

# Missionaries as Provisional Pastors

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“We send missionaries and not pastors. Missionaries should not serve as pastors, on the field.” These two statements heard by Luke, a newly appointed missionary at his orientation, created confusion. He knows that his field supervisor serves as a pastor in his local church, and a major portion of Luke’s first term will be spent in a church planting pastoral apprenticeship.

The confusion is not, though, about the phrase, “We send missionaries and not pastors.” There is broad agreement that the church sends out missionaries. The confusion is about the church planting missionary’s role once he lands. Within the scope of this article, we are not saying that every missionary sent to serve on a church planting team should serve as a pastor in a local church. However, we will argue that missionaries serving provisionally in the office of pastor is a biblical model for healthy church formation.<sup>1</sup> As

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<sup>1</sup> The New Testament uses the terms pastor/shepherd (4:11; 1 Pet 5:2), elder (Tit 1:5; 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Pet 5:1-4), and overseer (Tit 1:5; 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Pet 5:1-4) to refer to the same office. So, where the various titles are used in this article one office and function are in view. As we argue for the necessity and NT precedent for some missionaries serving as pastors, we have in mind that this is on a provisional basis. Baptists have historically recognized the two offices in the local church as that of pastors and deacons. However, one can see a strong case, both biblically and historically, for a third office—the evangelist. We want to allow for the possibility that the evangelist is a missionary who serves as a provisional elder and functions in ways almost indistinguishable from that of a pastor in the setting of church planting and revitalization. Nevertheless, due to our current historical and

an implication, some elder qualified missionaries must be sent out to form new churches, serving as pastors temporarily.

## Types of Missionaries

Is it biblically accurate to say that missionaries cannot or should not fulfill a pastoral role? This question requires us to think about what we mean by missionary. Certainly, the term has been used in a plethora of ways depending on one's historical and cultural context. The English word *missionary* comes from the Latin translation of the New Testament word ἀπόστολος, or apostle, meaning “delegate, envoy, messenger.”<sup>2</sup> The Greek word ἀπόστολος finds its root in the verb ἀποστέλλω meaning “send out.”<sup>3</sup>

The New Testament demonstrates two uses of “apostle(s).”<sup>4</sup> The first use of *apostle* is the technical sense with reference to those commissioned as Christ's authorized delegates or witnesses.<sup>5</sup> Paul's own defense for his apostolic authority serves as a key for understanding apostleship. The biblical criteria for authoritative apostolic identity appear to be 1) the Lord's selection (Matt 10:1-7; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2, 24; 1 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1); 2) eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:3, 21-22; 1 Cor 9:1-2; 15:8); and 3) authoritative

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ecclesiological context, we felt our argument would be most clearly understood with the terminology of some missionaries serving as *provisional pastors*. For a thorough explanation of the office and function of an evangelist see: Ricky Don Wilhelm II, *Where There is a Church: A Biblical Investigation into the Work of an Evangelist and Its Implication for International Mission Board Team Leaders in Established-Church Locations* (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> For a definition of “missionary” see William David Taylor, “Missionary,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 644. For a definition of “apostle” see “ἀπόστολος,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [BDAG], eds. William Bauer et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 122. Hereafter BDAG.

<sup>3</sup> “ἀποστέλλω,” BDAG, 120-121.

<sup>4</sup> For an extended argument see chapter 2 of, Wilhelm, *Where There is a Church*, 58-88.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor 14:37; 15:1-4; 2 Cor 13:3; Gal 1:8-11; Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; Col 1:25-28; 1 Thes 2:13; 2 Pet 1:16-21.

gospel preaching and teaching confirmed by miracles (Mark 3:14–15; Acts 2:19, 43; 5:12, 29, 14:3; 2 Cor 12:12).

What was the role of the Apostles?<sup>6</sup> The Apostles established the authoritative message of the universal church. When Jesus told the Apostles, “you will be my witnesses” (1:8), he indicates a sense of authoritative teaching as those who will “affirm, guarantee, and interpret the facts about Jesus.”<sup>7</sup> In

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<sup>6</sup> The authors hold to the position that Apostles and Prophets were a universal church role which ceased to have new officers in the first century. Their ministry continues to build up the church through the pages of Scripture. However, their universal office did not disqualify Apostles from also serving in a local church office. This multiple-role, apostolic model presents itself in the NT. Peter indicates dual role calling about himself in 1 Peter. In the introduction of the letter, he presents his universal function and authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1). Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 50. Wayne Grudem points out the significance of this introduction saying, “The supreme importance of the apostles is suggested by the fact that the phrase ‘of Jesus Christ’ is attached to no other New Testament office: we do not read of ‘teachers of Jesus Christ’ or ‘prophets of Jesus Christ’ or ‘evangelists of Jesus Christ’, only of ‘apostles of Jesus Christ’. Those who held this office had authority at least equal to the Old Testament prophets, for the apostles could speak and write God’s very words (Acts 5:3-4; Rom 2:16; 1 Cor 2:13; 14:37; 2 Cor 13:3; Gal 1:8-9; 1 Thess 2:13; 4:8, 15; 2 Thess 3:6, 14; 2 Pet 3:2) and thus could write the words which became New Testament Scripture (1 Cor 14:37; 2 Pet 3:16, cf. Rev 22:18-19; 1 Thess 5:27; 2 Thess 3:14).” (Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol 17, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, ed. Leon Morris [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009], 51). However, in chapter 5, Peter also identifies his local-church role when he describes himself in the office of “fellow elder.” Furthermore, textual evidence suggests that Peter wrote this letter while living in Rome (Grudem, *1 Peter*, 194). Historical evidence confirms that Peter served in a church in Rome until his death (Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Peter, The Apostle,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988], 1666). By calling himself a fellow elder, Peter shows that he didn’t serve in a universal capacity alone. He served locally as an elder in Rome, like the other pastors/elders/overseers to whom he wrote. In Paul’s case, he exercised a universal church office as an apostle appointed by Christ. He labored to lay the church’s foundation among the Gentiles. However, in relation to the identity of his local-church ministry, Paul functioned as an evangelist (i.e., provisional pastor).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Bolt explained the uniqueness of the Apostle’s teaching with the following points: “μαρτυρέω is used for God endorsing his word by signs and wonders (14:3)... In addition, the prophets testify to Jesus and forgiveness (10:43), and Paul, in agreement with them, testifies to Jesus’ suffering, resurrection, and proclamation (26:22f)... As such, they could testify that it was ‘this Jesus’ who had been raised by God (2:32; cf., 3:15), in accordance with the prophetic witness (10:43; 26:22), and who has made forgiveness available (5:31-32).” Peter G. Bolt, “Mission and Witness,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The*

other words, the apostles' witness was not merely evangelizing or teaching, but their own personal verbal endorsement of the correct teaching and interpretation of the gospel, which served as the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20).<sup>8</sup> God vindicated the apostolic witness through signs and wonders.<sup>9</sup>

The second New Testament use of *apostle* is in the generic sense of someone sent for a specific task. In this case, ἀπόστολος would best be translated as *missionaries* and gives credence to churches sending a variety of missionaries contributing to the body of Christ and the mission in different ways.<sup>10</sup> For

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*Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 170-171.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 93. In the article by Robert Thomas, he emphasized the revelatory language of Ephesians 2:19-3:10, which demonstrates this text was talking about inspired teaching of the apostles and prophets in the foundation of the church. Thomas says, "To apostles and prophets the word of God in Christ was revealed in a unique way (cf. 3:5). Because they received, believed and witnessed to that word, they were the beginning of the building on which others were to be built (cf. Matt 16:16-18)." Robert L. Thomas, "Correlation of Revelatory Spiritual Gifts and NT Canonicity," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 8:1 (Spring 1997), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Additionally, in Acts 13:47 Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6 in reference to their specific part in the apostolic function saying, "For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" Thus, in Acts 8, 10, 13, Luke further clarifies the apostolic witness as a necessity to validate that God's presence dwelled in the non-Jewish church. With the presence of the elders, the church, and the Apostles, the Jerusalem Council ratified this witness that the gospel "offers divine favor as a free gift to be received by faith; it rejected human effort as a means of or contributor to salvation. By implication it also dissociated Christianity from any attempt to restrict it to a particular racial, national, cultural, or social group." In other words, the Apostles witnessed and verified the presence of God dwelling among all nations, thereby unifying the church. In Acts, Luke does not portray all of the apostles as "traveling evangelists." Clark pointed out, "the apostles are closely associated with a stationary role in Jerusalem rather than a missionary one." So, he concluded, "More emphasis is given to their role of legitimizing others and their work than their own evangelism. The denotation of 'apostles,' at least as far as the Twelve is concerned, is thus much more 'authorized delegates' than 'missionaries.'" Andrew C. Clark, "The Role of the Apostles," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 210. As authorized delegates of Christ, the Apostles had a universal jurisdiction which other ministers do not possess, nor should be aspired to.

<sup>10</sup> See IMB's definition of a missionary: "The one who is a disciple of Jesus set apart by the Holy Spirit, sent out from the church, to cross geographic, cultural, and/or linguis-

example, in Philippians 2:19–30, Paul told the Philippians about his desire to deploy other missionaries to the church in Philippi and informed them that he planned to send their missionary (ὑμῶν δὲ ἀπόστολον), Epaphroditus, back to them (2:25). The rest of the letter fills in some details about Epaphroditus' missionary service. The Philippians sent him to pass on an offering to Paul in support of his mission (4:17–18). Epaphroditus determined to stay and minister to Paul (2:25).<sup>11</sup> He had apparently been away in this support role for enough time that he had “been longing” to see his sending church (2:26). He had suffered on the mission field (2:26, 30) and deserved honor for his ministry (2:29).

Some argue that there are two types of missionaries—the Paul-Type and the Timothy-Type. The idea is that the Paul-type goes to pioneer places and establishes new works then quickly moves on, but the Timothy-type works in a more pastoral role where the church is already established.<sup>12</sup> However, the Scriptures do not support these categories. Timothy was active in pioneer ministry with Paul and served itinerantly in various locations. Timothy's first appearance in the New Testament shows him traveling with Paul to plant churches in Macedonia (Acts 16:15). Also, Paul faithfully served in a church when he was in a location with an established-church.<sup>13</sup> The Scriptures do

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tic barriers as part of a missionary team focused on making disciples and multiplying churches.” International Mission Board, *Foundations*, v.4 (Richmond: IMB, 2018), 86. [https://issuu.com/trainingdev/docs/imb\\_foundations](https://issuu.com/trainingdev/docs/imb_foundations).

<sup>11</sup> Rick Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1991), 120.

<sup>12</sup> For example, John Piper has suggested two categories of missionaries that he calls “Paul-type” and “Timothy-type.” He described the *Timothy-type* missionary as one who works where someone else had already begun and the *Paul-type* as one who moves from place to place. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 195. Brooks Buser follows Piper's argument here: Brooks Buser, “A Better Way to Look at Missions,” *9Marks*, May 21, 2024, <https://www.9marks.org/article/a-better-way-to-look-at-missions/>.

<sup>13</sup> See Acts 15:41 and 16:5. When Paul plans to visit Rome, even though he is just passing through he says that he hopes to “reap a harvest among you” (Rom 1:13) and “eager to preach the gospel to you” (Rom 1:15).

not record missionaries as solely focusing on pioneer church planting. Paul made it his “ambition to preach the gospel not where Christ has already been named” (Rom 15:20). At the same time, Paul had an equal ambition to strengthen local churches. He had a deep concern for putting a church in order which would help secure health in that local church (Acts 14:22–23; 15:36, 41; 14:22–23; 16:5; 18:23; 20:2). And like Paul, Timothy also was heavily engaged in itinerantly strengthening existing churches.

Furthermore, Scripture gives no indication that Timothy settled in Ephesus as a permanent pastor.<sup>14</sup> Rather, he fulfilled the itinerant work of a missionary. The immediate context of 2 Timothy 4 makes this clear: “Do your best to come to me soon...When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments” (2 Tim 4:9-13). Luke consistently portrayed Timothy’s ministry as itinerant.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, when Paul tells Timothy “fulfill your ministry” (τὴν διακονίαν σου πληροφόρησον), Paul was urging Timothy to begin wrapping up his ministry in Ephesus, so that he could rejoin Paul as was his custom.<sup>16</sup> More will be said below to support the view that Paul and Timothy both served in a similar manner.

Epaphroditus’ missionary role was of no less value than that of Paul’s as the church planter, but it was different. Paul, like Timothy and others, labored as an elder. Epaphroditus aimed to support the work of the elder-qualified missionary that fruit might increase (Phil 4:17). This example

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<sup>14</sup> *Contra Eusebius, HE*, 3.4.6.

<sup>15</sup> “And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.” (Acts 19:22); “... Silas and Timothy remained there...and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.” (Acts 17:14-15); and “When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia...” (Acts 18:5).

<sup>16</sup> Robert Yarbrough explained, “‘Fulfill’ (from *plērophoreō*) is a word used only once in the NT outside of Paul’s writings. Here it means to carry out completely; to leave nothing undone.” Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 442.

provides a biblical precedent for the need of missionary support roles in organizational leadership, finance, logistics, member care, and other spheres.

One could see this to mirror a pastor–deacon relationship. Churches may send short-term, mid-term, long-term, male, and female missionaries that fill gaps which missionaries serving as pastors may not have the capacity to fill. Examples include outreach and disciple-making to women, students, or employees in the workplace. However, if we want to effectively plant churches and see the gospel take root among the nations, we must send missionaries who have the qualifications and abilities to lead a church.

### **Goal of the Missionary as Pastor**

Paul himself asserted that “he [Timothy] is doing the work of the Lord, as I [Paul] am” (1 Cor 16:10).<sup>17</sup> So, in his letters to Timothy, Paul was not only describing the expectation for Timothy’s ministry, but he was also describing the substance of his own work in the local church. What did this ministry of Paul and Timothy entail? Paul’s first letter to Timothy depicted his expectations for how Timothy should fulfil his task. In 1 Timothy, Paul told the young missionary, “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” (3:14–15). With these verses, Paul made a clear statement indicating missional instruction: he expected to find Timothy serving—in the household of God, which is the church of the living God (ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ . . . , ἥτις ἐστὶν ἐκκλησία θεοῦ ζῶντος). This missionary would carry out his mission in and through a local congregation.

Since Timothy had the duty to preserve sound doctrine in Ephesus, he would most effectively do so by investing his energies into the church, which

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 28, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2014), 425.

God designed to display and support the truth of the gospel.<sup>18</sup> Even a face-value reading of Paul's letters to Timothy make it inescapably clear that these missionaries were shepherding the flock. The first three chapters of 1 Timothy appear to lay out the blueprint of how Timothy should "behave in the household of God" (3:15) to form a healthy church by turning his attention to the church's doctrine, the church's worship, and the church's leadership.<sup>19</sup>

### **Forming Sound Doctrine in the Church**

Paul's instruction to Timothy greatly emphasized the importance of sound doctrine in a church (1 Tim 1:3; 1:10; 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3). In 1 Timothy 1:3-11 Paul addresses how false teachers (which seem to include Hymenaeus and Alexander [1:20]), had led the church astray – "contrary to sound doctrine" (1:10) – with speculative teaching about the law as opposed to using it "lawfully" (1:8). In 1 Timothy 4, Paul again returned to the subject of false teachers, then exhorts Timothy with a series of mandates: "If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed" (4:6); "train yourself" (4:7); "Command and teach these things" (4:11); "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (4:13); "Do not neglect the gift you have" (4:14); "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this. For by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim 4:6-16); and "Do not rebuke... harshly but exhort" (5:1). In both letters combined, Paul used approximately thirty imperatives dealing with Timothy's study and preaching responsibilities.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Yarbrough said, "In connection with 'the truth,' 'pillar and foundation' likely points to the church's role (through their confession of Christ; see v. 16) in combatting soul-destroying error at Ephesus in the form of false teachers and their deleterious effects," *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 219.

<sup>19</sup> For an extensive argument see chapter 4 of the dissertation, Wilhelm, *Where there is a Church*, 122-153

<sup>20</sup> John A. Battle, "Pastoral Imperatives: Paul's Use of The Imperative Mood in His Letters to Timothy and Titus," *WRS Journal* 12:2 (Aug 2005): 12-19.



Paul and Timothy prioritized preaching and teaching sound doctrine to form healthy churches.

### **Forming Right Worship in the Church**

After the establishment of the church in Jerusalem, Luke described them as a worshiping community (Acts 2:41–47). In matters of corporate worship, Baptists traditionally for the most part have adhered to the Protestant regulative principle which holds that, “worship should only include those elements that Scripture explicitly or implicitly endorses.”<sup>21</sup> The elements of worship on which the missionary should focus may vary depending upon a church’s weaknesses. Paul and Timothy instructed and modeled how God glorifying corporate worship forms healthy churches. For example, in 1 Timothy 2:1–15, Paul provided instructions for the Ephesian church when he charged Timothy to strengthen their corporate prayer (1–7)—which would spur on the missional vision—and correct matters of personal conduct in worship (8–15). Paul sent Timothy because this young missionary possessed a level of theological aptitude to help this congregation comprehend the substance of the apostolic teachings and to apply that teaching to their corporate worship practices.

A similar task stands before some missionaries sent today. Churches will need missionaries with the competency to identify distorted elements of worship and guide them to gospel-reflecting practices. As Mark Dever reminds us, “Christians and congregations are transformed into Jesus’ likeness by looking at his glory as we find it in Scripture. The implication for our corporate worship services is that every element and form of our gathered worship should show people from Scripture God’s glory in Christ so that we can all be transformed together into an ever more faithful reflection of that

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<sup>21</sup> John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2019), 277.

glory.”<sup>22</sup> Dever highlights the practical implications of what occurs when a missionary is skilled in handling the Word of truth to lead others in worship: Christ-centered worship changes lives.

### **Forming Qualified Leadership in the Church**

Having established God’s design for male eldership in 1 Timothy 2, Paul then sets forth the qualifications of church officers in chapter 3. Both elders and deacons should exhibit a godly moral character that would be an example to all members of the church. However, elders should have the ability to teach (3:2). Through their congregational teaching ministry, the elders instruct the church which supports the growth of sound doctrine, and deacons meet the felt needs of the congregation which allows overseers to focus on the ministry of teaching and prayer (Acts 6:1-7). Cultivating a doctrinally sound church requires both officers to fulfill their roles.

In 2 Timothy, Paul vividly illustrates the correlation between sound doctrine and elders. Paul told Timothy, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (1:13-14). Then, he continued with this admonition, “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2:2). Paul indicated that these “faithful men” would be those who serve as elders and, therefore, should carry out the teaching duties before the church.<sup>23</sup>

The missionary must possess the competency and a plan for raising up church leaders, but a missionary also must heed Paul’s warning not to “be hasty in the laying on of hands” (1 Tim 5:22). Paul encouraged his apprentice

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *How to Build a Healthy Church: A Practical Guide for Deliberate Leadership* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 99.

<sup>23</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel the Message of 2 Timothy*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 51.

to exercise patience in the election of church leaders because the church cannot always discern the character requirements for overseers quickly (3:2-13). Some men disqualify themselves early on because their character flaws are obviously present, but others' may become apparent only with time (5:24).<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, while some men markedly stand out as potential leaders, some may exhibit necessary qualifications only after a season of growth (5:25).<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Paul and Timothy exhibited patience in the formation of qualified elders.

### **Practicalities of the Missionary as Pastor**

As God's image bearers (*Imago Dei*), humans are imitators. We learn virtually everything by imitation. Indeed, to master any virtue or skill, one must start by imitating a person who portrays those desired characteristics. Imagine various family roles such as motherhood or fatherhood, or vocations like a farmer, a teacher, or a truck-driver. To become skillful in any of these roles or vocations, one must learn first from other experts what faithfulness and excellence look like. For example, the idea of a man taking over a farm without first serving as an apprentice under a competent farmer is foolish. Learning by imitation has been the standard and proven way to teach since the Old Testament times (e.g. Exod 23:24; Prov 4:14). The tradition at the time of Jesus was for disciples to choose a rabbi and follow him with the goal being mastery of the Torah.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, Paul encourages believers to imitate him as he imitates God and Christ (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; Eph 5:1-2).

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<sup>24</sup> John MacArthur, *1 Timothy MacArthur Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 225-226.

<sup>25</sup> MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 226.

<sup>26</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

Furthermore, even Socrates and the consequent school of pedagogy—the Socratic method—recognize the value of this type of learning.<sup>27</sup>

### **Missionary Pastor Models Faithful Eldering**

Jesus modeled his servant leadership among the apostles for three years. His mimetic way of teaching is worthy of imitation. For three years Jesus taught, demonstrated, and lived in the presence of his Father and his followers. He prepared the apostles to exegete faithfully the Hebrew Scriptures in light of his own life, teaching, death and resurrection, and consequently to write New Covenant Scriptures, to witness boldly amid persecution, and to live sacrificially without holding anything back.

It is the regular pattern we see that churches appoint pastor-teachers to shepherd newly founded churches. These new pastors need to be trained alongside mature, tested, and qualified pastors. This is exactly what Paul expected Timothy to do in his missionary service. How does the missionary train pastors unless he is modeling the role of a pastor? How does the missionary model handling the Scriptures soundly and faithful teaching and preaching apart from faithfully teaching and preaching? Until local men are trained, qualified and appointed, it is the church planting missionary's responsibility to model the character and teaching of an elder, and he does so by pastoring faithfully the sheep and training, formally and informally, other men to do the same.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ward Farnsworth, *The Socratic Method: A Practitioner's Handbook* (Godine, Boston, 2021).

<sup>28</sup> See also Sam Martyn, "Should Missionaries Serve as Elders," April 12, 2024, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/missionaries-serve-elders>.

## **Missionary Pastor Encourages Local Leadership**

We know Paul stayed only a brief time in Thessalonica before installing elders,<sup>29</sup> and one could use this example as the model for missionary church planting.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, Paul warns Timothy not to lay hands too hastily on anyone. A missionary serving as a pastor is called to labor intentionally to train other pastors. Therefore, as soon as possible he is to bring pastoral trainees and candidates to his side. While the missionary carries the main responsibility to shepherd, he intentionally shares pastoral leadership early on. From day one, his intention is to pass on his role to local pastors. However, this takes time.

Tom walked into a church plant on its second public gathering.<sup>31</sup> He had recently been baptized and married to Maria. Sixteen years later, he still walks to the same church every Sunday, now having served as a faithful pastor for the past nine years. It took seven years to see this faithful young man mature to take responsibility in his marriage, with his children, and in his ability to faithfully handle the Scriptures.

Thomas was a 21-year-old young man, who showed early in his Christian life that he possessed a gift of teaching.<sup>32</sup> He was quickly asked to lead a Bible study and preach his first sermon after he had joined a church plant. His teaching and preaching were solid, and his communication skills were notable for his age. Yet, in his daily living and in his ability to carry responsibility, he showed significant immaturity. He served as a pastoral candidate in

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<sup>29</sup> Paul and his missionary team were in Thessalonica only 3 Sabbaths, and when he wrote to them there were identifiable leaders (1 Thess. 5:12–13). Paul wrote this after Timothy had gone back to Thessalonica, seen that the believers were thriving despite persecution, and evidently saw enough to know that there were qualified men to lead to some extent. We don't know how long Timothy stayed in Thessalonica.

<sup>30</sup> Don Dent, *The Ongoing Role of Apostles: The Forgotten Foundation* (Westbow Press, 2019), 158-159.

<sup>31</sup> The name is changed for security reasons.

<sup>32</sup> The name is changed for security reasons.

the church for almost ten years before Thomas himself, and the church body, mutually recognized him to be qualified to pastor. He is now married with three beautiful daughters and has faithfully pastored four years together with Tom. The church is growing and in the process of planting another church.

No child grows into adulthood in a few months. It takes years of faithful parenting under God's grace. Yet, the day eventually comes for most parents when they must release their children into adulthood. The same applies for missionaries. While parenting takes well over a decade, we are suggesting that it takes several years in the local church context to train a man to be a pastor/elder. Our experience demonstrates that if the man is a recent convert, the training time will be significantly longer.

## Conclusion

The Creator of the world is on mission to redeem the entire creation out of chaos, rebellion, and idolatry and to glorify Himself by calling and gathering all the elect, from all the nations, under the lordship of Christ. Jesus Christ is both the perfect Apostle (Heb 3:1) and the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14). The Lord has appointed missionaries to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to rebellious sinners and to gather the converted people into local churches. The Lord shepherds His people under His own appointed under-shepherds, pastors.<sup>33</sup>

In this article we have argued that missionaries serving in the office of pastor in a local church (plant) is a biblical model for healthy church formation. Building healthy churches without modeling faithful pastoring is inherently problematic, and not the model given in the New Testament. Qualified pastors, like Luke, the newly appointed missionary in the introduction to this article, must be raised up in their home churches and sent out as missionaries to do the work of forming new churches by pastoring. At

<sup>33</sup> Shepherding is one of the main motifs in Biblical Theology. See Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 20 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

the same time, missionary church planters must intentionally raise up other men to shepherd the new congregations, first alongside the missionary and eventually to entrust qualified men to pastor the church. The church sends missionaries, and at least some of them must be sent to do the work of a pastor.

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