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**To the Ends of the Earth**

**Part 1 Why We Go**

**Pastor Ted Cunningham**

Today we launch To the Ends of the Earth, and this is Part 1 – Why we go. Our church is growing, and I don’t know any other way to say it than this, but some of you need to go. We love you. You’re like, “Right now? Do we need to leave right now?” I’m not talking about leaving, I’m talking about going. You know the difference. A growing church, as we are at almost 3,000 people every weekend on this campus, it’s time for this church to see more missionaries and church planters go to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Who here loves the Olympics? I don’t like the enthusiasm I got at 8:15 and ain’t liking what I’m getting at 10:00. This is one of my favorite times. I love the Olympics. That opening ceremony and the closing ceremony. The flags come in. People are proud of their country. It’s also my favorite time because I sit in my recliner and snack while judging professional athletes. That’s what I do. You should see me with a bowl of ice cream, going “Aw, stick that landing, come on!”

I thought it would be fun as we turn our attention to the nations in the next couple of weeks. Let’s just have a little Olympic trivia.

How many rings are connected to the Olympic symbol? What are the colors of those five rings? Blue, Black, Yellow, Red, and Green.

What do they represent? How many continents are there?

There are three people like, “I’m not doing school on Sunday morning at Woodland Hills.

There are seven major continents. Thank you, history teacher… I mean Geography teacher.

Were you here when I used an illustration from the movie, *The Patriot*? I Referred to it as the Civil War the entire time? We had three history teachers leave the church. They couldn’t recover from it.

So, the five rings represent five major continents. Can you name the five major continents? This is why we have Google, people. It’s Europe, Asia, Australia, and the Americas. That’s what kind of throws people because we combine North and South America and Africa. Antarctica refuses to put a team in the Olympics.

Which US Olympian has won the most medals? Michael Phelps. How many metals? 28 metals.

23 gold, 3 silver, 2 bronze. So, let’s turn our hearts toward the nation.

Today we are going to talk about *why we go*. We are going to unpack a lot about what we do for missions here and send off a team at the end. Scottish theologian P.T. Forsyth said this: “*A church cold to missions is a church dead to the cross.”*

Our church is wanting to ramp up more and more what we do and in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. Jesus was very clear. You’ve heard it said… It’s not called the great suggestion, it’s called the great commission, it’s called the great commandment. Those are the two we go to but read with me. The great commission is ***therefore go and make disciples of all nations***. One of the things about missions that is important to us as a church is we don’t just send out evangelists to evangelize communities around the world, we want to evangelize and disciple. We want people to hear the good news of jesus, receive Christ and place their faith in him. And look at what it says, ***“19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. So, it’s evangelism and discipleship. It’s all part of missions. …And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” And we take the gospel to the ends of the earth to the end of the age.***

In Acts 1: 8, Jesus said, ***8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem*** *(Your hometown)* And then you are going to go out from there*.* ***…and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”***

Part of our passion for missions is before we send someone to a foreign land, we want them to serve in their own hometown. This is a very important part. Today, you are going to see that missions and the local church are linked; you can’t separate the two.

Michael Patton shares this story about a short-term mission’s trip that went very well but some great questions came out of it. Let me just read this story quickly for you. *You go on a self-funded, self – led four-week missions’ trip to a small, unevangelized village in Africa. Upon arrival, as expected, it became apparent that these people have never heard the gospel of Jesus. After three weeks of evangelizing, over 100 people enthusiastically received the gospel and trusted in Christ. We were set to leave in only one week, but the natives were wanting to take the next step in their new faith.*

*They asked you what they are supposed to do once you leave, and you tell them they need to start a local church. To which they respond, “What is church?” You tell them that you’ve been learning about it in the States, you’ve known all about it for a while and now you are going to teach them about it.*

*They are eagerly wanting more information. They ask, “How do we accomplish being a church on our local setting. What exactly do we need to do. You tell them they need to begin to meet together regularly, and they should start ministries to accomplish the purpose of the church.*

*They then ask, “What are ministries?” You respond that they are avenues that the local church provides to accomplish the purposes of the church in their particular setting. “Great” they respond. We will start ministries. Which ones do we start first?” And this is missions. This is sending missionaries, planting churches, so let’s answer that question as a church today.*

What is church? We’re just going to run through these, but it’s gathering for worship as we do today. And on a day like today, after a day like yesterday, it is important for us to gather to be reminded of our faith, what we believe, and we know who is in charge. We know who is on the throne. So, we gather

We preach the bible. We speak the truth. Baptizing new believers. So, part of being a local church is the ordinances of the church. We baptize new believers, and we observe the Lord’s Supper together.

We’re led by elders. Sometimes when people start house churches, they will ask, “Is this a legitimate church? We say so long as you are practicing the purposes of the church and you practice the ordinances, and you’re led by elders. There is authority to keep that church on track, it’s ministry to one another and to the community.

So, before we talk about sending missionaries to the ends of the earth, we want to make sure we are caring for one another in this local church, that we’re healthy, that we are meeting the needs in our community, but our prayer as a church is this one here. You’re going to hear more and more about this. Our desire with this many people on campus each week, we are praying that God begins calling people out to say, “Hey, guess what? I’m going to sell everything, I’m moving to “fill in the blank” nation somewhere in the world and I’m giving my life to that nation.”

A church sends missionaries and plants churches.

If you have your Bible, I want you to turn to Acts 13. To actually give you a little assignment this week, if you would, read Acts 13 and 14. This is Paul’s first missionary journey. The chapter starts with them leaving out of Antioch, returning to Antioch. It’s his base of operations that you’ll see. But we see this link and how the missionary and the local church go hand in hand. The first thing we learn is that missionaries get their start in the local church. We’re all for mission organizations and agencies. They play a very important role. Like this week, the trip going with Manna, it’s important to have an organization that knows what it’s like to have boots on the ground.

Much like we have Convoy of Hope, locally, nationally and internationally. But instead of our church, when disaster hits Oklahoma or Maui, putting a container out in the parking lot and trying to figure out what the needs are, trying to figure out what we need to bring from home or the store and do we even have that available in our community and then figuring out how to ship it there. Your generosity allows us to partner with an organization that knows how to get relief efforts to the people that need it.

Mission organizations are the same, but the missionary, first and foremost, is not sent from the organization. The missionary is sent from a local church, their local church.

This is what we read in Verse 1, Acts 13***. 1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers:*** If you are brand new to the Bible, a profit was one who received direct revelation from God, and they were the proclaimer of it. A teacher was one that explained it and helped the congregation apply it. So, there were profits and teachers. …***Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch)… and Saul… Luke changes Saul’s*** name to Paul in Verse 13 of this chapter***2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”***

And this is what our prayer is now as a church. We are wanting more of you to step up, to stand up, to raise your hand and say, “Send me. I feel called by God.” And then we gather around you… And this is very important. Missionaries are not just called, but they are also sent by the local church. ***3 So after they had fasted and prayed…*** This next part we do at an ordination service of pastors, missionaries. …***they placed their hands on them and sent them off.***

I wish I could read for us all of Chapter 13, all of Chapter 14, but we will put it in one picture, one map. Some of you are like *this is why we have maps in the back of our bible, this is awesome*. This map is the summary of Chapter 13 and Chapter 14. It starts in Antioch. You will see all of these places mentioned. You’ll know that they started preaching and teaching in the synagogue. People came to faith. Gentiles came to faith as well. But here’s what I want you to see. After this journey, they end it where they started. Why is that important? Because when you get to the end of Chapter 14, here’s what we learn. Missionaries are not only called, but they are also not only sent. They are accountable to the local church. They’re accountable to their sending church.

Here's what we read in Chapter 14: 27: ***27 On arriving there*** (back to Antioch) ***they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them…*** This always reminds me… Who grew up in church? Anybody remember the slide projectors the missionaries showed up with that they didn’t know how to operate. They were donated to them from a church when it broke down and they are like “We’ve got a new one, you can take our old one.” Anyway, they were on Furlow and they would stop at our church and they would share with us all that God was doing. They were just going from church to church, but these missionaries, Paul and Barnabus were accountable to the church***. All that God had done and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.***

So, if missionaries are called, sent, and accountable, what’s our commitment as a church? You and I have a role to play, and every single person that calls Woodland Hills Family Church home, we have a role to play in our commitment to missionaries.

The first one I want to encourage you with… We are going to talk about prayer, we’re going to talk about giving, but pray for our missionaries. First and foremost, you know being a marriage and family church, we pray for their **marriages and families**. I want to encourage you, but when we get to the end of this list, maybe take a picture of it because we are going to get an assignment at the end of the message today and it’s one way for you and me to continue to pray for the missionaries that we have here locally and on the field.

But we pray for **their marriage and families**. This one is an important one because you ask… You ask a missionary. Even this morning we had some missionaries visiting and one of my first question I ask a missionary is **tell me about your sending church**. And then as we get into their marriage and family a little bit, I love to ask the question, “**Tell me about your last vacation**.” If you want to freak a missionary out, ask them about a vacation. I don’t know who started this, but it’s like they are not allowed to go and get rest. I say that’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard. I was asking my friend, Ethiopian Missionary Duane who I met last year. We’ve become good friends over the last year. I remember asking him that. He didn’t even want to tell me where he went because he thought it might be too luxurious. I said, “We’re going to send you more money to take another one.” Why in the world would you want a missionary to wear out, crash their marriage, crash their family, and think they are going to be any use for the gospel of Jesus on a foreign field? So, let’s continue our commitment, Church, to meeting the needs of not just missions work, but the missionary’s marriage and family.

We send them a christmas bonus and we tell them to use it for just some rest for your family. So, when you come back, you’re charged. Another thing we pray for is learning the **culture and language**. I spoke recently to a couple that felt called to the mission field in their sixties. And this was their biggest request of me. Learning a new language in your sixties? How many of you in your sixties want to go back to college. It’s a lot of work. We need to pray for their endurance during this time of learning a new culture, learning a new language.

**Getting along with other missionaries and local leaders**. We think being a missionary you just have to be a nice person who can preach and teach. Do you know what you also need to be? You need to be a strategic leader, an organizational leader. You’ll meet missionaries on the field that have a different plan or strategy than you and it can blow up. We need to be praying for the community that missionaries are developing on the field.

**Perseverance**. We’re not talking about easy assignments. Yes, we want young people in this church to step up and say, “Send me.” I just want to encourage you, next generation, this generation. It’s going to be hard. You’re going to have challenges, difficulties.

Hudson Taylor, Director of China Inland Mission. I love what he said. He often interviews candidates for the mission field. On one occasion, he met with a group of applicants to determine their motivations for mission’s work. He asked, “Why do you wish to go as a foreign missionary? “I want to go because Christ has commanded us to go in all the world the preach the gospel to every creature,” was one reply, another said, “I want to go because millions are perishing without christ.” Others gave different answers. And then Hudson Taylor said, “All of these motives, however good, Will fail you in times of testing, trials, tribulations, and possible death,” They asked if he had any examples of that and he replied, “Yeah, it’s called the Book of Acts. And if you choose to go and give your life for the gospel in a foreign land, there will be testing, trials, tribulations, possible. There is but one motive that will sustain you in trials and testing, namely the love of christ… period.” So, we need to be praying for their perseverance.

**The generosity of other churches**. This is important as well because a sending church can’t meet all the needs. This is why some missionaries… I remember being with a missionary one time. He showed me his list. He had like 72 churches that supported his work. One of the missionaries I met with this morning said that one of their churches, which was one of the least amount of support was like $10.00. others are $25.00, $50.00. Our full-time missionaries on the field, outside of our country are supported by woodland Hills at $1,000.00 a month. You think about that and you think that seems like quite a bit, but it is part of more churches needing to get in involved. And this is why I love 2 Corinthians 8: 1-4 where Paul is talking about generosity and encouraging churches to work together for the good news of the gospel going out. Here’s what we read. ***8 And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people.***

So, yes, we pray for our missionaries, but we also give generously. We ask you to give generously every week. We thank you for your generosity. And to kind of fill you in on just the first six months of the year, January thru June, just your missions giving from local to the ends of the earth, here’s the amount you gave in the first six months or this year: $282,580.17. That 17 cents is important because every penny counts.

Where did that money go? I wish I could tell you story after story; I wish I could read the letters and the emails we received from missionaries. I’m going to give you one slide with all the places that generosity went just in the first six months of the year. Haiti, Indonesia, Guatemala, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Native America, People right now, this summer serving in Native American missions, Israel, India, Bahamas, Fiji, Tanzania, Kenya, Care for Kids that I explained at the beginning, Convoy of Hope going to Oklahoma and Maui. Options pregnancy, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Christian Action Ministries, meeting the need and filling the need for meals in our community, and then, Pastor Serve

I just want to say it again, I say it every week. Thank you, Woodland Hills, for your generosity.

I’ll be honest with you. In sharing this message, I was like, “Oh no, the number of emails and requests and the people that will step up and be like “Can you… I have something I want listed on there.” And yeah, we have a whole process to go through all of that, but I just want you to hear our heart today that yeah, you may have a friend, you may have a family member that’s a missionary that is not supported by this church… I just want to encourage you. Our desire is to meet those needs. Sometimes you may make a request that it’s not the right timing, not the right ministry… If making the request and hearing a no will hurt you to the point you’ll leave our church, don’t make the request. We want to continue to support well. And frankly, we don’t want to become that church. I’m not criticizing any church that gives small amounts. But we don’t want to become that church that gives $25.00 - $50.00 a month to our international missionaries, which is what happens when a church thinks they need to supply the need and give to every single person that asks.

So, that is our commitment to missions through prayer and generosity, but our church is also committed to short term mission trips. This is something we want to get better at as well. We’ve been on short term trips over the years. I’ve been to Haiti. I don’t know if you count Canada counts, but I went there once. It was missions. I’ve been on a couple of trips to Mexico. I’ve been to Kenya, Tanzania. Our church is committed to this.

Here are the five reasons why you’re going to see an even greater commitment toward short term trips in our church. Here’s what’s cool. Travis is our elder who oversees missions. We were even talking about it between the services. I was just so encouraged because it’s a lot of work.

I don’t know if you know but going to a foreign country like Kenya with 28 people is a lot of detail. It’s a lot of organization. As we brought them up in the first gathering and are going to do it again, they had a hard time figuring out how to stand up here. They have to get through airports and customs and border control and make flights and connections. It’s a lot of work, It’s not a vacation, It’s not tourism.

**Number 1 is It’s our love for christ that compels us**. He’s commanded us to go, and we want to send people out of this church. We want you to be a part of short-term trips.

**Number 2 – It grows our hearts for the world by exposing us to different countries and cultures.** I’ve said this before, but I have to say it again. There are times people ask me, “What’s one of your favorite cities to visit in the country?” I’ll say New York City. People will respond with, “Why would you want to go there?” I don’t know if a Christian should have that reaction to any city or any country in the world. I know I make fun of California, but that’s just fun. I go to California; I have friends in California. I minister in California. Every time I go to California, I feel like a missionary, but you shouldn’t have… If you ever think of a city and go, “I can’t stand the people..” A short-term trip is for you. Ask God to grow your heart for people that don’t look like you, that don’t dress like you, that don’t speak the same language you speak, that don’t vote like you.

**Number 3 – It encourages our missionaries**. I do have a regret in the first 17 years of this church, I never visited Bob and Dee Dodson in Tanzania. I’m glad we were able to go there before Bob passed away, but every time I think about Bob and Dee Dodson and the dear friendship this church and Amy and I have had with them over the past. They were the first missionaries we supported 22 years ago. And just growing a church and having our family and raising our family, we just never made it over there. When we got there, I was just like “God, let me enjoy this time.”

I went to Kenya last year and met Duane, Ethiopian Missionary and we spend hours and hours riding in the back of this van. I was listening to his story and sharing. It was more encouraging to me than it was to him. At that moment, I realized this is why God brought me here to encourage him in his marriage and in his family. You’ve been a blessing as a church to Duane and his ministry in Africa.

**Number 4 – it gives an opportunity for every church member to go or to get involved**. It allows us to go, it allows you to get involved, and so allows the Holy Spirit to work with you in this moment. Again, we say this: we want you to serve in your hometown before we send you to a foreign land.

We talked about transactional relationships sometime ago. The person who asked the church to leverage resources to send them on a mission trip, but they have no interest in serving the local church. That doesn’t work. We want you to be a part of your local church.

**Number 5 – this is a big prayer for us. Our prayer is that God will call someone on a short-term trip to fulltime missions.**

With that, I’m going to invite the Kenya Woodland Hills team up to the stage. We’re going to pray over them as we close.

While they are gathering up here, would you please take out your phone and open your calendar. This team is going to head out of the Woodland Hills Parking lot at 2:00pm on Tuesday. I will be here physically to pray for them as they are sent out. We would love to have thousands from our church praying for them at 2:00 pm on Tuesday.

Father, we’re grateful for this team. We are grateful for the health of each team member and ask that they continue to stay healthy for the next couple of days before they leave and keep them healthy the entire time they are on the trip.

I pray for their unity as a team. When you bring 28 people together like this, it’s a lot of opinions and a lot of ways something can go. I pray for Kent and Stephanie as they lead this team. And I just ask that you give them grace and peace over all the details. We know Stephanie is keeping most of them. And we’re grateful.

And we just pray that as they share the gospel, as they encourage missionaries, as they encourage the students in the feeding centers and the students in the school, and as they encourage those in the church in Mombasa, I just pray that all of them are a bright shining light for Jesus on this trip. I’m also praying, Lord, and let this be the prayer of our church that someone standing up here will come home and say, “I’m going back and not coming back.” That you would begin to work in the hearts of those that are going on this trip.

And then I pray for our church that we would take the role of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth seriously. That we would realize how important it is to pray and to give and to send and for all of them to go. We are so grateful. So, thank you for this trip. Thank you for the opportunity. We pray for every detail along the way, for every airport, for every connection time. Oversee and go before them.

We pray this in the authority of the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said… Amen