

FOCUS 2020

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL SERIES

THE GREAT COMMISSION WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

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SOON PAK
... AND OTHERS

CONTENTS

Blessing All People:
The Original Great Commission6
Aaron Kauffman

Courage to Run Into a Riot.....7
Aaron Pierce

Polishing Arrows8
Alex Pettett

The Faithful Centurion9
Andrew Barron

100 Years from Now All
That Will Matter is Jesus10
Brad Lewter

Swept Up in the Mighty Purposes of God 11
Bryan Gibbs

Soften Your Heart and Believe12
Burt Plaster

Strangers in Our Land13
Clint Morgan

The Power in Glory.....14
Curtis Chanda

God's Agenda: Taking the
Church to Where it is Not.....15
Dan Brokke

Transformed by a Conversation16
Dan Schafer

Going with Jesus17
Dave Hall

The Day After18
Denise Beck

The Owner's Plans19
Dennis Episcopo

Releasing Control.....20
Donnie Searce

Radical Selflessness21
Frank Y

They Will Reach Them22
Galen Burkholder

So Abram Went.....23
Jeff Denlinger

Change of Plans24
Jeremy Taylor

Mission? Really?.....25
Joe Handly

World Upside Down 26
John Bernard

Are You a Mary or Martha?27
John Chesnut

How to Accomplish the Task? 28
Kärin Butler Primuth

Introducing People to Jesus29
Kevin Kompelien

Who is at Your Table?30
Kim Kargbo

Our Calling31
Lauren Libby

Glorious Things!32
Marcos Daniel González

Fear in the Mind Creates
Stress in the Body33
Matt Nickoson

Go There Before We Get There34
Matthew Ellison

Running Towards the Lost
with the Fragrance of Christ35
Michelle Atwell

The Giver's Reward36
Murray Cornelius

Will Our Ministries Stand the Test?37
Mutua Mahiaini

The Lost are Perishing:
What Shall We Do? 38
Paul Barreca

A True Kingdom Burden39
R. York Moore

Missions on the Bottom Shelf40
Rich Mendola

A Garment of Praise41
Rob Magwood

A Day of Good News42
Soon Pak

Raising Up Followers of Jesus43
Steve Douglass

Partnerships: Mutual, I'm Sure44
Timothy Crouch

Never Waste a Good Crisis45
Zachary King

DEAR FRIEND,
40 is a number
of biblical
proportions.
Consider these
unique mentions
of 40 among the
dozens we find
in the pages
of Scripture:

- The time of the flood lasted 40 days before the waters began to recede
- The spies' mission lasted 40 days and the subsequent lack of willingness to enter the land brought on 40 years of wandering in the desert
- Jonah prophesied for 40 days before the Ninevites repented
- Jesus fasted and prayed for 40 days (as did Moses and Elijah)
- Jesus appeared for 40 days following his resurrection

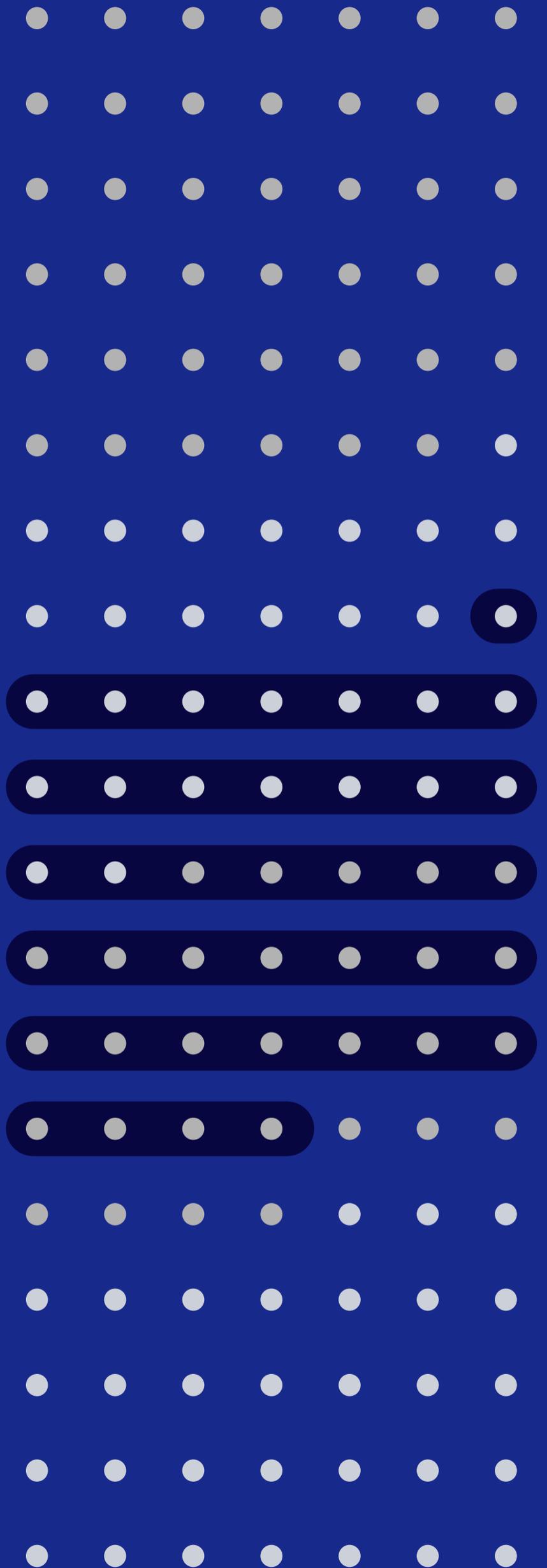
These are just a few of the many examples of the number 40 in the Bible.

The number 40 most often represents a time of testing, judgment, and preparation. Jesus' temptation for 40 days was a test. The wanderings in the desert were a judgment, as was the flood. Jonah's prophesying prepared the hearts of the Ninevites.

Jesus' appearances set the stage for the new mission of the church and the outpouring of His Spirit among the nations. Can we, together as a missions community, set aside 40 days to hear from Him in expectation of an outpouring of His Spirit among the nations?

These 40 devotionals have been written by the men and women that lead us in the Great Commission today. It is our hope that they will encourage you to take time to reflect and pray in hopeful expectation.

Ted Esler
President, Missio Nexus



Blessing All People: The Original Great Commission

AARON KAUFFMAN

President, Virginia Mennonite Missions

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” (Genesis 12:1–3, NRSV)

When we learned that Latino families connected to our domestic church plants were losing work due to the coronavirus pandemic, we quickly launched a relief fund. We didn’t stop to ask, “Are we a relief agency or a mission agency?” We had the means of mobilizing donors to help those in need, so we acted. We organized a distribution team and put out the word in less than forty-eight hours. As of this writing, we’ve received over \$28,000 and helped thirty-nine families.

In expressing their gratitude, these families often use the word blessing. “Thank you for making this blessing possible,” wrote María, a single mother of two who had lost her job. “This money will help me buy food for my children.” The Montoya family, whose father was laid off, stated, “We are deeply grateful for this help. We pray that God may multiply his blessings to all of you.” Their responses remind me that blessing all the families of the earth is the original Great Commission.

The first eleven chapters of the Bible narrate the tragic fall of humanity from a state of harmony with God, one another, and creation to one of estrangement and death. It climaxes with the ultimate human attempt to prosper apart from God, the tower of Babel. God graciously intervenes, confusing the builders’ language and scattering them over the face of earth.

Then God launched a rescue plan only he could craft, calling an aging, barren couple to leave everything they knew and head to an unknown land (Genesis 12:1–3). Through Abraham and Sarah, God promises to produce a great nation that will become a blessing to all the families of the earth. It is the original Great Commission. Their obedience kicks off a chain of events, sometimes glorious, other times heartbreaking, but ultimately salvific. Centuries later, the heir of this immigrant couple, Jesus Christ, undoes the curse of sin and makes the blessing of peace with God, one another, and creation possible through his death and resurrection. Paul calls this promise of blessing to all people through Abraham’s heir “the gospel” (Galatians 3:8).

The original Great Commission task of blessing the nations defies our dichotomies. It is both earthly and heavenly, individual and corporate, spiritual and social, local and global, spoken and performed, immediate and eternal. Faustino, a new believer whose family benefited from our immigrant relief fund, sums it up well: “I want to say thank you to all the brothers and sisters that are supporting us. Thanks to our powerful Father. May God protect our pastor and his family and all the missionaries that are in different places, in the name of Jesus. Amen!”



QUOTE

“The history of mission is the history of the spread of God’s blessing, the history of God keeping his promise to Abraham.” Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*



QUESTION

How do you see the task of blessing all nations reflected in other versions of the Great Commission? Whom does God want to bless through your church or organization?

Courage to Run Into a Riot

AARON PIERCE

Executive Director, Steiger International

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

Think about that. Anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists. What a curious statement! The author of Hebrews is speaking to a Christian audience, so of course they believe that God exists! But what does it mean to truly believe that?

I was born and raised in the center of Amsterdam, near the edge of the infamous Red-Light District. My parents were missionaries there in the '80s and early '90s, at the height of the punk rock movement.

My dad tells the story of a group of English soccer fans who were in town and had decided they wanted to fight with the drug dealers. Our family's apartment overlooked the main drug trafficking street, and they could see about eighty people gathering, armed with bricks, bottles, and clubs. Screams and the sound of breaking glass reverberated through the nearby buildings as the battle began to rage. It was a full-blown riot.

Suddenly, a solitary police car screeched into the parking lot across from our building. An officer jumped out of the car and ran into the angry mob, rubber baton in hand. Then something surprising happened. Although the mob could have eaten this guy for lunch, they instead dropped their makeshift weapons and fled down a nearby alleyway, with the lone officer with the rubber stick in hot pursuit.

In a moment of lucidity, the police officer realized what he was doing, clearly became frightened, and wasted no time retreating to the relative safety of his police car. But for a few crazy moments, that policeman had believed in what he represented. He had been convinced that the power and the authority of the law was greater than that of the unruly mob.

THAT is what believing that God exists looks like. Believing that God exists means that I am so convinced of the authority and power of the One that I represent, that I would run into the middle of riot for His sake. For it is in the riots—those moments when we have lost the illusion of control and depend entirely on God—that we experience His supernatural power.

If this year has taught me anything, it's that our plans, strategies, and wise rhetoric is not even close to accomplishing the Great Commission. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:20, “The Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.”

If we are to see the task we have been called to, finished in our lifetime, I am more convinced than ever that we need a supernatural outpouring of God's power.



QUOTE

Without faith it is impossible to please God.



QUESTION

What does it mean for you to have the kind of faith that would lead you to run head-long into a riot?

Polishing Arrows

ALEX PETTETT

Executive Director, World Witness, Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church

“The Lord called me from the womb,
from the body of my mother he named my name.
He made my mouth like a sharp sword;
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me a polished arrow;
in his quiver he hid me away.
And he said to me, ‘You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will be glorified....
I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth,’” (Isaiah 49:1–3, 6)

In Isaiah, the servant’s mission to be a “light for the nations” is conceived “from the womb”—meaning, the servant is born to do this task. Its spiritual genome is one of advancing Kingdom territory, which is characterized by the armaments of swords and arrows.

The sword is a close-combat weapon and represents the servant’s Gospel proclamation to all those within earshot. On the other hand, the servant is also a polished arrow. Arrows are ancient artillery capable of striking targets at a distance. All believers in Christ have this commission of close combat (i.e., local Gospel proclamation) but a few are chosen to be “polished arrows” launched into target-rich environments to proclaim God’s salvation to the nations. These “chosen” ones are the missionaries. No church is equipped without having sharp swords and polished arrows in its arsenal.

The Church’s privilege and obligation is to begin the process of creating and identifying these polished arrows “from the womb”

(i.e., before they were born, Psalm 102:18). To be a polished arrow requires parents to consistently lead their children in Biblical teaching and living. A polished arrow requires churches to purposefully sharpen the children through local Gospel proclamation opportunities. It requires parents and the Church, together, to willingly launch them unto the nations. The Church must deliberately send out their very best that God’s “salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” It was for this mission we, the Church, were born.



QUOTE

All Believers in Christ have this commission of close combat (i.e., local Gospel proclamation) but a few are chosen to be “polished arrows” launched into target-rich environments to proclaim God’s salvation to the nations.



QUESTION

Are your churches being challenged to begin identifying and praying for the unborn to become missionaries? And, is there a program tracking their “polishing” process?

The Faithful Centurion

ANDREW BARRON

CEO, Jews for Jesus-Canada

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us.” And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.” When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health. (Luke 7:1–10)

Luke enjoys contrasts. He puts things together that don’t seem to belong all together: men and women, young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, faith and unbelief, clean and unclean, Jews and Gentiles.

Here, we meet a centurion: a professional officer of the Roman army. He was smart, trained, well-connected and ruthless. This man loved Israel and her God and believed in the healing power of Jesus. Capernaum was a city known for darkness and unbelief. Luke contrasts the faith of the Centurion against the backdrop of Capernaum.

Jesus selected this town as the center of his public ministry in Galilee. The characters we meet in Luke 7 could not have been more dissimilar—the elders, the crowds, the disciples, Jesus, the centurion and his staff.

We learn that flowing out of his love and reverence for the God of Israel, the centurion had built the synagogue. We learn that the elders of the Jews said that the centurion was worthy because of that. This is a term of Levitical purity. To be *worthy* meant to be *clean*, to be *kosher* according to the laws of Moses and the custom of the day. The Centurion was *not* worthy—he was an uncircumcised gentile, a Roman soldier. He was unclean. We see in verse seven that he understood the law—a Jew could not go into his house and he could not go into the house of a Jew.

I can imagine him raising the money, drafting the plans and overseeing the construction of the synagogue all the while knowing that he would never enter the building he made possible because of his love for the God of Israel. His love embodied God’s love. It was a one-way love. It was a *do so* love and not just a *say so* love. It was a love that only desired the benefit of the beloved—no personal benefit. God sent the Son. He received nothing but gave everything. We receive everything and it costs us nothing.



QUOTE

“I have not seen such faith, even in Israel!”



QUESTION

Are you willing to build something for someone that you cannot go inside?

100 Years from Now All That Will Matter is Jesus

BRAD LEWTER

Lead Pastor, Grand Avenue Baptist Church

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33, CSB)

We all have people or schedules pulling us in different directions. Relationships, jobs, children, school, even finances, are examples of things that make up the daily lives of most people. The stress that comes along with having so many responsibilities can be daunting. I can remember talking to a wiser man about some of the troubles in life, and he said something that has always stayed with me, “Life gets lifey sometimes!” While the grammar of this statement is obviously incorrect, the sentiment is so true. We are all faced with the sad reality of trials, pain, and loss. We all have needs that have to be met to ensure life continues. So how do we balance the stresses and necessities of life that are inevitable with the kind of joyful and hope-filled life that Jesus promises to offer? Jesus helps us with that very question in Matthew 6.

When addressing how we should interact with physical possessions, Jesus said in Matthew 6:19–21, “Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Jesus continues this portion of the Sermon on the Mount by addressing the necessities of life that cause anxiety in the hearts

and minds of many. “Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25).

Jesus is saying that there is something more important that should occupy our minds than the collection of possessions that will fade away. There is something more important than the daily necessities required to sustain our lives, yes, even food, water, clothing. What could possibly be more important than these things? Matthew 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Our minds should be more occupied by the Kingdom of God than anything else. Why? “Because one hundred years from all that will matter is the work we do for the Kingdom.” That is what Jesus is teaching in Matthew 6. Yes, you need to eat, yes you will have material possessions. But what matters most is Jesus! So how do we balance these things? Leverage all you have (possessions, food, water, clothing, job, talents) toward fulfilling the Great Commission. Read Matthew 28:16–20.



QUOTE

“The mission was Paul’s calling, but not his treasure. His treasure was God himself. Communion with God must be our highest priority.” —Skye Jethani



QUESTION

What can you use today that can be leveraged toward fulfilling The Great Commission?

Swept Up in the Mighty Purposes of God

BRYAN GIBBS

Director of World Missions, The Navigators

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ. (Colossians 2:9–10)

Jesus' very first words in the Gospel of Mark are powerful. *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* Mark 1:15 With this bold statement Jesus ushered in a whole new reality for our world.

But what "time" did Jesus fulfill? I believe it was that long, dark age stretching from the Fall of Man to the moment God sent his Son. During that period of human history, the immediate presence of God was stripped away from all descendants of Adam and we were separated from the Father. Jesus said that "time" is finally over!

When Jesus showed up, he changed everything. For the first time in a very long time, there was direct fellowship between God and one man—and fellowship in a whole new way. Jesus said, *"... the Father who dwells in me does his works."* John 14:10 Amazing! The Father dwelt in the Son, and we see in the life of Jesus the perfect expression of the presence, will, and activity of the Father. Everywhere Jesus went, the kingdom (*basileia*, literally "reign") of God was at hand.

Jesus was the sample product, the original specimen, the first iteration, that revealed the quality of life God has in mind for his children. The life that Jesus displayed for us he also extends to

us, and it is way beyond anything we have experienced or imagined. It is so unexpected that our first step is simply to repent (*metanoia*, literally "overhaul one's thinking"). And it is so far beyond our grasp that our only way in is through believing the good news.

Just as the Father dwelt in the Son, so the Son indwells his people. Jesus returns us to the original fellowship that we were meant to have with God before the Fall—but now at a whole new level. This is what Paul wrote in Colossians 1:27, *"The mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you, so therefore you can look forward to sharing in God's glory. It's that simple. That is the substance of our Message"* (MSG).

The life that Jesus modeled for us in his own fellowship with the Father is the very life that he now imparts to us today. Through his Spirit he replicates his life in us so that we become the human vehicle for his divine activity. And his indwelling presence shows us that we are not really living until we are swept up in his mighty purposes—purposes that lead us to the end of the age and to the ends of the earth for the advance of this gospel.

”

QUOTE

"The Christian life is the life that Jesus lived then, lived now, by him, in you." —Major Ian Thomas

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QUESTION

What does it look like when we fully allow Christ to live his life in us today? What implications does this have for our task in the Great Commission?

Soften Your Heart and Believe

BURT PLASTER

CEO, WEC International

They did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. (Mark 6:52, NIV)

At the beginning of 2020, as our international mission fellowship was fasting and praying together for breakthrough in five specific unreached people groups, the comforting but perplexing message came to us: “Soften your heart and believe.” I had been seeking the Lord for His timely word for the start of the year as I normally do, but this surprised me. The words of Mark 6:52 unveiled the point further: “They did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” Having just been straining at the oars, the disciples’ failure to gain understanding through Jesus’ miracles, His walking on the water, and calming the violent wind were related to their having hardened hearts.

My first inclination during periods of emergency, turmoil, or testing is not to soften, but to toughen into a steely resolve to prevail, or at least to survive. It can seem like the raw determination to believe is synonymous with keeping faith. But straining at the oars is not enough. What I really need is a gentle trust, a softened heart to believe the Lord and the truth of His promises to me and to all His own.

Our hearts can be hardened by our response to disappointment, pain, or trauma. A hardened heart is an attempt to protect

ourselves from repeat injury through a willful stance of invulnerability. It may seem to us that we have good reason for our hardness. But it blocks faith and trust.

Softening my heart involves a return to dependency, reawakening my trust in the Lord concerning things far greater than my ability to control. As I trust God and believe in His promises, even storms, winds, global catastrophes, and cataclysms return to their humble place of dependence upon Him, for “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:17).

I soften and confess that He is loyal. I soften and admit that He is more reliable than I am. His soft heart agrees with mine as I pray for the lost. I know that He responds to my prayer for them.

If I will soften my heart and listen, He has a wonderful instruction for me, whatever the days may bring: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27).



QUOTE

As I trust God and believe in His promises, even storms, winds, global catastrophes and cataclysms return to their humble place of dependence upon Him, for “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”



QUESTION

How can softening your heart bring you into agreement with the Lord about His purposes in the ministry He has given you?

Strangers in Our Land

CLINT MORGAN

General Director, International Ministries

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Hebrews 13:2)

In the US, 44.7 million people are foreign born. Twenty percent of the Canadian population is foreign born. Globally, immigration and refugee numbers have grown and there is little indication that this is going to slow down. One cannot practically avoid encountering immigrants and refugees today. Consciously or subconsciously we all have a reaction when we see someone that falls within this category of "stranger."

How do we, as the Body of Christ, directed by God's Word, address the increasing challenges and opportunities before us due to the influx of immigrants and refugees into our own countries? How does our attitude toward these strangers fit into our understanding and fulfilling of the Great Commission?

As humans we see the world through a grid of accumulated knowledge and experiences that form our presuppositions. It is a fact that presuppositions, both positive and negative, about the 'strangers in the land' will, to a great degree, shape our response to them. The media is all too eager to form these presuppositions for us.

For example, if we perceive those coming from other countries to be:

- A raider in our work force
- A financial burden to our country
- A danger to our religious beliefs

- A disturbance in our educational system
- A carrier of strange and dangerous diseases
- A threat to our security

...then our treatment of them will most likely tend toward the negative. If this is the starting point of one's thinking it will be difficult, but not impossible, to move toward a Gospel response.

Consider a different set of presuppositions. If we perceive these same people to be:

- Created by God with a soul that has eternal value
- Worthy of our love as we love ourselves
- In need of love, friendship and safety
- People who long for a relationship with God
- Those to whom Jesus commissioned us to take the Gospel

...then our treatment of them will most likely be Gospel-filled.

It is imperative that believers make an unwavering commitment to respond to the "strangers" in a way that reflects biblical values, brings hope to those in need, and fulfills the Great Commission. The next time you encounter one of these strangers, prayerfully consider what fuels your response to them. You never know; they might be an angel.



QUOTE

Ultimately, we will do well to embrace the presence of immigrants and refugees by aligning our response with the Gospel rather than political rhetoric, emotionally charged tirades, or culturally driven reactions.



QUESTION

What is your response when you come across immigrants in your neighborhood?

The Power in Glory

CURTIS CHANDA

International Director, Global Teams

He who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. (John 7:18)

When I was ten years old, I took a Karate class at our local recreation center. I remember doing knuckle pushups—the reason for which I have lost! I also remember learning a valuable life lesson. Our instructor taught us that in punching an object, we were to focus not on the object itself, but rather concentrate on something beyond the object, say a wall. We were then coached to try to punch the wall. The impact felt by the intermediate object was significantly increased!

Without careful attention, ministry can devolve into a focus on ever-present challenges with a heavy tilt toward an outcome orientation. And honestly, most of the pressing issues we face are worthy and important; many of them are near to the heart of the Father. However, over time a fixed focus on the presenting challenges results in impact fade.

Jesus' ministry was characterized by looking beyond his presenting situations to the glory of His Father. From rebuking Pharisees to teaching sinners to raising the dead, Jesus had a fixed perception of and commitment to bringing honor to the Father. The Scottish writer George MacDonald believed that honoring his Father, not the outcome for humanity, was the single compelling motivation for Jesus Christ's incarnation, ministry, and death.

Ministering with an eye to glory requires both a change of heart, as well as the practiced discipline of refocusing our attention on honoring the One we serve. Renewal comes in pausing for recalibration to consider how, and if, our current service will bring glory – enlarged honor, value, renown - to the One we serve. This is not a life detached from circumstances, but one with a rigorous eye toward the object of our service. It is not an avoidance of hard work, but an empowering of it. "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing *the work* you gave me to do." (John. 17:4)



QUOTE

"The test of the life of a saint is not success, but faithfulness in human life as it actually is. We should not set up success in Christian work as the aim; the aim is to manifest the glory of God in human life, to live the life hid with Christ in God in human conditions." —Oswald Chambers



QUESTION

What activities in my life and ministry seem least infused with God's life?

God's Agenda: Taking the Church to Where it is Not

DAN BROKKE

President, Bethany Gateways

As truly as I live, and all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs...shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. (Numbers 14:21)

One of the saddest stories in the Bible occurs in Numbers 13 and 14. The Israelites, after two years in the wilderness, were now in position to take possession of the land promised to Abram more than five hundred years earlier. Twelve spies scouted out the land. But they brought a fearful report of walled cities and giants in this Promised Land. Fear gripped the hearts of the people. Caleb and Joshua earnestly pleaded with them to trust God. But they would not!

God said something truly remarkable in pronouncing His judgment for their unbelief. He began with a vision, “As truly as I live, and *all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord*, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs ... shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers.” God’s deep desire is that His people would by their presence bring His glory into the land. That generation died in the wilderness.

Thirty-eight years later Joshua led the next generation into this Promised Land. He divided the land for each tribe, and then they saw God bring victory through them. Joshua exhorted them to fully occupy what God had promised—to fulfill God’s agenda for them.

I was recently asked “What core convictions underlay what you do?”

- *We must increase our efforts to engage profoundly unreached peoples! To reach people in the hardest places with the Gospel is a matter of justice.*
- *The Church in America must stay engaged in missions around the world. The Great Commission is still in our Bible. We must not shrink back but must still “Go.”*
- *We must partner and work alongside of God’s people around the world. The task remaining can only be done by working together.*

The first recorded words of Jesus were spoken after Mary and Joseph found their 12-year-old boy in the temple with the religious leaders, “*Why were you looking for Me? Don’t you know I must be about my Father’s business?*” In another place Jesus said, “*My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work*” (John 4:34, ESV). Jesus was firmly focused on His Father’s agenda.

The Father yearns that we wholeheartedly “accomplish His work” today. The Holy Spirit is conducting an “orchestra” of His people from many nations each playing their part in the Great Commission symphony. Let’s embrace His agenda every day of our lives ... loving God and seeing people from every tribe and nation transferred from darkness to light—to dwell in the Father’s house!



QUOTE

The motto of every missionary, whether preacher, printer, or schoolmaster, ought to be “Devoted for Life.” —Adoniram Judson



QUESTION

Has your commitment to the Great Commission diminished in any way because of current circumstances?

Transformed by a Conversation

DAN SCHAFER

President, World Gospel Mission

This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,” (Matthew 6:9)

Nothing he seemed to be saying made sense to them. He was challenging everything they had ever known to be true. Jesus sat on the hillside seemingly changing all the rules that had guided their life and society.

Over and over Jesus spoke this phrase, “You have heard that it was said.” It was a favored introductory expression that was followed by an earthshaking announcement; a pronouncement that indicated a new reality.

Multiple subjects were covered, and now His attention turned to prayer. In a few simple words, he forever remodels His followers understanding of prayer. No more repetition or empty phrases. Nor was the focus to be on making God aware of our needs—because He already knows what we need before we pray.

No, prayer is to be about a relationship. It is about expressing, experiencing, and deepening that relationship; “Our Father.” It is to be about growing in our understanding of who He is; “who art in heaven.”

In fifty-two short words, Jesus changes prayer from useless babblings to a relational conversation with our Father. A refreshing revolution that makes prayer a meaningful conversation that literally transforms who we are as we experience the presence of the Almighty God as we speak to Him.

As we transcend time and, in our mind’s eye, sit at Jesus’ feet on the grassy mountainside, His teaching amazes us—even astonishes us. We, who are otherwise individuals of no real account, find ourselves as being viewed by the God and Creator of the universe as one of His children. We get to start a conversation with Him by addressing Him as our Father. Repeating those words causes us to get momentarily sidetracked as we contemplate the fact that “I am a child of the King.”

But the amazement doesn’t end there. Jesus’ exemplary prayer also reveals that our royal blood flows from no ordinary King. Our Father dwells in heaven. It’s too much! We must pause again in our prayer to soak in whom we are speaking with. Jesus is providing for us a truly transformational prayer.

Our task as missionaries is no less transformative. We enter a country, a region, a village, a home, or even into the life of a single individual with the Good News. With this message we challenge everything they hold true about the spiritual life and declare to them a new spiritual reality in Christ. That is the essence of the Great Commission. It is the task we received from Jesus.



QUOTE

Our message should be no less transformational than the Good News that Jesus shared with us.



QUESTION

Jesus modeled a transformational ministry. Are we following His example?

Going with Jesus

DAVE HALL

International Director/CEO, TEAM

When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida. (Luke 19:10)

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (John 10:16)

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18–20)

Much has been written in recent times about the missional nature of the church, both locally and globally. What does it mean for the church to be “on mission?” What are the appropriate philosophies and strategies that should shape the missional thrust of the church in the world today? Conferences, seminars, periodicals, and more provide forums where these questions are discussed and debated.

But at its core, what does it practically mean for the follower of Christ to engage in mission? Is there a simple concept that can serve as a compass, allowing us to periodically assess our course as individuals or organizations seeking to fulfill Christ’s instruction to make disciples of all peoples? As I read and re-read the life and ministry of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, I increasingly ask myself this question: *Am I going where Jesus would go?*

It’s pretty clear from reading the Gospels that Jesus had a clear sense of why he had come into the world, from his youth until leaving his disciples on a hill outside Jerusalem following his death and resurrection.

Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business? (Luke 2:49, NKJV)

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10, ESV)

I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd. (John 10:16, ESV)

Jesus came with a mission, one that shaped his words and actions. In brief, he came seeking those who were lost, neglected, suffering, marginalized; people in need of redemption and reconciliation that only God could bring. And he took his early followers along with him, all the way to a cross.

And so, I ask myself from time to time, were Jesus living in the city, the country, the world in which I now find myself, where would he be going? Who are the people and what are the places that would capture his vision and heart, shaping his days and activities? Then I ask myself and those with whom I together follow Christ, are we going there also?

Go ... make disciples of all nations ... and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19–20, ESV)



QUOTE

The promise of his abiding presence is most keenly sensed by those who are going where Jesus is going in the world today, whether next door or around the world.



QUESTION

Am I willing to go there with him?

The Day After

DENISE BECK

Executive Director, Velvet Ashes

**When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.
(Matthew 28:17)**

For years they had walked in sync with His steps; looking down as the dust His sandals kicked up landed on their toes. They listened as he strung words together in a way they had never heard before. Swirls of excitement and hope never left their chest for three years as they followed Jesus. And in the most intense set of days they had ever known they woke up to His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. And still another morning came. The hardest decision yet would be made on the day after.

Jesus's charge to "Go" didn't fall on the ears of totally equipped sold out gifted believers. In fact, Matthew 28:17 tells us his words settled on a crew of doubters who worshiped anyway:

"When they saw Him, they worshiped him; but some doubted."

And knowing full well those insecurities and doubts, Jesus spoke his Great Commission over them anyway. Trusting that on the day after, he would find them not miraculously changed, but unswervingly obedient.

I imagine the heaviness as the squinting eyes that strained to catch last glimpses of Him in the clouds turned to refocus on the ground beneath their feet; the road back home without Him. With each step made in silence, His words crept into their minds. "Go

and make disciples..." They who had followed must now learn to lead.

And today, without the memories of sharing life and breath with the Savior, we are asked to be just as obedient. In moments of high emotion that still tighten our throats as they make passes in our memories, we said yes to His call. With faces in heaven that we felt responsible for we boldly dreamed of what lay ahead. However, the sun set, and we woke up on the day after. With our minds cleared we realized our task in the great commission is not to put our hope in our ability to do, feel, be, execute anything on our own merit, strength or ability. Our task in the Great Commission is not to achieve Christian celebrity status. Our task is to remember that when the 2000-year-old call to "go" finally reached our ears, Jesus understood it would reach those who would still doubt; still be found lacking. His strength was never dependent on us. Our task is to, like the disciples, be unswervingly obedient. To keep taking steps that are born out of strength we can't take credit for. Because the call is still the call, no matter my strength. And the world will still need to hear on the day after.



QUOTE

"Obedience to God's will is the secret of spiritual knowledge and insight. It is not willingness to know, but willingness to DO God's will that will bring certainty." —Eric Liddell



QUESTION

Have you been allowing doubt in your ability prevent your obedience to what God is asking you to do?

The Owner's Plans

DENNIS EPISCOPO

Senior Pastor, Appleton Alliance Church

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (2 Corinthians 5:14–15)

Behind the call to world evangelism is the issue of radical stewardship. Some called it a failure. Others said it was an embarrassment. In 1884, the first missionaries from The Christian and Missionary Alliance set out on a 9,292-mile journey to The Congo in Africa. These five young men had just graduated from the newly formed Missionary Training Institute.

When they arrived, they battled Portuguese slave traders that saw these missionaries as threatening their profits. They battled disease and threats from tribal warriors. Their young leader, John Condit died of malaria shortly after his arrival. Three others, after failing to secure a mission site, decided to return to the United States. Only one of the original five stayed to eventually secure a small piece of land to launch the first Alliance mission.

Going to Africa was not a career decision for these five young men. It was a life investment choice based on their understanding of stewardship. They went to Africa because they were owned by Another. That Owner's plans called for an invasion of Satan's stronghold in Africa. In fact, even the servants who gave the financial resources for them to fund the mission understood this radical stewardship responsibility. The Owner was calling them to invest.

I am convinced that the most important issue in the church today is stewardship. I'm not referring to people giving money. I'm talking about God's people displaying God's ownership of their life. Paul puts it this way, "Christ loves compels us because we are convinced that one died and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

God is the owner of everything. Why? Because He created everything and everyone. He sustains His creation by His power. Everything belongs to Him. When a person turns their life over to Jesus, they give up ALL their rights. Bottom Line: God now owns me and everything that I possess. Part of my rebellion as a sinner is expressed in my attempt to deny this truth. I am only a manager and as a manager, my priorities need to be ordered by the Owner. This may call for a radical stewardship decision to declare God as Owner!



QUOTE

"All to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give." — Judson W. Van De Venter



QUESTION

How do I demonstrate that God is indeed the Owner of my life?

Releasing Control

DONNIE SCEARCE

CEO, Pioneers – Canada

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. (Psalm 131:1–3, ESV)

There are moments or even seasons when it is clear to us that we are not in control. As we mature in life, most of us realize, on a growing measure, that we are in control of much less than we had previously thought. A cancer diagnosis. A friend's betrayal. A child in university walks away from faith. A marriage is strained beyond what we thought would be possible. A loss of a loved one. And last, by not least, a pandemic. And by the way, lest you think these are far off events, I have had the privilege of walking with various friends in the last month for whom all these things have been true. Perhaps you too are dealing with such issues right now?

In Psalm 131, David models three principles that are incredibly applicable for us, especially those in leadership:

1. Acknowledge before God that we are not as strong as we think we are (verse 1).

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. (Note: the phrase “too great and too marvelous for me” refers to that which is “too difficult for me to understand.”)

Rich Mullins wrote in his song, “We Are Not As Strong As We Think We Are,” the following lyrics that reflects the heart of David as he wrote Psalm 131:1:

*We are frail, we are fearfully and wonderfully made,
Forged in the fires of human passion,
Choking on the fumes of selfish rage,
Between our hells and our heavens so few inches apart,
We must be awfully small and not as strong as we think we are.*

2. Calm our soul in reflection and prayer (verse 2).

But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. (Note: the picture David is presenting is one of a child that is at rest in the lap of its mother, not grasping or demanding.)

3. Call our team to hope in the only One who can help (verse 3).

O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. (Note: turn those we lead to the Lord Himself, the only One in whom true and lasting hope is found.)

David's response for his own anxious soul is an excellent model for us. One exercise to apply this is to pray through each step when we find ourselves and our friends in need. Fill your personal name in the blank:

O _____, hope in the Lord from *THIS* time forth and forevermore.



QUOTE

“It is sweet to be nothing and less than nothing that Christ may be all in all” —David Brainard



QUESTION

In what ways do I need to release control in my leadership over others and not feel threatened by that?

Radical Selflessness

FRANK Y

Acting Executive Director, UB Global

Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. (John 12:23–26)

Imagine two pandemics that decimated 30% of an empire’s population—including three emperors! The Roman Empire reeled from these realities in the second and third century AD. Yet in the midst of despair and death, the radical selflessness of God’s people was producing incredible fruit.

During the worst periods of the Roman plagues, many influential and wealthy people escaped to their countryside estates for safety. It was the Christians who remained, took in orphans, fed widows, and tended to the infected, even though it cost some their own lives. (It is worth noting that all this took place during periods of intense persecution against Christians.) Although we do not know the names of these courageous Christians, their actions advanced God’s Kingdom in powerful ways, laying spiritual foundations that would transform the entire empire into a Christian one a century later.

As the Great Commission community, we seek to make Jesus famous in every part of the world, among every people group. Often we are met with skepticism, derision, or apathy. But in the face of tangible acts of radical selflessness—the kind that is foreign to the world—the philosophical arguments and accusations of hatred and intolerance are silenced.

A pneumonic plague with 100% fatality rate was another such example. In northeast China and southeast Russia, during the

coldest months of 1910–11, this devastating disease took the lives of over 60,000 people. A British medical missionary, Arthur Jackson, volunteered to serve among poor day-laborers in Shenyang. Sadly, only eight days after arriving at the hospital (and 6 months after departing for missionary service), the 26-year-old doctor contracted the plague and died within a day.

Non-Christians in China were dumbfounded by the willingness of a young doctor to give up his lucrative career back home to serve among the least desirable of society. Although many Chinese were highly suspicious of Christians during that period, Arthur’s sacrifice moved non-Christian reporters to perfectly summarize the Gospel in Chinese newspapers:

Now he has given his only life for the lives of others, we see that he was a true Christian, who has done what Jesus did thousands of years ago.

What answers apathy? What silences skepticism? What advances God’s Kingdom around the world, bringing Him glory? Christians following their Savior to live out radical selflessness. In today’s highly connected world, let’s create and spread new stories of radical selflessness as inspiration to believers and witness to non-Christians. #RadicalSelflessness



QUOTE

What answers apathy? What silences skepticism? Christians following their Savior to live out radical selflessness.



QUESTION

During this COVID-19 period, what are unique opportunities to demonstrate radical selflessness among those we aim to serve—acts of sacrifice that transcends social expectation and understanding?

They Will Reach Them

GALEN BURKHOLDER

CEO, Global Disciples

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. (Mark 5:18–20)

In amazement, our small group of leaders listened to testimonies of Muslim leaders who had come to faith in Christ. We were in a secure out-of-the-way place in a nation bordering North Africa. Seven years earlier we assisted a small cluster of churches there to begin their own discipleship-mission training program in this predominantly Muslim region. Their goal was to equip their people to reach their ‘cousins’ with the Good News of Jesus.

The simple strategy was to build friendships with the Muslim neighbors and leaders they knew. In friendly interaction, they would initiate conversation about what the Qur’an reveals about Isa al-Masih (Jesus the Messiah). They would introduce ideas from the Qur’an like: Jesus is the Word of God (Sur. An-nisa’ 4:171), Jesus is the True Word (Sur. Maryam 19:34), and Jesus was born by the Spirit to Virgin Mary (Sur. Al-Anbiya’ 21:90–91).

Now we sat there, listening to a Muslim Sheik who had come to know Jesus the Messiah as his Savior and Lord. He told us about leading thirty-two other Muslim Sheiks to surrender their lives to Jesus. The testimonies that followed of the many ways Jesus

revealed himself were so inspiring and faith building. In this region and a neighboring region we visited, at least seven thousand Muslims have come to know Jesus as their Savior and Lord. When someone decides to follow Jesus, they are invited to a secret place for five days of instruction—*this was what we believed as Muslims, now this is what we believe as disciples of Jesus Christ*. There are prayers for deliverance, wisdom and courage. Then, if they are ready, they are baptized.

The new Christ-followers are instructed not to change the way they dress, but to go and talk with their own people about the Messiah, like Jesus instructed the man freed from demons in Mark 5. They join small groups, meeting regularly—and often in secret—to study the Injil, the Gospel(s), as the Qur’an encourages them to (Sur. Al-Ma’idah 5:46).

One African leader in our group asked their discipleship-mission trainer, “But, how will you reach the people just across your border?” He smiled and asked a young man in their training and from that nation to stand. “He will reach them,” he replied.



QUOTE

Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you.



QUESTION

How can we become better at equipping the people we serve to be ‘near-culture’ mission workers who multiply disciples and new fellowships among their own people?

So Abram Went

JEFF DENLINGER

President, WorldVenture

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. (Genesis 12:1–4)

I’ll never forget Jaime. As a new disciple of Jesus, Jaime did not ease into following Jesus, he jumped! We had just returned from a couples’ retreat focused on marriage and the twenty couples were still basking in the great fellowship and biblical teaching on Christ-focused marriages. The following week, a small group of guys gathered to pray together and Jaime wanted to know how the church could afford the costs of the marriage retreat. Several guys chimed in about the offerings that the church took up as a part of our worship. When Jaime heard someone say something about a tithe, he wanted to know if the ten percent was on the gross or net portion of the pay check. Everyone laughed, except Jaime. At our next worship gathering, Jaime came with three check books and proceeded to write a check from each one. When asked what he was doing, Jaime explained that the first check book was their personal account his wife knew about. The second check book was his business account the government knew about. The third check book only God and Jaime knew about. He wrote out three checks that Sunday. When asked why, Jaime replied, “The way I figure it, God’s blessings in my life began long before I believed in Jesus and I’ve a lot of back tithes to give.” As a new disciple, Jaime gave back to God what had been entrusted to him.

As much as I am drawn to the promises of God’s redemptive purposes for all of humanity given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, my pulse quickens in reading verse 4: “So Abram went ...” Abraham did not ease into following God, he jumped! By faith, Abraham believed God and he went. The tangible plan of redemption for all the families of the earth was launched and continues to this day.

While knowledge of the Bible and a grasp of God’s intent that none should perish are core to our knowing God and his ways, what God is looking for in us is simple obedience.



QUOTE

God told Abraham, “Go!” And he went. Jesus told his disciples, “Go!” So we go. We’ll keep going and making disciples until he says, “Come home!”



QUESTION

What does your next step of obedience to Jesus look like in blessing all the families of the earth?

Change of Plans

JEREMY TAYLOR

President, Tyndale House Foundation

You can make many plans, but the Lord's purpose will prevail.
(Proverbs 19:21, NLT)

When I was a kid, those words meant one of two things. Either the situation was about to get better, or things were about to get worse.

Once on a family vacation, my parents informed my siblings and me that we would be driving late into the night. But after dinner, my dad said, "Change of plans." We had passed a hotel with an outdoor pool, and he and Mom decided to stop early.

Another time, I lied about something stupid and got caught. The following day we had a fun family outing scheduled. "Change of plans," my dad told me. "Because you lied, you'll be staying home."

Whether a change of plans is good or bad, altering course is always hard. It makes us realize we are not as in control of our lives as we would like.

In the spring of 2020, the whole world's plans changed. When COVID-19 invaded our lives, whole nations were effectively shut down. Schools and businesses were closed, churches were forced to meet online, and all but "essential" workers were encouraged to "stay safe, stay home."

Changing plans so abruptly and so completely was a new

experience for most people, but it was not new for anyone who has suddenly faced a devastating diagnosis, dealt with the unexpected loss of a loved one, lived through a job loss, suffered a crippling accident, or any number of other blindsiding events.

In such times, what a comfort it is to know that God's plans don't change. The Bible makes it clear that God does not change his mind (Numbers 23:19), is not taken by surprise even when events threaten to overwhelm us (Isaiah 45:21), and is walking with us each step of our journey through the hardest times (Psalm 23:4). God's mission was set in place before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), and he is accomplishing it through all the circumstances of our lives.

God's mission, in the words of David Bosch, is "the redemption of the universe." God's plan since before time began has been to bring his creation into perfect alignment with him through Jesus Christ. Our task as followers of Jesus is to joyfully participate in that mission even when our plans radically change. That's what the Great Commission is all about. And when we do that, no matter what our circumstances, we can be assured of God's favor.

In times of great and tumultuous change, we take comfort in knowing that we'll never hear God say, "Change of plans." Instead, if we follow *God's* plan, one day we'll hear him say, "Well done!"



QUOTE

In difficult times, what a comfort it is to know that God's plans don't change.



QUESTION

When your plans change suddenly, do you acknowledge God's sovereignty, or do you attempt to lean on your own understanding? Are there ways in which you could trust God's plans more?

Mission? Really?

JOE HANDLY

President, Asian Access

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:1–5)

A few years ago, I was asked to develop an article for a new journal: *The Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*. Writing that article “A Reflection on Contemplative Mission” caused me to pause and consider the mission path of my life and the way I lead within mission. You see, perhaps you are like me: wired for mission. Ever since engaging in this mission life, I’ve been an activist at heart, in my mind, and in activity. It’s probably why I am at where I am today, though likely God would have a different view of that because honestly, the only reason I’ve come to this place is because of Him.

As I pondered the emergent field of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care, I was also thinking deeply about the mission agency in which I was now serving, Asian Access. For years, I was inspired by the likes of Henri Nouwen and Dallas Willard, but I led my life and mission more like a general rather than a spiritual formation guru. I was all about mission!

But, Asian Access had a different approach, one that was compelling, transformative, and healthy yet one that seemed to develop both healthy leaders as well as mission catalysts. And, these catalysts did not always burn out, like many who I’d known over the years. In fact, I met one Nepali graduate who had completely

burned out. He was one of the most successful church planters in Nepal before joining Asian Access but his time with God diminished and his focus was all about mission. But this focus led to burnout and a near marital collapse.

The renewal of this focus from John 15 is what turned his life around and caused me to pause. Often, those of us in mission are compelled by the Great Commission and all the passages in Scripture calling us to mission. But, mission is not our first priority!

Rather, our relationship with Christ is most important. As we abide in the vine, we will flourish and grow, and through that we will bear much fruit. The tragedy of our story is that oftentimes when we focus on mission, we burn out or lead toxic lives that lead others astray. I’ve met many a mission leader who was too toxic in their relationships or living on the edge rather than walking with Jesus and leading out of that relationship.

Friends, the best way to lead our lives is not to focus on mission but rather to focus on Christ. Let Jesus take the center, abide in Him and walk deeply with him. When we abide in Christ, we will bear much fruit. Apart from him? NOTHING!



QUOTE

“Everything in the Christian life and experience depends on the quality of our love relationship with God. If that is not right, nothing will be right.” —Henry Blackaby



QUESTION

Is your focus on Mission or is it on Jesus?

World Upside Down

JOHN BERNARD

CEO, United World Mission

Paul and Silas ... came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, ... saying, "This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you." Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason's house. When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, "These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has entertained them as guests. They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus." (Acts 17:1-7)

"These men who have been turning the world upside down have come here also..." (Acts 17:6). Some translations suggest that Christians "disturbed" or "caused trouble" in the world, as if they were a general nuisance. The better translation is that they were "turning the world upside down."

Acts 16-19 is the account of Christians entering pagan society for the first time. Luke makes plain how the gospel turned the world upside down by calling people to a radically different and novel way of life, with Jesus as Lord. When demonic forces, ungodly economic interests, and unrighteous political power resisted this message, the result was conflict.

Christian discipleship is not a private matter, but one that brings faithful followers of Jesus into public conflict with the world and its powers. It's not that Christians go looking for trouble. In every case in Acts where Christians are brought before Roman authorities for "causing an uproar," no basis is found for the charges. As in Thessalonica, so also in Corinth, Ephesus and the rest of Acts, Christian disciples seek to respect culture, obey the laws, and live at peace with all people. In fact, God's people are called to seek the flourishing of their societies!

For the disciples in Acts, though, matters turned out just as they had for Jesus before Pilate. Though no basis is found for the charges that Christians are stirring up trouble, Paul and his co-workers often are beaten and jailed. Paul ends up as a prisoner in Rome and is, finally, executed.

The core charge against the Christians was that they were not loyal to Caesar, "saying that there is another king named Jesus." Though they did not pursue political power or Caesar's throne or to break Roman laws, this charge rings true.

In Mathew 28:18, at the start of the Great Commission calling us to "make disciples," Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Our main task is to form disciples that live under this "authority," under the rule of "another King named Jesus." This is true even when it brings us into conflict with patterns of life that our culture assumes as normal and values as such.

Our task is to be disciples and to make disciples that turn the world upside down wherever we go by our loyalty to Jesus and to his way. This is a way of peace. But when we face resistance, we follow our Lord to the cross, loving our enemies, praying for those who persecute us, forgiving as we have been forgiven.



QUOTE

These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also. (Acts 17:6)



QUESTION

As disciples loyal to Jesus, where are we tempted to not live under the rule and authority of King Jesus?

Are You a Mary or Martha?

JOHN CHESNUT

CEO, Wycliffe Bible Translators - USA

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38–42)

Are you a Mary or a Martha? Hands down, I'm a "Martha." What do I mean by that? In Luke 10:38–42, Luke recounts the story of Jesus visiting the house of Mary and Martha. Martha is focused on the details of serving dinner and hosting Jesus, while Mary simply sits at the feet of Jesus and listens.

I resonate with Martha because she's a task-focused person, and God has wired me as a task-focused person as well. I find that I often build relationships through work. I enjoy spending time with other task-focused people because we get a lot done by quickly working through a to-do list.

Americans are often characterized as task-focused. Sometimes we start with work and then move toward relationship. In most other cultures, however, relationship precedes task. In fact, if one does not start with relationship, then the task may never occur.

I'm grateful that God has provided several "Marys" in my life to help me focus on being rather than just doing. Even in my relationship with my Heavenly Father, I find that I'm often so engaged with doing things for him that I miss spending time in reflection, just being before him. If I'm not careful, my daily devotions can become task-focused. For me, sitting quietly with God requires an intentionality that doesn't come naturally.

As you consider your own journey of loving God and loving people, where do you need to grow? Maybe you identify as a "Martha." And being a "Martha" is a good thing, but I also know that I need more of "Mary" in my life. If you find yourself to be more of a "Mary," how are you doing at being a "Martha"? Both attributes—the acts of being and doing—are important in our relationship with God and in our relationships with others. God desires both attributes in our lives!



QUOTE

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things..."



QUESTION

Do you find that you're more of a Mary or a Martha? What are two or three things you can practically do to grow in your non-natural tendencies?

How to Accomplish the Task?

KÄRIN BUTLER PRIMUTH

CEO, VisionSynergy

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:2–6)

As we prayerfully reflect these forty days on the task of the Great Commission, the scriptures remind us that *how* we accomplish the task is just as important as *what* we do. In John 17, Jesus prayed “that all of them may be one ... *so that* the world may believe that you have sent me.”

Numerous passages remind us that God designed the Body of Christ to function as one body, with all parts working in unity to accomplish His mission in the world.

Over the centuries, one of the most significant barriers to completion of the Great Commission has been division and lack of cooperation in the Church. Far too many ministries have not worked together. The result has been duplication of effort in some areas and major gaps in outreach in other areas. The right hand often isn't aware of what the left hand is doing.

David Barrett and James Reapsome in their book, *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World*, identified lack of collaboration between Christian organizations as the major hindrance to world evangelization. They write that two-thirds of all global evangelization plans are stand-alone, self-sufficient plans, each viewing itself as at the center of world evangelization. More recently, Gordon Conwell's 2020 report on the Status of Global Christianity lists the number of world evangelization plans since 30 CE is now 2,600!

There was a reason why Jesus' prayer for His disciples in John 17 was not for great faith, or courage, or even sound theology, but it was for unity. Jesus knew that our ability to love one another and work together would be the greatest challenge to the credibility of our witness and the completion of the Great Commission. But what does this call to unity practically mean for us today? It's been my experience that unity in the Body of Christ begins with cultivating a humble spirit of cooperation and a commitment to continually look out for the interests of others in all spheres of our lives (Philippians 2:4).

Our training ground for learning to “be one” begins closest to home, in our own families: How can you intentionally choose to “be one” with your spouse, “seeking that which is good for one another?” (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

Within our own ministries there are abundant opportunities to cultivate unity: Is there a broken relationship that needs your attention or forgiveness? Is there division between teams that needs resolution? Is there a like-minded organization you could explore partnering with to accomplish more together?

May God give us the grace to reach across whatever divides exist in our lives to be one with those with whom He has called us to be on mission.



QUOTE

You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete and fight. That is when you will discover who you really are, and your place in God's family. (Matthew 5:9, The Message)



QUESTION

In what way may the Lord be prompting you to lay aside your ego or your logo to “be one” with others so that the world may believe?

Introducing People to Jesus

KEVIN KOMPELIEN

CEO, Evangelical Free Church of America

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter). (John 1:35–42)

Twenty-six years ago, my family and I moved from a small university town in the Midwest to the San Francisco Bay Area in California. I was called to pastor a church with a huge heart for the world. In the early days, we launched a ministry into a neighborhood near our facility filled with first generation Hispanic and Southeast Asian immigrant families. At the same time, we partnered with ReachGlobal, the international mission of the EFCA, to begin an outreach among an unreached people group in coastal East Africa. Those were exciting days for the church!

We quickly realized that some of the issues we faced in East Africa, as we sought to accomplish Great Commission disciple making among an unreached people, were the same issues being experienced in the outreach ministry in our own city. Studies show that the Bay Area is the least church-ed metropolitan area in the United States. On the best attended Sundays of the year, less than 10% of our community are in a church of any kind. In contrast, my family had moved from a community in the Midwest where more than 75% of people identified with a church, even though many rarely attended. I realized the need to think like a missionary both in the community where I lived and in the church’s work in Africa.

As the church staff and I wrestled to gain a clearer mission focus for the congregation, we soon recognized that the issue we faced in almost every aspect of our outreach was rooted in the fact that people who were far from God, both in our community and in East Africa, had little or no true knowledge of Jesus. They simply did not know Him!

The account of Andrew encountering Jesus in John 1:35–42 was extremely instructive for us. John’s words in verses 41–42 gripped my heart. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

It became incredibly clear that the fulfillment of the Great Commission must begin by introducing people to Jesus so they can see His compassionate heart for them. Some have little or no knowledge of Him, while others have a mistaken or distorted knowledge. I realized that so much of Great Commission work begins with simply introducing people to Jesus and then walking with them as they grow to become obedient, fully committed followers of the Savior who introduce others to Him.



QUOTE

“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”
—Samaritan Woman in John 4



QUESTION

In what ways are you seeking to intentionally introduce people to Jesus, both in your daily life and in your ministry strategies?

Who is at Your Table?

KIM KARGBO

President & Founder, Accessible Hope International

He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” (Luke 14:12–14)

One Sabbath, Jesus was invited to a fancy dinner with a lot of important people. But as he observed the gathering, he notices that there are some striking problems at the dinner. On his way into the house of the wealthy Pharisee, Jesus is stopped by a man who has a tremendous swelling. We don’t know what caused it, but we do know a lot about the climate in that day—and today—toward people who are “different.” They are not welcome at the table. Jesus sees the Pharisees watching him keenly. He heals the man, and then asks the religious men whether they would pull their son out of a well if he fell in on the Sabbath. Or, forget the son, what if your ox fell in? They can’t answer, so the dinner begins.

But Jesus isn’t satisfied with this lack of response. He was trying to make a point. The dinner is far too homogenous for Jesus’ taste, filled with wealthy, self-important men. So, he proposes several thinly-veiled parables. These were not the kind of parables that left you pondering mysterious theological truths. They were self-explanatory and hard-hitting.

Or are they?

What typically happens when we read Luke 14, is that we see the references to the poor, crippled, lame, and blind, and we spiritualize these examples: poor in spirit, spiritually blind, etc. But I believe these are literal references, not figurative.

If you look around the “table” in the Body of Christ globally, you will notice a distinctive lack of people with disabilities. Oh, certainly most churches will have one or two people affected by disability, often a child. *But 15% of the world’s population has a disability.* If we are making disciples of ALL nations and peoples, shouldn’t the Church, the Body of Christ around the world, have a representative population? In fact, in light of Jesus’ mandate in Luke 14, perhaps there should be a disproportionate number of people with disabilities filling our sanctuaries—whether they are gilded with stained glass windows or open-air benches with a thatch roof.

Jesus was constantly seeking out people with disabilities. In fact, when John sent his disciples to verify Jesus’ identity in his season of painful doubt, Jesus identified himself with disabled people: “Go and tell John what you see and hear; the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, and the poor hear the Good News.” (Luke 7:22–23). In other words, “if you want to know who I am, look at people with disabilities and the transformation in their lives!”

Can we say the same? Are our church plants filled with the blind and the lame? Are our development programs reaching lepers and the deaf? Is the Good News known by those who are being hidden and ostracized in the communities where we work? Let’s evaluate our tables, and follow Jesus’ mandate for inclusive invitation to it.



QUOTE

For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” (Luke 14:14)



QUESTION

Do you have compassion and concern for people with disabilities as you minister?

Our Calling

LAUREN LIBBY

CEO, Trans World Radio

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25–27)

The months of March, April, May, and early June of 2020 were challenging times for every one of us! We worked under governmental enforced “Stay at Home” and “Lockdown” restrictions. Not just in just one country but globally! Some countries, such as Singapore, were ‘stay at home’ unless you needed groceries, and only one member of the family could shop.

On Cyprus, one would text the authorities, obtain a “permit number” that would admit you to buy groceries or other products. If you didn’t have the “permit” you could be arrested. Other places were on extreme lockdown with arrests and stiff fines for those whom law enforcement officers deemed ‘non-essential’ business activity.

Israel, when Jesus came to earth, was an environment in which the Romans enforced rigid laws of social interaction! Jesus understands what it is to live in an oppressive environment. He knows what it is to be marginalized. He knows what it is to live in strict social governance.

With this in mind, I was deeply impacted by the story of a nurse in New York City, who in tears, related, “in less-than-an-hour, nine of my patients in my intensive care ward, went ‘Code Blue’ or flatlined!” Nine patients entered eternity as she watched!

Jesus knows what it is to “flat-line!” He ‘flat-lined’ for you and me and the world! That is what we are about ... letting people know

Jesus ‘flat-lined’ so you, and me, and the world would not “flat-line” for eternity. That’s our “calling” ... to let people know that Jesus died so that they could live with Him forever and to know Him intimately in this life as well. Jesus came back after “flat-lining!”

I love the “Emmaus Road” story. A couple of Jesus’ friends were walking seven miles to the town of Emmaus. They talked about what had happened and the execution of Jesus. Another person joined them, Jesus, but they didn’t recognize Him. Jesus queried them about what was happening in the neighborhood. They were astonished that this stranger had not heard what had gone on. Then Jesus, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted the scriptures concerning himself! Still, not knowing it was Jesus, they invited him to dinner ... and suddenly they knew who their guest really was. “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24:13–32).

Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, is making hearts burn today as we share His Good News on air, on phones, on computers, individually and corporately. I sense it personally, in our parking lot talking to a neighbor who has never considered Jesus, who faces a very unsure future. Or to another neighbor who wants to begin to know Jesus on a deeper level.

That is our ‘Calling!’



QUOTE

“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”



QUESTION

Do I bring burning to hearts as I encounter others during this unsettling time?

Glorious Things!

MARCOS DANIEL GONZÁLEZ

CML/Pastor, Faith Assembly of God

Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;
behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush—
“This one was born there,” they say. (Psalm 87:4, ESV)

Psalm 87 is a fine specimen of Hebrew poetry, but it is much more than that. Beautifully crafted, this psalm provides us with a powerful promise and an end-time vision.

This psalm was written after the Babylonian captivity to encourage God’s people as they returned to Zion. For the modern reader though, I believe these verses encapsulate important missiological implications.

In the first line, we are reminded that the Lord himself founded the city. God’s merciful salvation plan for the nations originated in his heart. We get a glimpse of that heart as the psalmist begins to list several nations (traditionally sworn enemies of Israel) as part of ‘those who know me.’ To the early readers, including these nations in the Lord’s ‘register’ would be astonishing or even scandalous. But the Lord’s ways are beyond our ways and his compassionate heart is not bound by limiting socio-cultural boundaries we may have here on earth. His heart for the salvation of all types of people transcends what our biases may be.

He is telling Israel: my plan is wider than you perceive. I will save nations that are powerful (like Egypt and Babylon). I will save nations that seem far from God (like Philistia). I will save those who are near (like Tyre, north of Israel) and I will save nations who are far away (like Ethiopia). I choose to include them too.

In the psalm, these nations end up in the register of those who find salvation. As we see their modern names, it is exciting to see countries like Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, and the Palestinian people, well represented in the Book of Life.

Could God be gathering for Himself a people from historically rebellious nations or groups that seem impenetrable with the Gospel? According to this psalm, yes!

The imagery in the final verse of ‘singers and dancers’ lavishly praising God immediately sends me to Revelations 7:9. This is the victorious and culminating image of all our Great Commission work. These are glorious things to think of and speak of, indeed.



QUOTE

His heart for the salvation of all types of people transcends what our biases may be.



QUESTION

In our plans to fulfill the Great Commission, are we including nations and peoples who may seem unreachable? Are there nations and peoples in our lists we may be missing from God’s cosmivision to complete the Great Task?

Fear in the Mind Creates Stress in the Body

MATT NICKOSON

Lead Pastor, Kingsway Christian Church

Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.
In vain you rise early and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves. (Psalm 127:1–2)

Years ago, I was in a hard season. Anxious thoughts raced through my mind day and night. My stomach was a mess, and my hair filled the shower drain. When with my kids, I wasn't really there. When with my wife, every conversation was about struggle, strife, and stress. One night, I tucked my kids into bed, prayed with them and sang a song of thanksgiving. My words were there, but my heart and mind were somewhere else.

On this night, my sons asked me to lay on the floor of their bedroom while they fell asleep. I told them I could not, because I was planning to spend my evening reading my Bible and talking to God. So, I kissed them good night and headed downstairs to be with the Lord.

As God would have it, I was ready to begin a new study, and the stress of the season was making it hard for me to decide which direction to go. So, I did the very thing I discourage my church to do. I prayed and opened my Bible randomly. Here's what the Lord showed me:

“Unless the Lord builds the house,
the builders labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the guards stand watch in vain.”

In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat—
for he grants sleep to those he loves.” (Psalm 127:1–2)

I literally smiled and chuckled out loud. God could not have been any clearer to me that evening. Either he is building my life, or I am. If He is building it—I need only to live for Him and entrust to Him the rest. He has never failed me, and He will not start now.

Notice His good gifts too: Food to eat and sleep. The very things that I was desperately struggling to enjoy. That was not all God intended to say to me that night.

“Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.” (Psalm 127:3–5)

God is good (Mark 10:18), and His good gifts include my children. That night they wanted to be “with” their daddy, just like I wanted to be “with” my Heavenly Father. I knew I had to change and trust my Father again to build both His house and my home. I am reminded that the first disciples any of us make, are the ones in our own homes.



QUOTE

“Fear in the mind creates stress in the body.”
—Mark Driscoll



QUESTION

Is God calling you back into a relationship of trust in Him? How can you enjoy God's good gifts in this season?

Go There Before We Get There

MATTHEW ELLISON

President, Sixteen:Fifteen

I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9–10)

How many of you remember a time in high school or college when you had been assigned a book report, but procrastination got the better of you? With only a day before it was due you made your way to the bookstore to buy a little yellow and black booklet ... I imagine you can picture that booklet in your mind’s eye, can’t you? It was called CliffsNotes. For the record, I think it was cheating.

If you are not familiar with CliffsNotes allow me to describe them: They are basically a brief book summary that allows you to understand the master or main story of a book without reading it. CliffsNotes accomplishes this by revealing the book’s metanarrative, which almost always surfaces in the introduction of a book and is resolved at the end. The metanarrative (also called grand narrative) is the book’s overarching story or storyline that unites all smaller themes and individual stories.

Well since God has graciously given us the book of Revelation, we can cheat so to speak, (don’t cheat, read the whole Book) and skip to the climax or resolution of God’s story so that we might grasp the Bible’s metanarrative. Revelation allows us to “go there before we get there.”

In this breathtaking passage, the Holy Spirit peels back the curtains of time and space and gives us a glimpse into the end all of

history is moving towards. Here we see the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world, receiving the reward of His suffering. What is His reward? Worship! Worship that is flowing from the redeemed from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages. This is the resolution of God’s story or you could call it the consummation of His Church. It’s worth noting in Acts 2, that the Church was inaugurated in a global context and in Revelation 7 is consummated in a global context. When in heaven, bowing down before the Lamb, alongside untold numbers of worshippers from all nations, all tribes, all tongues there will be no doubt as to what God’s ultimate mission was. And we will know then, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that this mission was the greatest movement in history.

The resolution of God’s Story, for His followers, should give context, meaning and purpose to all of life—it should define our mission. It should shape how we live here and now, moving us to align our temporary, local lives and labor with His invincible, eternal, global purpose. There is nothing happening in the world that is more important than the Mission of Jesus Christ, this epic story of redemption is the centerpiece of His plan for this age, which means His it should be the focal point of His people.



QUOTE

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God, persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. (Revelation 5:9)



QUESTION

How does your Biblical vision of the throne of God drive you on your mission for Him?

Running Towards the Lost with the Fragrance of Christ

MICHELLE ATWELL

US Director, SEND International

**He stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stopped.
(Numbers 16:48)**

In a spectacular display of holy fear and worship, Moses and Aaron have thrown themselves on the ground at the command of God—His divine mercy covering them—because in a matter of minutes, the Israelites are going to be destroyed by God himself. His judgment once again on display. As His holy anger begins pouring out upon the people, a swift act of bold and unstoppable love intervenes. Moses, with every ounce of passion, wisdom, and urgency left in his tired bones, tells Aaron to make atonement for the people by running into the plague-stricken crowd with a burning censor.

The smell of death collides with the fragrance of life.

Can you see it? Can you imagine Aaron urgently running into the crowd, holding up the smoking censor, pleading with the Lord to save His people? The bible says, “And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped.” Let that take your breath away. The burning incense, a fragrant offering, rises to the Holy God. He answers. God’s anger is appeased and the plague is stopped.

But not before nearly 15,000 people died in this plague. The incense didn’t reach them in time.

This is a sobering picture of sin among God’s people. This is a dramatic example of intercession and the mercy of God. Ultimately though, this is a powerful picture that points to Christ standing in the gap between sinful people and a Holy God. Romans 5: 8 reads, “... but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” In His death, Jesus became a “fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Ephesians 5:2

Today, there are an estimated 2.5 billion people around the world who will experience the plague of eternal death if they don’t hear about the one who stood in the gap for them. Billions of people will die in their sin, on the road to hell, if the message of Jesus, and his atoning sacrifice on the cross, does not reach them in time.

Who will run to them? Who will plead for them?

Consider this: as Christians, you and I are called to “spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Jesus Christ everywhere.” (2 Corinthians 2:14).

”

QUOTE

“For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” (2 Corinthians 2:15)

?

QUESTION

What does this look like for you? Who are the people around you and around the world that are under this plague? Will you, like Aaron, run urgently and passionately to those who need to hear of Jesus’s sacrificial love—before it’s too late?

The Giver's Reward

MURRAY CORNELIUS

CEO, The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it.... They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out.... We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may be fellow workers for the truth. (3 John 2-3, 6-8)

John, while living in Ephesus, writes a letter to both commend and instruct Gaius, a disciple who leads of a group of believers in a nearby neighbourhood. He commends him for how he treated a group of travelling missionaries. When these missionaries arrived in Ephesus, they reported on the faithfulness and love of truth displayed by Gaius and this small gathering of believers.

John knows that these missionaries will return and visit this small church again and so he instructs Gaius to “send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.”

Three Missional Principles:

1. Gospel mission must be rooted in a passion for the truth of the Gospel.

John praises Gaius for his faithfulness to both teach and walk in the truth; for his integrity of belief and life; for walking the talk. The travelling missionaries reported that Gaius and those he led were people who loved the truth of the gospel.

2. Gospel mission demands equal sacrifice from both the Goer and the Sender.

John instructs Gaius to send this band of missionaries on their way “in a manner worthy of God.” This is a very humbling and probing thought. John makes it clear that the measure of our heart for God will be found in our commitment to ensuring that people everywhere have opportunity to hear the Gospel.

3. Gospel Senders who share in the sacrifice of the Goers, will share equally in the reward of the Goers.

Throughout the Scriptures we are called to be workers together with God. Senders work together with the goers. As we sacrificially support those who we send, those who go for the sake of the name, we are considered their fellow workers in gospel witness and we will share in their reward.



QUOTE

There is no better way to receive and sustain the blessing of God, than to send in a manner worthy of God.



QUESTION

Is our offering for the mission, worthy of God? Does our heart for God lead us to sacrifice? Our love for God will be measured by our commitment to sending.

Will Our Ministries Stand the Test?

MUTUA MAHAINI

International Director, The Navigators

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. (1 Corinthians 3:10–14, NIV)

In the gospel accounts, Jesus spoke clearly about the assignment He was leaving us, and it was neither a set of activities nor a vague aspirational dream. At the core of our assignment stands the Lord Jesus himself. In the Matthew version of what we call the Great Commission, Our Lord stated that everything he was tasking his disciples with, was predicated on the fact that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. *Therefore go ...* It is all about him.

In 1 Corinthians 3, we see that Paul clearly gets it. Using the metaphor of putting up a building, he explains how the job gets done, beginning with the foundation. He compares himself to an expert builder, his part in the overall assignment being to lay the foundation. That foundation, he tells us, is Jesus Christ. Going forward, anyone who participates in the construction work must similarly offer Christ-glorifying materials. So, how can we tell if we are truly building in the right way? Paul says that on the Day, our work will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. "If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward."

Only what matters will survive. What does matter—and this is what is at stake—is the glory of Jesus Christ Himself. Not organizations, not buildings, not budgets or secondary pursuits that often preoccupy leaders. What is of value that God will look for and reward after the refining fire? Psalm 2:8 describes the Father's most valuable gift to His Son: "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession."

We give ourselves and our energies to that which is most valuable to us. Our value system must be evaluated in the light of the Day, when God will reveal the quality of what we have been doing all along. It is easy to allow transient considerations to guide our investment of time, talent and treasure. And we always run the risk of aiming too low in a bid to obtain quick results in ministry. If the blessing of the Father is clearly focused on winning the nations, that must be our preoccupation, because that is where the Father is investing.



QUOTE

"Paul is thinking here not of the building up of wrong things, but of the building up of inadequate things." —William Barclay



QUESTION

It has been rightly said that the good is the enemy of the best. Are we guilty of impoverishing our ministries by aiming too low, and missing out on the Father's special blessing as He pursues the nations?

The Lost are Perishing: What Shall We Do?

PAUL BARRECA

General Director, Fellowship International Mission

“For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:15–16, ESV)

What motivates Christians to missionary service? If it is not to proclaim the life-giving gospel that saves people from hell, then missionary service is little more than a bold humanitarian endeavor. Christian missionaries from the Apostolic Era forward sacrificed greatly to reach “those who are perishing.” Understanding the reality of future judgment, they preached the gospel to hell-bound strangers. Modern evangelicalism has all but lost this motivation as the reality of hell is dismissed or minimized.

Although unpopular today, the church needs more sound biblical teaching on the doctrine of hell. Such exhortation will magnify the grace of God and motivate us to carry the gospel to those who are lost.

Our generation is not the first to soften hell by omission or denial. Medieval scholars represented by Erasmus had a more “enlightened” approach to hell, and it dissuaded Christian missions. Comparing the missionary zeal of Tyndale, Judson, and Paton to Erasmus, John Piper explains, “... This massive dose of bondage to sin and deliverance by blood-bought sovereign grace

is missing in Erasmus. This is why there is an elitist lightness to his religion—just like there is to so much of evangelicalism today. Hell and sin and atonement and sovereign grace were not weighty realities for Erasmus. But for Tyndale they were everything. And in the middle of these great realities was the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This is why the Bible had to be translated, and ultimately this is why Tyndale was martyred” (John Piper, *Filling up the Afflictions of Christ* [Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2009], 42–43).

The truth about hell impacted our six-year-old son in a way that it should impact us all. He returned from school relaying his Bible lesson about hell. “At least when they go to hell they will be burned up.” His thinking reflected the image of wood being burned in a fire. His mother corrected, “the Bible says that they will suffer forever.” His eyes opened wide as he exclaimed, “then what are we going to do!”

Our response to hell should be the same as this child. The lost are perishing. What are we going to do?



QUOTE

Although unpopular today, the church needs more sound biblical teaching on the doctrine of hell. Such exhortation will magnify the grace of God and motivate us to carry the gospel to those who are lost.



QUESTION

When was the last time you heard a sermon about hell?

A True Kingdom Burden

R. YORK MOORE

Executive Director, Catalytic Partnerships, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)

When I came to faith from Atheism as a philosophy student at the University of Michigan in my twenties, I immediately became deeply burdened for souls. My heart burned within me to see people saved, mostly from hell and God's holy wrath. As I grew as a Christian, my burden for souls grew but I so wanted people to know God's love, not only to be warned of His wrath and the consequences of their sin.

Later on in my journey with Christ, my burden grew to include world systems and structures, peoples and their ethnic cultures. I became burdened for the conversion of what I believe the Bible refers to as 'kingdoms,' self-perpetuating and interconnected engines that create, sustain, and perpetuate culture. At each phase of my burden, there was a small sense of guilt, feeling as if I'd left the simpler, purer burden I had first received from Christ.

After thirty years of evangelism, preaching, and deep Scripture engagement, however, I'm convinced that our Great Commission activity is to be fueled by all three of these burdens. Matthew 24:14 says, "This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come." I believe this verse will actually be fulfilled, not by the Church, but by God's holy angel, flying in mid-air, as John sees in Revelation 14:6-7, "Then I saw another angel flying high

overhead, having the eternal gospel to announce to the inhabitants of the earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. He spoke with a loud voice: 'Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.'" In both the Great Commission Prophecy and the Great Commission Fulfillment, the burden of God includes all three of these emphasis: salvation *from* God's eschatological wrath, salvation *to* worship and intimacy with God, *and* the conversion of the kingdoms of this world, the sociocultural realities that comprise ethnicities, tribal realities, languages, and peoples.

Our task in the Great Commission is to proclaim and accompany that proclamation with acts of power and justice in light of this reality. Stanley Hauerwas rightly says of the Church that we are an anomaly, a harbinger out of space and time that manifests the actualization of the future, certain reign of Jesus Christ. The proclamation of the gospel and the practices of the Kingdom collectively embody these burdens, they are how we perpetuate the outposts of the eschaton that we call the Church.



QUOTE

"The Church is an anomaly, a harbinger out of space and time that manifests the actualization of the future, certain reign of Jesus Christ." —Stanley Hauerwas



QUESTION

How, then, are you and/or your organization expressing these burdens in your missional practices?

Missions on the Bottom Shelf

RICH MENDOLA

CEO, International Friendships

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)

Abdul left his wife and children in Afghanistan to come and study for a PhD in the USA. In Afghanistan he served as a top ranked translator, often interpreting for foreign dignitaries. While he was well known in Afghanistan, he was a nobody in the USA. He rarely interacted with classmates and experienced profound loneliness. When he heard about the opportunity to go to an American home for a meal he eagerly signed up. When the family invited him over for lunch on Sunday and requested that he join them for a church service in the morning, he hesitated. As a Muslim, he did not want to attend church. But he really wanted to go to their home. He finally decided he would endure the church service so he could enjoy the lunch.

The meal was not the highlight of the day but the talk afterwards was, where he shared about his family, his life in Afghanistan, and his hopes and dreams in coming to American and where he learned about their family and life. Abdul decided that he would go to church every week if he could go to their home afterwards. And that became his weekly pattern.

This Christian family became his family. He saw their loving family relationships. He learned how Jesus impacted their lives. And he joined my Bible discussion group. Gradually, Abdul began to open his heart to the truth of the gospel. Having never met an Afghan

Christian or seen an Afghan church or seen an Afghan Bible, Abdul decided to follow Jesus.

Once he decided to follow Jesus, he wanted to read the Bible in Dari. He helped to retranslate the New Testament into his language. In partnership with the Far East broadcasting company he made tape broadcasts in his language that were beamed into Afghanistan. God used Abdul in an amazing way.

Hospitality is the key that opened Abdul's heart hear to the gospel. *This simple practice of inviting "strangers," foreigners, aliens, into our homes for a meal is missions on the bottom shelf.* It is a simple practice that all believers can participate in that does not require language training, moving, or support development. One of the greatest ways to complete the great commission in this generation is to see the restoration of Biblical hospitality in our churches.



QUOTE

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can." —John Wesley



QUESTION

How can we both practice and help fellow believers become active practitioners of hospitality?

A Garment of Praise

ROB MAGWOOD

CEO, SEND International of Canada

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified. (Isaiah 61:1–3, KJV)

During this pandemic the Lord brought to mind a chorus from college days. I searched for the scripture first in the Psalms, but eventually found it in Isaiah 63. (Praise the LORD for the KJV, eh?) The chorus goes:

*Put on a garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness,
lift up your voice to God
Praise with the Spirit, and with understanding,
O – magnify the LORD!*

For Kathleen and me, the ministry of God’s truth *through music* has been a great blessing to lift our hearts to praise the Lord in this unusual season. As we seek to stand firm on the truth of God, His strength, wisdom, and goodness, we agree with Peterson’s lyric: *“Is it good that we remind ourselves of this? It is.”*

Have you considered how reviewing some key songs might be a blessing for you and your family? Have you spent time thoughtfully weighing the excellent lyrics of songs old and new? (Some might also be beautiful instrumentals that lift your heart.) Have you included these in your personal quiet times? Your family times? Have you put on some praise while you pray, or while you work?

Kath and I have had many favorites come to mind. A small sampling includes:

- When God Ran (Phillips Craig and Dean)—a key line: *“Almighty God, the Great I AM – the only time I ever saw Him run, was when He ran to me.”*
- You are my All in All (Lamb of God)—a key line: *“You are the treasure that I seek.”*
- The Blessing (The UK Blessing)—a key line: *“May the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.”*
- O Lord, My Rock and My Redeemer (Sovereign Grace Music)—a key line: *“Strong defender of my weary heart.”*

A suggested exercise: Spend a few quiet moments letting the Spirit take you back, reminding your heart of a piece of music and/or lyric(s) through which He has blessed your heart. Jot down some of these expressions (even if they are ‘partial’) in your journal or note pages in your Bible. Spend another few minutes humming or singing, letting your heart be reminded of the truths of God’s faithfulness, and His blessings. (Ideas: Check iTunes or YouTube, and if you are a musician—even an amateur—go get out your guitar or sit at your piano to bring the Lord an offering of praise.)

A prayer starter: Lord, thank you for the gift of praise, and for the incredible treasure of music and lyrics we enjoy. As your people *“put on a garment of praise”* lift our fears, our concerns, our weariness. Our hope is in you alone. Amen.



QUOTE

“You are the treasure that I seek, You are my all in all” —Natalie Grant



QUESTION

Have you considered praising God with songs of praise during this time of uncertainty?

A Day of Good News

SOON PAK

Pastor of Discipleship, Ward Church

Now there were four men with leprosy ... They said to each other, “Let’s go over to the camp of the Arameans ...” When they reached the edge of the camp, no one was there, for the Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army, so that they ... left the camp as it was and ran for their lives. The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp, entered one of the tents and ate and drank. Then they took silver, gold and clothes, and went off and hid them. They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also. Then they said to each other, “What we’re doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves....” So they went and called out to the city gatekeepers and told them, “We went into the Aramean camp and no one was there ... and the tents left just as they were.” The gatekeepers shouted the news, and it was reported within the palace. (2 Kings 7:3–11)

We are all prone to hoard. When my kids were young, they all had a propensity to hold as many snacks as possible in each of their hands. I would drop a handful of cheerios on their tray and as soon as I would let them go, they would grab as much as each of their hands could hold. No amount of assurance would ease their grip of their precious treats; very cute in little kids, less so in adults.

In times of crisis, fear, and worry, we see this hoarding instinct take over. We find ourselves stockpiling our resources, our wealth, and yes, even toilet paper. We find ourselves caught up in the anxiety of our world and let its paradigm dictate our behavior. But in this passage, God reminds us that the story of His kingdom is not like the story of this world.

In our passage, we find four lepers who are caught between two fighting forces. An enemy encampment on one side and a city that has rejected them on the other. As the enemy had laid siege upon the city, desperation had come upon them and the city inhabitants. And in a moment of total desperation, the four lepers decide to wander into the enemy camp. But unbeknown to them, the Lord had caused the entire enemy to flee. The people were freed of the siege, they just didn’t know it yet.

As these four lepers wander into the camp, they find tent after tent abandoned along with all their treasures, food, and drink. And they do what all desperate people do, they begin to gorge themselves, storing the treasures, and hiding some as well. But in a moment of clarity they uttered these words in verse 9, “What we’re doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves.” Even as they had been rejected by the city they called their own, even as they served a king that was evil in their sight, even as they lacked things for themselves, they understood that to hoard the freedom that God had brought while others in the city were left to their own self destruction just wasn’t right.

Like the lepers, some of us maybe outcasts, broken, and rejected, but unlike the lepers, we serve a good King in Jesus. And our only task is not to fight, argue, or coerce, but as broken people share the grace and freedom that God has delivered to us to people who are hungry and blind in our world. The Great Commission calls us to go far and wide to herald the good news of deliverance, the good news of grace, the good news of blessing only found in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

For today is a day of good news and it is not right for us to hoard it just for ourselves.



QUOTE

“What we’re doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves.”
(2 Kings 7:9)



QUESTION

For love of our neighbor, what are the things in our lives that God is calling us to move from a place of hoarding to blessing?

Raising Up Followers of Jesus

STEVE DOUGLASS

CEO, Campus Crusade for Christ

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19–20)

Often the first thing we think of in fulfilling the Great Commission is witnessing. That is not wrong, but it certainly is not the total picture.

Consider the most often quoted passage defining the Great Commission: Matthew 28:19, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The main verb is not “go” or “baptizing,” it is “make disciples”—raise up learners who apply and imitate. Matthew 28:20 adds to that understanding, “... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (i.e. to *follow* what Jesus says to do). In Jesus’ earthly ministry He made “following” Him very clearly the priority for His disciples (e.g. Mark 8:34).

So, if following Christ is the goal, what are some key elements to make that happen? There are many, but to be brief, let me feature three: application, relationship, ownership.

Application: It is not enough to know a biblical truth. God wants us to apply it to our lives. How can we say we are following Christ if we don’t obey Him? Obvious, right? But that perspective dramatically affects how we disciple people. If we overload them each week with many Biblical lessons, their head-knowledge grows. But if, due to the overload, they don’t actually follow even one lesson, they are not moving toward becoming a follower.

Relationship: In the Gospels this point was obvious. Jesus’ disciples literally followed Him around and learned from Him together. As He taught, He illustrated by His life and walk with the Father. Today, however, we have to be more conscious that to follow Jesus we must grow in relationship and walk with Him. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “pray continually.” Frequent conversations are key to building relationships with people. So it is in building a relationship with God.

Ownership: Over time, as we disciple people, we need to wean them from dependence on us and our knowledge and practice. We need to move them toward owning the things they must do in order to have their own walk and ministry as a follower of Jesus. If we are used by God to raise up such followers of Jesus, we are raising up people who can similarly raise up more followers. That multiplication process is central both to engaging in the task of the Great Commission and ultimately helping to see it fulfilled.

Summary: The task of the Great Commission goes beyond just witnessing; it involves raising up disciples/followers of Jesus. Three of the important elements in doing that are *application* of biblical truth, strengthening of *relationship* with God and development of personal *ownership* of growth and ministry.



QUOTE

Former Dallas Theological Seminary professor, Dr. Howard Hendricks said, “The Bible was not given to satisfy your curiosity, but to overhaul your life.”



QUESTION

How might what you have read alter how you disciple people?

Partnerships: Mutual, I'm Sure

TIMOTHY CROUCH

Vice President, Alliance Missions

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:10–13)

Remember the moment in the film “White Christmas” when Phil Davis (Danny Kaye) first introduces Bob Wallace (Bing Crosby) to a young dancer named Doris? Eyes roll to her clueless reply, “Mutual, I’m sure.”

Mutuality takes time, effort and intentionality to develop. And mature, truly mutual relationships bless not only those in them, but those touched through them.

So, what about the relationship of the missionary and the church that sends and supports? Let’s be honest. It might not always feel like mutuality. Sure, there are some letters and an occasional video, but it seems the need, while legitimate, is a bottomless pit and hard-to-come-by resources flow in just one direction. Is this the way it is meant to be?

Today’s reading from Philippians is really a missionary support letter. Paul is writing a thank you card for a recent gift delivered through Epaphroditus Express. If we look closely, we see in it the kind of mutual relationship that blesses the missionary, the church and people lacking gospel access. God’s intent, really.

Paul recalls their “concern” now renewed after a time when, despite a record of recurring gifts from the early days of this church plant, they hit a skid in giving. And yet he reports that God has given him a heart that’s “content.” He’s seen ups of joy and downs

of suffering but isn’t ruled by extreme experiences. This is a partnership in which they’ve endured and matured.

And it’s one of mutuality. I love the self-awareness and other-awareness evident in the picture we’re given. Paul knows the church went through a dry spell. He’s in touch with whatever crisis they’ve been through. The Philippians are truly worked up about Paul’s imprisonment and the priority of spreading the gospel. Even when cash could not flow, Paul says they “shared in my affliction.” But it’s not just that they’ve been through a lot. It’s that they both understand, and it’s OK.

What undergirds such a healthy relationship across the distance? And what are the fruits of this “concern and contentment” mutuality?

- The missionary content with little is one who can “rejoice greatly” when blessings come.
- Such a missionary learns the “secret:” Christ is the true, unfailing source of enough.
- True concern leads churches to be faithful in “matters of giving and receiving,” and not only that.
- Such churches find their “own accounts increased” by the God who supplies all needs.
- From this relationship, true “profit” is to those who gain access to the “preaching of the gospel.”



QUOTE

Truly mutual *partnerships* bless not only those in them, but those touched through them.



QUESTION

If I’m a missionary or church leader, what healthy “contentment” or “concern” characterizes my relationship with partners? And what “profit” is resulting?

Never Waste a Good Crisis

ZACHARY KING

Director, Resonate Global Mission

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. (1 Peter 5:6–9)

The phrase, “Never let a good crisis go to waste,” is a popular piece of sage advice often attributed to Winston Churchill. Before Churchill or any other politician used it, our Enemy deployed it against the church and its mission. In 1 Peter 5:6–9, Peter warns the churches of Asia Minor that the Devil uses times of persecution, trouble, and anxiety as opportunities to “devour” believers. Just about anyone in ministry knows that crises have an interesting way of “stacking up” like wickedly repurposed Lego blocks of doom. Personnel conflicts arise in the midst of illnesses. A security crisis explodes during critical board meetings. Of course, Satan isn’t responsible for our sinfulness, nor does he cause hurricanes or earthquakes. Satan does take advantage of them. Satan takes a metaphorical crowbar and spreads the pre-existing fissures and fault lines in our soul and our relationships so as to weaken our faith and hinder our mission. He leverages our fear, anxiety, anger, and our disappointment to produce “collateral damage” in the church. As the disappointments, troubles, and anxieties stack up, to what can we appeal?

Peter reminds us of the need to be alert and discerning about the activities of the enemy (vs. 8). There may be more to our situation than first meets the eye. As Western Christians, we sometimes neglect the spiritual undercurrents flowing around us. However, the answer to the attacks of our Enemy is *active resistance* (vs. 9).

In the original Greek, Peter literally writes: “Standing firm in the faith and knowing that your fellow believers around the world are undergoing the same sufferings, resist him.” Our resistance in times of trouble, persecution and anxiety is based on two things: active faith in Christ *and* our fellowship in the sufferings of the global church. As we stand firm on these two realities, we are like a tree planted on the banks of a river (Psalm 1). The flood waters released by our Enemy cannot topple us because we are firmly rooted in Christ.

Moreover, we do not suffer alone because we “know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (vs. 9). Christ mobilizes the fortitude and resistance of the persecuted global church to strengthen our resolve. All of these sufferings together draw us closer to our Lord, whose sufferings on the Cross have liberated us. Participation in Christ’s sufferings is a big step towards “the goal for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:7–14). May God give you the strength to stand firm alongside the global church as we together actively resist our Enemy.



QUOTE

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.



QUESTION

Has the current pandemic crisis been a waste or a profit to you personally? How?



SPOTLIGHT

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