



## Transcriptions

### The Church That Cares

Ted Ward

**Annotation:** *Houghton College Missions Conference, Houghton, NY, November 4, 1973.* Ted Ward advocates involvement in short-term missions and challenges churches to be more aware of their particular responsibilities in recognizing and supporting missionary endeavor. Missions begin from the local church, the assembly of believers.



Within the last few years, one of the most important changes in missions has been the advent of a legitimate way for people to have short exposures in mission's activity. The general label thrown on that sort of activity is short-term missions or short-term mission assignments, short-term missionaries. When this first began, there was quite a bit of consternation within the establishment as to whether or not that was a good idea because, after all, the people weren't thoroughly committed to a lifetime at a certain longitude, a certain altitude, a certain latitude; obviously they weren't called by the Spirit. Never mind the fact that Paul couldn't seem to find his latitude and longitude and altitude during his career.

But short-terms has ushered in, I believe, a very legitimate way to reach three important goals for many young Christians and for the church, at large. And I was a fairly early supporter of the short-term idea, even when it was rather unpopular, because I saw in it a possibility to create opportunities, ways for service, for an even larger number of people within the church of Jesus Christ; especially young people who wanted somehow to find a way to invest themselves for some particular block of time in their lives in a dedicated service of a full-time sort.

Secondly, I saw it as an opportunity through which individuals who felt that maybe God could use them in a certain sort of a way could put that to a legitimate test in which they would have a chance to discover more of what the Holy Spirit was making of them as individuals and as personalities.

And third, I saw in short-term missions the very important possibility of bringing more enlightenment into the church with reference to the realities of missions. I believe that one of the most serious problems in missions in the modern world is the distance between the church and the missionary; or, more generally, between the domestic church situation and the situation to which missionaries are being sent. And I saw the possibility in short-term missions of a kind of traffic of young people moving away from a community for a year, two years, maybe just three months, and then moving back into that community maybe never again to be a “full-time missionary”; but ever and always to be a more informed, more aware, more concerned member of that local church. And I have maintained that even if no missionaries, in the full-time sense, were recruited from short-term missions, the whole operation would still be blessed of God in terms of the enriching of the experiences in the local church. I believe this profoundly.

It is based on a premise that I am sure so many of you here share and, yet, so often we find almost neglected: that missions begins from the local church, from the assembly of believers, and is an expression of what God is doing in *them*. *That* I’d like to talk with you about this morning in the title, “The Church that Cares.” I believe that no missionary conference is complete without an attention, a deliberate specific attention, to the issue of what is the role of the local church in missions. I’m a troublemaker, and I have asked the question many times in smaller congregations than this where it’s a little more manageable. What can a Christian, a member of this church, do for missions? And I quickly get a few hands in the air and I say, “Alright, what do you say?” and first thing, “We can support missions and missionaries.” Amen.

Another hand and a few hands are left, “We can pray for missionaries.” Amen. And now I have no hands left in the air. Beside the idea of somehow financially supporting and praying for, I find in many congregations a total lack of understanding of the role of the church in missions; or, at least, an unwillingness to verbalize it, to be more generous about it. I’m sure I wouldn’t find that here, and I say that sincerely because I know the stake of this church in missions. And I do not speak as if condemning this church; I speak rather to enrich and encourage your hearts. And especially to relate to the young people in the college—who are here with us today—who will, in the next few years, very necessarily come to grips with the question of what is the role of the church in missions. Because I believe there’re some issues confronting the church in North America that are going to make this a very important battle zone, and we’re going to have to have young people who have some clear understanding of the role of the local church in missions. Because it’s going to be increasingly possible for us to say, even as the United States Foreign Aid program said recently with reference to Brazil, “They no longer need our help. They are on their feet.”

It is a fact that the church of Jesus Christ is well planted in virtually every nation of the world. The church of Jesus Christ is on the move in certain other nations more aggressively than it is in our own. It’s going to be very possible for us to say, “They don’t really need our help.” And I believe that the issue of church and mission will become a battlefield. Budgets will become tighter. We’ll begin to spend more money on ourselves. We will, in fact, collect less money because we have less pressure on us to do so. And little by little the church of North America can so easily fall into a

kind of isolation that some of the churches of Western Europe fell into within the last two centuries. It can happen here.

So I call to your attention for encouragement and edification ten points regarding the church that cares. I believe that the church that cares is involved in the world. To be involved in the world and the world scene and the world picture and the world awareness is where it starts. I read for you, and pardon me, a fairly long passage of the words of our Lord in his farewell prayer in the presence of his disciples fixes our attention on his concern for his church. And I read this as introduction in the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of John beginning with the 1<sup>st</sup> verse [transcribed here in New International Version],

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. <sup>2</sup>For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. <sup>3</sup>Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup>I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. <sup>6</sup>"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. <sup>8</sup>For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup>I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. <sup>11</sup>I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. <sup>12</sup>While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup>I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. <sup>15</sup>My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

The church that cares is involved with the totality of the world in the same sense that Jesus Christ was keenly aware that he was not part of it, but keenly aware that he had been in it for a purpose. And when he gave account to his Father, he said, "I have finished the work. I have been involved and I have brought out from the world those that were yours and I have preserved them." And he prays that his disciples would be given the same sort of resources that he had had as they would take his concern for the world and perpetuate it. The church that cares is involved with the whole world and there is no way for the church of Jesus Christ to justify itself in a nationalism or in an isolationism of separation from the needs and the cares of the whole world. The church that cares also reaches out.

In John 13, we have that beautiful incident when Jesus performed that very functional and necessary labor that someone had to perform, of washing the feet of his disciples. And as that episode is concluded, Jesus calls attention to it in the manner of a good teacher after setting an example. He says, "Do you realize what we've just done? Do you realize what's happened? How do you explain it? Can you understand it?" And he concludes that with this particular statement, "If I,

then, the Lord and Teacher washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you should also do as I did to you." Now I ask you, in that perspective how do you read John 3:16? If God so loved that he gave the most precious thing he had for the redemption of man, does the church of Jesus Christ justify itself with doing anything less than giving the most precious thing and things that it has? The church of Jesus Christ is involved in reaching out. The church that cares, reaches. To reach is an act. It's not just a state of mind. It's not just a willingness; it's an act. How can our church be involved in missions? By reaching. The church that cares is motivated by love more than by duty.

Now I call your attention to the fact that—I'm aware as you are—that in Luke 12:48 we have one of those rather rare references. They're there, but they're rather rare, that say, "From everyone who has been given much, shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, they will ask all the more." This is not only with reference to God, but I think this is with reference to the general state of human expectations. That is not a frequent theme in the Word of God. However, it suggests duty and it suggests a concern that should be specially given to those who have riches and have the wherewithal to share.

I find, rather, a dominant theme coming through in the framework of 1<sup>st</sup> John where in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter beginning at the 19<sup>th</sup> verse we find some criteria that are laid down as more expressive of the motivations of the church and of the Christian. 1 John 4:19-5:3: "We love," and it does not say because we have to, but it says,

. . . because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup>Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup>And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. <sup>2</sup>This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. <sup>3</sup>In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome . . . [transcribed here in New International Version]

We're motivated by love; the love pattern laid down by God and reflected in Jesus Christ. This drives us even more than a sense of obliged, required duty. The church that cares is motivated by love. I call your attention in 1 Timothy in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> verses. There's an instruction there to Timothy for him to pass along to the rich—because there were the rich in the church at that time—instructing the rich not to put their store in the treasures of this world, but to be instructed to share, to do good with their riches, to give. This is the motive of love and this motive of love has been, praise God, characteristic of much of the church of Jesus Christ in North America. It must continue to be. It absolutely must continue to be so long as God gives us that prosperity that makes it possible.

Very few Americans who have not traveled have any idea how far above the mean standard, the standard of living in the United States really is. Now you can find the very wealthy in every country, but what you cannot find in most countries is the middle class. You find the very very rich who tend to be the very very oppressive; and you find much more in most nations, well over 90%, that we would class as "abject poverty." Never let the glossy traveler from another nation give you the impression that that nation is full of such people. With the exception of certain sections of Asia, particularly Japan, and certain counties in Western Europe, the rank-and-file of the human being on this globe is in such abject poverty and need that it is almost impossible for the American to

understand it. We talk about our poverty pockets in cities and I tell you that some of our pockets of poverty do deserve our attention but compared, again, to the world standards some of them look like wealth.

We are in a world where our riches are, in a sense, an embarrassment; and as the church of Jesus Christ in other lands looks at our riches they cannot understand why we are not even more generous. But our motivation should not be one of guilt, should not be one of obligation, but should be one of love sharing that which we have. The church that cares is motivated by love.

The church that cares is also in the business of seeking out workers. This is a role that I find many churches failing to exercise. I suspect that it is not the case here because of the presence of the student body, but many of you as you leave this place will go into churches where that role is not performed. One of the most pathetic things that I know of is the young Christian who feels that God has called him to a particular work who cannot find within his own church those who will even pray with him about that call; to say nothing of any aggressive committee within that church actually looking over the young people to ask God prayerfully, “Who among our people—among our young people, God, would you have us to set aside?”

The 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> are what we might call process functions in the church that cares in my list of 10. The church that cares seeks out workers, ordains or sets apart, sends, and supports. I call your attention to this process as reflected in several Scriptures. We’ve used some of these on the services of the mission week. The church at Antioch was involved in this process in Acts 13:1-4. The church of Jerusalem was involved in Acts 11:20 and following. In Acts 15, we find an inter-church communication being handed over to those that had been sought out, ordained, and sent. And then we find in Acts 15 and Philippians 4, if you’re interested in pursuing those, this function of support. And I don’t intend to make a great argument of it here because I know that you’re aware that, above all else, the support for maintenance of that person and persons that the church has sent out is absolutely necessary. But I remind you that these processes are all part of a totality and no one of them alone suffices.

The church that cares is involved in seeking out, even within itself. I ask you, “Does your missionary committee in your local church have, as its responsibility, the looking over the young people who are coming along—highschoolers, college young people—and counseling with them with reference to the possibility that God may be calling them?” I find instead, in so many cases, the missionary committee somehow insulates itself from the youngster who comes and says, “I may need some support next summer because I think God wants me to go into short-term work.” And they have all kinds of elaborate ways to push those people back down “so that their money isn’t wasted.” Is your church seeking out?

Is your church ordaining in the same sense of dedication that it ordains the pastor; that it ordains the other workers who are distinctly set aside? We find that in the early church, men were ordained to be sent and, thus, the tradition of missions in the church. It is not to be left to mission agencies. It is not to be left to management services called “mission boards.” It is not to be left to outside groups. It is to be an integral function of the local church. Now I maintain that those agencies can be also useful to the local church and the vehicles and means through which the sending is accomplished in an orderly manner, but the local church has no way to get out of that business. Seeking out, ordaining, sending, and obviously supporting.

I call your attention specifically to Romans 15. Romans chapter 15 verse 22 [NIV]: “This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.”

What do you suppose he meant by “helped on my way?” He wasn’t talking about cookies. He was talking about financial needs. And he says, “I’m expecting this,” and he had every right to. The one who has been sent by Jesus Christ has every right to expect, from the churches that are involved in his ministry, those supports. “Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord’s people there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord’s people in Jerusalem.” [Romans 15:15-26 NIV]

And I believe, here in this context, supported by that contribution as well. “They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.” [Romans 15: 27 NIV]

He puts it right on the line. He says, if we share spiritual burdens with the group, we also share their material burdens. The church that cares, responds to needs.

How often we say, “We’re willing to provide funds to send our own,” but we’re not willing to listen when other people in other lands say, “We have a financial need.” There are organizations within the United States that have a desperate time finding funds. They can find people, but they can’t find funds. They can’t raise money within the church because the church is only interested in supporting its own people. What a desperate situation especially when you realize that many missionaries are, in fact, truck drivers, bookkeepers, typists, telephone answerers, and so forth; jobs that could, in fact, be carried less expensively and more efficiently by local workers in many cases. But the church is willing to send out the young lady to be a typist but not willing to send that same money which would hire six local typists. Now something’s got to be done, friends, to wake us up to this whole question of stewardship.

I’ve already pointed out that I’m squarely on the line in terms of sending those whom God has called, but I think we have to also be willing to go beyond that: to provide resources to meet needs, to provide funds that can be used even more efficiently, in some cases, than by sending out Americans to do jobs that are basically non-missionary kinds of activities. The church that cares, responds to needs.

We’re moving into an era, in the church, when we’re going to have to face this one very squarely because evangelization in many countries from now on is not is not going to be done so much by missionaries as by members of the national church established in that land who will be carrying the cause of Christ forward with encouragement, support, comradeship, collegueship, and fellow evangelistic effort on the part of American missionaries, but not any longer sponsored exclusively by the American missionary. And the question is how is such work going to be supported in countries where there is no way, no way to raise real funds.

Number 9: The church that cares, persists. I call your attention to Luke 9 where our Lord, in one of his teachings, made a very hard statement. The church that cares, persists. Luke 9:57-62

[NIV]: “As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.’ He said to another man, ‘Follow me.’ But he replied, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Still another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.’ Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.’

The church that cares, persists. The church that cares follows through on its commitments. It never backs down. Once it has committed itself to the support of a certain operation, program, or person—barring a clear hand of the Holy Spirit diverting that energy to some other activity—the church persists. The church follows through.

The 10<sup>th</sup> point, and the one that I would close with, is that the church that cares is at one with the world; and the work of Christ within that world is at one with that world or part of that world that is the body of Christ. And, again, may I call you to this most profound of all the writings pertaining to our Lord’s statements in the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of John as we continue with his prayer on behalf of those disciples. And I call your attention on behalf of us because he prayed this prayer and carefully included us: John 17:18-26 [NIV], the church that cares is at one with the work of Christ in the world.

As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

The church that cares is involved with the world.

The church that cares reaches out.

The church that cares is motivated by love.

The church that cares seeks.

The church that cares ordains.

The church that cares sends.

The church that cares supports.

The church that cares responds to needs.

The church that cares persists.

The church that cares is at one with the work of Christ in the world.