

Ten Biblical/Educational Commitments to Guide Missionary Training

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1. Training objectives should be determined by the understanding, qualities, and skills required for effective service. God intends His people to be Christ-like and fruitful. He also identifies specific qualities and abilities which should characterize believers and leaders in Christ's church. He provides spiritual gifts and Holy Spirit empowerment, but He also specifies a need to be "equipped" - i.e. to be prepared to use one's spiritual gifts. Equipping should be intentional and purposeful; it should focus on those qualities and skills needed for spiritual maturity and effective ministry. Identifying qualities and skills of effective missionaries enables trainers to specify training objectives and pursue them intentionally.

2. Training is church related; learning occurs best in the context of community. God deals with people as families and communities, e.g. Abraham and his offspring (Gen.12:1-4), the nation of Israel (Ex.19:3-8), the Church (1 Pet.2:4-5,9-10)- corporate life was central in the early church, and "one another" passages in the New Testament. Life transformation typically occurs within a nurturing community: interaction facilitates reflective learning; social support and reinforcement facilitates learning.

3. Training structures and relationships must be consistent with training goals. Jesus taught leadership by metaphor and example. Jesus modeled humble, self-sacrificing leadership (Phil.2:5-8). Biblical leadership is oriented to responsibility/accountability vs. authority/power. Structural and relational dimensions of training must be appropriate to training goals. We cannot teach what we have not learned or lived. Hierarchical structures and authoritarian behaviors are counter productive to the goals of missionary training.

4. Training strategies should be appropriate to the learner's way of thinking and learning. An important and distinctive aspect of culture is worldview. Culturally conditioned language supplies the categories by which we order experience, and influences the processes by which we think. Social interaction reinforces accepted perceptual frames. Learning progresses most efficiently when account is taken of individual and cultural perspectives and processes. Even when the training goal is consistent, the route to that goal need not be.

5. Training strategies should incorporate and build upon the learner's experience. Adult learners bring a wealth of experience on which they can build. The relevance of prior experience determines appropriate training strategies along the "pedagogy-andragogy" spectrum. As trainees acquire relevant experience, they should be permitted to build on that experience. Trainer roles and strategies should be responsive to trainee competence.

6. Theory should be validated by Scripture and the created order. Theory intends to describe reality-it makes truth claims. The prophets of Israel also made truth claims which required verification: consistency with prior revelation (Deut.13); consistency with the physical world (Deut.18). Truth claims appropriately are tested for consistency -- internal and external.

7. Information should be appropriated and obeyed. The emphasis of the Hebrew verb yada (to know) is experiential; it connotes intimate, personal participation in or appropriation of that which is known. Speculative and theoretical "knowledge", the mere accumulation of information,

is not true knowledge. The purpose of revelation is instrumental; God desires to make us holy, not only to make us wise! "Truth" is known only when it is appropriated and obeyed.

8. Skills learning should include instruction, demonstration, and guided practice. Research on skills- learning indicates a multi-step approach to training. Initial instruction is most effective when it includes, a) step-by-step explanation, and b) qualities which discriminate appropriate and inappropriate performance. Instruction becomes meaningful when followed by expert demonstration, alternating entire-skill, and step-by-step performance. Repeated practice, with expert feedback, is required for skill acquisition. Mental practice often positively supplements real practice. Reflection on performance is essential to develop expertise-i.e. for identifying appropriate refinements or alternative procedures which achieve or exceed requisite standards.

9. Character qualities and values are effectively communicated only when teaching includes modeling and reflection. Much of Jesus' teaching addressed character qualities and values. The end point of revelation was not pronouncement, but incarnation! Nevertheless, even the incarnate Christ had to interpret the significance of His person and ministry. To be educationally effective, modeling must be wedded with intentional reflection.

10. Training equips the learner for effective ministry and continuing growth. Growth is the goal-and-test of training. God intentionally facilitates growth. The effect of growth is empowerment (vs. dependency). It entails a) the capacity "to take a large view"-to appreciate alternate perspectives, customs, and mores, b) the capacity to recognize and critique assumptions and values c) the capacity to tolerate ambiguity d) the capacity to identify sources of information and wisdom, e) the capacity to think creatively f) the capacity to envision alternative models and g) the capacity to build consensus.

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