

Student's Guide

# ESSENTIALS OF WORLD MISSIONS



Introduction to the Worldwide  
Mission of the Church



TIMOTHY TENNENT

Essentials of World Missions  
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# Overview

Title: Essentials of World Missions

Speaker: Dr. Timothy Tennent, President, Asbury Seminary

The purpose of this course is to provide a broad introduction to the worldwide mission of the church of Jesus Christ. Beginning with a Biblical foundation, the course examines key Scriptural passages in both the Old and New Testaments that relate to the mission of the church. The second part of the course addresses key theological and cultural challenges that the church faces in proclaiming the gospel and establishing culturally relevant and viable churches. The third portion of the course exposes the student to key concepts in 21st century mission thinking, including mission strategy, the role of forging global partnerships, and the need to focus on church planting. Throughout the course, the emphasis is on practical ways the church can be more effective in ministering cross-culturally and fulfilling the Great Commission.

## GOALS

1. Familiarity with the key Scriptural passages that relate to mission and missions.
2. Knowledge of the history of missions and the various related developments, movements, and strategies.
3. Ability to articulate the trends in, myths about, and challenges facing missions today.
4. Ability to define and distinguish between key terms.

## REQUIREMENTS

1. 10 sessions
2. 2 hours per week (lesson and discussion)

## FORMAT

Video and audio

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**World class.** All Bible classes are taught by world-class professors from major seminaries.

**Holistic.** We want to see students move through content to deep reflection and application.

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**Accessible.** BiblicalTraining is a web-based ministry whose content is provided at no cost.

**Community-based.** We encourage people to learn together, in mentor/apprentice relationships.

**Broadly evangelical.** Our materials are broadly evangelical, governed by our Statement of Faith, and are not tied to any one church, denomination or tradition.

**Partners.** We provide the content and delivery mechanisms, and our partner organizations provide the community and mentoring.

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# Your Speaker

Dr. Timothy C. Tennent is President of Asbury Theological Seminary and Professor of World Christianity.

He previously served 11 years as Professor of World Missions and Indian Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass. Prior to his work in Massachusetts, Dr. Tennent taught missions at Toccoa Falls College in Georgia, where he was honored as teacher of the year in 1995. He also teaches annually at the Luther W. New Jr. Theological College of Dehra Dun, India, where he has served as an adjunct professor since 1989.

He has also ministered and taught in China, Thailand, Nigeria and Eastern Europe. Ordained in the United Methodist Church, he has pastored churches in Georgia, and preached regularly in churches throughout New England and across the country.

Dr. Tennent is the author of several books, including *Building Christianity on Indian Foundations*, (ISPCK, 2000); *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, (Baker Academic, 2002); and *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology*, (Zondervan, 2007). He is the co-author of *Revitalizing Practice*, which is about challenges to theological education in North America (Peter Lang, 2008). Dr. Tennent is also the author of a missiology textbook entitled *Invitation to World Missions: A Missiology for the 21st Century*, which was published in 2010.

## EDUCATION

Ph.D., University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Th.M., Princeton Theological Seminary

M.Div., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

B.A., Oral Roberts University

# Student's Guide

We are pleased that you have chosen to use materials from BiblicalTraining.org. We trust that you will find them to be of the highest quality and truly helpful in your own spiritual growth and that of your church. Please read through the following guidelines; they will help you make the best use of this guide.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

**Listen or watch the lesson.** The lesson for each chapter is designed to be listened to outside of your meeting. Each lesson lasts for an hour. This is a crucial step. If the meeting time with your fellow students is going to be productive and encouraging, everyone in the group needs to have listened to and wrestled with the lesson.

**Take notes.** This guide has the outline for each lesson with a summary of the teaching for each major point. If you are unable to take notes while listening to the lesson, please work through the guide at some point before your meeting.

**Questions.** Each chapter closes with a series of questions. Some of the questions are data based, confirming that you understand the information. Other questions are more reflective, helping you move beyond the important accumulation of knowledge to challenging you to think through what you are learning about God, yourself and others, and finally to application. Our encouragement is to think through your answers before your meeting and then use the meeting to share your thoughts and interact with others.

**Meeting.** Meet together with your group.

## **MEETING TOGETHER**

While some people may have to study on their own, we strongly recommend finding a group with which you can study.

A group provides encouragement to finish the class.

Interacting with others, their understanding and insight, is the most effective way to sharpen your own thoughts and beliefs.

Just as you will need the help of others from time to time, so also they will need your help.

# Mentor's Guide

If you are leading the group or mentoring an individual, here are some suggestions that should help you.

**Your role is to facilitate.** This is not an opportunity for you to teach. In fact, the less visible role you take, the better. Your role is to listen and bring out the best in the other people.

**Preparation.** Be sure to have done your homework thoroughly. Have listened to the lesson and think carefully through the questions. Have an answer for each question that will get the conversation going. A great question is, "What is the Lord teaching you this week?"

**Creativity.** What works to help one person understand may not help another. So listen to the conversation and pray that the Lord help you bring out the greatest interaction among all the people.

**Correct error.** This is difficult. If someone says something that isn't right, you don't want to come down on them, telling them they are wrong and shutting down their participation. On the other hand, if you let an obvious error pass, the rest of the group may think you agree and what was said was correct. So look for gracious ways to suggest that perhaps the person's comment was incorrect.

**Focus.** Stay focused on Jesus and the Bible, not on church or religious traditions.

**Lead the discussion.** People don't want to listen to a sharing of common ignorance. Lead by asking questions that will prompt others to think.

**Silence.** Don't be afraid of silence. It may mean nothing more than people are thinking. But if the conversation lags, then ask thought-provoking questions to get the discussion started, and then step out of the way.

**Discipleship.** Be acutely aware of how you can mentor the people in the group. Meet with them for coffee. Share some life with them. Jesus' Great Commission is to teach people to obey, and the only way this happens is in relationship.

**Men and women.** Be aware that men and women tend to learn differently. Don't ask the men to become women in how they answer.

**Privacy.** All discussions are private, not to be shared outside the group unless otherwise specified.

**Goal.** The goal of this study is not just increased knowledge; it is transformation. Don't be content with people getting the "right" answers. The Pharisees got the "right" answer, and many of them never made it to heaven (Matt 5:20).

**Relationships.** Share everyone's name, email and phone number so people can communicate during the week and follow up on prayer requests. You may want to set up a way to share throughout the week using Slack or WhatsApp.

**Finish well.** Encourage the people to make the necessary commitment to do the work, think reflectively over the questions, and complete the class.

**Prayer.** Begin and end every meeting with prayer. Please don't do the quick "one-prayer-covers-all" approach. Manage the time so all of you can pray over what you have learned and with what you have been challenged. Pray regularly for each individual in the meeting.

# 1

## God's Missionary Heart

### **SECTION OVERVIEW**

Dr. Tennent begins this summary course on World Missions with a definition of the terms "mission" and "missions," and gives us an understanding of the mission of God, that missions begins with God and his missionary heart.

### **WELCOME**

# **"MISSION" AND "MISSIONS"**

## **1. Mission**

"The *missio Dei*, that is, God's mission, God's plan through all ages, to redeem and save the world through His own initiative."

## **2. Missions**

"The various tasks which the church is called to in order to fulfill the Great Commission and be obedient to our Lord Jesus Christ."

# **THREE ASPECTS OF THE MISSION OF GOD**

## **1. Divine initiative**

God's preparing of the hearts of people to receive the gospel message before we arrive with the gospel message.

## **2. Historical transmission**

Missionaries arriving in particular places, times, and contexts to preach the gospel and plant churches.

## **3. Indigenous assimilation**

Assimilation of the gospel into the lives and experiences of the people to whom we are going

# **GOD'S MISSIONARY HEART**

Missions begins with the very heart of God.

## **1. Old Testament**

Mission of God lies behind the whole of the Old Testament

## **A. Genesis 12**

Personal, national, and spiritual blessing promised to Abraham.

## **B. Genesis 22**

Promise to Abraham is repeated

## **C. Psalm 2**

God will bless the nations.

## **D. Isaiah 49**

Blessing and promise to be extended beyond Israel to the Gentiles.

## 2. New Testament

The promise of blessing made about Christ is brought to the world through the obedience of the Church to satisfy the Great Commission.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why does it matter that we make a distinction between "mission" and "missions?" How will it change our missions practices if missions begins with the mission of God?



5. Genesis 12:1-3 is such an important passage for missions and for the story of redemption, it would be good to commit it to memory.

## **RECOMMENDED READING FOR THE COURSE**

*Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the 21st Century*, by Timothy Tennent, Kregel Publications, 2009.

# 2

## The Great Commission

### LESSON OVERVIEW

We now walk through the Great Commission in each of the Four Gospels, highlighting their unifying themes and the distinct message that each Gospel writer highlights.

### MATTHEW

Key passage: Matthew 28:18-20

#### 1. Authority

Jesus speak with authority and gives the church that authority as he sends us out to bring salvation to all peoples.

## 2. The imperative

“Make disciples” is the only imperative in Matthew’s Great Commission passage.

## 3. All people groups

In using the phrase *panta ta ethnē* Jesus uses a people term, not a geographic term.

## MARK

Key passage: Mark 16:15-16

## 1. Importance of gospel proclamation to all creation

Emphasis on gospel proclamation and the preaching of the Word

## **2. Importance of the Church**

Local churches live out and embody the fullness of redeemed society before the eyes of a watching world.

## **LUKE**

Key passage: Luke 24:47-48

### **1. Content of the gospel**

Emphasis on repentance and the forgiveness of sins and the work of Christ on the cross.

### **2. Continuity between the Old and New Covenants**

The Great Commission emerges as a fulfillment of the Prophets; Luke recounts Jesus explaining on the road to Emmaeus how Moses and the Prophets give witness to himself.

# JOHN

Key passage: John 20:21

## 1. Continuity between Christ and the Church

Christ is the sent one, and now he is sending us out into the world.

## 2. Sending role of the Church

As Christ sends us, we send missionaries into the world to tell of the good news.

## QUESTIONS

1. What are the common themes in all four accounts of the Great Commission? What are some of the distinctions? Why do you think we have such variation in the four passages?





# 3

## Theological Questions

### **LESSON OVERVIEW**

In this last lesson in the Biblical-Theological section of the course, Dr. Tennent answers several theological questions related to the Great Commission and the obedience of the church in the world. He address objections that people have to the uniqueness of Christ and the exclusive nature of the gospel message. He also defines for us what actually qualifies as "missions."

## **OBJECTIONS TO THE GOSPEL**

### **1. Pluralism**

The belief that many different religions can lead independently to God, and that Christianity is just one of many religions leading to God.

### **2. Inclusivism**

Though salvation is only found in Christ, the work of Christ can achieve its effect apart from one's conscious knowledge of and faith in Christ.

### **3. Response: Engaged exclusivism**

The lost are indeed lost, and desperately need the gospel; Lost saved only through response to God's work in preparing hearts and sending missionaries with the gospel.

# **CLARIFYING WHAT MISSIONS IS**

## **1. People and people groups—access to the gospel**

### **A. Evangelism**

Where there is access to the gospel.

### **B. Missions**

Where there is no access to the gospel.

## **2. The spread of the gospel in Acts**

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth; Not just geographic, but ethnic spread from Jews to Greeks to all Gentiles.





# 4

## History of the Church's Expansion into the World

### LESSON OVERVIEW

In this second part of the course, Dr. Tennent explores the history of the church's expansion into the world. He focuses primarily on the modern period and looks at what makes the modern missionary period unfold in the way that it does.

# MODERN PERIOD OF MISSIONS

## 1. First era of missions: Beachhead Missions (1792-1910)

“Beachhead” is a military term describing how people took possession of a new territory.

### A. Planting the church in a new country

Geographical emphasis over people and ethnic emphasis

### B. Work along the coastlines

Emphasis on work along coastlines; safety and logistical wisdom in living on the coast

### **C. Long-term, resident missionaries**

Missionaries go and never come back.

### **D. William Carey**

Father of modern missions; "An Enquiry into Obligations of Christians to use Means to Reach the Heathen"

## **2. Second era of missions: Frontier Missions (1865-1974)**

### **A. Interior parts of the country**

Move from the coasts to the frontier, or inlands

## **B. Faith missions**

Missionaries raise their own support rather than relying upon supporting churches or missions agencies.

## **C. New brand of missionary**

Not ordained; less educated than previous generations; often recruited directly from college campuses; greater emphasis on autonomy

## **D. Hudson Taylor**

Taylor founded China Inland Mission, relying on faith missions, and recruited students.

### **3. Third era of missions: Unreached Peoples Missions (1934-2004)**

#### **A. Unreached people groups**

Focuses on the remaining unreached people groups that do not currently have access to the gospel.

#### **B. Missions is about peoples, not places**

More than places, missions is identifying the individual people that needed to hear the gospel the are behind cultural, social, and linguistic barriers.

#### **C. Wider range of strategies and partnerships with national churches**

**4. Fourth era of missions: Indigenous-Initiated Missions (1989-Today)**

**A. Non-Western missionaries**

In the first three eras the focus is Western missionaries, now there is an explosion of non-Western missionaries.

**B. Church planting movements**

Initiated by the non-Western church to reach other cultures with the gospel

**SUMMARY**



3. How does a focus on people groups rather than places change the way missions is done? How can we help others stay focused on reaching peoples rather than places?

4. What is the appropriate role for Western churches in partnership with national leaders? What are you or your church doing to work with indigenous churches in the Global South (Asia, Africa, and Latin America)?

# 5

## Full Circle of Missions Strategy

### LESSON OVERVIEW

We begin the practical section of the course with a look at the full circle of missions strategy, which is based in several passages of Scripture. Dr. Tennent uses Acts 11 as an example of this four-step process.

### MISSIONS STRATEGY

Church planting is at the heart of the Great Commission (Acts 11).

**1. Step 1: Cross-cultural communication of the gospel.**

Gospel proclamation (whether by preaching, bible study, or theological education) ought to lead to church planting.

**2. Step 2: Plant a church.**

Gathering together of Christians into communities that meet together, pray for each other, and are disciplined

Acts 11:21

**3. Step 3: Disciple the believers.**

Intentional investment in believers; teaching, training, and following up.

Acts 11:26





# 6

## Modern Missiological Techniques

### LESSON OVERVIEW

At this point in the lessons Dr. Tennent turns to examining some modern missiological techniques, the kinds of things that churches are using and understanding to be better equipped to serve missionaries. He also lists five different categories of missionaries.

### SUPPORTING MISSIONARY WORK

#### 1. Mission boards

Send and support missionaries

**2. Questions new churches are asking**

What does it mean to be the church? What is essential and what are secondary cultural accommodations?

**3. Relating to indigenous churches**

Challenge of reaching and evangelizing unbelievers and the new churches that spring up once they come to faith

**4. Procedure for receiving support**

Most mission boards and churches have the same basic procedure.

# **CATEGORIES OF MISSIONARIES**

## **1. Long term: Pioneer and regular missions**

Pioneer missions: Going to a place where there are not enough Christians to provide access to the gospel, or the church is there but it's not viable.

Regular missions: Working in a context where the church has already been planted, is thriving, able to disciple its own members, and able to reach out.

## **2. Non-resident missionary**

Missionary who works with a people group outside of the primary location of that group.

## **3. Asynchronous resident missionary**

A resident missionary who is not able to stay in that location for an extended period of time, but return over and over again over long periods of time.

#### **4. Tentmakers**

People who are involved in secular professions, who work in cross-cultural contexts for the explicit purpose of gospel proclamation.

#### **5. Short-term missionaries**

Any missionary that is working in a field for less than three years.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Does your church have standards for what missionaries you will support? What are some of the requirements? Why is it important to distinguish between regular missions and pioneer missions?



4. What is the proper place for short-term missions in the church? What should be the ultimate goal of short-term missions? Take time to read through Dr. Tennent's six dangerous questions about short-term missions and reflect on each one (a link to the questions can be found on the lecture web page).

# 7

## Six Tasks for the Local Church

### LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, Dr. Tennent recommends six tasks that every local church should consider in order to be more effective in their overseas missions work.

### TASKS FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

#### 1. Equip and educate people about missions.

There is a growing need to educate people about the rise of non-Western missions, the importance of church-planting, and the role of discipleship.

## **2. Develop a comprehensive strategy regarding missions.**

We must learn to think carefully about our missionary commitments, what are the priorities, what are we doing, and what is our missionary spending policy.

### **A. How missions will be funded**

Unified budget, special missions pledge, or percentage of overall budget.

### **B. How to handle previous commitments that don't match the new vision**

Implement changes slowly and do not neglect those who have served faithfully in the presence of the Lord.

## **3. Establish a missions budget policy.**

A policy which clearly transfers non-missionary spending to other parts of the budget that are not connected to missions.

**4. Care for your missionaries.**

Churches need to give both financial provision and pastoral care to the missionaries they support.

**5. Achieve the right balance between local activity and global missions.**

Emphasis on involvement in serving locally knowing that it sets the groundwork for missions endeavors.

**6. Commit to pray for your missionaries.**

Developing good prayer partners that will agree to pray for missions and work with them in that way





# 8

## Trends in Missions Today

### LESSON OVERVIEW

Dr. Tennent explores several trends, both positive and negative, in modern-day missions, along with a quick look at the importance of understanding world religions.

### TRENDS IN MISSIONS TODAY

#### 1. A deeper appreciation for the challenges we face

Willingness of the church to reflect on the nature of the task, the challenge of the task, and how we might be more effective for the sake of the gospel.

## **2. Growth in partnerships**

Partnerships between national churches and the home church continue to grow.

## **3. Shift from partially supporting several missionaries to fully supporting a few missionaries.**

More fully, and more intimately supporting fewer missionaries in an effort to be more strategic in our effort to support missionaries.

## **4. The growth of technology**

Technology is being used to communicate with missionaries on the field, to communicate with other Christians in diverse places, and to provide follow-up and accountability.

## **5. A decline of moral courage about the message**

The world is becoming more hostile to the gospel message, therefore there is a declining courage to take the message to the world.

## **6. Modern missions and world religions**

We must be able to respond to the different religions of the world knowing the essence of their teaching and the key stumbling blocks to the gospel.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. How many different missionaries does your church support? What are the benefits of partial and full support? What are the downsides of each method?



# 9

## Top Ten Myths about Missions

### LESSON OVERVIEW

Dr. Tennent dispels the top ten myths about missions, so that we can be better equipped to think appropriately about the great missionary cause.

### DISPELLING THE TOP TEN MYTHS ABOUT MISSIONS

#### 1. Myth 1: Unreached means gospel-resistant

Many people in the world today who are unreached are unreached, not because they have been offered the gospel and were then resistant to it, but simply because they have never been offered the good news of Jesus Christ.

## **2. Myth 2: Evangelism always leads to church planting**

It takes churches to ultimately spawn other churches, therefore church planting cannot happen through disembodied contact.

## **3. Myth 3: Missions means going to live in jungles somewhere**

Missions takes place in urban, rural, and remote places with much of the emphasis today being on the urban setting.

## **4. Myth 4: The remaining work of missions can be done by national Christians**

There are many places where there are no indigenous believers who can bring a national witness or where there is mistrust and cultural issues with near culture groups inhibiting the work of missions.

**5. Myth 5: Missionaries have destroyed cultures**

Missionaries have spoken out against evil practices while engaging in teaching, training, and empowering people.

**6. Myth 6: There are no job opportunities in missions**

Missionary work is probably the most diverse group of people in the world, doing every conceivable professional task, as well as all of the traditional Christian ministry tasks, from preaching, to counseling, church-planting, and so forth.

**7. Myth 7: Missions is only for the super spiritual**

Missionaries are godly men and women who are doing their best to follow God in ordinary, sometimes difficult, often lackluster situations.

**8. Myth 8: Short-term missions projects are sufficient to fulfill the Great Commission**

Short-term missions is part of a larger strategy of missionary activity that could never fulfill the Great Commission alone.

**9. Myth 9: Missionary commitment is mainly about giving money**

Financial support, though important, should be seen as a part of the larger commitment to send workers.

**10. Myth 10: Hearing the gospel is the same as being reached by the gospel**

Just because the gospel message is heard on the radio does not mean the gospel message and the implications of the gospel message have been sufficiently understood.





# 10

## Top Ten Things the Church Should Know about Missions

### LESSON OVERVIEW

Finally, we conclude the practical section and the course with a discussion of the top ten things the church should know about missions.

### TEN THINGS THE CHURCH SHOULD KNOW

#### 1. The rise of the non-western church

There is a tremendous number of non-Western Christians that are rising up today.

## **2. The urban context of missions**

The number of people who now live in cities outnumbers the people who live in rural areas.

## **3. Access and viability criteria**

Churches need to apply the access and viability criteria in order to be effective in establishing their financial, resource, and personnel priorities

## **4. The role of short-term missions**

The importance of having a smart, short-term missions program

## **5. The importance of strategy**

Need for strategy and really understanding the non-Christian peoples with whom we're working

## **6. Evangelistic and missionary mandates**

Importance of remembering the difference between the cross-cultural task and the mono-cultural task.

## **7. Church planting**

The goal of missions and the goal of the Great Commission is church planting.

## **8. Growth of Pentecostal Christianity**

Churches need to be aware of and be comfortable with working with the great army of Pentecostal-oriented believers around the world today.

## 9. The way missionaries are sent out

Missionaries are being sent out as professional tentmakers, some as full-time church planters, some in various kinds of other activities

## 10. Our mission kids have grown up

Growing need to increasingly begin to work more cooperatively with the national churches and the missions boards that are being set up by the national churches

## QUESTIONS

1. How will the growth of the non-Western church affect how your church does missions? Do you currently work with any indigenous church?



5. Is your church currently involved in church planting?  
What can you do to increase your involvement in this area?