions club." The tyranny of new trends and demands for immediate, visible results holds no sway. Members see missions as the work of the church together rather than the personal, private activity of the individual. In this church, members see missions as a core ministry of the church, not an occasional short-term project. Relationships with missionaries are deep, serious, and lasting. Joyful giving to missions is a basic part of the church's budget, not merely the fruit of occasional and desperate appeals. And members actually value missions enough that some want to uproot their lives and be sent out long-term by the church.

This isn't an impractical idea, nor an especially complicated project to realize. I've seen this vision become a reality in numerous churches, large and small. It's not that hard. It

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all flows primarily from finding one's missions agenda and methods in the Bible.

That's the main premise of this book: God's Word gives us everything we need to know to obey him and bring him glory. That includes everything we need in order to obey his Great Commission to make disciples among all nations (Matt. 28:18–20). That doesn't mean his Word explicitly addresses every question we might invent. Nor that every suggestion in this book comes directly from a biblical command or example. But it does mean that the Bible is fully sufficient to give us the agenda and principles that inform our methods and decisions. In it we find a wealth of principles and imperatives that will give order and shape to our endeavors, and in the process free us from the oppressive tyranny that comes from relying only on our own pragmatic resources and humanly devised notions.

One of the things we see clearly in Scripture is that a concern for missions is for all Christians, because it is a concern for every local church, together. So whether you are an interested church member, a missions leader, or a local church pastor, this book has something in it for you.

But before we can discuss the work of missions, we first need to nail down a few foundational biblical principles. Then we can consider how we might apply them with wisdom to our own missions activities. So let's get started at the place where all wise Christian endeavors should start—with the Bible.

A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR MISSIONS

I once rented a vacation apartment on the sixth floor of a building with no elevator. The owner had been very clear in every email, stating, “This apartment is on the sixth floor and there is no elevator.” Still, the significance of her disclosure didn’t really hit me until I was panting on the fifth-floor landing, hauling suitcase number two of three up the winding stairs. Yet, as I stood there trying to remember the symptoms of a heart attack, I couldn’t feel angry toward the owner. She had been up-front about it, all along. I should have paid more attention.

Full disclosure is a good and honest way to begin any relationship, including the relationship between a writer (like me) and a reader (like you). That’s why I want to begin this book by stating some foundational biblical convictions about missions. You may not agree with each and every one of them. I hope you won’t put this book down if you don’t. There might be useful stuff here, even if we don’t agree on everything. And then you, as a reader, can be like the Bereans in Acts 17 and test everything to see if it squares with the Bible.

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We need to start by defining the aim of the church's mission.

THE MISSION OF MISSIONS IS PRIMARILY SPIRITUAL

At the outset of a small book we don't need to enter deeply into the debate about churches' responsibility to meet both eternal needs through gospel proclamation *and* temporal needs through material care. Christians as individuals clearly should care about all human suffering. And Christians should especially care about the terrible, eternal suffering facing all those who remain under God's wrath. We needn't pit the two concerns against one another in our personal lives. John Piper has balanced it well, saying: "Christians care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering. Else they have a defective heart or a flameless hell."¹

As we turn to the global mission of the church, I hope we can agree that the church should especially care about eternal suffering. The church is that unique gospel community chartered by Jesus Christ himself. Consequently, it should especially labor to fulfill its unique mission to guard the gospel, proclaim the gospel, and disciple those who respond in repentance and faith to the gospel. If our churches fail at that mission, no matter what other good things we do, we will have failed in the unique mandate that Christ has given us as churches. It is good to do other good things, and our churches may make different decisions about engaging in good works and social action. But it is the stewardship of the gospel that remains utterly unique to the Christian church. We must keep first things first. That is the priority of Christian missions.

It's important to press this point right up front because in recent days some Christians have suggested that encouraging churches to prioritize a spiritual mission means their members and missionaries won't care at all about earthly human suffering. Historically, though, it has often been the generations whose churches focused most on heaven and salvation that have done the most social good. Even today researchers like Robert Putnam puzzle over the unusual level of altruistic giving by religious people from heavenly minded churches.² Or we might read the widely acclaimed work of sociologist Robert Woodberry, who demonstrated that "conversionary missionary protestants" (meaning missionaries who prioritize saving souls above all else) have done more lasting social good globally than those who only, or mainly, focus on doing social good alone.³

Of course, at the end of the day we don't prioritize eternal matters in our churches because of history or social science. We do it for love of neighbor. If we are convinced that eternal suffering in hell is the most pernicious of all human suffering, what else would we prioritize? Even more, we prioritize eternal matters for love of God. We want our churches to fulfill the God-glorifying purpose for which he specially entrusted them with the gospel in the first place.

We are joyfully driven by the command of our Lord to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20). And we are driven by the apostle John's heavenly vision:

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After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:9–10)

Calling and discipling all the peoples saved by the Lamb is the primary mission of missions. Whatever other good things a church may choose to do, that great vision must be our most fundamental objective and the joy toward which we labor. Would anything less be worthy of the one who "came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15)? Evangelism and establishing Christ's church is our first priority in missions.

THE MISSION BELONGS TO GOD, FOR HIS GLORY, ON HIS TERMS

God intends not only that his mission would go forward but that it would go forward on his terms. He means to get glory by showing that the mission is his and that his power sustains it. Any effort on our part to change or broaden the mission, or to substitute our ideas for God's, runs the risk of trying to rob God of his rightful glory. And trying to rob an all-knowing and all-powerful God of the thing he is most passionate about in all the universe is breathtakingly stupid and ultimately pointless. God says:

For my name's sake I defer my anger;
for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you,
that I may not cut you off.

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.
For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it,
for how should my name be profaned?
My glory I will not give to another. (Isa. 48:9–11)

God cares about how the mission goes forward because he will not give his glory to another. As we look to the pages of Scripture to understand the mission, this fact must remain etched in our minds. The mission of global redemption is ultimately for God's sake: "For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it." And that is a wonderful thing.

Our confidence in missions and our joy in salvation flow from a knowledge that God's mission of mercy finds its origin in his desire for his glory, not in our ability or desirability. Praise God! God declares,

For my name's sake I defer my anger;
for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you,
that I may not cut you off.

That may be one of the most encouraging verses in all of Scripture. As long as God cares about his own glory, and as long as he remains committed to getting glory by showing mercy to sinners, all those who trust in him are secure, and his mission will never fail. God has decided how the mission should go forward. He intends it to go forward by the simple declaration of the gospel and the gathering of his children into churches, so that everyone will see that salvation is God's work, and he will get all the glory.

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GLOBAL MISSIONS IS PRIMARILY THROUGH THE LOCAL CHURCH

Who is responsible to carry out this mission of global salvation? To whom did Christ give his Great Commission in Matthew 28? That's a more complicated question than merely asking who was there when he spoke the words recorded in Matthew 28:18–20. In one sense the commission to missions was given to every individual Christian. But in another sense it was given primarily to local churches. Why would I say that?

Each of us individually is called to obey Christ's command to make disciples who know and obey his Word. But how does he intend us to do that? His Word is clear—normally we are to pursue obedience, build up disciples, and plant other churches through the local church. The local church makes clear who is and who is not a disciple through baptism and membership in the body (Acts 2:41). The local church is where most discipling naturally takes place (Heb. 10:24–25). The local church sends out missionaries (Acts 13:3) and cares for missionaries after they are sent (Phil. 4:15–16; 3 John 1–8). And healthy, reproducing local churches are normally the aim and end of our missionary effort (Acts 15:41; Titus 1:5).

But why is God so committed to accomplishing this great work of redemption through his church? Because he is passionate for his own glory. He has determined to act through history “so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10). God is committed to using the church to accomplish his work of redemption to display the glory of his wisdom to the universe. The church was God's

idea. It is his one and only organizational plan for world missions. Most of all, it is his beloved Son's beloved, blood-bought bride.

Consequently, any humanly invented organizations that assist in missions must remember that they are the bridesmaids, not the bride. They are stagehands, not the star. That position and honor and responsibility has been given by Christ to his church, and only to his church. Organized cooperation among churches for the sake of missions is a wonderful thing (more on that later), but those who organize that cooperation must remember that they are coming alongside—not supplanting—the local church.

It's because the Bible is so clear on this point that this little book is so unapologetically focused on the local church as the engine of world missions. Even as we consider our own individual commitment to the global mission, we should do so in the context of our roles as church members. If we are to understand how to pursue the mission faithfully, the local church must be central to identifying, training, sending, and supporting. The mission has been given to Christ's church for Christ's glory.

THE BIBLE SAYS A LOT ABOUT HOW TO APPROACH MISSIONS

But how does God want his mission to go forward? It would be cruel for God to know what he wants, but then leave us to figure it all out. God would never treat his children that way. Throughout his Word, God has given us a treasury of instructions on the global mission of the church—what it is and how to approach the mission in faithfulness and joyful confidence.

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We love and honor him not merely by working toward the final goal he's given—worshippers from every language, tribe, people, and nation—but also by using the means he has decreed. And he has told us that his global mission will advance through holy lives, faithful prayer, gospel proclamation, and healthy reproducing churches.

That's really what the rest of this book is about: unpacking these principles from the Bible and then trying to apply them with wisdom to the missionary practice of our local churches. Because the happy news is that though the work of global evangelism is difficult, it is not complicated. God has told us everything we must know right there in the Bible.

The Bible tells us what the mission is: the church's mission is to display the glory of God by declaring the gospel to all peoples, by gathering churches in every place, and by filling them with disciples who obey God and will praise him forever for his grace (Isaiah 56; Matt. 28:18–20; Rom. 15:7–13; Eph. 3:8–11; Rev. 7:9–10).

The Bible tells us how the mission will go forward: through prayerful dependence, gospel proclamation, biblical discipling, and church planting (Ex. 6:5–8; Rom. 10:17; Col. 4:2–4; 1 Thess. 5:11).

The Bible tells us what kind of missionaries we should support: biblically faithful, methodologically patient, gospel-proclaiming, church-loving missionaries (Acts 16:1–3; Rom. 10:14–15; 2 Cor. 8:23; 2 Tim. 4:1–5; 3 John 1–8).

The Bible tells us what the end goal of missions should be: transformed individuals in biblical churches who will ul-

timately join a heavenly multitude praising the Lamb of God forever (Rom. 8:1–11; Heb. 10:19–25; Rev. 7:9–10).

That's just a tiny sampling of what Scripture has to tell us about missions. We are not left alone to lean on our own puny resources to figure out the mission of the church for the nations. God is much too kind and serious to have done that. So let's move forward with these four biblical principles firmly in mind:

- The mission of missions is primarily spiritual.
- The mission belongs to God, for his glory, on his terms.
- God gave the mission to the local church.
- And the Bible tells us all we must know to faithfully fulfill God's mission.

With these principles clearly stated, let's begin to unpack and apply them.

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WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR GLOBAL MISSIONS?

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**This volume is part of the 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches series.*

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