

# ***Lutheran Mission Matters***

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# Gospel Power Overcomes Barriers

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**Abstract:** This reflection paper is an attempt to share my struggle in figuring out how God is working in my life and how I can relinquish my efforts to control my life. This is a real struggle because there are so many things, like worries, work challenges, family problems, and even successes, that draw attention to me and my wanting to be in control. I have looked at the whole package of Barnabas and Saul being set apart and then released for mission as a model of the sending and the going. Then the Centurion is such an example of faith in the power of Jesus. The purpose of this article is to help others to see Jesus, to go to Him, and then to be released for mission.

Reading and studying the Bible account of the centurion who wanted Jesus to heal his servant/slave made me take a good look at myself. At the same time, *Lutheran Mission Matters* announced the theme for this issue—“Released for Mission,” which is a good translation of Acts 13:1–3. I have been thinking about what this phrase can mean to a layperson like myself.

What does “Released for Mission” really mean? Who is and how is one released for mission?

I am on the foreign mission field. I have left my home and family to travel far away to a new culture with new strange foods. I have this all in order. I have been released for mission, right? Being on the foreign mission field has nothing to do with this statement other than it says where I am at this time. It gives my location.

Released for Mission is a state of mind. In whom do I trust? Do I worry about what I need to do? Am I proud and pat myself on the back for a success? Wherever I am, it is so easy to become bogged down in my own abilities. I think I can do something or I am afraid of trying something new or challenging. Each of us has



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God-given abilities that we can and should use. However, I think that the phrase “Released for Mission” does not mean looking at my abilities and what I can do. The focus cannot be on me. Someone rightly stated before we headed off to Hong Kong, “It is not about you!” It hurts my pride but it is so true and a good reminder.

In reality, I have to ask, “Where did I start going wrong?” So many things pull me in all directions. Some of these things are political questions, right liturgy, recognition on the foreign field, popularity, hurt feelings, worries about tasks, pain in our families, too many tasks, an unanswered prayer, etc. Amid all this chaos is the question, “In what are we grounded?”

In Luke 7:1–10, we are told that when the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent word to Jesus to heal his servant. Wow! The centurion heard of Jesus and went to Him for help. This is the foundation of the expression, “Released for Mission”: to hear about Jesus and to go to Him. There are probably many other things we can learn from this story in Luke 7, but I want to hang on to this special foundation. When we hear of Jesus, we are to go to Him. Jesus can’t be an after-thought but rather the starting point. We are all in the fast pace of today’s world and can very easily get caught up in busyness and many tasks. Who has time to be still and know that He is God?

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How do we put Jesus first in our lives? How do we not get caught up in the many political factions, false pride, worries about loved ones, many tasks and deadlines? We are human, and there are troubles in families, in workplaces, and even in our churches.

How do we focus on Jesus as our power and force? Yes, we have been given many abilities. The centurion also was an important man. He had many men under him and gave orders that were followed. He was a powerful man. He still went to Jesus, though, because he recognized that Jesus had the power he needed. As lifelong Christians, do we still see the authority of Jesus? Do we recognize His power as what we need in our lives? Do we hear about Jesus and go to Him? We do hear about Jesus in church and in our Bible reading. What is my response? Do I run to Jesus and seek His authority and power in my life?

About my Bible reading—if I say that I read my Bible daily, many would consider this a very good thing. I also like to think it is a good thing. To be clear, the Word is powerful and so it can get in, even if I am distracted. To be honest, I have to admit that I have already read a chapter of the Bible one day, and then the next day I wonder if I had read that chapter. Now, it’s true that God can still use His Word even when I am distracted. Saying that though does not imply that the situation is good. Recently, I was at a presentation about how to hear God in Bible reading. It was

good to look at what I do and how it could be better. The first thing was to pray for the Holy Spirit before reading. Then read the chapter, section, or even verse several times to let something hit you as something meaningful for your life. (There was a caution not to get caught up in something that you don't understand. Why did this happen? Why is this different from another Gospel? These kinds of questions are for research and are good in their place but not for listening to God in our lives.) Personal Bible reading has a spiritual goal, not an academic goal.

When we are truly living in the authority and power of Jesus, then we can be released for mission. It is not about me, but about Jesus. How do we do this? I think everyone needs to find his or her own way. For example, if I am checking off Bible reading as one more task in my day, or if I do one of my many tasks and later remember to ask God to bless my efforts, Jesus is an afterthought and not the foundation. These can be used as guidelines to shake up the system. When Jesus is the foundation of everything, only then are we ready to be released for mission, whether it is in Hong Kong, Africa, Chicago, or South Dakota.

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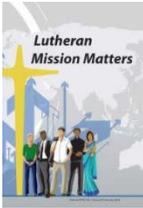
So what could life be like when we are released for mission? My first thoughts are that the outcome doesn't matter when I am out of the picture. I don't need the success. The result is in God's hands. This is very freeing. If I am going into a project or decision and talking with God about it, trusting in Him, I know that He has my back. I have heard this expression a lot lately, and it means much in a relationship. When we trust in God, He has our back—through the process and into the result. When I think of God's having someone's back, I think of Moses. God wanted Moses to go and take His people out of Egypt to the Promised Land. God showed Moses many ways how He would have his back, and yet in Exodus 4, after God says again that He's got it, Moses still shows a lack of trust: "'Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.' But Moses said, 'Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else'" (vv. 12–13). Moses did eventually go, but this account also shows good conversations with God. To be released for mission, we do need this time of conversation with God. For some of us we need more time in prayer. We also may have relapses when we again try to be in control. God is there, though, when He pushes us out of our comfort zone to work for Him.

My story includes my resistance to getting out of my comfort zone. When we decided to go overseas after retirement, it was so that my husband would be able to teach overseas and I would go along to take care of him and do some volunteering. When we were asked to come to Hong Kong, I was told that I would also have to work in a school. That was not part of my plan. I retired much sooner than my husband and was doing just fine without a position of my own. When I prayed about

this, I told God that if we were to make this move, He would have to give me what I needed to do the work. I felt very inadequate. I was put in a secondary school with eight hundred students and fifty teachers. It is a Cantonese school and most people don't really want to speak English. It is a challenging situation. I am to help with the English and also share Jesus in a busy high school setting. It was out of my comfort zone, big time. I won't say that I have made this move always with grace and confidence, but God has put me into this school and He is using me even when I flounder. I still have times when I am like Moses and ask, "Do I really have to do this?" but I am remembering to talk with God more. Being Released for Mission is ongoing. God has our back as we go out, releasing us to forget about ourselves and do things for God and others.

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In closing, I would like to go back to the centurion. We hear about Jesus, we go to Him and are on the way into Mission. We are "Released for Mission."



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