



*The Fourth Journey*  
*The Story of Military Missions*  
*From The Book of Acts*

*Handbook for*  
*Churches, Chaplains and*  
*Para-Church Ministries*

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## *The Military Missions Network*

*A network of evangelical Churches, Chaplains, and  
Para-church Ministries fulfilling the Great  
Commission of Jesus Christ by reaching, equipping and  
ministering to military members and families  
worldwide.*

*[www.MilitaryMissionsNetwork.com](http://www.MilitaryMissionsNetwork.com)*

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# Introduction

At first glance it might seem that the New Testament has little to say about the subject of missions and ministry as applied to the military. However, a closer examination reveals that there is indeed, contained on the pages of the New Testament, both a story and theology of military missions and ministry.

But it would only make sense that this would be the case. After all, Jesus was born and Christianity was established under one of the most dominating military powers in the history of the world – the Roman Empire. Everywhere, on the pages of the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles, there are soldiers and government officials. The epistles, too, are filled with military terminology and illustrations. The military presence is everywhere. But so is the power of the gospel! And so is the Church that has been given the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Considering the power of the gospel and the glory of the infant Church, it would be amazing if the Roman government and military had not been significantly impacted by the early Christian movement. Considering God's wisdom and sovereignty, it would be remarkable if He had not harnessed, in some strategic way, the might and influence of the Roman Empire for His missionary purpose. Scripture emphatically affirms that God uses human power and authority for His purpose and glory.

The Bible is not silent about the matter. This handbook is primarily about the biblical and theological basis for military missions and ministry. From Acts, an attempt is made to lay a scriptural foundation for this important aspect of missions and ministry. With this foundation in mind, a premise for military missions and ministry is established. Thoughts are shared about implications and applications. In thinking about a holistic approach of military missions and ministry, a case is made concerning the need for a military missions and ministry network.

This handbook also introduces and lays out the basic purpose behind the Military Missions Network. The MMN is not so much an organization as it is a spontaneous emerging network of chaplains, churches and para-church ministries which are coming together across the globe to fulfill the Great Commission.

Gary Sanders  
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# 1

## The Fourth Journey The Story of Military Missions from Acts Acts 21:15-28:31

What is traditionally referred to as the Apostle Paul's "journey to Rome", described in detail in Acts 21-28, is here being referred to as the fourth missionary journey. It has been often assumed that during this time period Paul's missionary plans and work had been interrupted and put on hold by his incarceration and corresponding trials. The traditional view is that Paul resumed his missionary activity after his release from his first imprisonment in Rome, which is recorded in Acts 28.

### The proposal of a fourth missionary journey

There are several under-girding presuppositions to this thesis of a fourth missionary journey. First, Paul is still a missionary doing missionary kinds of activity during this time period. This is abundantly clear from the narrative itself. As he asserted in 2 Timothy 2:9, though he was at times imprisoned, the Word of God was not! A significant aspect of doing missions and ministry is adjusting to and harnessing all kinds of human opposition and limitation and, as a result, taking the gospel of Christ into places like prisons (Acts 16:23-40). Second, during his incarceration, he is still laying the apostolic groundwork for the gospel in the Roman world, especially as the Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 2:42; Gal. 2:8-9; Eph. 2:20). Third, primary and secondary missions objectives are clear and discernable from the story, providing reasonable evidence that this was indeed a Spirit-inspired, fourth missionary journey.

The fourth missionary journey of the Apostle Paul began in Jerusalem and ended in Rome. The duration of this journey, the longest of all his missionary journeys, was somewhere around five years, from approximately 58 to 62 A.D.<sup>1</sup> This journey had obviously been on his heart for some time. Scripture reveals that during his third missionary journey he openly shared his plans and desires to travel to Jerusalem and then on to Rome, and even beyond there to Spain, for the purpose of furthering the cause of Christian missions (Acts 19:21; 20:22-24; Rom. 1:10-15; 15:23, 28-32). The terminology he uses in these passages seems to suggest that he hoped and believed this journey would prove to be the will of God.

But not only was it in the mind of the Apostle Paul to go on a fourth missionary journey to Rome, it was also apparently the will of God. During this fourth journey he referred to himself as a "*prisoner of the Lord*" (Eph. 3:1; 4:1) for the cause of the gospel (Philemon 1:1, 9, 13). Jesus himself appeared to Paul in the midst of this journey, declaring that he would testify on behalf of the gospel in Rome as he had in Jerusalem (Acts 23:11) – the beginning and ending points of the journey. While on this journey, an angel also appeared to Paul confirming the

fact that he would go to Rome and “*stand before Caesar*” (Acts 27:24; see also Acts 9:15).

In the narrative concerning the third journey the statement is recorded that, “*Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’*” (Acts 19:21, ESV). The fourth journey was evidently the will of God for a specific missionary purpose. What Paul did not anticipate was that this particular missionary journey would be under the custody and in the context of the Roman government and military (Prov. 16:9; James 4:13-15).

### **The nature of the fourth missionary journey**

Apparently this journey was much different than what Paul had originally expected and from what he had experienced while on his first three missionary journeys. From the perspective of hindsight he declared that his circumstances while on this journey had actually turned out for the greater progress of the gospel (Phil. 1:12-13). He was apparently saying that what God had providentially planned for the fourth journey had actually turned out to be more effective, from the standpoint of timing and strategy, than if he had been on another journey similar to that of the first three! It seems safe to assume that he originally had in mind for this journey (from Jerusalem to Rome and then on to Spain) something of the same nature as that of his first three journeys.

This fourth journey was evidently meant to be different from the previous three. On those earlier journeys his primary focus was on evangelistic preaching, teaching, making disciples, establishing local churches, guiding and strengthening the churches, and training and ordaining church leaders (Acts 14:21-27; 15:36,41; 16:5; 18:23). The primary base of operation for those journeys was the local church (Acts 13:1-4; 14:21-28), although there were other regular places where the missionaries ministered (e.g., Acts 16:13; 17:1-2; 19:9-10).

On this, the fourth journey, the primary base of operation was not the local church but rather places like military barracks, ships, prisons, government halls, and the like. At least a primary focus seems to be on utilizing the social networks of the government and military to advance the gospel. Not being military himself, the only way Paul could do this was by being *with* and *under* the Roman government and military as a prisoner. Apparently, somewhere along the way, he began to see God's strategy in his situation as he insisted on remaining in Roman custody and on standing before Caesar (e.g., Acts 25:10-12, 21). Paul did not stop being a missionary because he was under custody, but rather he did missions and ministry in a different venue. This is exactly the point made in the following comments by William Barclay in speaking about Paul's imprisonment in Rome during the fourth journey.

*“Paul was a prisoner but so far from his imprisonment ending his missionary activity it actually expanded it for himself and for others. In fact, the bonds destroyed the barriers... Paul's imprisonment, so far from shutting the door, opened the door to new spheres of work and activity, into which he would never*

*otherwise have penetrated...His imprisonment had opened the way for preaching the gospel to the finest regiment in the Roman army. No wonder he declared that his imprisonment had actually been for the furtherance of the gospel. All the Praetorian Guard knew why Paul was in prison; many of them were touched for Christ; and the very sight of this gave to the brethren at Philippi fresh courage to preach the gospel and to witness for Christ...Paul's bonds had removed the barriers and given him access to the flower of the Roman army, and his bonds had been the medicine of courage to the brethren at Philippi.”<sup>2</sup>*

### **How the fourth missionary journey strategically advanced the gospel**

How exactly did the fourth journey strategically advance the gospel? Paul and the other believers partnering with him advanced the gospel by utilizing the social networks of the government and military to accomplish several important purposes.

First, he defended, clarified, validated, and vindicated the gospel before Jewish leaders, officials from the Roman government, military commanders and soldiers, and other influential people (Acts 23-26, e.g., Acts 25:26; 27:24). He was also able to successfully defend himself and prove himself not guilty of the charges being brought against him. It was important to the foundation of the Christian movement for the gospel and the Christian church to be officially recognized and legitimized in the eyes of the Roman and Jewish governing authorities and, too, for the leading spokesman of the movement to be vindicated. Put another way, in these early days of the Christian movement the gospel needed to be properly and officially defended. Note the repetition of the use of the word “*defense*” to describe Paul’s ministry during this time (Acts 22:1; 24:10; 25:8, 16; 26:1, 2, 24). Using the same word, he refers to his “*defense and confirmation of the gospel*” and to fact that he had been “*appointed for the defense of the gospel*” (Phil. 1:7, 16).

Keep in mind, too, that part of the purpose of missions is to proclaim the gospel to those who will reject it as well as to those who will accept it (see Acts 13:46; 28:24-29; Rom. 9:17). John Stott states that a major theme of Luke’s narrative in Acts is Jewish opposition. It was this very hostility and rejection, being necessary, which “*justified...Paul’s policy of turning to the Gentiles.*” This was an important way in which the gospel was strategically advanced during this journey.

Second, the Roman government and military provided needed protection for Paul and the other missionaries. The Apostles, especially Paul, and the other early Christian missionaries were essential to the success of the movement. In several incidences Paul would have been killed had it not been for the military and the government. Twice he was rescued from death by the commander Claudius Lysias (Acts 21:32; 23:10, 27; 24:7; 26:21). Paul’s own testimony before King Agrippa was that God had helped him by providing government and military protection (Acts 26:22). Through this protection the gospel and Christian movement was safeguarded and, therefore, strategically advanced.

John Stott, in his commentary on Acts, states, “*Luke’s second and corresponding theme is Roman justice. He consistently presents the Roman authorities as*

*friends of the gospel, not foes. We have already had occasion to notice this. It is not just that the first Gentile convert was a Roman centurion, Cornelius, or that the first convert of Paul's missionary journeys was the Roman proconsul of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus (13:12). It is rather that, whenever they had the opportunity, the Roman authorities defended the Christian missionaries."*<sup>3</sup>

Roland Allen, in his classic book, *"Missionary Methods, St Paul's or Ours?"* makes this same point and goes a step further to say that the Christian movement was "materially assisted", or, in a sense, legitimized, by its context of the Roman Empire. He states, *"Just as he (Paul) refused to preach in native states and passed through large towns in the territory of Antiochus without stopping to preach, so within the Roman province he passed through native provincial towns like Mithia or Vasada in order to preach in Lystra and Derbe – military posts in which there was a strong Roman element. Professor Ramsay has shown that there is in the Acts an apparent intention to contrast the conduct meted out to St Paul by local provincial authorities with that which he received at the hands of Roman officials and to present the Romans in the light of protectors of the Apostle against the persecutions of the Jews.*

*No doubt in selecting as the sphere of his work the centres of Roman administration, St Paul was led by the desire to obtain for himself and for his people the security afforded by a strong government. He felt that as a Roman citizen he could in the last resort expect and receive the protection of Roman officials against the fanatical violence of the Jews; but he did not only seek Roman protection. He found under the Roman government something more than peace and security of travel. He found not only toleration and an open field for his preaching, there was also in the mere presence of Roman officials an influence which materially assisted his work. The idea of the world-wide empire which they represented, the idea of the common citizenship of men of many different races in that one empire, the strong authority of the one law, the one peace, the breaking down of national exclusiveness, all these things prepared men's minds to receive St Paul's teaching of the Kingdom of Christ, and of the common citizenship of all Christians in it."*<sup>4</sup>

Third, a very important part of spreading the gospel has to do with how many people are discussing it in a particular region being considered. To achieve critical mass in the matter of the mass evangelization of the Roman Empire, a lot of people, both believers and unbelievers, in far and wide places had to be talking about the gospel. Obviously, many within the military and government circles of that day did not believe and embrace the gospel of Christ. However, it seems clear from the narrative in Acts and from Paul's comments in Philippians (1:12-13; 4:22) that many people within those circles knew about and were indeed discussing the gospel (Acts 25:14; 26:31). It certainly helped that these were networks of influential and transient people! For this very reason, a legitimate evangelistic method in the New Testament was controversy (Acts 22:21-23; 23:6-10; Rom. 11:13-15; see also Acts 14:19; 16:19; 17:5, 8, 13; 19:23, 29). The gospel was strategically advanced to a great degree on this fourth journey by way of discussion and controversy in and through the courts of unbelievers!

Note what Lenski has to say about this subject regarding the Praetorian Guard from his commentary on Philippians 1:12-13: *“From the time of Tiberius to that of Vespasian this guard consisted of nine cohorts, 1,000 men in each (Tacitus). It was a picked body, all of its members were of Italian birth. They received double pay and enjoyed special privileges, every soldier ranked with the centurions of the regular legions. The entire guard was not always stationed at Rome, certain divisions were at times posted in adjacent towns. Because of its numbers and its position the Praetorian Guard wielded a powerful influence in the state; the emperor often courted its favor and on his ascension bestowed liberal donations upon it.*

*The way in which Paul writes ‘in the entire praetorium’ and then refers to ‘the rest’ evidently has back of it a special connection of Paul’s case with the praetorium. For two years, day after day, soldier after soldier had guarded Paul in his rented house. In this way Paul gained entrance into the praetorian cohorts. His daily guards heard all he said and did, talked about it in their barracks, became interested in the case, and, when it was now up for hearing, when it was established that the imprisonment had to do with this Christ of Paul’s teaching, the whole influential body of the imperial guard became thoroughly conversant with and interested in the case. The people of the capital of the world and its dominating military force, in the remarkable providence of God, through this lowly prisoner Paul, heard the whole gospel story of Christ. Since the imperial court had thus far acted favorably, all this publicity was likewise favorable. No wonder Paul was joyful.”<sup>5</sup>*

Fourth, there were evidently many within these government and military circles that did in fact embrace Jesus Christ and begin to spread the gospel through their corresponding relational networks. This seems to be a reasonable assumption from the text in Philippians and from the narrative in Acts. This assumption is also strengthened by other evidence in the New Testament regarding the response of people within these categories who embraced Christ and His missionary enterprise.

Some of the soldiers of the New Testament who responded favorably to the gospel and, in some cases, with true faith, included the centurion who appealed to Jesus on behalf of his slave (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10); the centurion and soldiers around the cross (Matt. 27:54; Luke 23:47); the soldiers who with sincerity approached John the Baptist on spiritual matters (Luke 3:14); Cornelius and his household and attendants (Acts 10-11); the Praetorian Guard (Phil. 1:12-13); and the officers and government officials who showed kindness toward Paul (Acts 24:23; 27:3). Many soldiers and government officials were exposed to Jesus and the early missionaries. Only God knows how many became believers and were used to help spread the gospel through social networks associated with the military and the government (Phil. 4:22). It is a reasonable hypothesis that this was a real purpose in God’s mind for the fourth journey.

### **The timeline and itinerary of the fourth missionary journey**

During the five-year period of the fourth journey, Paul was *with* and *under* five groupings of soldiers. At times, especially regarding his traveling companions

(Acts 27:2-3), it could be said that other believers (i.e., those believers visiting and ministering within the camp of the military because of the fourth journey) were to some degree or another, *with* and *under* the military. These five groups of soldiers were stationed in Jerusalem, in Antipatris, in Caesarea, on the ships and Island of Malta, and in Rome. Those in Rome included the famous Praetorian Guard.

In Jerusalem, where Paul was arrested, a garrison of soldiers was stationed at the Fortress of Antonia at the northwest corner of the temple complex. There were probably about two hundred soldiers who heard Paul's explanation of the gospel on the stairwell leading to the barracks (Acts 21:32, 40ff). According to the narrative he spent several days in the barracks, most likely exposing some one thousand soldiers (the normal number in a garrison) to the gospel. Later, when it became known that there was a plot to murder Paul, he was taken to Antipatris, a military post about halfway between Jerusalem and Caesarea (Acts 23:31). The text records that he was transported by four hundred and seventy soldiers. Imagine what they must have been hearing and discussing along the way!

From Antipatris, Paul was taken to Herod's Praetorium, the governor's official residence in Caesarea (Acts 23:35). Caesarea was the seat of the Roman government in Judea. Certainly there would have been a good number of soldiers, government officials, and attendants located in Caesarea. All of them would have known the story of Paul and Jesus. Paul was kept in custody in this city for more than two years, during which time his fellow Christians and friends were able to visit him (Acts 24:23). While under custody in Caesarea, Paul was able to give a defense of himself and the gospel to Ananias the high priest, leading Jewish elders and influential men (Acts 24:1; 25:5), a lawyer named Tertullus, Felix the governor and his wife Drusilla (dialogue occurring often, see Acts 24:26), Festus the governor and his council (Acts 25:12), King Agrippa and his wife Bernice, and to military commanders (Acts 25:23). Note the interest of the commander, Claudius Lysias (Acts 22:30; 23:28).

Apparently, there were many soldiers and important officials who heard Paul speak of the things of Christ during his stay in this city (Acts 24:24-26). It is hard to imagine Paul having a better opportunity to advance the gospel than what was given to him by virtue of God providentially placing him *under* the custody of the government and military. Acts 25:23 summarizes well the kinds of opportunity that Paul had to strategically advance the gospel while on his fourth journey. It states, "*So on the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice amid great pomp, and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.*"

Because Paul had appealed to Caesar the decision was made to send him to Rome. Paul, along with his traveling companions, Luke and Aristarchus (Acts 19:29; 27:3), boarded the first of three ships, spending from six to eight months with two hundred and seventy-three other passengers (Acts 27:37), a good number being soldiers. In command was Julius, a centurion of the Augustan cohort (Acts 27:1). During part of their journey, they encountered a fierce storm which lasted two weeks, eventually destroying the ship (the second). Consequently, they were shipwrecked on the Island of Malta.

Paul basically functioned like a military chaplain while on the ships and during their stay on Malta. He offered counsel to the commander, exercised spiritual leadership under the commander, witnessed and ministered to the crew, spoke the Word of God, demonstrated faith, encouraged the crew, ministered in the Spirit, and ultimately was a source of blessing to the unit (Acts 27:1-28:11). After spending three months on Malta, witnessing a spiritual revival which involved the entire island, they set sail for Rome on a third ship. Imagine the impact of this experience on the entire crew and especially on the soldiers who were part of this military mission! For the soldiers it was a military mission. Through God's intervention, for the missionaries it was military missions and ministry!

Finally they arrived by ship in Rome where Paul, being allowed to live in his own rented quarters, was placed under house arrest for two full years (Acts 28:30-31). Paul was constantly being guarded by soldiers from the Praetorian Guard (Acts 28:16; Phil. 1:12-13). From Luke's description Paul had complete freedom to minister. From other New Testament accounts a number of Christians were involved in the ministry. Surely Paul would have had a significant amount of contact with a large number of soldiers and government officials in Rome.

Kenneth Wuest has this to say about Paul's situation in Rome: "*Paul had been living in his own rented quarters near these barracks, guarded by soldiers twenty-four hours a day. He lived for two years with a Roman soldier chained to his wrist. As the different soldiers would take their turn guarding Paul, they would hear the conversations he had with his visitors, conversations full of the gospel and of the Saviour of sinners. They would hear the apostle pray, and would listen as he dictated the epistles he wrote. The noble prisoner would talk to them about their souls, talking in the international Greek so common in those days. Thus, the gospel went through the barracks of the Roman soldiers, a place where it would not have gone, if Paul had not been a prisoner there.*"<sup>6</sup>

Because of the fourth journey, Paul, as well as many other Christians, had a significant amount of meaningful contact with large numbers of soldiers and government officials. This could not have been a coincidence! This could not have been in vain! This alone makes the fourth journey a very strategic and successful missionary journey. Regardless of whether or not the majority of these soldiers and/or government officials believed in the gospel, just their hearing it, discussing it with others, and knowing about Paul's situation was very significant to the strategic advancement of the gospel and to the cause of world missions! This was Paul's main point in Philippians 1:12-13. All of this time Paul spent *with* and *under* the military could be referred to as military missions.

There were other Spirit-inspired missionary objectives for the fourth journey. These included promoting unity and ministering to Jewish believers via the offerings given by Gentile believers (Acts 11:29-30; 24:17; Rom. 15:25-31); preaching and teaching to large numbers of Gentiles and Jews (Acts 21:40-22:23; 23:11; 28:23, 30); the writing of the prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon); effective prison missions and ministry (Acts 27:1; Col. 4:7-18; Philemon 1:10); the encouragement and edification of believers (Acts 28:14-15; Rom. 1:10-12; 15:24, 30; Phil. 1:14); successful

missionary work in various places (Acts 28:1-11); and maybe even medical missions (Luke, the physician, was on the fourth journey; see Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:24; and the “we” sections of Acts; 16:10-40; 20:5-28:31).

The Apostle Paul was not the only Christian on this missionary journey. He had other traveling companions, at least during portions of the journey. Luke and Aristarchus are mentioned by name and included in the narrative (Acts 27:2 with Acts 19:29; 20:4; Col. 4:10). There were other imprisoned believers involved in the ministry (Philemon 1:10, 22-24). And there were other believers involved in various cities along the way, like Jerusalem, Caesarea, Sidon, Puteoli, and Rome (Acts 21:15-26; 24:23; 27:3; 28:13-15). There was evidently a good bit of coming and going by a number of believers during Paul’s incarceration in both Caesarea and Rome (Acts 24:23; 28:30-31; Eph. 6:21-22; Phil. 4:21-22; Col. 4:7-18; Philemon 1:10-13, 22-24). This was in a sense bringing the Christian movement to the military and to the halls of the government!

### **The fourth missionary journey is the story of military missions in Acts**

Based on the amount of time that the Lord allowed Paul to remain *with* and *under* the Roman military, witnessing to kings, governors, commanders, soldiers, Jewish leaders, and other prominent people (Acts 25:23), and doing all kinds of other related missionary work, it seems that this was indeed a Spirit-inspired, fourth missionary journey! It appears that God intentionally placed these Christians *with* and *under* the military and government to utilize these social networks to strategically advance His missionary cause in the Roman world.

This fourth journey could be referred to as the story of military missions in Acts. Only God knows all the details of what was accomplished during this journey. So much of what happened in all areas of missions and ministry in the Acts story was merely summarized (e.g., Acts 13:48-49; 14:6-7, 20-21; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:8). This is a reminder of John 21:25, “*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.*”

Only God knows how many in the Roman military and government networks believed in the gospel. Only God knows how those who believed within those networks were used to spread the gospel or how the discussions of unbelievers within those same circles were used in the same way. Suffice it to say that God is sovereign, wise, and strategic in carrying out His missionary purpose in the world in all generations. He “*works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will...*” (Eph. 1:11, NIV). “*The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations*” (Psalm 33:10-11, NIV).

The fourth missionary journey serves as a biblical foundation for military missions and ministry today. As these early Christians utilized the social networks of the government and military to advance the gospel, so believers today should do the same. As the gospel goes forth in and through these networks, it will bring its life and light to a great host of individuals and families serving in the militaries of the

world, and through them, to countless others as well. It will also bring its benefits and blessings to the militaries and governments of the world.

Lest there be concern among some as to the evangelistic zeal of Christians involved in world-wide military missions and ministry, it needs to be stated that Christianity is indeed a friend to government and military institutions. It is Christianity that recognizes and affirms the necessity for and legitimacy of human government – which includes military authority (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-10). It is Christianity which teaches a proper submission to human government and leaders (1 Pet. 2:13-17). It is Christianity that affirms a strong work ethic, making men and women good servants within the government and the military (Col. 3:22-4:1). It is Christianity that calls those in the military to practice honesty, integrity and contentment (Luke 3:14). Because of the presence of Christian missionaries the Roman military was blessed (Acts 28:10). Where Christianity flourishes in and among the governments and militaries of the world both will be better. The gospel not only brings life and light to individuals but also to all of human society, including the institutions of the government and the military. Correctly understood those within these institutions will welcome both the message and influence of Christianity.

# 2

## A Theological Foundation for Military Missions and Ministry

There is a story of military missions and ministry found in the book of Acts. As it should be with all Christian missions and ministry, this story is rooted in theology. Three categories of military missions and ministry are examined here: principles, paradigms, and strategies.

### Principles of military missions and ministry

#### God has a missionary heart for the military “people group”

The focus of the command of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) is “*the discipling of all the people groups of the world.*”<sup>7</sup> The term “people group” is being used loosely here to refer to military members and families. As used here, a people group is a subculture of people based on some commonality of life, a network of people who are connected and defined by identifiable common characteristics. For a discussion of the meaning of the technical term “people group” as used in missiology see John Piper, *Let The Nations Be Glad*, pp. 203-208.

Why consider those in the military like a separate “people group”? There are good reasons. First, they have a unique lifestyle, language, and culture (and even tribal dress!). Second, they are somewhat culturally isolated from others in society. This is due to the way installations are set up; security reasons; the transient, nomadic lifestyle required; the strong bond formed by common experiences; and even intentional indoctrination. Third, the type of commitment required by this lifestyle and culture creates a highly tribal environment.

The very first Gentile converts to come into the church were from the military people group. The story of the conversion of Cornelius and his household is found in Acts 10-11. Cornelius was a centurion from Caesarea. He was a devout and influential man, well respected by the “*entire nation of the Jews*” (Acts 10:22). Cornelius was divinely directed through a vision to send for the Apostle Peter and to hear the message of the gospel through him. During the same time the Lord spoke to Peter through a vision and the Holy Spirit, leading him to go and minister to Cornelius and his family. Cornelius, his family, and others who had gathered for Peter’s message were saved as they heard the gospel (Acts 10:44-45). There were most likely other soldiers present on that day (Acts 10:7). The point is clear from this story that God initiated this encounter. God has a missionary heart for military members and families.

#### God has a missionary plan to reach military communities

Because God has a heart to reach those in the military he also has a plan to reach military communities. After all, to reach those in the military necessitates going to military communities!

There are two types of military communities: those found on and around military installations and those made up of deployed troops. In Acts we see God's plan to reach both types of military communities. There are six Roman colonies mentioned in the book of Acts. They are: Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14-52); Lystra (Acts 14:6-23); Philippi (Acts 16:12-40); Corinth (Acts 18:1-28); Troas (Acts 20:6-12); and Ptolemais (Acts 21:7). These were places where churches were planted. The purpose of the Roman colonies was military. Also mentioned in Acts were other New Testament cities where there were military installations such as Derbe, Caesarea, and Rome.

Note what Barclay says about the Roman colonies: "*When Paul chose a place wherein to preach the gospel, he always did so with the eye of a strategist. He always chose one which was not only important in itself but was also the key point of a whole area. To this day many of Paul's preaching centres are still great road centres and railway junctions. Such was Philippi... Philippi attained the dignity of a Roman Colony. The Roman Colonies were amazing institutions. They were not colonies in the sense of being outposts of civilization in unexplored parts of the world. They had begun by having a military significance. It was the custom of Rome to send out parties of veteran soldiers, who had served their time and been granted citizenship, to settle in strategic road centres. Usually these parties consisted of three hundred veterans with their wives and children. These colonies were the focal points of the great Roman road systems which were so well engineered that reinforcements could speedily be sent from one colony to another. They were founded to keep the peace and to command the strategic centres in Rome's far-flung Empire. At first they had been founded in Italy; but soon they were scattered throughout the whole Empire, as the Empire grew.*"<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of the local church is to reach its community with the gospel. This includes all the people of its surrounding context. Surely there were many soldiers in these cities who had the chance to hear and believe the gospel. This was the case with Cornelius and other soldiers from Caesarea (Acts 10:7). This was the case with the Praetorian Guard (Phil. 1:12-13). In Pisidian Antioch, a Roman colony, on one particular Sabbath "*nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord*" (Acts 13:44). Luke reports that the "*word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region*" (Acts 13:49). Significant ministry was taking place in military communities like Lystra, Derbe and Philippi (Acts 14:21; 16:9-10). In these military communities, especially where there were large crowds and public controversy associated with the ministry of the missionaries, soldiers would have been present to see and hear the gospel (e.g. Acts 13:44-52; 14:8-20).

There is also the example of God planting believers with communities of deployed troops. As Paul is being transferred from Jerusalem to Caesarea he is, in effect, with deployed troops (Acts 23:23-35). God placed Paul, Luke and Aristarchus with deployed troops for six to eight months during the voyage from Caesarea to Rome (Acts 27:1-28:14). These missionaries served as a type of military chaplain (or any Christian soldier) who is deployed. God has a missionary plan to reach military communities.

## **God has a missionary strategy to reach the military as a means of fulfilling the Great Commission**

When God set his love upon Cornelius and his household He had the world in mind! It was not His intention for this family to hoard the wonderful news of salvation. From the beginning, even before Cornelius was saved, the Lord worked in his heart so that others would be able to hear the good news about Jesus. Cornelius had “*called together his relatives and close friends*”. When he arrived, Peter “*found many people assembled*” (Acts 10:24, 27). Cornelius said, “*Now then, we are all present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord*” (Acts 10:33). Cornelius’ commitment to reach others with the gospel surely continued in the days following his conversion. That is the work of the Holy Spirit in the redeemed heart. Keep in mind, too, that Cornelius was a very influential man. Instantly, he had a great opportunity to impact many people for Christ, including those soldiers under his authority. Who knows how he was used to help pave the way for this military community to hear the gospel later during Paul’s imprisonment recorded in Acts 23:33ff.

Here we have evidence of God utilizing the social networks associated with the system of the government and military to fulfill His missionary purpose. There were other systems which He harnessed for the spread of the gospel during the first century. Some of these were the system of the synagogue created in connection with the dispersion of the Jews (Acts 17:1-3); the system of commerce and trade associated with large cosmopolitan commercial centers such as Antioch (Acts 11:19-26); the Greek language and culture as a system; the educational systems of the day (Acts 17:17-34; 19:9-10); and the system of the Roman roads (Acts 16:12; Philippi was located on the famous Via Egnatia, the main highway from Asia to Europe).

In a book entitled, *Linked*, the author makes this statement: “*Paul understood...the message had to spread. So he used firsthand knowledge of the social network of the first century’s civilized world from Rome to Jerusalem to reach and convert as many people as he could. He walked nearly 10,000 miles in the next twelve years of his life. He did not wander randomly, however; he reached out to the biggest communities of his era, to the people and places in which the faith could germinate and spread most effectively. He was the first and by far the most effective salesperson of Christianity, using theology and social networks equally effectively....Paul was a master of first-century social and religious links, the only network at the beginning of the modern era that could carry and spread a faith*”<sup>9</sup>

## **Paradigms of military missions and ministry**

What are the biblical patterns for doing military missions and ministry? Three primary paradigms are disclosed in the Acts’ story.

### **In and through the local church**

The formation of the Church was a major development reported in the book of Acts (Acts 1:15; 2:1-47; 1 Cor. 12:12-13). Much attention was given to the

establishment and building of the church (Acts 14:21-23; 16:5). This was the focus of the first three missionary journeys. As previously indicated, there was much local church activity taking place in many of the military communities listed in Acts. These local churches were tasked to reach their whole community for Christ, which would have meant demonstrating love and concern for soldiers. Jesus taught that believers should express a servant's attitude toward soldiers (Matt. 5:41). Paul expressed concern for the salvation of soldiers (Acts 25:23 with 26:29). John the Baptist taught soldiers spiritual principles (Luke 3:14).

New Testament ministry meant tearing down all kinds of social divisions such as those which existed between Jew and Gentile or slave and master (Eph. 2:14-22; Col. 3:11, 22-4:1). This was the power of the gospel in the first century! Surely, this would have applied to any social divisions resulting from Roman military service. Though it is not spelled out in Acts, those believers from the military, like Cornelius and his family, were to be a part of the local church. Because of the role ascribed in God's economy for the local church, a primary paradigm for military missions and ministry is the local church! Local churches in military communities should be intentional and strategic in doing military missions and ministry.

### ***With and under the military***

Because of the unique nature of military service and culture, there are certain aspects of military missions and ministry which cannot happen in the local church as the primary base of operation. This is the very reason why churches, mission boards and commissions send chaplains to serve in the military. The fourth journey provides the important "*with and under*" paradigm for military missions and ministry. There are certain types of missions and ministry in which one can best participate as an insider (e.g., prison ministry).

Paul and other believers while under custody and imprisoned were literally *with* and *under* the military and government. God did this for his missionary and ministry purposes. Another way in which this becomes obvious is in how Paul was uniquely prepared for this time period and ministry by his being a native born Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-40; 22:24-30). For example, Roman citizens had the right to a public hearing. This would prove strategic in terms of Paul's unique role in the fourth journey. Also, his citizenship granted to him a much needed credibility for this journey. Other believers were, at times, at least to some extent, *with* and *under* the military by virtue of their association with Paul and/or the other prisoners. In giving this particular paradigm it seems that God is revealing the need for an apostolic and missional dimension of military ministry.

The application is clear. From the standpoint of the Christian church there is a need to fulfill this "*with and under*" dimension of military missions and ministry through the calling and ministry of chaplains. From the standpoint of many governments and militaries there is a commitment to meet the spiritual needs of soldiers and their families in a way which can only be met through this paradigm. Local churches also participate in the *with* and *under* paradigm by equipping Christians in the military for their own unique marketplace ministry.

Para-church ministries also fit under this paradigm for several reasons. First, they are typically designed and structured to be apostolic and missional in approach. As stated, this dimension is particularly needed in this arena of missions and ministry. Second, many of those called to these ministries are prior or retired military, which means that they are still able to meet the “*with* and *under*” criteria. For example, based on their prior service, they are able to maintain relationships with those inside the military system and, if retired, have access to the installations. They are still somewhat considered to be insiders. In a sense, they are indigenous missionaries. Third, because of their desire and efforts to maintain close working relationships with the chaplains they often meet the “*with* and *under*” criteria.

Christian soldiers and families who are trained and equipped to serve Christ in and through the military also fit under this paradigm. The most strategic way to do military missions and ministry is through Christians who are in the military! For this reason, a significant amount of time and energy, on the part of churches, chaplains, and para-church ministries, should be devoted to training and equipping Christians in the military to live out their faith in a holistic way (Eph. 4:11-16; Col. 1:28-29).

### **In connection with a military presence**

In nations which promote liberty and justice, Christian missions and ministry often happen in connection with a military presence. Democracy itself, with its corresponding values, is a natural by-product of Christianity. The gospel is all about true human freedom (John 8:31-32; Gal. 5:1). There are numerous illustrations from the fourth journey of a paradigm of missions and ministry in connection with the presence of the Roman military. For example, the ministry that took place on the Island of Malta would most likely never have happened if Paul and his companions had not been *with* and *under* the military (28:1-11). Today, likewise, Christian missions and ministry often happen in connection with militaries and their countries which promote liberty and justice.

### **Strategies of military missions and ministry**

In Acts missions is defined in terms of both the coming and going dimensions – both coming to and going from a missionary base of operation. Three strategies relating to military missions and ministry can be identified from the Acts story.

#### **People sent from an established base of operation**

The first three missionary journeys (Acts 13-21) illustrate this particular strategy of the Holy Spirit. Individuals are sent from the established base of operation of a local church to do missions and ministry. A contemporary model of this would be chaplains sent out from their respective local churches to do military missions and ministry. Chaplains are missionaries to the military “people group.”

#### **People sent to an established base of operation temporarily**

Due to the Jewish dispersion occurring as a part of Old Testament history, Jews were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. During Pentecost many devout

Jews would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Acts 2:5, 9-11 records the various nations from where the Jews would come for this annual feast. With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the glory associated with the early days of the church, many of these Jews who had been converted decided to remain in Jerusalem. Later, as a result of the persecution which arose in connection with Stephen's death, these zealous believers were scattered (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19-24). Many of them most likely went back to their homelands. As they went they preached the gospel (Acts 8:4; 11:19ff). It seems that this was a premeditated missionary strategy of God to evangelize the Roman Empire in the fullness of time.

A contemporary model of this particular strategy of the Holy Spirit would be military members and their families sent to the local church or chapel temporarily and then later sent out as "missionaries" as they move from assignment to assignment. Local churches and chapels employing this strategy would view their ministry to military members and families as a part of their missions philosophy and program.

### **People sent to a mobile base of operation temporarily**

While Paul is *with* and *under* the military, people are sent to him temporarily, his mobile base of operation being places like barracks, prisons, ships, etc. The base of operation is considered mobile either because it moves or the one doing the ministry moves, or both. This especially applied to military missions and ministry during the fourth journey. Paul was often being moved from one military base of operation to another. Soldiers were most likely coming to and going from each place. Whether Paul was going to people or people were coming to him, his mentality and approach was that he was always doing missions and ministry!

Another example of this missions' strategy was when Paul moved his base of operation from the synagogue to the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10). This base of operation lasted for a two-year duration. Evidently people were constantly visiting this school. This proved to be a very effective strategy! Regarding this situation, Acts 19:10 states, "...*All who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*"

A contemporary model of this missions' strategy would be military members being reached, ministered to and disciplined as they are connected temporarily to a mobile base of operation, especially during times of deployment. There are all kinds of situations arising from military operations where a mobile base of operation is established. In those situations, because of the nature of the military, soldiers would very often be coming and going. Chaplains, and other Christians in the military, as they are equipped and prepared, have a unique opportunity to live out and utilize this strategy for the kingdom. The local church and the para-church ministries can become a real part of this strategy by intentionally training Christians in the military for ministry and discipleship when they are in these situations and environments.

# 3

## The Premise of Military Missions and Ministry

Military missions has to do with intentionally and strategically reaching the military with the gospel as an effective means of fulfilling the Great Commission throughout the world. Military missions is made possible as Christians, by being *with* and *under* the military, utilize the social networks of the government and the military to advance the gospel in the world. By “*with*”, it is meant either a part of and within the system as a military Christian or family, or associated or having a relationship with through some other connection such as ministry or employment. By “*under*”, it is meant under the authority of, either by virtue of rank or special permission of association.

The apostle Paul during a significant portion of his missionary career did military missions and ministry as he was *with* and *under* the Roman military and government as a prisoner. During his fourth missionary journey, he testified, taught, and ministered to many soldiers, commanders, government officials, kings, prisoners, Jews, Gentiles, and fellow believers. His own testimony of this time period and corresponding experience is found in Philippians 1:12-13 (NIV), where he said, “*Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me (i.e., all his experiences while being with and under the military as a prisoner) has really served to advance the gospel (i.e., missions and ministry). As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard (i.e., military and their social networks) and to everyone else (i.e., others in the same setting) that I am in chains for Christ.*” Here he is speaking of military missions and ministry. In his letter to the Philippians he was seeking to encourage them about the situation regarding his imprisonment. It is also possible that he was indirectly encouraging them about involvement in military missions and ministry (Phil.1:14). Remember, Philippi was also a military community.

A commitment to military missions today means winning, training, and discipling Christians within the military in such a way that the gospel is propagated and disciples are multiplied worldwide in and through the social networks associated with the governments and militaries of the world. Doing this in the best, most effective way calls for a comprehensive approach utilizing both the local church and “*with* and *under*” paradigms as well a variety of strategies.

Military ministry is simply carrying out the commands and teachings of Christ as applied to military members and families. It means reaching, loving, serving, caring for, blessing, teaching, training, etc., those connected to the military. Military missions and military ministry should be inseparably bound together. The foundation for both is the Great Commandment and the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas the focus of military ministry is oftentimes defined in terms of what is happening in the local setting alone, the focus of military missions is what is happening in the kingdom of God worldwide.

## **Basic components of military missions and ministry**

There are basic theological, philosophical, and practical presuppositions, which under-gird the concept of military missions and ministry. The following components are some of the most important building blocks.

### **The idea that those who live the military lifestyle are like a unique “people group.”**

Because of the unique nature of military culture and service it is helpful, when thinking through and planning for this area of missions and ministry, to consider those in the military like a distinct people group. In his book, *The Clustered World*, Michael Weiss identifies 62 PRIZM clusters that make up the 275 million American residents. One of these clusters (i.e., “people groups”) is “*military quarters*”, defined as “*the lifestyle of Americans who live on and around military bases*”. Weiss states, “*Clusters are based on the observable sociological phenomenon that people tend to live with others like themselves, sharing similar demographics, lifestyles, and values.*”<sup>10</sup>

### **The mindset that reaching the military people group with the gospel is important and strategic from the standpoint of world missions strategy.**

Why is it important and strategic to reach this “people group” with the gospel? First, the military is racially integrated. To reach a nation and the world means all races. Second, the military population is very young. The Great Commission is all about reaching new generations. In the U.S. the military has the nation’s highest concentration of adults less than thirty five years of age. Third, this population is very transient and nomadic. Fourth, the military population is a melting pot. People from many different places and social backgrounds come together for military service. These factors increase the probability for spiritual movements in and through the military! Fifth, it seems that the discipline and honor involved in military service, along with the gravity of the duty that is required, make this “people group” more receptive to truth than others in the general population. Too, the dangerous nature of their particular service often makes for open hearts. And sixth, a high percentage of individuals within the military are generally influential in human societies. Especially in some nations where the military and the government are virtually one and the same, military leaders are government leaders. To influence the military is to shape the nation.

### **The viewpoint that God wants to reach the military “people group” with the gospel and then to use them as a vehicle to reach others.**

The endeavor of world missions first began when God chose a small people group, the Jews, to bring His salvation to all the nations (Genesis 12:1-3). From “*nations*” in Matthew 28:18-20 comes our word “*ethnic*” which means “*relating to a group or groups in society with distinctive cultural traits.*”<sup>11</sup> Reaching the military with the gospel and reaching the world through the military is a solid, New Testament missionary philosophy.

**The perspective that the militaries of the world are systems through which God works to achieve His purposes – one of these being His missionary purpose.**

Obviously, one of the main purposes God has for military systems is to establish and maintain order in human society (Romans 13). Another purpose would be to use the military system as a medium through which to propagate the gospel and multiply disciples worldwide. There is evidence in the New Testament and from church history that God has used the military, both directly and indirectly, to do just that! While being good citizens, Christians should work within human systems to achieve God's missionary purpose. Some refer to these common human systems, such as the government and the military, as "domains."

*"When we take seriously our call as believers to disciple the nations, the DOMAIN concept becomes important for our understanding of God's purposes in human societies. It will also bring clarity to the significance of our professional capacity as a stewardship we hold.*

*DOMAINS are the influence centers of human societies, often called infrastructures, or the marketplace. The domains of education, the arts, science, government, health care, business, family, the church each have a role to play as they interface to make any community, city or nation work.*

*Because the domains are the same around the world, it is an incredible connection for believers to serve God's purposes through their chosen career. For instance, today a scientist in Beijing can have more in common with a scientist from another country than they do with someone who looks like them, eats the same breakfast, speaks their language and lives in their own neighborhood; simply because they are scientists dealing with the same global issues. The common ground is their professional domain.*

*Today God has opened new pathways for the gospel that require those with professional job skills to go where pastors and missionaries are either unwelcome or not valued. They have something either needed or wanted. Serving with professional excellence opens relational opportunities to both demonstrate Christ's character & attributes and speak the blessing of the good news."<sup>12</sup>*

**The conviction that every Christian is both minister and missionary.**

This was the cry of the protestant reformation, a natural outworking of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. As the Father sent Jesus to be His missionary to the world, so Jesus has sent Christians into the world to be His missionaries (John 17:15-18; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 2:10; 4:11-16). All Christians are ministers and missionaries by virtue of their calling. Christians in the military, including Chaplains, are indigenous missionaries and ministers! Christians outside the military who have a heart for and regularly minister to those in the military are cross-cultural missionaries.

**The belief that there is a Biblical and practical basis behind the three primary streams of Christian ministry which flow through the militaries of the world – the chaplains’ corps, the para-church ministries, and the local church – all three being collocated in military communities.**

(And, in the case of deployed troops, the military community is on the move with the chaplains uniquely being with the troops.) The chaplains corps exists because of the unique nature of the military lifestyle and of the commitment of many nations to provide for the spiritual needs of their soldiers and their families. For this reason churches and mission boards, in cooperation with civil governments, have sent chaplains to serve as indigenous ministers and missionaries within the military.

The military para-church ministries have fulfilled a unique apostolic role in the matter of military missions and ministry. Generally, they have been *with* and *under* the military in unique ways. Many of their ministers and missionaries have a military background, making access to the military community more attainable. Throughout their histories they have played a vital international role in military missions and ministry.

The local church is the primary God-established base of operation for all evangelistic and missionary activity in the world. That being the case, missional churches located in military communities should want and plan to do intentional ministry to the military and missions through the military.

The Military Missions Network is built upon the premise that all major streams of military missions and ministry are good and beneficial and that a greater sense of partnership between these various entities will bring about a greater effectiveness in accomplishing the Great Commandment and Great Commission. As led by the Holy Spirit, committed, missional Christians should work within these individual ministry streams and also should seek to bring these streams together whenever doing so will enhance the mission of the universal Christian church.

**The understanding that the local church engages in missions when she wins, disciples and sends back out those from the military who have been sent to her for a temporary time.**

In the New Testament there is precedence for missionary activity being defined as ministry to transient populations which temporarily come to an established base of operation. When the Apostle Paul was under Roman custody and confined in prison while on his fourth missionary journey, he continued his missionary activity by ministering to those sent to him. He continued his missionary activity not by going, but by people being sent to him. During much of his missionary career he proclaimed the gospel and Word of God to soldiers (and prisoners and jail officials) sent to him while he was under custody and confined in prison. Paul was engaged in military missions and ministry (and prison missions and ministry).

Likewise, a local church, serving as a base of operation, can be “missionary” by winning, discipling, and sending back out those temporarily sent to her by way of

the military. Chaplains and those from the military para-church ministries completely focus on military missions and ministry. On the other hand, those within the local church can fail to see military ministry as missions because they are thinking of missions as being defined only by the “going” dimension and not by the legitimate “coming to” dimension. In Acts, missions is defined in terms of both the coming and going dimensions – both coming to and going from a missionary base of operation!

A church can effectively do missions by winning, discipling, and sending back out those from the military who have been sent to her for a temporary season. The local church does military missions in two ways: by sending individuals to the military people group as chaplains or as para-church missionaries; and by strategically and joyfully receiving individuals from the military in order to bless, win, disciple, and send them back out. In essence, this is the idea of military missions in the local church.

# 4

## Implications

All theology has implications. The following three things are called for when considering a New Testament theology of military missions and ministry.

### **The adoption of a holistic view of military missions and ministry**

This begins with the recognition of the interconnectedness of all three primary ministry streams flowing through the militaries of the world – the chaplains' corps, the para-church ministries and the local church. In reality, all three streams are connected because of the unity of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:4-6). A puzzle is best defined by looking at all its parts as they are correctly connected to form the whole picture. Using another word picture, there are three streams which come together to form one river. Ecclesiastes 1:7 (NIV) is an interesting verse. It states, "*All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.*" Using the analogy of this verse, all streams are separate, yet, in reality, are connected by the sea. In reference to military missions and ministry, it is easy for those within the individual streams to live as though their stream is the river! A holistic view of military missions and ministry begins with the recognition of the interconnectedness and value of all three streams. Jesus prayed for His body to be one (John 17:21-23). This prayer is for those engaged in military missions and ministry too!

Also important to this holistic view is the conviction that the involvement of all three streams is essential in order to do military missions and ministry in the most effective way. All three streams have come about through the providential workings of God in biblical and church history. All three streams have a unified connection and basis in the book of Acts.

Also required in this holistic view is a strategy that wisely utilizes all three streams of ministry, based on the individual, unique, potential contribution of each stream. There are unique contributions each stream can bring to the table of military missions and ministry. There are deficiencies when the streams operate in isolation and strengths when they operate in collaboration and partnership. These contributions and deficiencies need to be carefully considered, catalogued, and shared.

And, necessary to this holistic view is a plan that includes building relationships, networks, and partnerships with others from all three streams both locally and in other geographical regions, especially those other regions that are strategic to one's own ministry context.

## **A comprehensive, synergistic approach in doing military missions and ministry**

This will involve those from all three streams encouraging and, to some degree, working together to see the fulfillment of the following:

- Chaplains being raised up and sent to serve in the militaries of the world. Also, helping and partnering with chaplains wherever they need and want assistance in carrying out their ministries.
- Local churches doing intentional and strategic military missions and ministry all over the world.
- Para-church missionaries being raised up and sent to minister to the militaries of the world.
- Collaborative efforts between local churches, para-church ministries, and chaplains around the world.
- Spiritual movements (evangelism, discipleship, ministry, missions) planted wherever the military is and goes.

Taking these implications seriously calls for individuals from within the three ministry streams to intentionally work to bring the streams together wherever and whenever possible for mutual win/win kingdom purposes. Practically, for those in a particular stream, this means helping and supporting those from the other streams of ministry. Chaplains and para-church ministers can use their expertise and knowledge to help local churches develop flagship models of intentional military missions and ministry. Churches, as a part of their focused military ministry, can help chaplains and para-church ministries by providing things like facilities, volunteers, and financial resources. Put another way, churches should actively help and support those expressions of military missions and ministry occurring through the “*with* and *under*” paradigm. Chaplains and para-church ministries should actively help and support those expressions of military missions and ministry occurring through the local church paradigm.

Functionally, the three streams have often operated in isolation from one another (Although, chaplains and para-church ministries have more often sought out ways to work together). For example, doesn't it make sense for churches to be available to help chaplains with their ministries? After all, chaplains are missionaries from the churches! Obviously, in the New Testament, the churches helped and supported their missionaries! The point being made here is that each stream, as a part of its normal operations, should actively engage in supporting and helping those from the other two streams.

Synergy is defined as “*the working together of two or more people, organizations, or things, especially when the result is greater than the sum of their individual efforts or capabilities.*”<sup>13</sup> As previously stated, there are strengths and benefits when the three streams operate in cooperation and there are deficiencies when they operate in isolation. All kinds of creative things can be done when believers working within the three streams come together seeking Biblical unity and win/win kingdom propositions.

Each stream brings its own unique contributions to the table of military missions and ministry. The following ideas are based on general observations and are simply the opinions of some individuals within the three streams. Obviously, there are and will be exceptions. These are simply some suggestions as to the unique contributions of each stream, given to stimulate thought and discussion.

### **The unique contributions of para-church ministries**

- Tend to be simple and focused in their ministry objectives.
- Have developed a much needed expertise in pure evangelism and discipleship.
- Have worked diligently to build relationships with chaplains.
- Comfortable with a missional, apostolic approach to ministry. Because field staff missionaries most often work from a home base of operation, they are required to minister where the military live and work.
- Many para-church missionaries are retired military or at least have some military experience. That being the case, they have relationships with those in active duty military circles and are still considered as insiders by virtue of their prior service. As such, they have a very valuable understanding of the military lifestyle and culture.

### **The unique contributions of the local church**

- Maintain a more comprehensive ministry involving all ranges, ages and types of people. There is strength in diversity.
- Have a more stable base of operation which is usually tied to facilities and to participation on the part of high percentages of non-transient members.
- More numerous. Churches are everywhere all over the world.
- Adequate facilities.
- Have a large volunteer base.
- The local church is unique in God's economy.

### **The unique contributions of chaplains**

- Access to military members and families and to military installations.
- Credibility as an insider.
- Understanding of the military lifestyle and culture.
- Level of training, from both denominational and military sources.
- Can be with the troops anywhere and anytime, and for more concentrated periods of time. Working and living among the military, especially in dangerous situations, creates a very effective ministry environment.
- The ministry base of chaplains, being on the installations or with deployed troops, is in the midst of the greatest concentration of military in the area.

Linking together the unique contributions of each stream can produce a powerful synergistic effect when there is an effort to cooperate and partner in the matter of military missions and ministry.

## **The creation and development of a network (and many networks) to facilitate military missions and ministry worldwide**

Taking in consideration all that has already been said, the purpose of networks involving those doing military missions and ministry should be the following:

- To encourage relationships between those doing military missions and ministry from the three streams.
- To promote collaboration in military missions and ministry efforts.
- To facilitate partnerships and networks between those from the three streams within and between geographical regions.
- To promote the emergence of churches doing intentional military missions and ministry (i.e., churches with a focused military ministry).
- To provide a means by which military members and families can connect with like-minded chaplains, churches, and para-church ministries.

The above summarizes the basic purpose of the Military Missions Network. The Military Missions Network is not so much an organization as it is a spontaneous emerging network of chaplains, churches and para-church ministries which are coming together across the globe to fulfill the Great Commission.

# 5

## The Military Missions Network

### Purpose

#### Who or what exactly is the Military Missions Network?

##### The MMN as an emerging network

First and foremost, the Military Missions Network is a spontaneously emerging network. It is not an organization. It does not involve any hierarchical structure. It is beyond any church, ministry or grouping of such. There is no membership. This network is arising from a common philosophy shared by evangelical Christians involved in the domain of military missions. It is about spiritual movements and global military missions.

Evangelical churches, chaplains and ministries registered with the MMN share a common commitment to the Great Commission and a mutual love for those in the military. Relationships and partnerships between particular churches, chaplains and ministries linked through this network are based on voluntary associations, common convictions, mutual benefits, and shared goals. All such relationships and partnerships are initiated by individual parties.

There are signs that this network is emerging everywhere! Military ministries in local churches are spontaneously springing up in near and distant places. Chaplains, pastors and church leaders, and para-church ministry leaders are beginning to come together in new and fresh ways for collaboration, collegiality, and to form ministry networks and partnerships. This is not only happening within defined geographical regions where there is a military presence, but also between geographical regions, especially in connection with the common pathways associated with the military.

In this primary sense the MMN is...

***A network of evangelical churches, chaplains, and para-church Ministries fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus Christ by reaching, equipping and ministering to military members and families worldwide.***

##### The MMN as a facilitating ministry

**Our mission** - The mission of the MMN is to ignite a shared vision, to equip kingdom leaders, and to build a global network for the purpose of reaching the world through the military of the world.

As a key component of the mission, the MMN seeks to accomplish two primary objectives. First, to link Christians who have a passion to reach, equip, and minister to military members and families worldwide. To facilitate these linkages emphasis is given to the following three primary initiatives. The emergence and development of...

**Focused churches** - Churches that are strategic and intentional in reaching, discipling, training and ministering to military members and families.

**Creative partnerships** - The collaborative efforts of chaplains, churches, and para-church ministries within a particular key region.

**Functioning networks** - The collaborative efforts of chaplains, churches, and para-church ministries within and between key regions, especially where there are identifiable common pathways associated with the military.

The second primary objective of the MMN as a facilitating ministry is to provide a web resource to facilitate connections among Christians within the domain of the military culture.

**Our vision** - An expanding global network of kingdom-minded movements of evangelism and discipleship reaching the world through the military of the world.

**MMN volunteers** - Chaplains, para-church ministry leaders, pastors, church leaders, Christians in the military and others who strive to foster spiritual movements which advance the cause of global military missions.

**MMN missionaries** - Individuals or couples who raise support to minister through the MMN serves as catalytic missionaries. These individuals or couples have as their desire and intention to work within the larger body of Christ in the domains of military culture and ministry.

**Web connections** - The MMN web site serves as a resource to facilitate connections among Christians within the domains of the military culture and ministry.

**Types of connections** - Through the web site and those involved in the network, connections can be made with other Christians and especially with and through para-church ministries, chaplains, and local churches. There are three types of churches registering with the network: military friendly churches, churches with a focused military ministry and international English speaking churches which minister to the military.

### **A military-friendly church**

A military-friendly Church is one which loves and welcomes military members and families into its fellowship. This is a church in which military members and families can expect to be embraced with open arms and can also anticipate being genuinely invited to participate in the life and ministry of the church.

There is already in place an informal network of military-friendly churches known to and through the masses of military members and families, assigned to installations scattered across the U.S. and the world.

As a service to military members and families the MMN maintains a directory of military-friendly churches listed on this web site.

### **Characteristics of a military-friendly church**

1. The congregation in general and the leadership in particular has a heart to reach and minister to military members and families.
2. The church has a reputation for being military friendly among military members and families which move to and from the community.
3. The church has a significant number of military members and families involved in its fellowship, ministry, and worship.

### **For military-friendly churches desiring to be listed in the MMN directory of churches**

Churches desiring to register and be listed on the web site must meet two simple criteria. They must be considered a Military Friendly Church using the simple definition and characteristics provided by the MMN. They must also be able and willing to affirm and embrace the basic purpose and faith statement of the MMN.

### **A church with a focused military ministry**

A church with a focused military ministry is one which has developed a unique and creative ministry to the military. The military ministry of a focused church goes beyond being military-friendly to the place of having a vision, plan, and strategy which actually has been worked out and put into practice by those leading the ministry. Ministry to and missions through the military is a significant aspect of the vision of a focused church. However, having a focused military ministry does not mean that this is the total emphasis of the church, but rather one important ministry and way of doing missions.

### **Characteristics of a church with a focused military ministry**

#### **1. The senior pastor and key leaders have adopted the philosophy of military missions and ministry.**

Each church has its own leadership structure. The point here is that the appropriate leaders, especially the senior pastor and leadership board, have officially adopted the military missions and ministry philosophy as that of their own. This means conducting some type of leaders' orientation on the philosophy. We suggest that an official affirmation be recorded in the minutes of the appropriate leaders' meeting(s).

#### **2. The Church has been led to understand and embrace the biblical paradigm of military missions and ministry as a deliberate missions strategy of the church.**

We encourage the senior pastor or missions pastor to plan an orientation and training forum of some type for the purpose of educating the congregation on this subject, to be followed by some appropriate way for the congregation to indicate their affirmation. This can be done in a variety of ways such as through a sermon series, in a business meeting, or as a part of a world missions conference. In smaller to medium-sized congregations this probably would involve the entire congregation. In the larger or mega-churches this might be done in the

leadership or core group circles only. The point here is that in general the church understands and embraces the biblical paradigm of military missions and ministry, and sees the need to network and partner with others within the three streams of ministry.

**3. A positive attitude is prevalent on the part of the church regarding the constant movement and transition within the military community. The church, having been led to embrace the philosophy of military missions and ministry, has consequently developed a positive attitude about military people coming and going in and through the church.**

This obviously involves a subjective evaluation on the part of the leadership. Oftentimes there is a negative undercurrent among church members toward the military because of the transient nature of their lifestyle and the resulting challenges to relationships and church life. This is often perceived as negative, discouraging individuals within the church from getting involved with military members and their families, or from inviting them to freely participate in the life and ministry of the church.

Rather than seeing the transient nature of the military lifestyle as a negative, a church embracing the paradigm of military missions and ministry actually views this as a positive, making it possible to have a greater missionary impact in the world. The evidence that a church has effectively made this paradigm shift is that a positive attitude is prevalent on the part of the church as a whole regarding military people coming and going in and through the church. People in the church are actually excited about military members and families constantly moving in and out of the church!

To facilitate this paradigm shift in the typical church, leaders must guide the members to understand and embrace the biblical philosophy of military missions and ministry. Leaders must call the church, at the appropriate levels, to intentionally adopt a positive attitude about ministry to and missions through the military. Because attitude is so vital when it comes to being effective in any aspect of church life this is a very important characteristic.

**4. A specific group of people within the church has been called out and identified and are now leading what is characterized as a focused military ministry.**

In the typical church where there is a significant component of military there is a group already prepared by God to lead this ministry. Many of these individuals will be military but some will be from the civilian world. It is just a matter of calling them forth, and then identifying, training, and commissioning them to lead the ministry.

**5. A vision, plan, and strategy have been formulated by the appropriate leaders and have been put into practice in order to reach, train, equip, and minister to the military of the community.**

This means that the appropriate leaders, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have formulated, clarified, and written down the vision, plan, and strategy for

doing military missions and ministry in and through the church. It should include specifics in terms of evangelism and outreach, ministry and caregiving, training and discipling, and commissioning and networking, as these functions relate to military members and families in the church and community.

**6. The church has developed a kingdom mindset in general and regarding military missions and ministry in particular.**

This characteristic is somewhat subjective. For a church to become excited about military missions and ministry it must have a kingdom mindset! The question here is, does the church in general have a kingdom mindset in this matter?

**7. There is a desire and willingness on the part of the appropriate ministry leaders of the church to connect with other like-minded Christians involved in military missions and ministry within the U.S. and around the world.**

Why is it important to intentionally connect with others doing strategic missions through and ministry to the military? First, all Christians should be concerned for the health, well being and propagation of the body of Christ worldwide. Second, Christians are required to partner in the matter of winning, discipling, and caring for those within the military lifestyle and culture. After all, the body of Christ is worldwide and the military is worldwide. Partnership is a required necessity! The question is, will we do this well, in an intentional and strategic way, or will we do this haphazardly and poorly? When it comes to military missions and ministry, missional churches intentionally connect with others both locally and globally in order to be more effective in fulfilling the Great Commission and the Great Commandment!

**For focused churches desiring to be listed in the MMN directory of churches**

The following three things are required for a particular church to register and be listed on the web site. First, be defined as a church with a focused military ministry using the description and characteristics provided by the MMN. Second, have a full description of its military ministry on the church web site. As a service to focused churches the MMN will list the church web addresses along with the church names. This provides accountability so that the churches listed on the MMN web site have in reality developed a focused military ministry that is missional in mindset and nature.

It also enables individuals and families moving to a particular area to be able to fast-forward connection to particular churches by viewing their web sites and specifically the sections about military missions and ministry. Third, be able and willing to embrace the basic purpose and faith statement of the MMN. These would need to be affirmed and embraced by the senior pastor and appropriate leadership. Of course, this affirmation does not mean that a church has to compromise or give up distinctives in theology and practice.

Also, please note that churches which are listed in the focused directory of churches are also listed under the directory for military friendly churches. It is

assumed that churches which have developed a focused military ministry are already truly military friendly.

It is also requested that each church listed on the MMN web site consider providing a link to the MMN on their respective web site.

### **An International Church**

Located in countries where there are U.S. military installations and communities, international churches in the MMN directory are English language churches which welcome and minister to U.S. military personnel and their families.

International English speaking Churches desiring to register and be listed on the MMN web site must meet two simple criteria. They must be located near a U.S. military installation and have a heart to reach and minister to military and their families. They must also be able and willing to embrace the basic purpose and faith statement of the Military Missions Network.

### **The Faith Statement of the MMN**

The Military Missions Network affirms Biblical Christianity as a foundational core value. The intent behind the MMN is to build networks of kingdom leaders who hold to Biblical Christianity with its historical creeds and confessions. Therefore, we begin with and from the Bible, which contains the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. The MMN accepts those areas of doctrinal teaching on which, historically, there have been general agreement among all true Christians. Because of the specialized role of the MMN, freedom of conviction is necessary regarding other doctrinal matters, provided that any interpretation is based upon the Bible alone, and that no such interpretation shall become an issue which hinders the purpose of the MMN. The MMN statement of faith is a broad evangelical declaration written to facilitate working relationships and partnerships between many true believers.

Each individual formally associating with the MMN is required to embrace and affirm without mental reservation the MMN Faith Statement. Churches with a focused military ministry, which desire to be connected with the MMN, are required to concur with this broad minimum statement. This is not an attempt to overrule distinctives among various groups of true believers. Rather, it is a means for Biblical Christians of varying persuasions to unite in the simple truths and work of the Gospel. The MMN reserves the right to deny a request for inclusion by any individual, church, or ministry.

#### **Statement of Faith**

The Bible, inerrant in its original writings, is the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

There is one God, eternally existent in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was begotten by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He is and remains true God and true man. He lived a sinless

life. He vicariously atoned for sin through His shed blood and substitutionary death on the cross. He bodily rose from the dead on the third day and ascended into Heaven where he sits at the right hand of God the Father as High Priest and Advocate of all true believers. He will personally return in power and glory. All who believe in Him by faith are justified before God on the grounds of His death and resurrection.

Man was created in the image of God. Man sinned in Adam and thus came under divine condemnation. As a result of the fall, man's nature was corrupted in every part. Fallen man is separated from God and totally unable to please Him. Regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit are absolutely essential for the salvation of lost and sinful man.

Eternal life is a gift of grace received by faith alone in Jesus Christ for salvation.

The Holy Spirit indwells all true believers and enables them to live a godly life.

There is spiritual unity of all true believers in Jesus Christ, made a reality by the work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ.

Every true believer is commissioned by Christ to share the Gospel with others and to participate in the task of making disciples of all nations. The local church is the primary God-established base of operation for evangelistic and missionary activity in the world.

Both the saved and the lost will be raised from the dead. The saved will be raised, judged, and rewarded, and will inherit eternal life. The lost will be raised for judgment and everlasting punishment.

Jesus Christ will return in glory and triumph for the final judgment and the consummation of His Kingdom.

## **The Core Values of the MMN**

### **Keeping the kingdom of God foremost**

We will joyfully and purposefully release disciples and resources for the benefit of the whole kingdom of God.

### **Building networks on the basis of relationships first**

We will make God-honoring and trusting relationships the bedrock of our cooperation.

### **Being committed to a global vision**

We will stay committed to reaching every military member and their families . . . and through them the entire world.

### **Embracing a movement-building philosophy**

We will follow the Biblical model of multiplying discipleship, where we commit to building disciples who will make other disciples. We commit to not only minister to military, but through military to the world.

**Maintaining a Christ-pursuing heart**

We will make sure our hearts stay alive. The constant revival of the heart and our love for God and others will drive our passion for Kingdom causes.

**Balancing strategy and faith**

We will attempt to always balance the dynamic tension of strategic intentionality, risk-taking faith, and Spirit-led flexibility.

**Affirming Biblical Christianity**

We will build networks of Kingdom leaders who hold to Biblical Christianity and its historical creeds and confessions.

# 6

## Applications

### Fueling the emergence and development of the network

There are a number of essential things that are needed in order to fuel the emergence of the network. Individuals, chaplains, para-church ministries and churches can and should be involved at many levels in seeing these things happen. The following seven essentials are required:

- Models in key geographical regions of churches that have a focused military ministry.
- Models in key geographical regions of creative partnerships involving all three streams.
- Models of functioning networks between key geographical regions, especially where there are common pathways associated with particular military jobs and installations.
- Conferences enabling people from all three streams to come together for the purpose of vision casting, relationship building, training, to generate energy for movement building, and for sharing and exposing best practices.
- Mapping and making known what is happening in the world of military missions and ministry, especially relating to the emergence of the network.
- The development and propagation of materials for the purpose of spreading ideas and for inspiration and training.
- Catalytic missionaries. I.e., those seeking to foster and fuel the emergence of the network with its corresponding kingdom-minded movements of evangelism and discipleship. Anybody can be a catalytic missionary!

### Ideas and actions for all

Some of the many things that can be done on a personal level to encourage the emergence of the network are:

- Study the biblical principles regarding military missions and ministry. Start Bible studies in the community on the material from Acts.
- Begin to build bridges with and between those from the three streams of ministry. Encourage others to do the same.
- Talk to key churches, chaplains and para-church ministry leaders about connecting with and through the MMN.
- Serve as a catalyst in the community to bring leaders from the three streams together for discussion, prayer and dialogue.
- Pray!

- Help military-friendly churches go to the next level by developing a focused military ministry.
- Write about the need for networking, partnerships, etc., in newsletters, periodicals, newspapers.
- Include relevant information on church, ministry, or personal web sites.
- Talk to Christian radio stations about getting the word out on what is happening in the community in terms of military missions and ministry, especially in terms of what is happening through joint operations!
- Spread the word through contacts in the military.
- Other? Be creative!

## **Starting a focused military ministry in a local church**

For individuals desiring to start a focused military ministry within a particular local church, the following points of application are suggested.

- Start with a strong military-friendly church.
- Begin serving and showing loyalty. Take small steps in beginning to informally do military missions and ministry.
- Approach the senior pastor and other key leaders. Share your heart and vision.
- Introduce the Biblical material on military missions and ministry from Acts. With the blessing of the leadership, begin a Bible study for interested persons, especially for military members and families in the church and community.
- At the appropriate time, begin pulling interested persons together for vision casting, brainstorming, dreaming, and initial training.
- From the above group, formulate a ministry team to lead the military ministry of the church. Begin to develop a comprehensive vision, plan and strategy. Start small.
- Utilize available resources. These include: chaplains and para-church leaders in the community; leaders from other churches doing focused military missions and ministry; The Military Missions Network; See church web sites of focused churches listed on the web site of the MMN.
- Train leadership as you go. With the turnover involved with the military it will be extremely important to continually train new leaders.
- Be patient. Solid ministries do not happen overnight.
- Above all, trust the Lord. Only He can build a powerful ministry!

## **Categories of military missions and ministry involvement in and through the local church**

There are three spheres in which a local church can participate in military missions and ministry. Those leading this ministry in a particular church should seek to be Spirit-led, creative and comprehensive in the planning process. All discussions and plans should be rooted in and flow out of prayer. Maximum input is needed from as many people as possible. The structure of the ministry should be such that an unlimited number of individuals can be involved at various levels based on personal desires. In a fully-developed, comprehensive ministry,

consideration should be given to some application regarding all five purposes of the church (i.e., evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry and worship) in each of the three spheres of missions and ministry. Under each of the spheres listed below, the following categories of involvement should be carefully considered during the planning process and in recruiting volunteers.

### **Within the context of the local church as a base of operation**

The following categories of involvement within this sphere have to do with the military ministry of the church.

- Administration of all missions and ministry efforts
- Evangelism and outreach to military members and families
- Serving, supporting, and caring for military members and families
- Facilitating connections so that military members and families can plug into ministry and fellowship opportunities
- Training and equipping of military members and families
- Discipleship of military members
- Leadership development for military members
- Worship or inspirational gatherings for military members and families
- Commissioning and sending military members and families

### **Within the context of the surrounding geographical region**

The following categories of involvement within this sphere have to do with the church participating in local military missions.

- Serving, honoring, or showing support for military members and families in the community, those which are not connected to the particular church in view, as well as for chaplains, para-church ministries and other churches.
- Networking and partnering with chaplains, para-church ministries and other churches in the surrounding region for the cause of military missions and ministry.
- Leading the way and setting the pace in the region in terms of military missions and ministry. In other words, by virtue of example, the church demonstrates leadership in the community in this vital area of missions and ministry.

### **Within the context of the U.S. and the world**

The following categories of involvement within this sphere have to do with the church participating in global military missions.

- Mission trips which are planned to accomplish a military missions and ministry purpose
- Training military members for ministry during times of deployment
- Networking and partnering with chaplains, para-church ministries and other churches beyond the surrounding geographical region of the particular church.
- Leading the way and setting the pace in the nation in terms of military missions and ministry. In other words, by virtue of example, the church

demonstrates leadership in the nation in this vital area of missions and ministry.

## **Initiating and developing creative partnerships and functioning networks in and between geographical regions**

This starts with at least one influential individual from each of the three streams in a particular region. These individuals, as a team, will serve as catalytic leaders in the community. Partnerships and networks are built on relationships. The first steps will include prayer and effort in getting together those doing military missions and ministry in the particular region or regions being considered. Individuals from within the three streams will need encouragement to intentionally take the time and effort required to build relationships across ministry lines.

Other necessary components to the process will include: vision casting, prayer, dialogue, training and time. A simple way to encourage the process is for individuals to begin helping each other with ministry wherever it is easiest to do so. Exactly how partnerships and networks will function will vary, depending on the types of military installations and the particular players involved in the particular geographical region(s) being considered.

## **Conclusion**

This is the day of networks and partnerships! In virtually every field of modern life and work in human society networking and cooperation is necessary in order to be relevant and effective. There are three wonderful streams of Christian ministry flowing through the militaries of the world – the chaplains' corps, the para-church ministries and the local church. Doesn't it make sense for those within these three streams to come together in fresh and new ways, capitalizing on the unique contributions of each stream, in order to more effectively fulfill the Great Commission? This is the underlining intention of this handbook. May the Lord use the thoughts and ideas contained in this handbook to spark new spiritual movements among the military of the world – for God's glory and the good of all the nations!

## About the author

As founder and president, Gary Sanders currently serves as a full-time catalytic missionary with the Military Missions Network. As a military missionary in residence, he also currently serves as Minister of Military Missions with the First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Virginia. In addition, he is Associate Staff with the Military Ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. Gary has 20 years of experience as a senior pastor, having served in two local churches, both located in military communities. He has also served as a chaplain in the Alabama Army National Guard. Gary is single, never married, and in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 7, enjoys giving himself wholeheartedly to the Lord and the ministry.

**[www.militarymissionsnetwork.com](http://www.militarymissionsnetwork.com)**

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