

Identifying Cross-Cultural Gifting

who is God tapping for missions service?

by Ellen Livingood

Many of today's church leaders are taking seriously their role in identifying those God is preparing for global service. They want to follow the precedent set at the launch of New Testament missionary activity (Acts 13), where God involved the Antioch church in recognizing and sending missionaries.

The concept is exciting! But how do we know who God is tapping? How can we identify those we should be encouraging to pursue the next steps toward global missions?

A Spirit-Led Process

Many of the most famous and effective missionaries of the past were initially rejected for service by their church and/or mission agency because they didn't measure up to human expectations. God sometimes chooses human instruments who don't fit our profile, and unless we are sensitive to the Spirit, we may dismiss them as poor candidates. So prayer is certainly the most important key to finding those God is preparing for missions.

Jesus encourages us to "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Mt. 9:38). It also seems appropriate to ask Him to use our church in that identifying and sending process, just as He used the church at Antioch.

As we pray and seek God's choice of those to send, it is helpful to identify characteristics that frequently mark people with passion and gifting for missions. Some churches prioritize apostolic gifts that relate primarily to vision and leadership. In this article, we've chosen to describe more general indicators that mark those with an ability for crossing cultures. Many of these characteristics may be visible even in children.



Short-Term Trip Indicators

Missions trips are great places to discover clues about whom God is gifting for effective global ministry. Here are some indicators:

1. The ability to adapt relatively easily to life and service in another culture—observed by the team leader and missionaries or local hosts
2. A natural desire to develop relationships with those of other cultures rather than just hang out with teammates from home
3. Evidence of adaptability and flexibility, not easily frustrated when plans must change
4. A personal sense of unusual joy and/or "fit" in the cross-cultural context
5. Ongoing efforts to maintain cross-cultural friendships following the trip

Spiritual Passion Indicators

Growth in discipleship is a lifelong process. And for those younger in chronological or spiritual age, Christian character may need a lot of development before they are ready for extended missions service. The indicators listed here may be evident only in embryonic form, but they reveal a heart for God and the nations.

1. A passion to love and serve God, even without lots of outside motivation or recognition
2. Deep concern for people and their needs (keeping in mind that God has missionary roles for the task-oriented introvert as well as the people-oriented extrovert)
3. A burden to pray for people beyond their own circle of friends, especially the lost and needy
4. Evidence of a passion to see people come to know God and an eagerness to share the gospel
5. A love for the church and a willingness to serve
6. A personal sense of God's call—throughout the history of missions, some individuals have sensed a clear, divine leading toward global service, even at a very young age.



ties or cultures—fellow students, coworkers, neighbors, etc.

3. An intentional rejection of materialistic values and a growing commitment to prioritize people and relationships over tangible things
4. Resourcefulness and creativity in problem solving; not easily discouraged
5. A regular investment in helping others achieve, rather than just focusing on their own projects and success
6. A desire to learn about, and appreciate, other cultures and cross-cultural workers, evident in things like (1) curiosity about other countries, cultures, or languages; (2) reading missionary biographies; (3) choosing to spend vacation time in cross-cultural settings; (4) hosting missionaries regularly in their home

What other characteristics do you think mark those God may be preparing for future missions service? We would love to expand and improve our list.

What Do We Do Next?

Share these markers or your own set of identifiers with key leaders in your church—staff, elders, teachers, small group leaders, short-term team leaders, your GO team, even parents. Ask them to help identify children, teens,

General Lifestyle Indicators

All believers should develop a lifestyle that reflects a serious commitment to being Jesus' disciples. Here we have tried to identify traits especially important for cross-cultural workers.

1. Relationships with different types of people within their own culture—they have friends from all age groups, relate well to those of different economic status and educational level, and enjoy spending time with people with various types of interests rather than associating with just those similar to themselves
2. Intentional friendships with people from other ethnici-

Very early in a prospective worker's journey toward missions, **Life Spring Christian Church** of Cincinnati, OH, comes alongside them with what they call a **Shepherding Group**. This hand-picked group of three to five people observe the potential missionary's life, ask questions, encourage, and guide in spiritual and emotional development.

With spiritual sensitivity, they walk alongside individuals as they move toward missions service (in other cases, they may eventually confirm that God is leading in a different direction). As workers approach departure for the field, the Shepherding Group members may change, and the size often grows to include those who can address different and expanding needs.

and adults who may exhibit a number of these characteristics.

Sit down individually with those identified as potential workers. Explain that church leaders see evidence that God may be preparing them for greater global impact. Pray with them. Offer to walk beside them in the process of seeking God's will and preparing for extended missions service. Suggest age- and life-phase appropriate next steps to continue their process of discovering God's plan.

All ages can expand their exposure to other cultures and get involved in ministries that help to confirm their gifting and heart for the nations. Here are two resources that



can help provide an overview of the process of entering missions:

- *To Timbuktu & Beyond* by Marsha Woodard (shorter and less in-depth)
- *Global Mission Handbook* by Steve Hoke & Bill Taylor (a more extensive compendium of articles and tools)

A resource for the church in sending workers:

- *Skills, Knowledge, Character: A Church-Based Approach to Missionary Candidate Preparation* by Greg Carter

Ellen Livingood launched and leads Catalyst Services to further church/agency collaboration. She works with churches and mission organizations to unleash the untapped potential of God's people.



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