The greatest challenges for missionaries and missions agencies are not usually things like grasping the biblical foundations of missions or even cultural acquisition. We do not normally struggle to understand the vital importance of church planting or language learning. The problem is knowing how to do what God has called us to do. Our concern is application; our need is how to get from arrival to new church. Such is the area of focus for Developing a Strategy for Missions, Mark Terry’s and J.D. Payne’s contribution to Baker Academic’s Encountering Mission series of missiology texts. Terry is a veteran missionary and now professor of missions at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. Payne is pastor of church multiplication at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama. Both have taught previously at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and bring both field and academic experience.

Terry and Payne follow a traditional outline as they first define terms, then lay out a biblical, historical, and practical foundation for strategy formation. They define strategy broadly as “the overall process describing what we believe the Lord would have us accomplish to make disciples of all nations” (5). The definition provides necessary groundwork for the remainder of the book, though it is not entirely clear what is the difference between the goal of strategy and the process for achieving that goal. The authors differentiate between strategy and strategic planning, defining the latter as “a prayerfully discerned, Spirit-guided process of preparation, development, implementation, and evaluation of the necessary steps involved for missionary endeavors” (13). This second description is more helpful and provides an outline for the more practical sections of the book.

After dealing quickly with objections to strategic planning and some biblical foundations, Terry and Payne list a series of “Missiological Principles for Strategy Development.” Though brief, the chapter reveals the influence of Donald McGavran’s church growth teaching. They emphasize the priority of evangelism, receptivity, and the importance of sociology and anthropology in missiology, all of which will be important in later chapters.

Some of the most interesting and informative material in the book comes in chapters outlining the history of missionary strategy from the Apostle Paul to the present. This section is not purely historical, as Terry and Payne seek to apply past strategies to twenty-first century missions. In addition, the history chapters overlap considerably as contemporary strategies emerge. Perhaps reflecting Terry’s past work on the history of evangelism and missions, this section is clear and valuable.

The second half of the book focuses in on the development, application, and evaluation of strategic plans. Terry and Payne avoid a “step by step” approach with a series of brief chapters on research and profiling, discerning receptivity and need, visioning and goal-setting, teaming, and methodology. They conclude with chapters on execution and evaluation. All are clearly important pieces of the overall process addressed by the book.
Terry and Payne have filled an important need in missionary training with this work. The book would be useful for individual missionaries or missions agency leadership as a discussion guide for strategy development. Teachers would find it helpful as a text for an upper-level missions class on either the graduate or undergraduate level.

The only significant weaknesses in the book are in its structure and in particular emphases revealed in certain chapters. For example, a chapter on “Contextualization Strategies” begins with a broad discussion of contextualization then focuses exclusively on controversial strategies in the Muslim world (C1-C6 spectrum, insider movements, CAMEL). A very technical discussion of goal setting stands in contrast to other less detailed chapters. The application chapters (16-27) are somewhat disjointed, lacking clear connection between topics, and the book ends abruptly without a conclusion to bring these chapters together.

Overall, however, Terry and Payne accomplished a significant feat in bringing in one book much important material on strategy and strategic planning. The chapters on historical strategies are most valuable. Throughout the book, the authors provide side notes and case studies from history and contemporary missions practitioners. The material is comprehensive and broadly applicable, making Developing a Strategy for Missions a valuable addition to the literature.