



Mobilization Foundations



Mobilization Principles and Practices





Introduction

With each person being unique, living in differing contexts and working with various churches amidst a changing world, there is no one size fits all approach for the mobilizer or the mobilized. New mission opportunities are created, new generations of Christians grow up and new mission partnerships are explored. Still, in the midst of all this diversity, there are some common mobilization principles and practices that do not change. Being mindful of these will be helpful for us and for the churches and individuals we are mobilizing.

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Biblical Principles

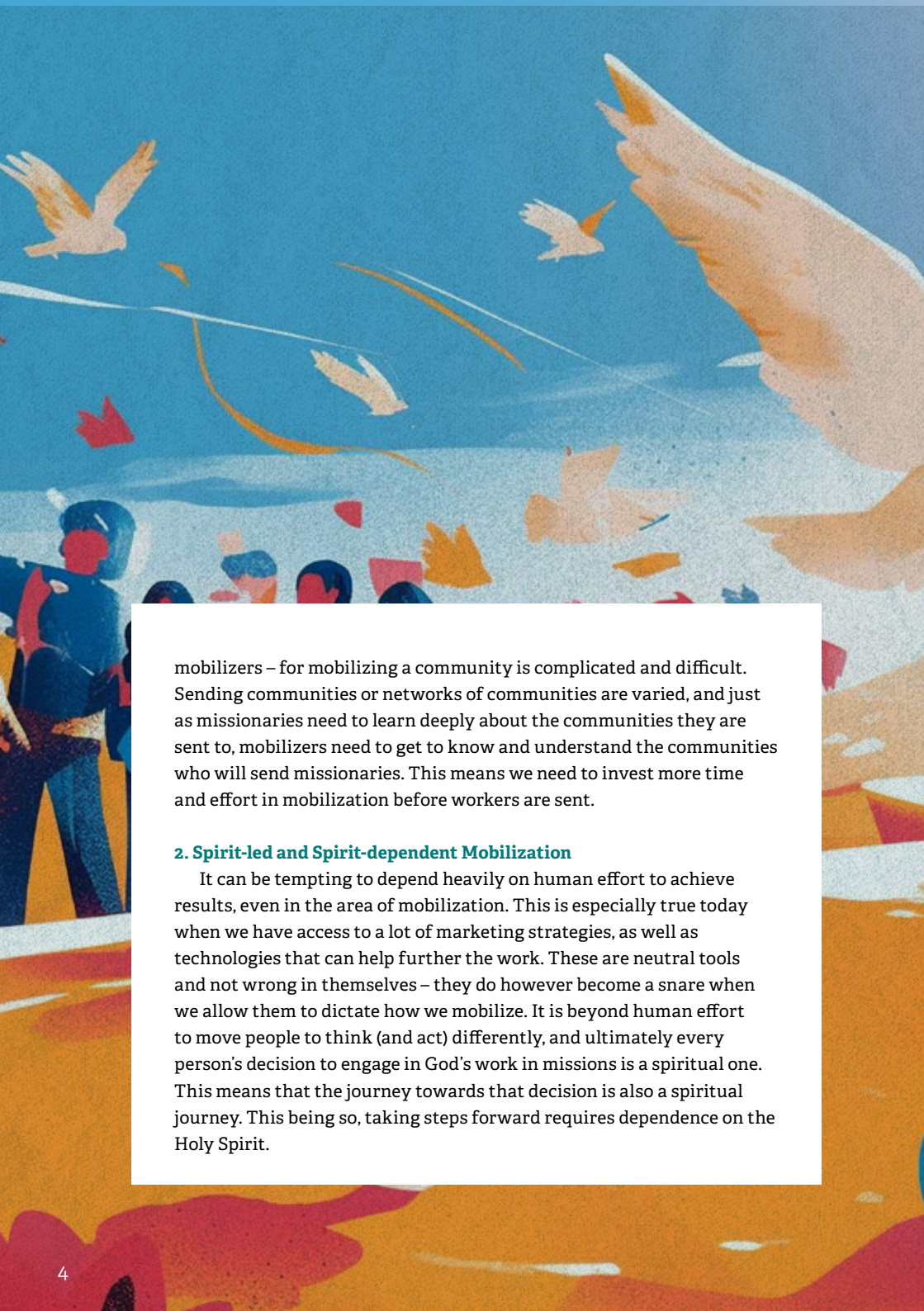
The goal of mobilization is to advance God's missional purposes. Therefore, it must be done God's way. Unfortunately, there are many poor examples of mobilization being done in non-biblical ways, such as exaggerating reports to play on people's emotions, recruiting workers without consulting their churches or raising funds without proper reporting. How do we ensure that we do not become "conformed to the patterns of this world," as Paul reminds us in Romans 12:2? We need to be mindful that as we engage in mobilization, we take time to regularly reflect on how our mobilization approaches align with biblical principles – and be prepared to change them, when they do not.

1. Mobilizing the Individual in the Context of Community

As much as it takes a village to raise a child, the same is true with sending a missionary. Missions work is a community effort. Scripture has shown us that God desires His plans to be pursued in the context of community.

Paul the apostle was very aware of this. Yes, his conversion and calling involved a very special, supernatural and direct personal encounter with God. And yes, he was indeed a spiritual giant, chosen by God to play a unique role. Even so, it took about 10 years from the time God called him before Paul was finally sent by the Antioch church. During those 10 years, God had to work on the Jewish church (see Acts 10) so that they would be ready to accept Gentiles as fellow believers. We can also see that during Paul's missionary work, he was never out of touch with the churches. Paul's epistles frequently refer to the support and partnership he received from churches and individual believers.

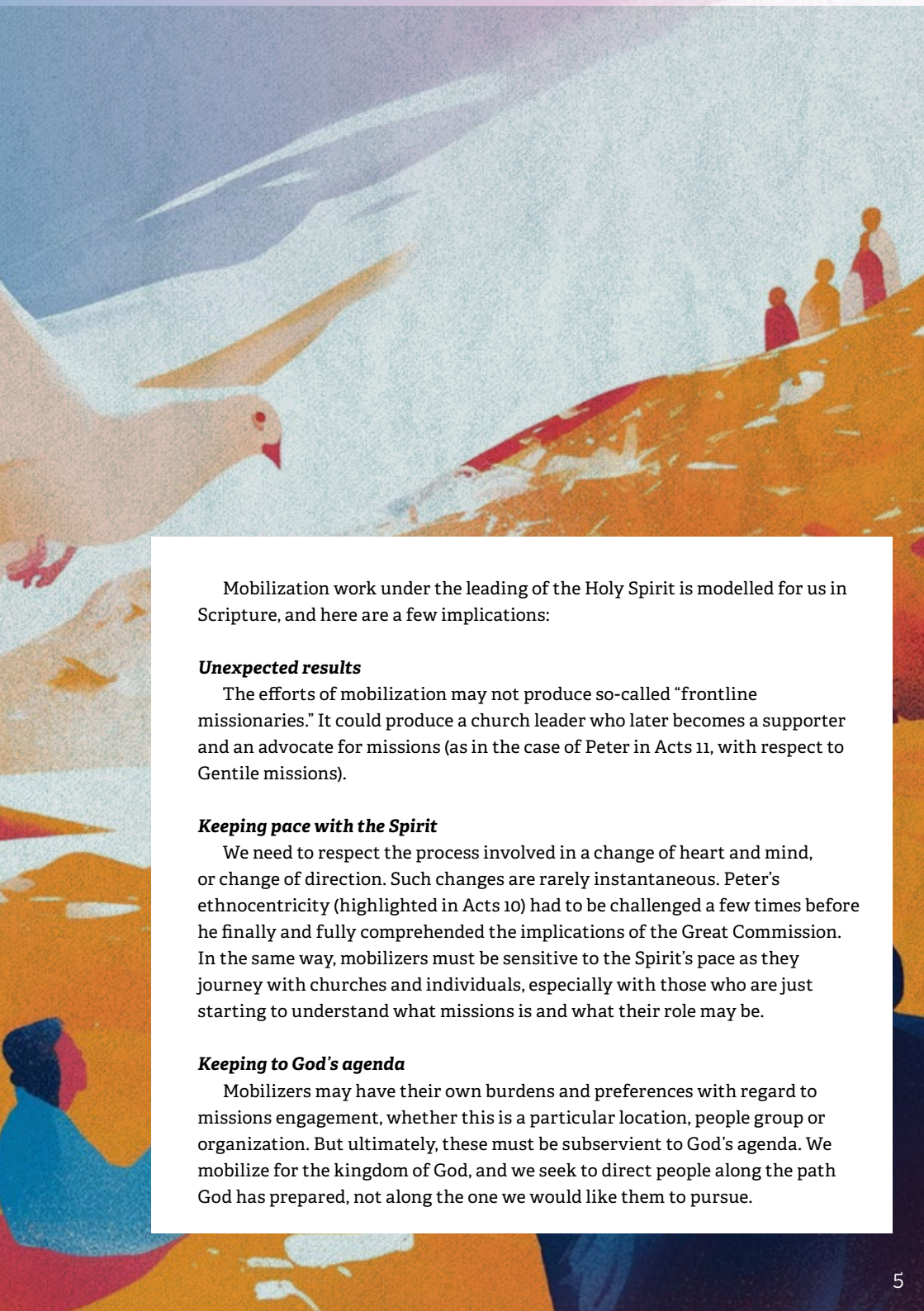
The same is true today. Mobilization is not simply about recruiting individuals to the mission field. It is also about preparing the local church community to send out workers. This requires a strong conviction and commitment among



mobilizers – for mobilizing a community is complicated and difficult. Sending communities or networks of communities are varied, and just as missionaries need to learn deeply about the communities they are sent to, mobilizers need to get to know and understand the communities who will send missionaries. This means we need to invest more time and effort in mobilization before workers are sent.

2. Spirit-led and Spirit-dependent Mobilization

It can be tempting to depend heavily on human effort to achieve results, even in the area of mobilization. This is especially true today when we have access to a lot of marketing strategies, as well as technologies that can help further the work. These are neutral tools and not wrong in themselves – they do however become a snare when we allow them to dictate how we mobilize. It is beyond human effort to move people to think (and act) differently, and ultimately every person's decision to engage in God's work in missions is a spiritual one. This means that the journey towards that decision is also a spiritual journey. This being so, taking steps forward requires dependence on the Holy Spirit.



Mobilization work under the leading of the Holy Spirit is modelled for us in Scripture, and here are a few implications:

Unexpected results

The efforts of mobilization may not produce so-called “frontline missionaries.” It could produce a church leader who later becomes a supporter and an advocate for missions (as in the case of Peter in Acts 11, with respect to Gentile missions).

Keeping pace with the Spirit

We need to respect the process involved in a change of heart and mind, or change of direction. Such changes are rarely instantaneous. Peter’s ethnocentricity (highlighted in Acts 10) had to be challenged a few times before he finally and fully comprehended the implications of the Great Commission. In the same way, mobilizers must be sensitive to the Spirit’s pace as they journey with churches and individuals, especially with those who are just starting to understand what missions is and what their role may be.

Keeping to God’s agenda

Mobilizers may have their own burdens and preferences with regard to missions engagement, whether this is a particular location, people group or organization. But ultimately, these must be subservient to God’s agenda. We mobilize for the kingdom of God, and we seek to direct people along the path God has prepared, not along the one we would like them to pursue.

An abstract background featuring warm, textured colors of orange, yellow, and red. In the upper right, two hands are depicted in a reaching gesture, rendered in shades of red and orange. The overall style is painterly and expressive.

3. Integrity in Mobilization

Jesus promised His disciples — and all others who wanted to follow him — a God-centered life that would not be easy. Instead, He said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.” (Luke 9:23,24). Jesus knew that most people did not truly understand what it meant to follow Him, nor did He compromise His message to make it easier for people. In Luke 14:25-34, He warns His listeners to count the cost. When God called Paul to Gentile missions, the only promise made to him was one that Barnabas conveyed: “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name (Acts 9:16).”

Missions engagement implies following the call of Jesus to walk a certain path. For mobilizers, part of the challenge is how to present this to those considering what it might mean for them. Is it to be presented as a romantic vision of a Christian living a fulfilling life as he or she serves God overseas? Or as a life that will be challenging and costly - but absolutely worth it? How should mobilizers spell out the costs to be counted, and at the same time gently guide people forward in their missions journey?



Popular culture is strongly influencing the Christian community with its consumeristic paradigm, making the task of preparing and challenging people to go to the mission field radically counter-cultural. While society promises to give people what they want, mobilization invites people to give up what they have.

Hard as it may be, we must mobilize God's way. The consumeristic approach of "attracting" people to missions with promises of immediate and visible rewards and results in this life may well be effective in drawing people into service. However, will they attract the kind of people suitable for the frontlines – people prepared to take up their cross daily and follow Jesus?

Mobilizers need to consider carefully the biblical integrity of missions message content – whether in preaching, missions awareness presentations, discipleship-follow up or media development. We need to ensure that our delivery of the message and invitation to missions engagement are reflective of Jesus' approach.

3. Mobilization as Spiritual Discipleship

The apostle Peter had a number of discipleship lessons to learn before he was ready to begin ministering to Gentiles. He had heard the Great Commission – yes. He had watched Jesus minister to Gentiles as well as Jews – yes. But deep down inside he still believed that Gentiles were “unclean” in God’s sight. He needed to hear these words from the Lord, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (Acts 10:15) and then share with others, “God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.” (Acts 10:28)

Later, after hearing Cornelius’ story, Peter says, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.” (Acts 10:34–35) He had finally come to understand — through a number of difficult and unusual set of encounters — that he should not only be concerned for his fellow Jews. It was then that Peter stepped out of his comfort zone and obeyed.

Mobilization is more than giving churches and individuals information about the lost or the unreached. This reality, though heart-breaking, does not always move people to action.



Some reasons for this may be:

- A lack of personal and vital experience of Christ – some may attend church, but do not really understand Jesus' teaching
- Self-preoccupation – involvement in missions may challenge or obstruct personal dreams and desires.
- Unawareness of actual conditions in other parts of the world – some may believe there are no more unreached peoples because of the internet and ease of travel; or that people from certain religious blocs are generally hostile and generally not open to the Gospel, thus too risky to reach out to!
- Theological confusion and rationalization – certain doctrines like hyper-Calvinism, the belief that God in His sovereignty has elected who will be saved, so we can simply trust Him to do that. This undermines the Christian responsibility in missions and overlooks the many examples in Scripture of God choosing to partner with His people in fulfilling His purposes. At one point in his quest to mobilize the British church, William Carey was rebuked with these words, "Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine." This mode of thinking is not uncommon today and this is just one example among many theological teachings that keep people from being involved in missions.
- Satan's attacks – we often relate spiritual warfare with what goes on in the mission frontlines. We need to realize that he attacks on all fronts and at every opportunity, though he may do it more subtly before a missionary is sent out. Discouragements, lies and division are just some of the enemy's strategies to keep people from the mission.

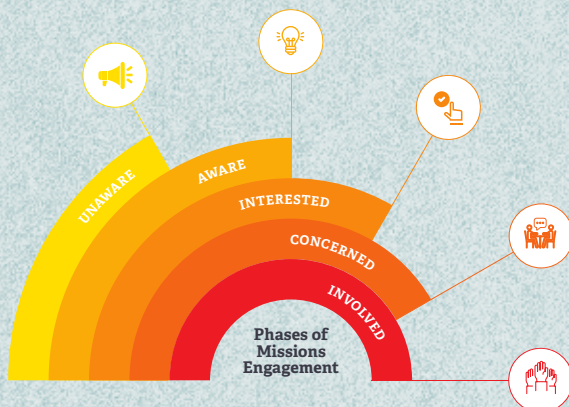
These reasons for resistance can only be resolved by a deep and growing relationship with God, and a growing desire to do His will. Just as teachers cannot make students learn but can foster an environment that promotes learning, mobilizers cannot create spiritual vibrancy in people but can cultivate favourable conditions for mobilization. We want churches and individuals to get involved in missions both with all of their hearts and for the right reasons – including a desire to obey God wholeheartedly and to play their part in His kingdom coming on earth.



Best Mobilization Practices

How do we put these biblical principles into practice?

We have to start where people are. This may sound obvious, but it needs to be emphasized. Mobilization is like a journey — often a long and winding one — from total unawareness to deep, ongoing engagement. This is true whether we are talking about individual Christians or church communities. As we pursue the various phases of this journey, there will be conditions and factors that help, or hinder, our progress.



OMF Mobilization training has developed this chart which shows the phases an individual or a church tends to go through before missions engagement. It is a process of being at first unaware (or vaguely aware) of what missions is to being aware (some may start here depending on their background or church context) to being interested (starting to ask questions, may still be detached) to concerned and finally to involved (which may in itself have sub-

phases of deepening involvement).

There are many factors involved that can encourage or block people from moving forward. There will also be overlaps in moving people/churches along, but this chart presents the basic process of an individual's missions journey.

The chart may look linear, but as we journey with people and be mindful of all the different factors, circumstances and even spiritual conditions, we know that this is not always straightforward.

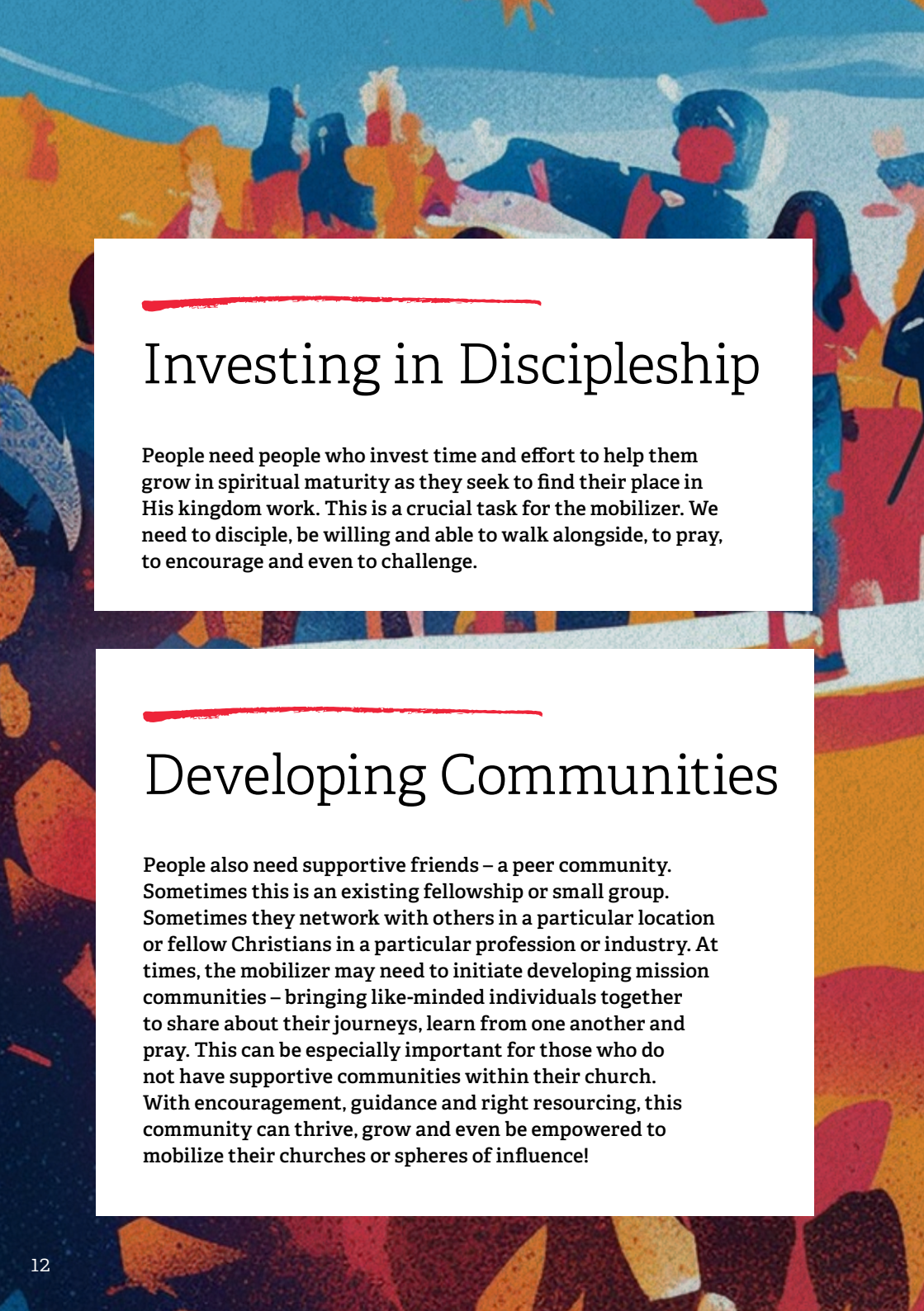
Investing in Learning and Un-learning

Learning is foundational if we want to move people along in their journey – learning from the Bible, learning from history, learning from good and bad modern examples, learning from personal interactions with serving missionaries.

We also need to invest time in “un-learning” – that is, correcting wrong ideas and exposing myths. It involves discerning where wrong impressions have been given, unbiblical views shared, or misinformation passed on – and boldly but gently teaching truth.

Emphasizing Prayer

From the beginning to end of this journey, it is important to stress the vital role of prayer in equipping and guiding people. God moves through prayer; and those who pray are constantly reminded that missions work is God’s work. He is after all, the Lord of the Harvest. People also need prayer partners or a prayer community, and prayer resources. Without these, their journey may be unnecessarily hindered or completely blocked.



Investing in Discipleship

People need people who invest time and effort to help them grow in spiritual maturity as they seek to find their place in His kingdom work. This is a crucial task for the mobilizer. We need to disciple, be willing and able to walk alongside, to pray, to encourage and even to challenge.

Developing Communities

People also need supportive friends – a peer community. Sometimes this is an existing fellowship or small group. Sometimes they network with others in a particular location or fellow Christians in a particular profession or industry. At times, the mobilizer may need to initiate developing mission communities – bringing like-minded individuals together to share about their journeys, learn from one another and pray. This can be especially important for those who do not have supportive communities within their church. With encouragement, guidance and right resourcing, this community can thrive, grow and even be empowered to mobilize their churches or spheres of influence!

An abstract background featuring a collage of colorful, hand-painted shapes and figures. In the upper left, there are silhouettes of people's heads in dark blue and red. To the right, a large, light orange winged figure, possibly a dove, is depicted. The background is filled with various geometric and organic shapes in shades of blue, orange, red, and yellow, creating a vibrant and textured effect.

Connecting with and Resourcing Churches

The local church plays a critical role in preparing missionaries and in establishing a solid sending base for them. Mobilizers need to grab hold of opportunities to mobilize churches and church pastors, not simply potential goers. These could be through preaching, teaching in Sunday School, youth fellowships or disciple groups. Offering to support the pastor in any of their missions-related effort is a great way to build trust and develop good relationship. Church pastors, once they catch the vision, can open many doors for mobilization. Mobilizers need to get to know church leaders and mission committees, and to keep them provided with relevant, up-to-date mission resources. There may also be opportunities to provide training or consultation to the church to ensure that their missions involvement is strategic and carefully thought through. This is not only good and important for missionaries-in-preparation, but for the whole church. Churches also need to journey from unawareness to a committed engagement in missions, similar to individuals.

There are instances when a potential missionary comes from a church that does not see missions as a priority. This can make the journey lonely for the individual. Mobilizers can help to encourage individuals in mobilizing the church. Depending on how open the church is, this will take a lot of grace and patience.



Conclusion

Doing mobilization God's way can be both challenging and affirming. His ways are not always predictable and can involve a lot of waiting. We may also be challenged as we strive to listen and seek His wisdom, as this requires us to remain teachable and servant-hearted. But as we see God work out results according to His timing and His will, we are affirmed and encouraged that He has used us in mobilizing others.

Reflection Questions

1. List the people, circumstances and resources that encouraged you in your own missions journey.

2. List the people circumstances and resources that discouraged you in your own missions journey.

3. Reflecting on your own journey and on the people who were part of it, what are some good Biblical Principles these people practice? What principles are often overlooked? Why would some principles be used more and why are other principles overlooked?

4. Which of the best practices above seem most difficult to you? Why? How can these difficulties be overcome?

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