

2015 NORTH AMERICAN MISSIONS EMPHASIS SERMON

PORTRAIT OF A MISSIONARY ROMANS 1:13-17 ROGER FREEMAN, TENNESSEE

Begin by showing a family portrait—either personal or perhaps one of a famous family. Note to the congregation that the portrait was a snapshot of a moment. Perhaps you know what happened right before the photo was taken (brother was pulling his sister’s hair, and mom was shouting for focus) and what happened right afterward (everyone ran away to do their own thing with sighs of relief that “it was over with”). Regardless, a moment was captured in the greater experience of life that will forever define what was imaged. Portraits tell only part of the story, but without them, we would be left to only imagine the faces owned by the names.

Today, let’s consider a portrait of a missionary. What does a missionary really look like? Maybe you know a missionary and have a face already in mind. Maybe you don’t know a missionary or even what a missionary is and does. Today, let’s image a missionary for you. We don’t want to focus on the face, though. Instead, we want to focus on the missionary heart.

Missionaries look a lot like us, really.

They are struggling in the context of their circumstances. They experience the same types of celebrations we do when they achieve success in little and big things. They have imperfect ministries and families—but they know they serve a perfect God. They hunger for God to direct them on what to do and how to do it. They long to tell others about Jesus and the gift of salvation because of the cross.

As part of the Southern Baptist “family,” we have missionaries we support through prayer and with monetary gifts so they can live out their calling. Theirs is a calling to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel. Our North American Mission Board (NAMB) helps Southern Baptist churches like ours send out missionaries throughout the United States and Canada. NAMB leaders are committed to sending the most missions dollars to the places in North America having the fewest evangelical churches. More than 2,300 missionary households are represented in this work. In addition, we have thousands of student missionaries and chaplains involved in taking the gospel to the cities and communities in North America.

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NAMB is putting the dollars it receives through two primary funding channels—the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®—to plant churches that are proclaiming the gospel throughout North America. The missionaries we send through the North American Mission Board are not proxies—they aren't taking our place. Instead, they are very much partners—partners in the gospel. They are worthy of our support, and we want our church to give generously to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, but we cannot leave it to missionaries, pastors or other clergy to share the gospel. We must all be involved because the Great Commission of Matthew 28 was given to all of Christ's followers.

If your church is not familiar with Annie Armstrong, you may use this brief overview. You may want to call out a particular member in your own congregation who is a “modern day” Annie and hold her (or him) up as a representation of such.

Annie Armstrong was a faithful Christian woman who loved her Lord, supported her pastor and church and had missions on her heart. As a lay member of the Seventh Baptist Church in Baltimore, Md., her pastor, Richard Fuller—the third president of the Southern Baptist Convention—heartily encouraged her work of rallying women to recognize the missions needs around them in the growing world city of Baltimore. She saw thousands of immigrants coming to Baltimore who needed the gospel

in their new home, the newly freed (post Civil War) men who needed an education that had been earlier denied them and the child factory workers in the city streets who needed the love of Christ and His church. Annie and the women of Seventh Baptist Church began what they called a “Missionary Union” to meet these needs, and this soon caught on with other churches, as well. This ladies’ missions movement became the WMU, or Woman’s Missionary Union, and Annie Armstrong served as the first leader. Annie was conservative theologically and a diligent worker. She traveled the country, visiting Southern Baptist churches and speaking to women’s groups to encourage them to be passionately involved in home missions and to begin WMUs in their churches. Annie never took a salary or reimbursement for her expenses in travel or her role in WMU. The offering that bears her name carries on the Great Commission in planting churches and preaching the gospel in North America.

AS WE CONSIDER WHAT A MISSIONARY’S HEART LOOKS LIKE, LET’S CONSIDER ROMANS 1:13-17 (HCSB):

“Now I want you to know, brothers, that I often planned to come to you (but was prevented until now) in order that I might have a fruitful ministry among you, just as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am obligated both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish. So I am eager to preach the good news to

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you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For in it God's righteousness is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith."

THERE ARE THREE "I AM" STATEMENTS IN THIS PASSAGE:

ROMANS 1:14 - "I AM OBLIGATED ..." (KJV READS, "I AM A DEBTOR ...")

- › An obligation is defined as something one must do because of a law, rule, promise, etc., or something one must do because it is morally right.
- › We have an obligation to both men and God—a debt. But this obligation is not a monetary debt. It is the obligation to preach the gospel that has been entrusted to us because of what Christ did on the cross for us. Though a free gift, we are compelled to share it with others. This must be our passion. Faith in the good news of Jesus Christ is the basis for God's justification of sinners.
- › How wonderful that someone before you believed it was his or her obligation—a debt to be paid—to tell you about Jesus. You/We owe much to them. Now, the debt is ours, and we must be excellent stewards of the gospel message by generously and intentionally sharing it with others.
- › This is what missions is all about—taking and telling the gospel to those who haven't heard it and trusting the

Holy Spirit to move within the hearer's heart to bring the person to salvation. Romans 10:15 says, "And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the gospel of good things!" We are all sent to proclaim the good news!

- › We have a debt to pay to a world that does not know Jesus. As we witness to others of the hope within us, and as we give through the Cooperative Program and to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, we are joyfully paying the spiritual debt we owe.

ROMANS 1:15 - "I AM EAGER TO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS ..."

- › To be ready to preach the gospel means to have total confidence in it and a firm commitment to it. Readiness requires preparation, but not perfection. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."
- › Being ready means being eager—having a passion for the mission that exclaims, "Let's do this!"
- › Readiness also includes understanding current events, contexts and culture.
- › Missionaries serving through NAMB in 32 priority cities face many challenges as they minister in a diverse and difficult context to a culture that often is antagonistic toward the gospel message.

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› We are to be ready to witness at every opportunity God provides us with our neighbors, families, coworkers and acquaintances.

ROMANS 1:16 – “I AM NOT ASHAMED ...”

- › We have confidence in the truth of the gospel and can boldly stand firm in that truth.
- › We know we are accountable to God for our faithfulness and do not need to fear man.
- › Belief in the power of the gospel enables us to stand firm in times of persecution for that belief. Second Timothy 1:12 says, “... and that is why I suffer these things. But I am not ashamed, because I know the One I have believed in and am persuaded that He is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day.”
- › Before we can say we are not ashamed, we must first experience the power of salvation in our own lives.

› The gospel is the only good news in a world full of bad news. We have the best story of all to tell—how people can be forgiven, restored, given a purpose for living, a hopeful life now and an eternity of joy forever.

Like our North American missionaries, we must look for opportunities to share our faith with confidence and boldness. Pray for divine appointments. Pray for open doors. Be willing to risk for the gospel, for the reward is great—and eternal. We must be motivated, compelled and even captivated by the gospel message to such an extent that we can't help but tell the world. As we encourage our missionaries through our prayers and financial gifts, let us also be mindful that they cannot do it alone.

For further information on the North American Mission Board, consult namb.net/annualreport. For further information on the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, visit AnnieArmstrong.com.

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