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Revisiting the Missionary Task

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Editor's Note, Spring 2022

Zane Pratt, Vice President for Training, IMB

Welcome to *The Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions.* This journal is designed to be the missiological voice of the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention. Through it, we hope to express what the workers and leaders of the IMB have learned through 177 years (and counting) of history since our founding in 1845. We also hope to offer thoughtful analysis of contemporary issues in Christian mission, along with anticipation of future trends. Our desire is to make a useful contribution to the current conversation about mission based on the perspectives, experiences, and convictions of the IMB.

The theological convictions that guide both the IMB and this journal can be found in *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (BF&M), which is the doctrinal statement of the Southern Baptist Convention and its entities. We are driven by the belief that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant word of God, and that it is therefore the shaping force and final authority for our missionary thought and practice. We are equally driven by the conviction that every person on earth is a sinner in desperate need of a savior, and that Jesus, God the Son in human flesh, is the only savior for sinners. There is salvation in no one else. We believe that people must hear the Good News about Jesus, repent of their rebellion against God, and trust in Jesus alone for their salvation, if they are to be saved. We believe that we are commanded to make disciples, not merely converts, and that disciples are made and nurtured in the context of healthy local churches. We are convinced that Scripture commands us to make such disciples among all the nations and peoples of the earth. Therefore, we believe that the missionary task consists of entry, evangelism, disciple-making,

healthy church formation, leadership development, and exit to partnership to the ends of the earth.

This journal will be practitioner driven and peer reviewed. We believe there is a need for missiological writing that is both academically rigorous and grounded in field experience. Our hope is to provide a platform for missionary practitioners, churches engaged in global mission, and other mission partners to engage in gracious and constructive conversation about critical issues in missionary thought and practice, all within the confessional framework of the BF&M. This journal is aimed at missionaries, missionary strategists, missionaries in training, and churches engaged in global mission, with the anticipation that it will be useful to seminaries and other Christian educational institutions as well.

This first issue is devoted to a look at *Foundations*, published by the IMB in 2018. Foundations was written to articulate the convictions of the IMB on who an IMB missionary is and what an IMB missionary does. The articles in this edition of the journal will look reflectively at key issues addressed by *Foundations*, beginning with the hermeneutical basis of evangelical missiology. We pray that it will encourage missionaries and advance the mission Christ gave to his church!

FEATURE ARTICLE

Foundations of Missiology

Zane Pratt

Missiology is a popular subject. Countless books, articles, and podcasts are produced every year on some aspect of Christian mission. Most of them focus on strategies and tactics for the various components of the missionary task. However, before we can address these sorts of practical issues, we need to step behind the particulars of missionary practice and ask more fundamental questions. What are the foundations of our missiological method? Where do we go for answers to the central questions of missional thinking? How do we determine the nature of our mission, the acceptability of various methods, and the desired outcomes of that mission? Before we can answer these questions, however, we must also ask the questions that lie behind them. How do we even determine the right questions to ask? How do we go about finding the answers to these questions? What sources do we mine for missiological insight, and how do we use them rightly? The answers we give to this set of questions behind the questions lay the necessary foundation for any further missiological inquiry.

This foundational set of questions points us to even deeper questions about issues most people simply assume and therefore seldom examine. How do we know what we know about anything? Because missiology is a theological subject, we are particularly interested in theological epistemology. How do we know what we should believe and what we should do about those things broadly connected with theology and worldview? What is the connection between what we believe and what we do? How closely aligned are the things we formally profess to believe and our actual worldview assumptions and values? What sources other than our formal theological convictions influ-

ence our beliefs and actions? The answers to these questions will shape everything else about our missiology.[1]

As evangelical Christians, our starting point for any line of inquiry is the Bible. In fact, our entire theology of Scripture gives shape and substance to our missiology. This includes the nature and attributes of Scripture. It also includes our convictions about biblical interpretation and our approach to hermeneutics. Evangelical missiology must be applied biblical hermeneutics if it is to be evangelical in any meaningful sense of the word.

This means more than simply saying that we base our approach to missions on the Bible. Everyone who calls themselves Christian in any sense claims *that*, whether correctly or not. This approach to missiology requires understanding and application of each of the attributes of Scripture, as classically formulated in the evangelical tradition. The Bible is not only inspired and inerrant; it is also authoritative, clear, necessary, and sufficient.[2] It also requires a hermeneutically responsible approach to its contents. The Bible must be interpreted in its grammatical, historical, and textual contexts. It must be interpreted within its own framework as a Grand Narrative of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. It must be viewed within its own covenantal structure. Hence, the Bible should be read and understood diachronically, in the categories typically designated as Biblical Theology. The Bible must also be interpreted synchronically according to its great themes – the whole counsel of God on all the central issues of biblical revelation. In other words, evangelical missiology flows from the major heads of biblical doctrine as well as the proper interpretation of individual passages. Evangelical missiology must be rigorously biblical in every sense of the word. Therefore, the foundation for evangelical missiology is a robust doctrine of Scripture, interpreted according to the grammatical/historical method of biblical hermeneutics, considered both diachronically (Biblical Theology) and synchronically (Systematic Theology).

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[1] A classical example of this sort of theological prolegomena is Auguste Lecerf, *An Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949.) An excellent recent example of this type of inquiry is David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003).

[2] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 47-140.

Our Doctrine of Scripture

The Bible is the word of God. Whatever the Bible says, God says. The Bible was written by dozens of people over a span of many centuries. The books of the Bible reflect the personalities and styles of those people. However, the Holy Spirit worked in the minds of those human authors in such a way that every word they wrote was the word he wanted. This is what we mean when we say that the Bible was inspired by God. Inspiration does not mean that God gave some inspiring thoughts and impressions to the human authors and then left them to flesh it out according to their best wisdom and insight. It also does not mean that God used the human authors as typewriters, dictating his message with no engagement of their context or personality at all. Rather, inspiration means that God breathed out his word (2 Timothy 3:16) and carried the human authors along by his Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21) in such a way that what they wrote in their way was also perfectly what God wanted said, down to the very words they used.

There are several inevitable implications to this understanding of the inspiration of Scripture. The first implication is that the Bible is true. God cannot lie, and he is never mistaken. He knows all things comprehensively, and he knows the future as certainly as he knows the present and the past. If God says something, we can count on it being correct. Therefore, since the Bible is his word, everything it tells us is true. There is no error in the Bible. This complete truthfulness does not apply just to matters of theology or spirituality. It also applies to everything else the Bible teaches about every subject it addresses. Obviously, it is necessary to apply normal rules of reading to the biblical text. Approximations and figurative language are used in the Bible, and these are not errors. Everything must be interpreted in its context and according to its genre. However, when the teaching of the Bible contradicts the constantly changing standards of contemporary knowledge, conventional wisdom, or current social standards, the Bible is right and everything that disagrees with it is wrong. We can trust everything the Bible teaches us, whether the world agrees or not.[3]

The next implication of this understanding of the inspiration of Scripture is that the Bible is authoritative. It is, in fact, our highest authority, and every

[3] For discussions of inerrancy, it is hard to match two classics on the subject: Benjamin Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2020), and J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958).

other claimant to authority must be evaluated and judged by it. God is the supreme authority in the universe. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Therefore, whatever he says outranks whatever anyone else says. Since the Bible is God's Word, it is therefore a higher authority than any ecclesiastical leader, any church council, any tradition, or any other book. It is a higher authority than any scientific theory, philosophical system, methodological approach or sociological model. It is also a higher authority than any vision, dream, or spiritual impression. It outranks our preferences and desires. God is King, and he has the last word on everything. That word is the Bible, and we do not get to judge it by any other standard or pick and choose what parts we like and what parts we do not. The Bible rules our beliefs, our lives, and our ministries.

The next implication of this understanding of the inspiration of Scripture is that the Bible is clear in everything we need to know. God is not a failure at communication. He is infinitely greater and smarter than we are, and it is true that he says some things that our small minds have a hard time grasping. However, God knows what we need to know, and he has made those things clear in His word. We may not be able to comprehend everything about him, but we are able to apprehend everything necessary for life and godliness. We should never say, "The Bible is hard to understand," and then make that an excuse for believing or doing what we want. There is more than enough that is crystal clear in the Bible for us to be saved from our sins, to grow in conformity to the image of Christ, and to serve Him faithfully in the mission He has given us.

The Bible is necessary. We cannot know God unless God reveals himself to us. He is infinite, and we are small. His understanding has no limits, while our understanding, as finite creatures, is profoundly constricted (Job 38:1–42:6, Isaiah 40:12–29, Romans 11:33–36, 1 Corinthians 2:6–13). Furthermore, the minds of fallen men and women are darkened by sin and Satan in such a way as to render the things of God opaque and unintelligible to them (Romans 1:18–25, 3:11; 1 Corinthians 2:14–16; 2 Corinthians 4:3–4). We would not know who God is or what he requires of us had he not taken the initiative to reveal himself and his ways to us. As Kevin DeYoung so succinctly states it, "The only Being knowledgeable enough, wise enough, and skillful enough to reveal God to you is God himself."[4] He has done so through his word. If

[4] Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God At His Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 88.

we did not have the Bible, we would have the witness of natural revelation to show us the eternal power and divine nature of God (Romans 1:20), but we would know nothing more. We would know nothing about the Incarnate Word apart from the witness of the written word, and without it we would also know nothing about the mission God has given us. The Bible is necessary for us to be saved, to know God, to know how we are to live as his sons and daughters, and to know both the goal and the means of his mission.

Finally, the Bible is sufficient for us. We do not need any other source of instruction to know God, to be reconciled to him through faith in Jesus Christ, to live the life he wants us to live, or to fulfill the ministries he wants us to pursue. We do not need any other book, any ecclesiastical structure, or any person to give us the "real" meaning of the text of Scripture. We do not need to depend on secular social sciences to know how to live as God's people or to fulfill the Great Commission. While we are free to learn useful things from other sources, we don't have to have them, and we must always evaluate them under the authority of the word of God.[5]

Our Interpretation of Scripture

Because the Bible is the very words of the living God, we must handle it carefully. We must be careful to read out of it what it actually says (exegesis), and not read into it what we want it to say (eisegesis). In this matter of biblical interpretation, context is king. Words mean what they mean in the context of sentences. Sentences mean what they mean in the context of paragraphs, paragraphs in the context of chapters, chapters in the context of books, and books in the context of the entire narrative and teaching of the Bible. A given passage of Scripture means what it says, according to the meaning of the words and the structure of the grammar, in both its immediate literary and historical context and in the context of the big picture of the Bible. No word, verse, or passage of Scripture can possibly mean anything that it could not mean in context. Furthermore, although different cultures may notice things in Scripture that others do not, and although application may vary from one setting to another, the meaning of the biblical text does not change. A historical/grammatical approach to the meaning of Scripture is valid and binding in every cultural setting.

[5] For a concise summary of the nature and attributes of Scripture, see Kevin DeYoung's excellent work, *Taking God At His Word.*

This means, then, that we are arguing here for the universal applicability of historical/grammatical exegesis. The text means what it says according to the words, the grammar, and the contexts that the human authors, carried along by the Holy Spirit, chose to write. This is true in every age and in every cultural setting, including among oral learners. To say that each culture has its own way of understanding texts, and that no one approach may be privileged above another, is ultimately to deny that the text has any definable meaning at all. It is to engage in hermeneutical nihilism. It may be based on a laudable desire to avoid ethnocentrism, and it may grow out of the correct observation (noted above) that different cultures may notice things in the text that others do not. It perhaps flows from the failure to distinguish between interpretation and application. Nevertheless, even those who argue such a position write in such a way as to negate their own argument, for they wish to be understood according to the normal rules of historical/grammatical exegesis, even by readers from different cultures.[6]

The Missiological Implications of Clarity and Sufficiency

Some who affirm the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture (and, at least formally, the necessity of Scripture) still question the clarity and/or the sufficiency of the Bible, and on that basis would seek other sources for missiological instruction. One well-known missiologist commented to this author (in a private conversation) that anyone could make the Bible say anything they wanted it to say, making the Bible unuseful as a source for missionary method. His preferred approach was to look at practices which had yielded the largest numerical growth in reported converts, and then to reproduce those practices.[7] This fits well with the pragmatism of American culture, and this sort of approach is appealing to many. In many ways, the Church Growth school of missionary practice is a reflection of this mindset, with its use of sociological factors to determine conditions under which churches typically grow, commending these as appropriate missionary methods.

[6] For a concise discussion of this issue, see Will Brooks, "Grammatical-Historical Exegesis and World Mission," in Scott Callaham and Will Brooks, eds, *World Mission* (Lexham Press, 2019), 240-247.

[7] It should be noted that the word "convert" was left undefined, with an American revivalist understanding lying in the background, thus highlighting the importance of theological analysis in missiology.

The doctrines of clarity and sufficiency speak directly to this approach. As stated above, God is not a failure at communication. The Bible is clear in its description of the mission God has given His church and in its instructions on how that mission should be accomplished. While it is true that anyone can eisegete whatever they want into Scripture, it is not true to say that they can exegete whatever they want out of the text. The text of the Bible has meaning, and everything that God thinks we need to know is clear to the regenerate reader who is willing to put in the work of reading carefully. Furthermore, God has shown us more than simply the results he wants us to achieve. He has also revealed a great deal in His word about how we are to go about the work he has sent us to accomplish.[8] The Bible is enough. It defines both the end and the means to that end. The proper approach to missiology is to study the Bible as a whole, allowing it to define the issues, set the questions, and create the strategic framework for the mission God has given His people. A missiologist should approach the Bible with the assumption that it will communicate clearly the things necessary to carry out God's mission. He or she will look in Scripture for the answers to the questions that engagement with Scripture has raised. Scripture does not exist as a grab bag of prooftexts which can be used to bolster whatever philosophy, strategy, or method an author wishes to propose. Scripture as a whole, on its own terms, shapes the discussion, answers the questions, describes the methods, and defines the end.

This does not mean that evangelical missiologists cannot learn from other sources of information. All truth is God's truth, and any believer is free to make judicious use of what others have observed. In particular, missionaries find themselves making constant reference to history, geography, economics, politics, medicine, and a host of other practical disciplines. They utilize the insights of cultural anthropology in order to communicate the gospel as effectively as possible in a given context. They may even make use of sociology as they evaluate their methods. However, our doctrine of Scripture sets clear limits on the use of such sources of information. Extrabiblical sources are never the starting point in missiological conversation. Scripture is. Scripture judges all other sources; they do not judge it. Not only must the surface elements of extrabiblical sources be evaluated by Scripture, but the underlying

[8] A prominent Southern Baptist pastor once said in a meeting of gospel workers overseas, "Once you know the what, the how doesn't matter." This statement accurately mirrors American evangelical pragmatism, but the editors and writers of this journal courteously but firmly disagree.

worldview must be evaluated as well. Scripture has the first word and the last word, and it has the controlling word in between.

Conclusion

This article has barely scratched the surface of the foundations of missiology. There is still much to be discussed, particularly in the shaping dimension of systematic theology on missionary theory and practice. However, the first thing that must be said is this: the formal principle of Protestant theology, *Sola Scriptura*, is also the formal principle of evangelical missiology. A robust evangelical theology of Scripture, combined with a commitment to historical/grammatical hermeneutics, is the essential foundation of evangelical missionary thought and practice.

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PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

Entry

Beginning Well

Bill Macman

One purpose of IMB's *Foundations*[1] is to highlight the foundation and parameters on which missionaries build strategies and tactics. There are six core components to the missionary task. The first task listed is Entry. Effective entry is critical to the process, as we must cultivate "access to people who need to hear the gospel" if we want to reach them.[2] That step requires missionaries not only to know the unreached peoples they are seeking to reach, but also to know themselves well so their access strategy fits within biblical parameters as well as their giftedness, training, and calling.

In some ways, entry starts when potential missionaries begin to address their calling and consider their options. Gailyn Van Rheenen notes that missionary candidates are frequently "certain of God's call to missions but unsure of the place to which God is leading them."[3] God may burden a potential missionary for a particular peole or place through study, short-term trips, or other means. These potential laborers wrestle through several questions that precede actual entry into a ministry context.[4] These questions may include:

1 International Mission Board, *Foundations* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2018), 7.

2 IMB, *Foundations*, 76.

3 Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 154.

4 Van Rheenen, *Missions*, 154-155.

- Could we be part of God's mission in this context?
- How do we choose a place from all these possibilities?
- Where does God want us to minister?
- What will be our ministry there?

Entry thus begins when missionaries-to-be turn their hearts toward peoples and places.

Actual entry into a new people or place, includes four components: research, presence, identity, and communication ability.[5] These four components should function simultaneously rather than sequentially. Research provides information about people groups and their locations that informs the missionary's identity on the field, presence among a people, and commitment to strong communication skills. Presence deals mainly with access to a particular people group or location, with missionaries serving with integrity and intentionally seeking to reach non-believers in the context. Identity thus affords missionaries a role consistent with their "skills, training, and interests"[6]; it facilitates opportunities to connect with the community where the gospel is proclaimed, disciples are made, churches are formed, and leaders are developed. Where governments restrict presence, gaining access through creative access requires field workers to live out their identity trusting that creative access work is "a calling from God, not a distraction or a nuisance."[7]

Finally, communication skills are central to our task. Effective communication skills enable missionaries to engage in the heart langague of the people to whom we are sent. These skills grow not only by study of the language and culture of a people group, but also from good research of peoples and places, consistent presence with the community, and authentic identity that opens doors for evangelizing. Each one of these aspects reciprocally informs and impacts the ability to communicate. This article focuses on research and communication ability while also briefly addressing presence and identity.

5 IMB, *Foundations*, 76.

6 Ibid., 78.

7 Ibid., 77.

Research

With billions of unreached people around the globe, local churches and missions agencies must strategize wisely in using resources God provides. The number of unreached people groups varies based on the definition of UPGs and the research methodology,[8] but the research is nonetheless essential as missionaries seek to understand people group demographics and prepare Great Commission strategies. That research should be done "soberly and carefully, to make sure the job is done wisely."[9]

Research is practical. It helps the missionary see who the unreached people are, what work has been or is currently being done, and what contextual factors play into the missionary task. These factors include religious, historical, cultural, economic, and political issues that might affect the work of evangelism and healthy church planting. In today's world where information is readily available, missionaries can begin initial research even before going to the field and then continue that work after arriving on the field. In some ways, research is an ongoing process for remaining current in missiological emphases and strategies.

Though the *research* in these stories is unique, the Bible does offer some examples of people studying a context. The Lord directed Moses to send twelve spies to research the Promised Land (Numbers 13). God instructed his people to do research to see tangibly what he promised to give them. God had promised them the land, and he wanted the people to see not only the fruit of the land but also the obstacles in the land. God thus tested their faith in him to overcome the obstacles and fulfill his promise of a land flowing with milk and honey.

Similarly, the apostle Paul took note of the obvious idolatry in Athens (Acts 17:16-17) simply by observing the city as he waited for his teammates to arrive. So pervasive was the idolatry that it deeply distressed, even "infuriated,"[10] Paul. One commentator noted that in Athens, "Its temples and statuary

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[8] J.D. Payne, and John Mark Terry, *Developing a Strategy for Missions (Encountering Mission): A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 128.

[9] Zane Pratt, Jeff Walters, M. David Sills, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 260, Kindle Edition.

[10] John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 366

were related to the worship of the Greek pantheon, and its culture was pagan. Therefore Paul, with his Jewish abhorrence of idolatry, could not but find the culture of Athens spiritually repulsive."[11] The result of his observation was not, however, his immediate departure from the city; rather, it was that he "reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there" (Acts 17:17). Observation compelled him toward proclamation.

John Mark Terry and J.D. Payne point out the importance of research when preparing a missions strategy. On one hand, missionaries need to research "past knowledge of the working of the Spirit among the people, in the church, the team, or the organization."[12] This step would include discovering any historical events that might impact a group's receptivity to the gospel. It also includes team members reviewing their personal histories and reflecting on "how their pasts will affect the present and future outworking of the strategy."[13] All missionaries bring their own stories to the field, and reviewing those stories of personal and team successes and failures can help prepare them for the future.

On the other hand, "present knowledge of what the Spirit is doing"[14] is also critical. The questions to ask to discern what the Spirit is doing can be numerous, but a central one is, "Where is God currently working among individuals or groups?" At a practical level, this research might seek to know the status of Bible translation, the identity of other evangelical outreach efforts in the area (if any), and the number of believers and churches among a people group. It is a recognition that the Holy Spirit at times directed Christ-followers to people and fields where he was already at work among God-prepared people waiting to hear (e.g., Luke 10: "person of peace"; Acts 9: Ananias and Paul; Acts 10: Peter and Cornelius; Acts 18: Aquilla, Priscilla, and Apollos). God was already working, and he led his people on assignment to others he had already prepared.

Thus, research that increases knowledge of God's past faithfulness and his ongoing work strengthens the missionary for present and future work. At

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[11] R. N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 473.

[12] Payne and Terry, *Developing a Strategy for Missions*, 12.

[13] Ibid., 352.

[14] Ibid., 352.

a different level, Henry Blackaby points out that recognizing where God is working requires "living in an intimate love relationship with God. . . . a tender, sensitive heart, prepared through a love relationship with the Father, will be ready to respond to God at the slightest prompting."[15] These believers "pursue him [God] as people empowered by the Holy Spirit whose hunger for him comes from the Spirit's work within them."[16] Assumed behind good missiological research is also the researcher's growing relationship with God.

Concurrently, research is valuable in determining the most effective way to be a presence among an unreached people group. In a day when "Most of the unreached people groups and places of the world are found in countries that either do not grant missionary visas, or that severely restrict missionary activity at the least,"[17] creative access strategies can be a significant component of an entry strategy. While some view platforms as only "a 'cover' for missionaries,"[18] others see them as "a product of God's calling, equipping, and gifting."[19] In fact, a legitimate platform provides identity for the missionary who must strive to do evangelism and discipleship while also being ever ready to answer the question, "What do you do?"[20] in a way that is true while not threatening their presence.

One might say, every missionary is on a platform in the sense that they have a legitimate presence among the people they engage. In some countries, missionaries can openly identify as religious workers; in others, the environment is hostile and a less overt presence is necessary in order to have access. A colleague described his situation this way: "Where we serve, the context is not hostile, but the locals' perception of a 'missionary' is far from the reality. When asked, 'Why are you here?' I can respond, 'I am a consultant for theological education [the official platform], but what I really enjoy doing is helping people come to know God in a personal way.' This is all true and

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15 Henry T. Blackaby,Richard Blackaby, and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group., 2021), 127-129, Kindle Edition.

16 A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2004), 181.

17 IMB, *Foundations*, 77,

18 Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book Group, 2005), 211.

19 Pocock, Van Rheenen, and McConnell, *Changing Face of World Missions*, 211.

20 IMB, *Foundations*, 78.

consistent with what I do, and it identifies me as someone who knows about and likes to talk about spiritual things."[21]

Regardless of the type of visa cross-cultural workers might have, their identity in the community should be characterized by exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-25), trusting the Bible as their authority (2 Tim 3:16-17), making disciples who obey everything Jesus commanded—including making more disciples (Matt 28:18-20), and leaning on prayer as "central to [their] strategy"[22] (Luke 10:2). Thus, the call of Jesus for his faithful followers to pray for more workers for the harvest should lead to the next generation of gospel workers researching and seeking entry in more places.

Communication Ability

The work of ministry is about communicating the gospel. Regardless of the form of communication, missionaries are to abide in Christ, share the gospel with the lost, and disciple believers.[23] Doing this work most effectively requires learning the language of a people group, understanding that this task is "both absolutely necessary for a successful missions experience and a significant contributor to [one's] culture shock."[24] The work is not easy, and it requires devoting time and energy to language and culture study. Only in knowing the language and understanding the culture will missionaries "be able to have deep conversations about heart issues if they are to share the gospel, teach the Bible, and disciple believers effectively."[25]

In language learning, missionaries are "digging a well that you and others will drink from for the rest of your life."[26] Van Rheenan wrote about a significant aspect of language learning: evangelizing as a missionary even while acquiring language skills. This quote is worth pondering when one thinks about the entry stage of the missionary task:

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21 Personal conversation with author. Used with permission.

22 IMB, *Foundations*, 30.

23 Ibid.,, 20.

24 Pratt, Walters, and Sills, *Global Mission*, 231.

25 IMB, *Foundations*, 78.

26 Pratt, Walters, and Sills, *Global Mission*, 234.

> Some missionaries, passionate about reaching the lost and planting churches, want to bypass the crucial stage of language and culture learning. Missionaries, however, cannot be effective teachers unless they are first learners. Neglecting language and culture learning during the first months on the field reduces missionaries' effectiveness in all other stages, and the resulting movement is often anemic rather than vibrant.
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> Even during the early learning stage, however, we [Van Rheenen and his wife, who served as missionaries] did not abandon our identity as missionaries, ambassadors for the kingdom of God. We learned the language as Christians. Learning a language is inherently a social exercise, and the people with whom we interacted during this process were also the reason for our effort. Language learning provided an arena for building relationships and learning to communicate the essentials of the gospel message, though initially in an elementary way.[27]

Foundations makes a similar point: "It is unproductive to postpone gospel sharing in the new language until the language learner is relatively proficient."[28] Not only can reaching language proficiency take some time, but the missionary can also get out of the habit of sharing the gospel during the work of language school. Limited language skills should not be permission for limiting evangelistic efforts; they should be a means to first learn cross-cultural evangelism using the most basic tools. Simplicity, in fact, often communicates best regardless of one's language level.

The missionary is first and foremost a "communicator of God's word in obedience to the Great Commission."[29] Missionaries learn the local language not because they simply want to know another language, but precisely because the message they proclaim is the message of redemption through Christ. Scott Callaham is correct: studying a language in order to communicate the gospel cross-culturally means "laying aside the closely held 'right' to use

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[27] Van Rheenen, *Missions*,349.

[28] IMB, *Foundations*, 79.

[29] Scott N. Callaham, "Language and World Mission," in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues*, ed. Scott N. Callaham and Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), location 3444, Kindle Edition.

one's native tongue."[30] Indeed, he concludes, "if a missionary never effectively learns the language of the host-nation community, he or she severely limits the scope of ministry only to the atypical people who can cross to the missionary's side of the language bridge."[31] Such a self-imposed limitation should not be the choice for a Great Commission missionary.

A word of caution is in order at this point. At its core, communication on the mission field assumes relationships with nationals. It "involves a careful study of language and culture and time spent with people."[32] A worthwhile consideration regarding entry is the tensions missionaries face between learning culture and language on the ground and remaining connected to their family and home through electronic means. Those connections are important, but immediate access to "people back home"[33] sometimes gets in the way of relationship building with locals. Technology that could prove helpful in cross-cultural work may, in fact, become a hindrance to that work. That is particularly the case when relationships are *on the screen* in one's mother tongue more than *face-to-face* in the language of the people a missionary is called to reach.

Conclusion

Entering a new field for the sake of the gospel can seem an impossible task, and it is indeed impossible by mere human ability. God, however, calls his church, sets them apart, sends them, and equips them for the assignment he has for them. Relying on him lessens the pressure on the missionary as he or she first engages a new ministry field. Rather, it leads the missionary to walk in step with the Spirit into the very field that is white unto harvest.

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30 Callaham, "Language and World Mission," Location 3675.

31 Ibid., location 3714-3715.

32 Pocock, Van Rheenen, and McConnell, *Changing Face of World Missions*, 316.

33 Ibid.

Evangelism

Sharing the Gospel in Community

Lucy Witten

When a missionary arrives on the field, the task can seem overwhelming. He lands in a city filled with lost souls. His job is to proclaim the gospel to the multitude, but his evangelism efforts alone seem small in comparison to the size of the task. What can the missionary do? How can his effort make a dent in the vast lostness around him? In this article, I will demonstrate the value of missionaries partnering with the local church or a near-culture church on the field to evangelize non-believers.

Biblical Foundations

Jesus speaks of the church working together to proclaim the good news of his kingdom. Jesus describes his followers as "a city on a hill that cannot be hidden" (Matt. 5:13). He tells them to "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16). A city is not one person alone. By their very nature, cities are made of many individuals near one another. The gospel is on display as unbelievers see the community of Christians together. Willis and Coe explain:

> People need to see the grace of God lived out among a group of people. They need to see other believers repenting, confess-

> ing, rejoicing in God's grace, and forgiving others. They need to see the gospel applied to life... You are not meant simply to show off the light you have as an individual, but rather you are meant to display the light of the gospel through a community of people who are unified in Jesus.[1]

The good news of Jesus Christ in the gospel is lived out before an unbelieving world in the church.

Jesus describes two specific characteristics of the community of believers who point others to his salvation, love and unity. Jesus says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). God's saving love for mankind is demonstrated when church members love one another. Dever writes, "One of the main reasons that the local church is to be a community of love is so that others will know the God of love... The life of the local congregation makes the audible gospel visible."[2] The gospel message of God's love is on display when the church is characterized by love.

Before his death on the cross, Jesus prayed:

> I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:20-23)

Jesus believed the church's unity would communicate that God loves people. The church has a role to play in God's work of redemption: the evangelization of all people and nations.

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[1] Dustin Willis and Aaron Coe, *Life on Mission: Joining the Everyday Mission of God* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 133.

[2] Mark Dever, *The Gospel & Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 51.

The New Testament provides examples of the church functioning as an evangelistic community. First, Jesus sets the pattern of partnership in gospel proclamation when he sends his first disciples out two by two to proclaim the arrival of the kingdom of God and preach repentance (Luke 10:1-9, Mark 6:7-13). In Acts, new believers were added to the early church daily as they followed the apostles' teaching together (Act 2:42-47). Peter and Paul traveled with other believers as they shared the gospel message (Acts 10:23,13:13-52). The gospel spread through the work of the entire church in regions where there was no apostolic presence (Acts 9:31, 11:19-26). Paul commended the church in Thessalonica because they were known as a community that spread the gospel far and wide (1 Thess. 1:8). Plummer conveys, "The apostolic mission devolves upon each church as a whole- not upon any particular member or group. Each individual within the church, then, will manifest missionary activity according to his or her particular gifting and life situation."[3] Church members were involved in evangelism together in the New Testament as the gospel spread across peoples and nations.

Christians from Western cultures can be characterized by a lone ranger mentality.[4] Individualistic thinking must not pervade missionary evangelism. Chan and Beuving assert, "While every *individual* needs to obey Jesus' call to follow, we cannot follow Jesus as *individuals*. The proper context for every disciple maker is the church. It is impossible to make disciples apart from the church of Jesus Christ."[5] (emphasis theirs) The task of evangelism is rightly accomplished with both personal and corporate evangelism. Evangelism must connect to the local church. Missionaries need to evangelize in partnership with new and established churches in their context. Helping the local church to flourish as an evangelistic community enlarges the reach of the missionary.

Practical Applications

Churches are evangelistic communities when evangelism is a normal activity for them. Dever characterizes this culture as "an expectation that Christians will share the gospel with others, talk about doing that, pray about it, and

[3] Robert L. Plummer, *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Biblical Monographs, 2006), 144.

[4] Willis and Coe, *Life on Mission*, 88.

[5] Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 51.

regularly plan and work together to help each other evangelize."[6] In fact, the missionary does not need to bring foreign ideas or programs into a church body to help cultivate this integration of evangelism into church life. Stiles explains, "We don't remake the church for evangelism. Instead, Jesus did not forget the gospel when he built the church."[7]

For example, baptism and the Lord's Supper are physical pictures of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The preaching of the Word proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ. When missionaries regularly participate in the life of the church, opportunities abound to encourage a church to adopt an evangelistic culture.

Chelsea serves as a missionary to an unreached people group in Southeast Asia.[8] She also attends a local church consisting of other people groups in her city. When her small group asked for prayer requests, she requested prayer for a friend from a particular unreached people group with whom she had been sharing the gospel. The church members were shocked. They advised her those people were hostile to the gospel and would never come to faith. She must not risk her safety to share the gospel with them. However, as they took her request to the Lord week after week, the Lord began to change their hearts for evangelism. God convicted them that sharing the gospel with unlikely converts was a task for them as well as Chelsea.[9]

Another missionary, Anthony, helped his church plan their sermons through the book of Acts for almost a year. As the church elders preached the story of the early church from God's Word, the congregation saw their role in sharing the gospel. Instead of Anthony trying to convince believers they needed to share the gospel, they began to ask him for advice in situations where they were able to evangelize. The Word of God convinced them of their need to proclaim God's salvation.[10]

The evangelistic community of the local church emboldens all the followers of Christ in the church to share the gospel. If missionaries contact churches and do a training on evangelism methods, a few gifted individuals may begin

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6 Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*, 17.

7 J.M. Stiles, *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 64.

8 All missionary and local church member names have been changed for security purposes.

9 Personal conversation with Chelsea.

10 Personal conversation with Anthony.

to share the gospel on their own. If, however, the missionary and the church together model evangelism and invite new believers to participate alongside them, they are more likely to inject evangelism into part of the regular lifestyle of the members.

Jamie came to Christ after attending church meetings for over a year. Through gospel-centered prayers, music, preaching, discussion groups, and chats over lunch, almost every church member had shared the gospel with her. When the church mentioned an Easter outreach to children, Jamie, a new believer, was eager to participate. Shy by nature and nervous around kids, she supported this evangelistic effort through her skills as a baker. She attended the event and brought beautifully decorated baked goods for each family. During the meeting, a fellow church member shared the gospel story in a simple way for the children.

Jamie watched evangelism in action. These initial steps to participate in the evangelistic event led to greater boldness in her life. Jamie now has conversations with her own friends about the gospel. She also creates opportunities for these friends to hear the gospel as she invites them to connect with other church members over coffee.[11]

Missionaries Matthew and Kandy invited a group of young professionals from their local church to their home for Bible study and prayer. During this time of discipleship, they spoke often of sharing the gospel and encouraging one another in their efforts. Some of these believers readily shared the gospel, while others began to take baby steps. When Matthew and Kandy threw an evangelistic Christmas open house, they invited these young professionals to come alongside them serving food and initiating gospel conversations. Matthew and Kandy would be unable to share the gospel with everyone at the party. Young professionals still living in their parents' homes would not have the ability to host such a large scale gathering on their own. Working together this church family and the missionary couple could have a greater impact on the lost.

Indeed, both the missionary and the church need to recognize the value of their partnership. A missionary, for example, must work to make the gospel understandable to someone in a culture different from his or her own. The local church body intuitively navigates the culture that is foreign to the

[11] The author personally witnessed these events.

missionary. The church can help the missionary understand the worldview of the people around them. The people's understanding of reality, human nature, death, and purpose makes a difference in how to best convey the gospel to them. The church will have insights into which biblical metaphors of salvation resonate within the culture based on their own conversions to Christianity.[12]

Missionaries can also assist the church in their evangelism efforts. Missionaries often have a comfort level in sharing the gospel that many new believers do not possess. Missionaries can ask questions as outsiders that would be offensive coming from a local person. For example, in the author's context, questions from a foreigner about why a religious practice is followed are seen as an interest in the people themselves and happily answered. If a local asked the same question, it is perceived as judgmental. A missionary's unbelieving friends may think of the gospel as good for only a foreigner, but their perspective often changes when they meet the local church community that includes believers of their own people group or nation. Seeing how the gospel saved someone from their same culture and religious background can have a great impact on the lost.

In places of high persecution, the missionary can serve as an extension of the church's own evangelism and discipleship efforts. Nik Ripken describes the way persecuted believers often want to partner with Western missionaries. He writes:

> We know our own people. We can choose the best fishing pole and the right weight of the line, and we know what size hooks to use. 'As we fish here in our own culture, can we use you as fishing bait? ...People in our culture do not know whom they can trust when they have dreams and visions; they don't know who to talk with when God has touched their hearts. They see you as safe people... You can have hundreds of spiritual conversations while a local person could possibly have a dozen. So

[12] Ideas for this paragraph are a summarization of topics from Sam Chan, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World: How to Make the Unbelievable News about Jesus More Believable* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018).

> are you willing to be bait for Jesus and allow us to gather in a harvest of local souls?'[13]

This partnership humbles the missionary but allows for broad sowing of gospel seed.

Conclusion

Almost 7.9 billion people live in the world today.[14] Each individual needs to hear the message of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. God has called missionaries to the ends of the earth, filling them with a passion to share the gospel where it is not well-known. As God builds his church in new places, wise missionaries can heed the advice of Mack Stiles: "To be compelled by love to share the gospel individually is a beautiful thing, but when it happens in community it's joyfully glorious."[15] May missionaries go forth in partnership with the evangelistic community of the local church.

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[13] Nik Ripken & Barry Stricker, *The Insanity of Obedience: Walking with Jesus in Tough Places* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 259.

[14] *World population Dashboard: United Nations Population Fund.* World Population Dashboard | United Nations Population Fund. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2021, from https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population-dashboard.

[15] Stiles, Evangelism, 48.

Discipleship

The Need for Qualitative Analysis

Jonathan Martyn

Missionaries love numbers. As a means of stewardship and of evaluating the progress of the gospel in a specific place, missionaries count such things as number of gospel presentations, number of baptisms, and number of churches planted. In the same way, resources like Joshua Project present percentages of lostness in various locations and among different people groups. Such numerical analysis can be helpful in determining peoples with the least access to the gospel and locations where organizations should allocate more resources. When considering the task of discipleship, though, such numerical analysis may not give us an accurate picture of progress within the missionary task. In this article, I argue that we need more qualitative analysis to help us evaluate the task of disciple-making.

Making Disciples

Before we consider what that qualitative analysis might look like, though, we should consider the fundamental questions of what is a disciple and how do we make disciples? Simply put, a disciple is a follower of Christ.[1] Biblically, no distinction exists between believers and disciples. Those who believe

[1] *Foundations* (Richmond, VA: IMB, 2018), 53.

in Jesus follow him and seek to live in obedience to his commands. It follows, then, that disciple-making is the process of teaching people how to follow Christ in such a way that it leads to an increasing level of Christlikeness.

Foundations helps us here by describing the six transformations of a disciple: transformed heart, mind, affections, will, relationships, and purpose.[2] While the first of the six happens at conversion, the others "are found in increasing measure as a disciple grows through faith in Jesus as a member of His body, the church."[3] Thus, being a disciple is a process that begins at conversion and continues throughout the Christian life.

Of significance is the recognition that disciples are transformed in these ways not because of participation in specific programs but because of their devotion to the Master. Stephen Wright explains,

> We cannot reduce [discipleship] to schemes, formulae, or a syllabus of instruction. It is vitally significant that discipleship rooted in the pattern of the gospel concerns real, complex, many-sided people learning what it means to be loyal to a real person: Jesus Christ, for it is logically impossible to be a "disciple" in general terms; you have to be a disciple of someone or something.[4]

Rightly understood, then, disciple-making should not have its aim simply in ensuring that believers have attended a certain set of courses or have learned certain material. Discipleship is not a box to be checked off on the way to completing the task. Rather, disciple-making is about equipping believers with the foundational knowledge and ability to "self-feed" for the remainder of their Christian life. That is, the fundamental question of disciple-making is: have believers been equipped to read Scripture, understand it, and apply it to their lives in such a way that leads to lifelong transformation? Thus, we can see the critical nature of Scripture to the discipleship process. In its essence, disciple-making is about pointing people to God's Word so they can read and obey it.

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2 Ibid., 53-56.

3 Ibid., 53.

4 Stephen Wright, "Discipleship as Integral Component of World Mission Strategy," in *World Mission*, ed. Scott Callaham and Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 106.

In that sense, the task of disciple-making is intricately connected with the work of church planting. As *Foundations* explains, "God provides the local church as the necessary setting and primary relationships for the full measure of biblical discipleship."[5] If the church is the primary context in which believers are discipled, then we need to ask if the churches we plant have members with the knowledge and skill to disciple others. Do the leaders in these churches have the ability to create sermons, Bible studies, and other discipleship-oriented content that will lead believers both to know God more completely and to obey him more fully? Of course, disciple-making is not just about learning to write sermons. Leaders must grow in holiness and model obedience for others, while learning to communicate and lead others into greater obedience. All believers, and especially leaders, must *be* disciples while also seeking to *make* disciples.

The Problem with Metrics

In that sense, then, statistical analysis does not always give us an accurate picture of progress as it relates to discipleship. In his book *Tyranny of Metrics*, Muller makes this point when he writes that "what can be measured is not always worth measuring."[6] Moreover, "what gets measured may have no relationship to what we really want to know."[7] For example, numbers of attendees at discipleship or training events do not tell us what was taught, how it was taught, or whether the attendees actually learned anything.

We might also compare two different discipleship-oriented events. The first is a two-hour seminar that requires no preparation in which participants simply listen to a talk on some important subject. More attend because less is required of them. The second event is more interactive where students must read on some subject beforehand, share their insights on the topic, develop a plan for how to disciple others to live out the truths studied, and report back in three months about their efforts in discipleship. Fewer people attend the second event because more is required of them. Simply measuring number of participants will lead us to value the first type of training over the second and will not enable us to evaluate whether participants have internalized the

5 *Foundations*, 57.

6 Jerry Z. Muller, *The Tyranny of Metrics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), Introduction, Sec. 1, para. 6, Available at: https://www.perlego.com/book/840027/the-tyranny-of-metrics-pdf.

7 Ibid.

content or have been equipped to do something. In other words, we don't gain an accurate picture of whether they have actually been discipled.

Stating that they haven't actually been discipled does not diminish the importance of the first type of discipleship event. Such events are important and can stimulate greater love for Christ and more fervent obedience to his commands. The point is that when we focus solely on metrics, we end up measuring – or even *valuing*– the wrong thing. Another way to look at this issue is to consider processes of deeper discipleship and training leaders for different types of church ministry. Lay leaders and almost any believer can participate in entry level, informal theological training. Thus, the numbers of those discipled in such programs is higher. More formal degree programs have stricter entrance requirements and take longer to complete; thus, fewer will participate. If all we look at is numbers, the first is more valuable since we can provide deeper discipleship to more in a shorter time. But as I will show below, the second is perhaps more valuable in the long run because it provides deeper understanding, reflection, and meditation on the topic, thus enabling both obedience and ability to teach others why and how to obey.

In that sense we might consider Diagram 1 and see that the highest percentage of believers would benefit from the more basic types of discipleship. The further we move up the discipleship pyramid, the fewer the number of believers who would benefit from such programs. Some might ask why we should invest the time and resources to develop more rigorous discipleship programs when only a few will benefit from them.

Diagram 1: Discipleship Pyramid

Only looking at these criteria, though, fails to recognize the strategic value of the more in-depth programs. Because the more advanced programs require participants to read, engage with, analyze, think critically about, write, and present, those who finish the program are equipped to *do* more for the kingdom. Someone who completes a basic discipleship course should be able to share some of the content learned with others, but someone who completes a more advanced degree will have the ability to *produce his or her own* discipleship and training materials. Even if only a few are equipped at that level, this advanced training is still of strategic value since the few can influence so many more for a longer time. In that sense, we can consider Diagram 2.

Diagram 2: Pyramid of Influence

Thus, when it comes to the task of disciple-making, focusing on metrics alone can give us a skewed perspective of what we are accomplishing. We need qualitative analysis to accurately assess whether the programs we implement are meeting the desired objectives and producing the kinds of disciples the church needs.

Objectives for Disciple-Making

Discipleship and disciple-making are somewhat unique within missionary contexts because we recognize that the missionary will not be in this context forever. Thus, the missionary must make disciples with an equipping model – planting a church in such a way that these new believers are equipped with

the knowledge and ability to continue their pursuit of Christ long after the missionary is gone. In the hopes of providing some sort of objectives for disciple-making efforts within missionary contexts, let me provide five questions for evaluating our disciple-making efforts.

Are our disciple-making efforts helping believers to love God more deeply? This objective should be obvious, but if we merely track metrics, we will have no means of evaluating whether believers in this context are growing in holiness and in love for God. But in the NT, we see Paul stating his goal as "that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28) or praying for believer that they may gain wisdom "in the knowledge of him" (Eph. 1:17). Paul desires these believers to grow in their knowledge of God that they might trust him and experience more of him in their lives.

While some have a tendency to dichotomize knowledge and obedience in discipleship, we see these two concepts in unity in Scripture. In the Great Commission, Jesus describes the process of disciple-making with the phrase "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). In order to obey, disciples must be taught something. It's only in their growing knowledge of God that they can obey. In the epistles we see the same dynamic where the authors first teach them something they need to know about the gospel before transitioning to the practical imperatives in the later half. For example, in Ephesians Paul spends chapters 1-3 helping believers understand their position "in Christ," then pivots in 4:1 and spends 4-6 commanding them to live out those truths in specific ways. Therefore, Paul could say to the Ephesian elders that he declared to them "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:28).

Are our disciple-making efforts equipping people to interpret Scripture faithfully? Healthy churches have leaders who know how to interpret the Word, but all believers should have the ability not only to interpret and apply Scripture but also to evaluate theological ideas through the lens of Scripture (Acts 17:11). Discipleship programs and materials often convey information to help believers grow in their relationship with Christ, but they can convey that information without leading believers to correctly read and interpret Scripture; thus, they may not know why they should act a certain way and are not equipped to face a new choice or temptation. In contrast, though, Paul writes that faithful believers are those who know how to rightly divide the Word (2 Tim. 2:15).

Discipling believers to interpret Scripture doesn't necessarily mean we teach a course on hermeneutics (though that may be helpful at times), but it does mean we evaluate our discipleship methods to ask the question: Is this process modeling the correct way to read and interpret Scripture? Scripture is the fountain of theology. Ability to interpret is essential to developing good theology and planting healthy churches that think biblically about key doctrinal ideas. Moreover, it means that believers can apply the truths of Scripture to any issue they face, including issues that arise in their context long after the missionary has left.

Are our disciple-making efforts equipping people to view their world from a biblical perspective? Similar to the previous point, one objective in disciple-making is helping believers to know Christ and the biblical story in such a way that they see the world the way God does. In Galatians 5 Paul explains this idea with the phrase "walk by the Spirit" (5:15), fleshes that out with the "fruit of the Spirit" (5:22-23), and then summarizes the whole discussion with the command, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep step with the Spirit" (5:25). Keeping step with the Spirit points to the idea of believers abiding in Christ (John 15:1-8), following him day by day, and living out his truth in their daily lives. Doing so requires knowing him and his gospel in a deep, personal way.

The book of 1 Peter provides a good example of the need to disciple believers to think biblically. Peter's original recipients were facing persecution and wondering why they were. Peter encouraged them and helped them understand suffering, explaining that they should not be surprised at the challenges they faced (1 Pet. 4:12). Not only should these believers navigate persecution by looking back on what God has accomplished in Christ (1 Pet. 1:3), but with forward-looking faith, they should also anticipate and look forward to future glory in Christ (1:3-5, 13; 2:7; 4:13; 5:4). Thus, Christians should consider themselves "sojourners" (1:1, 17; 2:11) who live honorably before unbelievers, and Peter helps them to know how to do so. Following Peter' example, we need to train new believers in missionary contexts to be discipled to think biblically about their situation and calling.

Are our disciple-making efforts equipping people to self-theologize? As missionaries share the gospel, begin to disciple and then gather believers into churches, one goal should be to equip these believers to self-theologize. One characteristic of a healthy, indigenous church is that it can do theology on its own. Thus, as new believers become better interpreters of Scripture and think biblically about their situation and context, these maturing disciples should be able

to articulate what God's truth means in their cultural context. Missionaries should consider whether their discipling efforts are simply leading believers to memorize, copy, or utilize the missionary's own theological ideas, or are they equipping the church to do theology on its own.

Are our disciple-making efforts equipping people to join God in his mission? I left this objective last on purpose since missionaries tend to gravitate to this purpose first. Discipling new believers must certainly result in both a greater understanding of the gospel and a greater burden to share it. But even as missionaries evaluate whether local believers are growing in their desire and ability to share the gospel, they need to recognize these believers as partners and co-laborers. This means that missionaries need to listen to national believers and not just dictate that they join the mission on our terms. The desire and passion of new believers to join us in spreading the gospel should naturally flow out of God's Word and an understanding of God as the author of mission--not just because we tell them they need to do God's mission.

Conclusion

In January 1956, Jim Elliot and four others were speared to death in Ecuador as they were attempting to share the gospel with the Huaorani, an unreached people with no known contact with the outside world. In the years since, many have pondered whether the mission was a "success" or if the sacrifice of these five was worth it. If the simple obedience of these five is not enough to consider the mission a success, then one must consider measurable outcomes (e.g., how many were motivated to become missionaries or how many people were reached as a result of hearing this story) and contrast that with the cost of these five lives. For her part, Jim's widow Elisabeth Elliot was annoyed with such speculation. Ellen Vaughn explains Elliot's perspective:

> Metrics are great, and a useful means of assessing stewardship of resources, but measuring eternal destinies by temporal formulas is a risky business. We just don't have enough transcendent dimensions in our brains to comprehend the mysterious, sovereign, quantum workings of God that emanate from eternity past for the purposes of His glory for eternity future. To opine about what God is up to in terms of results can stray into the realm of hubris, or faithlessness. If we must see that there

> are worthy results in order to come to peace about what God has done or allowed, then we have no faith.[8]

Disciple-making is a difficult task. An equipping model that provides believers with the knowledge and ability to pursue Christ for the rest of their lives enables the missionary to walk away as Paul did: entrusting them to God and to the Word of His grace (Acts 20:32).

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[8] Ellen Vaughn, *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2020), 259-260.

Healthy Church Formation

The Vehicle and Goal of Missions

Kevin Rodgers

Even though every aspect of the missionary task is vital to cross-cultural missions, healthy church formation is the fulcrum on which everything rests and pivots. Church planting is God's plan for reaching the nations for His glory, which makes healthy church formation simultaneously the goal of the missionary task and the vehicle for accomplishing it.

Yet, it is at the point of healthy church formation that things often derail. Multiple complications can occur in this phase of the missionary task, but the two most common relate to "health" and "formation." Sometimes unhealthy churches are formed, which either inhibits reproduction or results in more unhealthy churches. Another common challenge is the inability to transition from a small group to the formation of an actual church.[1]

Most church planters have unlocked Entry, and they have well-developed tools for Evangelism and Discipleship. Even on the back end, after churches are planted, leaders often have tried and true methods for developing other leaders and pushing on to other fields. It is at healthy church formation, this

[1] This assertion is based on my experience as a church planter in Sub-Saharan Africa in various countries and contexts, as well as observing the same in those I have supervised and led across the affinity. Many make disciples, but few get to multiple healthy reproducing churches.

most crucial point in the process, where things tend to get fuzzy. Below are some of the areas that get "fuzzy."

Critical Errors in Healthy Church Formation

Sometimes church planters fall short at healthy church formation because they started wrongly in the beginning. The missionary task is too often approached from an individualistic, Western perspective which makes it difficult to move beyond the individual to the actual group. *I* can enter, *I* can evangelize, *I* can disciple, *I* can train leaders and *I* can exit... but I cannot be a church. One must move from the "I" to the "we" at that point, and it is difficult to focus on the "we" when everything up to that point has been about the "I".

This individualistic approach to international church planting is problematic at several levels. For example, church planters sometimes project a model of church planting divorced from the sending church, and at times, from the local church on the field. This is true not only in parachurch organizations, but even in denominational sending agencies. Rather than the church planter seeing himself as an extension of the ministry of his sending church(es), he may find the distance and time away from the sending church can create a false sense of autonomy. Eventually, he begins to operate more like a professional, independent operator accountable only to the mission board, rather than a "sent one" from his local church and denomination.

This dissonance also creates a model of missions that is problematic and not reproducible. National partners are unable to lift the curtain and see any existing connection between the missionary and his sending church(es). All they see is a professional, paid, exceptionally trained church planter who suddenly appears in their country.

Church planters who are disconnected from the local church may often focus on the lost to the exclusion of the existing church; they "filter for faithfulness" in individuals and focus on those who might have apostolic gifting ensure reproduction. The problem is not that they filter; it is that they sometimes ignore the existing church in the process. This can lead others to think that the missionary task is just an individual, apostolic task and not also a corporate one. Church planters can fall into the hidden trap of simply reproducing themselves instead of also planting reproducing churches that will plant others.

Obviously, where there is no existing church, it is necessary for individual missionaries to go there and engage in the missionary task. They must enter, evangelize, disciple, and form healthy churches. Those churches need developed leaders, and that same cross-cultural worker should be working towards exit. Yet, healthy exit is dependent upon the formation of a healthy church—a healthy church that sees missions as integral to its health. This is the only way to ensure a continued generational witness in that location and to create churches that will one day send out their own missionaries to the ends of the earth. In short, international church planting is not just the purview of the apostolic worker. It is also the responsibility of the existing church to plant more churches. Healthy churches have reproduction as a part of their DNA.

Ed Stetzer addresses this in *Planting Missional Churches.*[2] Stetzer refers to Jack Redford's approach in his influential 1978 work *Planting New Churches.*[3] While the book is more practical than theological, Redford lays out a 9-step method for existing churches to plant new ones. His steps are simple, like forming a missions committee, selecting the new location, sending church members to cultivate the new field, etc. While Redford focused on the Western context, his work was contextualized for Africa by Claylan Coursey in *How Churches Can Start Churches.*[4] Redford's book is a call for a corporate approach that involves the entire congregation in church planting.

In the '90s, though, the church planting conversation shifted to focus on the role of individual church planters instead of churches planting churches. As Stetzer puts it, "the entrepreneurial planter became more central."[5] Today, in international missions, the focus is almost exclusively on the apostolic type of church planter and his role in starting new churches. Stetzer rightly advocates for balance and a both/and approach when it comes to church planting.[6] Churches should involve the entire body in planting other churches locally

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2 Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches that Multiply* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

3 Jack Redford, *Planting New Churches* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1979).

4 Claylan Coursey, *How Churches Can Start Churches: An Easy Eight-Step Plan for Beginning New Churches* (Kenya: Self Published, 1984).

5 Ed Stetzer, "Should Church Planting Be Done Through People or Through Churches?" *Christianity Today* n.p. [cited 29 Aug. 2020]. Online: https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/january/should-church-planting-be-done-through-people-or-through-ch.html

6 Ibid.

and send entrepreneurial (apostolic) church planters to plant where there are no existing churches.

While Stetzer is speaking primarily to a North American context, much can be applied to international missions. Cross-cultural missionaries are naturally apostolic as they are sent to unreached people groups, cross cultural boundaries, and learn new languages. It is difficult for local churches to go to the ends of the earth and start new churches. Yet, without careful explanation, the missionary might unwittingly give new churches a model of church planting that is incomplete. There is a definite, vital role for "sent out ones" to go where no one has ever gone. However, there is also a need for every new church to have missions as a part of its DNA and to be simultaneously involved in the missionary task in its local context while sending missionaries to the ends of the earth.

Missions as a Characteristic of Healthy Church

Much has been written recently on the various attributes of a healthy church. However, the importance of a missions DNA is often missing in the discussion. In Mark Dever's *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*[7], evangelism is one of those nine marks, but there is no mention of missions being a characteristic of health.[8] Yet, reproduction and the ability to self-propagate have long been seen as a core component of the local church.[9]

At the other end of the spectrum, those focused on rapid reproduction are also talking about church health, but they do not emphasize missions as one of those characteristics. As in Dever's book, there is an emphasis on evangelism in the local church, but the driver and implementer of missionary advance is the "sent one" and not the local church. The church circle tool used

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7 Mark Dever, Nine Marks of a Healthy Church (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).

8 The nine marks came out of a letter Dever sent to a church outlining the nine characteristics they should look for in a new pastor. Building on that concept of church leaders who emulate those nine characteristics, he later wrote the book. There are many characteristics that could be added, but missional focus is one that is lacking in his text.

9 Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson are credited with the formulation of the Three-Self model. "Early on, Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson called for the planting of indigenous churches that were self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. These three 'selves' became the watchwords for progressive missions and led to the development of autonomous churches around the world." Paul G. Hiebert, Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 58. These concepts were further developed by Dixon Hoste, Jonathan Nevius and Rolland Allen. For a current critique of the Three-Self model see Robert Reese, "The Surprising Relevance of the Three-Self Formula," Mission Frontiers 29:4 (2007): 25–27.

by groups like "No Place Left," for example, is valuable in helping churches assess their own health.[10] While there are many variations of this tool, most include nine characteristics—but missions is typically not included as an attribute of a healthy church.[11]

A better approach is found in the IMB's own *Foundations* document.[12] In this document, the local church reflects twelve characteristics of a healthy church. One of those is Biblical Mission. The church is responsible for reaching the lost around them through evangelism, and it is also responsible for reproducing itself locally through planting other healthy churches. Additionally, the church must send out and support those called to be "sent ones." The church should pray for them as they go to the nations and look for healthy ways to work alongside them through volunteer projects where they serve As people are won to Christ in that cross-cultural context, discipled and formed into healthy churches, those new churches must also be infused with a missional DNA where all believers see themselves as "on mission" and support those who are sent out to be "on mission" in far-flung places.

Biblical Examples of Healthy Church Formation

When reviewing the New Testament account, there are at least 33 local church congregations mentioned.[13] While there is great diversity in each situation, one can see at least three patterns that emerged: organic church formations, churches planting other churches, and "sent-ones" intentionally planting churches on missionary visits.

Organic Church Planting: It is commonly recognized that many churches in the New Testament were formed by believers who were scattered by persecution (See Acts 11:19). The ethos of those early believers was to spread the gospel wherever they traveled, and this resulted in disciples made and churches

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10 See the NPL presentation at https://noplaceleft.net/nf-4-fields-training-videos/

11 This is due in part to their desire to use the Jerusalem church in Acts 2:36-47 as the healthy church model. In fairness to NPL, they only include the characteristics covered in that passage. Their nine characteristics are different from Dever's. Their desire is not to create an exhaustive ecclesiology with the church circle tool, but to offer a reproducible method that can be easily utilized in the formation of churches. However, NPL's vision is not churches planting churches but apostolically oriented disciples making disciples. Missions is more defined as the work of the individual believer (or church planter) than as the work of a corporate body.

12 IMB, *Foundations*, 61-64.

13 For an exhaustive list see, https://www.bible.ca/ntx-directory-of-churches-in-bible.htm

planted. These were not intentional church planting missions, but examples of believers being intentional in their witness as they were scattered.

There were also other organic ways that the church spread. Greg MaGee notes that the church in Rome was likely planted by Jews from Rome who had been exposed to the gospel while visiting Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.14 There were likely other examples of believers traveling for different reasons to various places and taking the gospel with them. Consider all those in Jerusalem at Pentecost who eventually returned to their place of origin, as well as future visitors to Jerusalem who encountered the early church and then reproduced that model back in their hometown.

Churches Planting Churches: There are also examples of churches planting churches in the New Testament. The clearest example lies in the ministry of the church in Colossae. The church in Colossae was not founded by Paul, and many scholars contend that Epaphras (a disciple of Paul) was the planter and pastor of this church. While Colossae was likely planted by an individual, it seems that this church and its influence spread to the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. where other churches were planted as well.15

Intentional Church Planting Missions: These would include the various missionary journeys of Paul and the missionary journeys of Peter and others. Peter was instrumental in the birth of the church in Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea. Paul, along with Barnabas, Silas, Luke and others serve as the prime example of the classic missionary band sent to intentionally take the gospel to the pioneer places of his day. While this is a vital approach that should continue, it is not the only way that churches were formed in the New Testament.

A Call for a Holistic Model Embedded in the Church

In the New Testament, the prominence of the local church and its focus on Biblical Missions is undeniable. Whether it was churches forming new churches, mission teams sent out by churches, or God-ordained encounters between people and local churches, the local church (not individuals) stands at the center of gospel expansion around the world. Some tend to focus on the "sent out ones" in passages like Paul's first missionary journey in Acts 13 while forget-

[14] Greg MaGee, "The Origins of the Church at Rome," *Bible.org*, n.p. [cited 29 July 2021]. Online: https://bible.org/article/origins-church-rome#P100_28698

[15] Richard Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (NAC, Vol. 32: Holman Reference, 1991), 163-64

ting that the story started with a local church that sent them. The very term "sent one" implies a sender. God sends, but He has chosen to do so through His church.

The biblical model of church planting is a holistic one where local churches multiply locally as they also send out cross-cultural, apostolic workers to distant, unreached places. Yet, with our culture's overemphasis on professionalism and individualism, many churches in the West believe that church planting is the sole purview of those they pay to do it, whether at home or abroad. Disciple-making movements that emphasize individual believers on mission unwittingly make the same error by focusing solely on the individual's responsibility to the exclusion of the corporate body's role in church planting. On the mission field, this leads to people bypassing the local church to get to the lost, instead of mobilizing the local church to do her part to reach the lost around her. The result is an unhealthy church in the West and an unhealthy church planted in the world.

Conclusion

Healthy Church Formation and Missions go hand in hand. If one fails to emphasize a missional ethos in the churches planted, then those churches will neither be healthy nor reproduce. The New Testament draws a clear connection between missions, church planting, sent-ones, and the local church. Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13) is often cited as an example of individual missionaries going to the ends of the earth. Yet, those early missionaries were not individuals—they were members of a body, sent out as an extension of the missionary outreach of the church in Antioch. To divorce the sent ones from the senders is a mistake that leads to lazy sending churches and overemphasized individualism on the part of missionaries. This, in turn, can lead to new churches planted that will continue to reproduce this unhealthy perspective and short-circuit their own role in reaching the ends of the earth.

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Leadership Development

Re-enforcing Healthy Churches and Preparing for Exit

W. Mark Johnson

"Wherever there are churches, whether newly planted or long rooted, there is need for godly, effective leaders. Helping to provide and multiply them through training and mentoring has been, and undoubtedly will always be, a major focus of mission work."[1]

The training of leaders is an essential part of the missionary task. How it is best done depends upon several factors such as language, culture, and preferred learning styles. Each missionary context needs leadership training approaches deemed appropriate within each reality. Missiologist Arthur Glasser wisely observed: "No one methodology for follow-up ministry or leadership training is normative for all situations. Methods must change because situations change and because spiritual growth itself makes new demands."[2]

[1] G.R. Corwin, G.B. McGee, and A.S. Moreau, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 253.

[2] A.F. Glasser, Charles Van Engen, D.S. Gilliland, and S.B. Redford, *Announcing the Kingdom: the Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 209.

Historically, leadership training takes three basic configurations:

1. formal, institutionally based theological training like a seminary or Bible college,
2. non-formal local church training like Theological Education by Extension (TEE),
3. some form of individual personal coaching and/or mentoring of potential leaders done by a local church pastor within the local church context.

Glasser's observation above continues to merit serious consideration regarding how leadership training can most effectively meet this generation's unique global training needs. Yet, no matter what form leadership training takes in any given context, the importance of having a well-defined strategy for leadership development remains essential to fulfill the missionary task. This point becomes evident when we remember the essential components of the missionary task.

Following the biblical model, the IMB emphasizes that the missionary task is composed of six essential components. These tasks can be understood as being logically sequential in their development and application, without being mechanical or linear in their actual implementation: Entry, Evangelism, Discipleship, Healthy Church Formation, Leadership Development, and Exit. In this sequence, the development and training of local church leadership is the penultimate step in the process before arriving at exit phase. Exit is defined in *Foundations* as being the completion of the missionary task: Our goal is to complete the missionary task in each people group or place and then to exit, with the new churches from that place or people as our partners in the ongoing task of global evangelism.[3]

For this closure to occur in the missionary cycle, effective leadership training within the recently planted churches must have previously occurred. This means biblically qualified leaders are receiving some form of leadership training "in an effective and biblically faithful way."[4] This point then leads to a couple of questions. What is effective leadership training? And, of what does it, or should it, consist?

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[3] International Mission Board, *Foundations* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2018), 107.

[4] International Mission Board, *Foundations*, 108.

Leadership training, at its most basic level, is teaching God's people obedience to the Great Commission. It is teaching God's people to obey all that Christ has taught. What does this mean in practice when considering the present global challenges of training leadership for local church ministry? Churches worldwide need a deep pool of trained leaders to effectively fulfill Christ's mission for His church among all peoples in all places. Lesslie Newbigin speaks to the leadership preparation task:

> The task of ministry is to lead the congregation as a whole in a mission to the community as a whole, to claim its whole public life, as well as the personal lives of all its people for God's rule. It means equipping all the members of the congregation to understand and fulfill their several roles in this mission through their faithfulness in their daily work. It means training and equipping them to be active followers of Jesus in his assault on the principalities and powers which he has disarmed on his cross. And it means sustaining them in bearing the cost of that warfare.[5]

Three words come to the fore in Newbigin's explanation of the importance of leadership training. Those words are train, equip, and sustain. Training and equipping imply preparation. Leadership training and equipping should consist of three levels of development. Church leaders in a missionary context, as well as church members, should receive the benefit of this three-tiered training and equipping. The three components of leadership development are training and equipping in the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life, theological and biblical knowledge (within the context of actual ministry application), and missionary/pastoral care (sustaining and caring for the local church workers who face the brunt and pay the personal toll for their engagement in the rigors of missionary ministry). Each of these three points merits further development.

Spiritual disciplines

The first and primary call for all Christians is to be faithful, Christ-centered disciples. For this reason, Christian leaders must have a baseline knowledge and practice of the classic spiritual disciplines. This baseline consists of

[5] Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 238.

things like, but is not limited to, growth in the comprehension and application of the Word of God in daily life, consistent daily prayer (both personal and corporate), evangelism, fellowship, and service. One cannot assume that the spiritual formation of Christian leaders (missionaries, pastors, and church members) in these classic spiritual disciplines will occur on their own without intentional prioritization on the part of a leadership training strategy. Unfortunately, it can no longer be assumed that effective training in spiritual disciplines is occurring in many established evangelical churches worldwide. If this is the case in existing churches, the challenge and need to train leaders in the spiritual disciplines for churches being established in the global mission context are even more pressing.

Before a missionary can exit, missionary leaders must make certain the local leaders who will be leading and caring for the churches that have been planted are practicing the spiritual disciplines. Newbigin speaks directly to the importance of this practice of the spiritual disciplines on the part of local church leaders: "The minister's leadership of the congregation in its mission to the world will be first and foremost in the area of his own discipleship, in that life of prayer and daily consecration which remains hidden from the world, but which is the place where the essential battles are either won or lost."[6]

Christian leaders cannot lead in an area in which they are not practitioners. Leaders cannot practice that which they have never been taught. Therefore, training in, preparation for, and practice of the spiritual disciplines are urgent necessities and essential components of the training of Christian leadership worldwide.

Upon assuring that leadership training is in place for teaching spiritual disciplines to global Christian leaders, global Christian leadership (both missionary and national) must prioritize the spiritual formation of those with whom they regularly work: the local church membership and/or church planting team of which they are a part. Historically, Christians have always recognized the need to have their lives grounded in the basics of biblical spirituality. This has been the case throughout the whole of church history. However, the rigor of post-modern life and ministry makes this spiritual preparation ever more important and necessary, particularly at the local church level. The devil is not more devilish in the world's global cities and "hard places" than he is in

[6] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 240.

other places of established Christian presence; yet, the stresses, strains, and temptations of many missionary contexts bring more readily to the surface the full display of the human heart's depravity. A grounding in the spiritual disciplines is the first line of spiritual defense for local church leaders and church members. This makes spiritual preparation a top tier priority in leadership preparation worldwide.

Theological and biblical training

Globally, church leaders and church members need a strong biblical and theological foundation upon which their beliefs can rest, and from which their ministries can be directed. Traditional seminary preparation continues to be a viable and efficient option in many missionary contexts worldwide for training future shepherds of local churches. However, this is often not the case for missionary engagements in contexts hostile to the Christian faith or without access to certain technological advantages. In those cases, other appropriate methods need to be considered, such as the use of advanced technology to deliver the best content, or the use of oral methodologies contextualized for the learning needs of those with an oral learning preference. Remembering Glasser's words, missionary context is determinative in the question of methodologies. Whatever the preferred methodology might be, the training and discipling of new converts and church members in theology and Scripture's foundational truths are paramount in preparing leaders. The growing strength and pervasiveness of the secular worldview along with newly invigorated religious alternatives to the Christian faith require that Christians have a firm convictional grasp of the biblical narrative and implications of the biblical worldview. If they do not, the aggressive secular and religious alternatives might prove a significant impediment to effective global ministry.

This training must be done with the highest levels of intentionality. This intentionality might be a classroom or small group setting where a missionary will be communicating and inculcating theological and biblical content. Whether in a literate or an oral preference setting, varieties of technological means are now available as resources for those engaged in leadership training. Yet, training focused on content must always be within the context of actual local church ministry and practice. The global ministry practitioner needs to be trained by word, deed, and godly example. This holistic approach to training is important, because ministry is spiritual warfare.

The godly example of the missionary and/or pastor living out the very truths proclaimed in the pulpit, taught in the classroom or modeled and storied in a small group (word and deed) continues to be the strongest of all apologetics offered in defense of the truthfulness of the biblical message. Gospel faithfulness often comes at a high price for those involved in the white-hot fires of global mission ministry. For this reason, sustaining nurture and care must be given to those who bear the brunt of the most intense spiritual conflict.

Missionary/pastoral care

Those who take the blows of global mission ministry often find themselves depleted and drained; they need pastoral care. In a denominational mission context, this is normally provided for the global missionary by those who work in Member Care. However, the bulk of pastoral care must take place, when possible and often by necessity, within the local church context. For this reason, planting healthy churches pastored by trained and equipped leaders is essential in the development of a pastoral care feedback loop needed for the well-being and care of all those involved in Christian ministry. True Christian fellowship is what missionaries, pastors, and church members need to survive and thrive in the rigors of global Christian ministry. The place of preeminence where much needed fellowship and accountability are to be found is the local church, no matter where the ministry context might be.

Perhaps most importantly, the global Christian worker needs a true friend with whom he or she can have genuine heart to heart fellowship. True friendship is the under-appreciated key to Christian sanctification in any context, missionary or otherwise. J. I. Packer speaks to the importance of this:

> Christians today must seek fellowship. Lonely and isolated Christians, spiritually starved and discouraged Christians, and with them members of prosperous churches and busy Christian workers—all need fellowship, and all should make a point of endeavoring to get it. The Puritans used to ask God for one 'bosom friend', with whom they could share absolutely everything and maintain a full-scale prayer-partner relationship; and with that they craved, and regularly set up, group conver-

> sations about divine things. We should be wise to follow their example at both points.[7]

A global Christian leader who has a "bosom friend" will find the strength to persevere and prosper amid the rigors of ministry. Missionary exit is not the abandoning of the recently planted church; missionary exit is the doorway by which Christians can and should develop a deeper level of partnership for mutual spiritual edification.

Missionaries play an important role in developing national leaders in their missionary context and in the leadership training process worldwide. When national partners become the primary persons responsible for training other nationals, preparing them for Christian service in their culture and among the nations, we missionaries are close to being able to declare, "mission accomplished." In conclusion, why is it important that global leaders be trained? The answer is simple. The world is full of sheep without shepherds. In the words of Tom Houston, "Leadership development is clearly the greatest need if we would see the sheep with good shepherds."[8]

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[7] J. I. Packer, *18 Words, The Most Important Words You Will Ever Know* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2007), chap. 18, "Fellowship," Logos Library System.

[8] W.H. Fuller, *Global Crossroads: Focusing on the Strength of Local Churches* (World Evangelical Fellowship, 2000), 231.

Exit

Training and Trusting

Preston Pearce

Alex served among the Z people. He trained many to use his evangelistic and discipleship materials, and many churches were planted. Some of them did not see the relevance of some of his material; but he was the teacher, so they learned his material, passed it on, and continued to see churches multiply. Unfortunately, after some time passed Alex was deported. Though he was sad about leaving, Alex felt like the work was in good enough shape since so many churches had been planted. In time, however, doctrinal questions arose which the churches were not equipped to answer. The confusion over these questions led to dissension and division, and the movement stalled.

The scenario above reflects realistic field situations yet we are left with a number of questions. Where, if any place, did Alex go wrong? Assuming he couldn't change the deportation, what could he have done differently? Why was it that his methods led to expansion but at the same time left the church unable to respond to critical issues in their context?

Foundations describes the goal of our labors as "to complete the missionary task in each people group or place and then to exit, with the new churches from that place or people as our partners in the ongoing task of global evan-

gelism."[1] What is meant by "exit," and how does this affect the other parts of the task? And how do missionaries exit in a healthy way?

Many if not most missionaries understand that, as *Foundations* explains,[2] exit is not abandonment. At the same time, it seems that many see exit simply as the missionary leaving a location or people. In this article I hope to show that a more helpful understanding of exit sees it as training and trusting national believers throughout the missionary task.

More Than Leaving

Exit has become a key part of strategy planning in recent years. For a first example, the Team Leader training with which I was involved in the past understood exit as leaving: the missionary leaves, having seen at least the beginnings of a CPM, ideally to engage another people group or field. Participants identified statistical markers that might indicate the appropriate time to exit.[3] And while the most recent statistics indicate that 100% of missionaries eventually leave, in reality a significantly lower percentage of those exits are related to the status of the work. Many exits are involuntary (deportations, health, family issues, etc.), while some are voluntary (missionaries who feel led elsewhere, move into leadership, etc.); thus, the timing may not be related to the status of the work. In many cases, exit did not seem to be a concern until the missionary realized he was leaving. There must be a better way to understand exit.

Another example is "Model-Assist-Watch-Leave" (MAWL), which is often considered a core concept in multiplication. If one does an internet search for this expression, he might find that most of the initial hits have little more to say about "Leave" (i.e., exit) than a brief mention that Jesus, after modeling, assisting, and watching, left to go to heaven.[4] This may leave one wondering

1 *Foundations*, 102.

2 *Foundations*, 104.

3 David Sills critiqued the trend among missions agencies toward exiting too soon in *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody, 2010). Roland Allen lamented the practice of Anglican missions to exit too late in *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

4 E.g., "MAWL," https://noplaceleft.net/mawl/; C. Anderson, "What is M.A.W.L.?", https://www.dmmsfrontiermissions.com/m-a-w-l/; and "The Kingdom of Who?...Model, Assist, Watch, & Leave," https://asianroughrider.com/2015/09/30/the-kingdom-of-who-model-assist-watch-leave/, accessed 28 July 2021.

if there is a way to think of exit that has more relevance to our strategic planning than simply "leave like Jesus."

Tom Steffen in *Passing the Baton* emphasizes that exit is much more than simply leaving. It is a mindset that should be present from entry and includes all the adjustments the missionary makes in his own efforts as the work progresses. In this sense, every such adjustment is in some way a form of exit: from multiple changes of focus while remaining on site to a change of location while remaining accessible, to eventually making a complete withdrawal. Steffen describes it as moving "from learner to evangelist, to teacher, to resident adviser, to itinerant adviser, and finally to absent adviser."[56]

Understanding exit this way allows exit to affect the other parts of the task all along. It also means that missionaries can and should be practicing healthy exit from the beginning, regardless of how long they remain where they are. As one missionary, who has served over 10 years with the same people group remarked, "We are always exiting somewhere and entering somewhere." They adjust what they do with different groups in various places who are at different stages in the task. With some, they are evangelists and equippers. With others, they help their national partners with broad seed sowing projects. With others, they and national partners are doing leadership development and coaching the next generation; with still others, they and their national partners are exploring other towns and peoples to engage.

Does this understanding of exit find any support in Paul's practice? In Acts, Paul and his team left places for a variety of reasons.[7] Interestingly, Paul's exit from a place on his initial visit was often involuntary due to persecution. Sometimes he left a teammate when he fled. Luke usually notes the presence of disciples. His subsequent visits were marked by less opposition, which might be explained by his desire primarily to encourage and strengthen the disciples and churches in those places (Acts 14:21-23, 15:36). He trusted those disciples and churches to continue in what they had believed, and he regarded his work in those places as complete (Rom 15:19-22). This might at least suggest the kind of adjustments in role that Steffen describes.

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5 Tom Steffen, *Passing the Baton: Church Planting That Empowers* (LaHabra, CA: Center for Organizational and Ministry Development, 1997), 21-24.

6 Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 104-5.

7 Steffen, 3.

Training and Trusting

If the missionary sees exit only as "leaving," this may affect his approach to partnership. He may think, "one day I will turn all this over to qualified national partners." That is exit "to" partnership. But, if exit influences the entire task, partnership begins at entry. The result is that exit is not "to" partnership but "in" partnership. This requires intentionality on the part of the missionary.

Ian Buntain was recently named director of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's World Missions Center. His comments about the spiritual trajectory of his home country (Canada) are insightful on this point:

> Canada ... in my lifetime has gone from being a "Christian nation" ... to a post- and now pre-Christian nation. I have concluded that the deficit in my discipleship heritage was a lack of faithfully *training* and *trusting* a next generation of restless, gospel-centered leaders....[8] [emphasis added]

Buntain's comments highlight two essential activities of healthy exit: training and trusting local believers. Both are essential.

Training with an exit mentality involves more than training local disciples to use materials the missionary has developed. It means equipping disciples and churches to handle the Scriptures faithfully and communicate it clearly to produce their own content, not just consume or pass on the missionary's content.[9] It means working with them to develop ways to equip their own people effectively, or give them access to effective training, including theological education, so they are prepared for long-term leadership and influence. It means grounding them in sound hermeneutics and biblical theology so they understand how to use Scripture to carry on the task and to face issues which inevitably surface after the missionary's departure. Paul was in Thessalonica only a short time, but his letters to the church there indicate he grounded them in biblical theology, from election to eschatology (Acts 17:1-9, 1Thess

[8] https://www.facebook.com/swbts/ post June 27, 2021. Accessed July 19, 2021.

[9] Will Brooks and Sunny Tan, "Theological Education as Integral Component of World Mission Strategy" in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues*, ed. Scott Callaham and Will Brooks (2019), kindle edition, loc 3067.

1:4, 4:13-5:11, 2Thess 2:1-14)—doctrines it seems missionaries instinctively avoid because they are difficult, divisive, complex, or seem peripheral.

Trusting means treating local believers not as projects but as genuine partners in the task. It means learning from them as well as releasing and empowering them to do what they have been equipped and empowered by the Spirit to do. Paul modeled this beautifully with his multicultural team. It is striking that as he traveled from Corinth to Troas he was accompanied by seven men from four different places (Acts 20:4-6). As Will Brooks points out:

> Acts and the Pauline Epistles mention a hundred different people associated with Paul, and at least thirty-eight are considered coworkers. Many of those were people won to Christ and discipled as a direct result of Paul's church-planting efforts. Moreover, the backgrounds of those partners are quite diverse.[10]

Brooks mentions some examples. Titus, a Gentile, traveled with Paul, then on behalf of Paul; Priscilla and Aquila led a house church and traveled with Paul; Tychicus delivered Paul's letters to Ephesus, Colossae, and Philemon, yet was obviously more than a courier; Epaphras was likely converted while Paul was in Ephesus, then started the church in Colossae. Timothy traveled with Paul, and on Paul's behalf, and did much more.[11] Paul trusted these colaborers deeply.

In his classic *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours*? Roland Allen laments the lack of indigeneity, the unhealthy dependence, and the poor contextualization of Anglican missions in the early 20th century. Allen saw these not as the fruit of poor strategy but of sinful hearts: racial and religious pride that caused the missionaries to approach the "poor heathen" with an attitude of superiority in virtually everything, in addition to underlying unbelief that prevented them from trusting the Holy Spirit's work in their converts.[12]

In contrast, Allen asserted that Paul's ministry was gospel-centered (that is, aimed at leading locals to life) rather than law-centered, to improve their

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[10] Will Brooks, "Paul as a Model for the Practice of World Mission", in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues*, ed. Scott Callaham and Will Brooks (2019), kindle edition, loc 5015.

[11] Brooks, "Paul as a Model", loc 5015-5038.

[12] Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 141-44.

morals. But more importantly for our purposes here, Paul "retired" (Allen's term for "exit"). Allen said of Paul:

> He was always glad when his converts could progress without his aid. He welcomed their liberty. He withheld no gift from them which might enable them to dispense with his presence.... He gave freely, and then he retired [exited] from them that they might learn to exercise the powers which they possessed in Christ. He believed in the Holy Ghost.... He believed therefore in his converts.... He believed that [Christ] would stablish, strengthen, settle his converts. He believed, and acted as if he believed.[13]

Missionaries might do well to ask themselves a couple questions to discern to what extent they are "in" partnership: "Am I training my national partners to think rigorously and biblically, or am I merely training them to pass on my material?" "Am I trusting my national partners, treating them as equals, and working from the beginning to put the work in their hands?"

Exit and the Other Components of the Missionary Task

Foundations reminds us that we should in fact begin our work with exit in mind.[14] A colleague recently remarked, "To exit well we must enter well." He meant that partnership begins at entry, not at exit.

We should also continue our work with exit in mind. Exit affects evangelism and discipleship. Equipped local believers will always be better evangelists, disciplemakers, and church planters than foreigners; they understand the barriers to conversion and growth better than the outsider and are more credible models. So, the missionary pivots to equipping local leaders sooner rather than later, lest in the locals' minds the task remains "the missionary's job."

Exit influences church planting and leadership development as well. The missionary with a healthy exit mentality recognizes that the church belongs

[13] Allen, 148-49.

[14] *Foundations*, 101.

to the local believers under Christ, and the "shape" of the church needs to reflect a kingdom community in that context.[15] The same is true by extension of leadership development and theological education. Western models of education may not be effective in some contexts, but the missionary needs to work with the national partners to see that the things they have heard from their leaders, in the presence of many witnesses, can be passed on effectively to other faithful believers who can teach others (2 Tim 2:2).

Conclusion

Let's revisit the opening scenario and see an alternate ending: Alex eventually realized the churches were facing issues he had no idea existed. He also had no idea how to address them, but he knew they needed to be equipped to address those and other issues biblically. So, he spent some more time with a few local leaders, teaching them hermeneutics and biblical theology. He then persuaded them to meet with others to develop their own discipleship and leadership development processes apart from him, so they would feel less constrained to do things "his way." Though Alex was deported, churches continued to grow and multiply.

Exit is more than leaving. It should be a mindset that allows the missionary to enter as a learner and pivot to modeling, training, and trusting so that when the actual departure happens, things are in place—disciplemaking, church planting, and rigorous leadership development—that position believers and churches to face their own unique challenges and continue to grow and multiply.

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[15] Ott and Wilson, 112.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Urgency and Healthy Church Planting

Chuck Lawless

In more than a decade of working with the International Mission Board, I have learned from career missionaries the ongoing tensions of (1) evangelizing with urgency and (2) planting healthy churches. I have asked some of the leaders in the South Asia affinity to help me think through these tensions, and their responses are below. Each response is a compilation of thoughts from various leaders—particularly, Will J and James M, members of the IMB's South Asia leadership team.

Chuck Lawless: Why does urgency matter in your work?

Affinity of South Asia Peoples: 94,000 people are born every day in South Asia. All are born into sin and separation from God, and all of them born each day will enter into a Christ-less eternity without the hope of Jesus. Nearly every one of them born today will grow up with limited or no access to the Gospel and will be taught to follow and worship a false god and idol that leads them away from righteousness.

One Team Leader's geographic area of focus illustrates this sense of urgency. This area grows by half a million people every year. To reach 10% of just the population growth, we would need to see 50,000 come to faith annually and 1,000 new churches started – and that makes no impact into the existing population!

We know that God's heart is that all people would be saved and come to the knowledge; that none should perish (1 Tim 2:3-4, 2 Pet 3:9). The offer of salva-

tion is freely available to them (Rom 10:9-10), and that salvation offers them new life and freedom from the bondage of sin (Rom 6:14, 2 Cor.5:17). Walking in newness of life will begin to restore the brokenness in their life and culture (Eph 4:20-6:9), and we want them to know how to experience that new life.

We also desire for Jesus to return and restore all things new, to bring in the new heavens and new earth. While we don't know the exact timing, we do know that the gospel will go to all nations and then the end will come (Matt 24:14). We know that there will be believers from every nation, people, tribe, and language around the throne (Rev 5:9). Therefore, we go to these peoples and places with the good news.

CL: Clearly, the reality of lostness around you compels you to share the gospel urgently. Even as you seek to engage millions of people, why does theological training matter in your work?

ASAP: First, the Great Commandment (Matt 22:34-40) calls us to love God and love others. The more we know about God, the greater we love Him for who He is and what He did for us. The Great Commission then calls us to make disciples. This is a lifelong process for each believer to continue to grow in righteousness, put off the sinful ways, and obey His commands (Matt 28:19, Heb 5:11-14).

Second, God has also called elders to shepherd the churches. These elders are tasked with protecting the flock from false teaching (Acts 20:28-31, Titus 1:9, Eph 4:14). This requires continual learning and understanding of the Word. Paul warned his churches that false teachers would arise even from their own groups (Acts 20:29) and would lead the church astray. We see examples in Galatia (Gal 3:1), Corinth (1 Cor 8:1), and Thessalonica (2 Thess 2:2). Churches need elders who can protect the flock *and* accountability for elders who might lead the flock astray.

This pattern of false teaching in the church in the New Testament is also prevalent in the South Asian church today. Believers are led astray through an imported prosperity gospel that blends well with the karma understanding of Hinduism. Well-meaning evangelistic pushes (many organized from the West) have left behind converts, not disciples. Therefore, theological training is not something that we reserve for when leaders and elders need to know more; theological training begins at the beginning when somebody becomes a believer.

Third, right doctrine fuels right action. Theological misunderstandings will impact the way believers live out their Christian lives (e.g. the idle believers in Thessalonica). The church is meant to be the "pillar and foundation of truth" (1 Tim. 3:15), It is vital that the church protect and proclaim this truth.

CL: Do you see these two issues (evangelizing with urgency and planting healthy churches) as contradictory or complementary to each other?

ASAP: They are complementary in the same way that each of the components of the Core Missionary Task is talked about separately but overlap and work together to fulfill the task at hand. Evangelism without discipleship is incomplete according to the commands in Scripture. God's heart for the redemption of His people, His urgency, is why we run to the ends of the earth to proclaim His Good News. At the same time, His love and care for His bride is why we desire to present the body to Him as whole and healthy.

However, trying to do both well is hard unless you walk in the giftings given to the church. The "sent-out ones" run with urgency to those who do not know Him. "Shepherds" oversee the church as she continues to bear fruit and grow in the knowledge of God and His Word. This is not to say that sent-out ones don't care for the bride; the call of the lost just rings louder when they prioritize their time. Therefore, it is imperative to build teams (both cross-cultural workers and local believers) to ensure that the on-going task of "meat" discipleship isn't left undone. The different giftings the HS grants to the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-12, Rom 12:3-8, 1 Cor 12:4-11) enable missionary teams and local churches to work together to evangelize with urgency and plant healthy churches.

CL: If these tasks/goals are complementary (even though difficult to accomplish), what are you doing in your affinity to hold these two tasks together?

ASAP: From the beginning, new believers are taught simple methods to learn from God's Word. One example is the SWORD method which trains believers to ask five questions about the passage they read: What do we learn about God? What do we learn about mankind? Are there sins that we should repent of? Are there any commands to obey? Are there any examples to follow? Tools like this one are how we introduce hermeneutical training for new (and existing) believers to lay a foundation for discipleship through knowledge and obedience to the Scriptures.

We also help national networks identify those who are "sent-out ones" and those who may become local elders/overseers/pastors as they study the characteristics of healthy churches in God's Word. The nationals then work together to have "sent-out ones" pushing for lostness while also having churches equipped with healthy elders/overseers/pastors.

We further work with church planting networks to identify Movement Strengthening Strategists (MSS), whose responsibility is to help keep the pastoral and theological needs (depth) of the network before the leadership team. This MSS is also responsible for the on-going development of the pastors and the development of resources that will help combat specific weaknesses within the network. The MSS typically has a pastor/elder/teacher gifting while also recognizing the urgency of the task.

Two training resources we have developed are "Foundations for Teaching the Bible" (a training that is distinct from the overall Foundations document of the IMB) and "Confessions." Both strategies were developed over a decade ago as affinity leaders saw multiplying church planting networks and began to ask the question, "How do we keep the gospel and church planting multiplying while at the same time not leaving the bride behind?" We wanted to address the need for these churches to grow into maturity and health.

"Foundations for Teaching the Bible" is a tool developed to teach indigenous pastors how to preach the Word in the context of the entire biblical narrative. Over months of time, these leaders work to create almost a year's worth of sermons. They work together in small groups, leaning into the collective worldview, while continuing to refine and practice their hermeneutic. After carefully crafting their sermon, they practice delivering it in front of the entire group.

Through this indigenous hermeneutical community, these pastors learn to be faithful to Scripture as they preach the Word. Working together helps them to learn from each other and helps to protect the group from errant readings of scripture. All this practice takes place under the supervision of seasoned workers.

The second resource, "Confessions," is a tool to help existing church networks (both elders and sent-out ones) learn theology as they study issues and doctrines most relevant to core beliefs and issues they are facing in their communities. Through this training, the indigenous leaders of a network

of churches work together to create doctrinal statements on ten core doctrines (in many cases to the point of published confessions of faith).

For the initial 8-10 doctrines, we provide the biblical texts from the respective articles in

the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 and facilitate a multistep process with the leaders to develop a doctrinal statement for each doctrine based on those texts. We want network leaders to learn and become comfortable with the process so that after the course, they do this work on their own. We give them these verses as a place to start, but we also encourage them to add others that they find helpful. These tools and processes aid the indigenous network to always go to the Word for correction and application for subsequent doctrines, to combat false teaching when it arises, and to engage their own worldview from a biblical perspective.

Finally, the "School of Church and Mission" is a program we have created for local partners to continue their leadership development towards taking ownership for the Great Commission in their own country. This "school" is an initiative rather than an institution, and

each "semester" of the program focuses on doctrinal training, New Testament missiology, and strategic planning.

CL: It sounds like you are doing much to keep evangelistic urgency and healthy church planting in your work. In what areas do you think you could still improve in this work?

ASAP: We need more Movement Strengthening Strategist co-workers who have the Shepherd/Teacher gifting but a heart steeped in urgency to come alongside and join our teams to build upon the methods, tools, and foundation church planters and trainers have laid. These co-workers need to be willing to be servants who mentor and coach those with the Holy Spirit-given calling to shepherd the flock (rather than assuming the Western-style "lead from the front" style).

CL: Thank you for your responses amid all the work you have to do to reach South Asia. What else would you want to include for our readers?

ASAP: We are thankful for the opportunity to share all that God is doing across South Asia. We are building off the foundation of many years of faithful co-workers and national partners. Today one can find many expressions

of local ownership of the Great Commission; South Asian churches and leaders are taking responsibility for Unengaged People Groups and geographic areas. Pray that more laborers will come from the vast harvest field of South Asia to join the work.

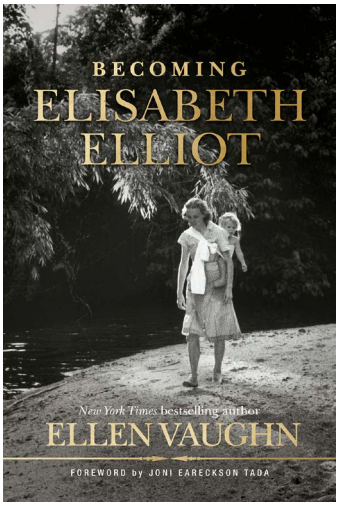
In addition, a coalition of South Asian Movement Strengthening Strategists continues to grow. These are national brothers who were trained and mentored by IMB units. In various fields they are now taking local ownership of this pastoral training process while the cross-cultural workers are in the background in a coaching role. Pray that in the days to come they will be unified around the vision, have opportunities to train other pastoral networks, and begin to disseminate their own pastoral training materials to help the churches grow in health and maturity.

RESOURCE REVIEWS

Vaughn, Ellen. *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot.* Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2020.

Reviewed by Audrey McGrath, IMB Field Personnel, APAC

Ellen Vaughn's book, *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot,* gives readers wonderful insight into the life and faith of Elisabeth Elliot. Vaughn hopes to "introduce this gutsy woman of faith to a generation that does not know her" (10). The book starts by describing how Elisabeth, or Betty, as she was known, was brought up in a home of order, devotion, and laughter. She discusses Betty's years at school, including the time she met Jim Elliot. Vaughn explains their struggles as Jim and Betty sought the Lord's will regarding marriage. Vaughn tells stories of their time in the Ecuadorian jungle as they dealt with medical emergencies, wild animals, floods, and more. Their hearts were set on sharing the love of Christ with a tribe of people known for their violence called the Waodani. Jim, with four other men, flew to meet with members of this tribe and consequentially died at the end of their spears. Vaughn recounts Betty's life after their deaths and the struggles she faced along with their young daughter, Valerie. Betty was befriended by two women from the tribe and eventually went and lived among them to work and learn their language. After leaving



the Waodani tribe, she shared her story and inspired millions through her writing and speaking.

Vaughn shares many struggles faced by Elisabeth Elliot that are also faced by missionaries today. She discusses how Betty dealt with times when people did not care for her personality, even telling of Betty's first encounter with Jim's mother, which Jim called "a flop." She narrates Betty's setbacks—including the loss of a year's worth of translation work when some luggage was stolen. Vaughn describes Betty's struggles with grief—not only the horrific loss of her husband, but other tragic deaths along her journey as well. Readers also learn of times when Betty struggled with interpersonal relationships, especially with Rachel Saint, the sister of one of the men killed. Vaughn describes Betty's anguish as she wondered where the Lord really wanted her to serve and if she was making a difference. Most missionaries will not face the extreme difficulties that Elisabeth faced, but all can learn from her faith and dependence on the Lord. All can be encouraged by her dedication to obedience and determination to "do the next thing" (268).

Vaughn included journal entries and excerpts from letters, which made it feel like Elisabeth was helping tell her own story. She did not shy away from presenting difficult parts of Elisabeth's life, but instead described the strong emotions Elisabeth felt during those times. She vividly depicts Elisabeth's anguish after the death of her husband. She portrays the struggles Elisabeth faced as she sought to know God's will for her life. Vaughn also clearly narrates what it was like in the Ecuadorian jungle. The book does, however, come to a somewhat abrupt halt at the point when Betty and Valerie return to America. Vaughn gives a brief description of how she spent the years after her return—including caring for her second husband in his battle with cancer. As much as the reader may wish to hear about this part of Elisabeth's life, they must wait, for as the author says, she will "tell those strong stories in another volume" (258).

For those interested in the life of Elisabeth Elliot, there are several resources available. The best resources are Elliot's own books that tell her story. *Through Gates of Splendor* is the story of the five men whose lives were taken at the end of a spear in the Ecuadorian jungle. *These Strange Ashes* recounts Elisabeth's time working with the Colorado Indians of Ecuador. *Devotedly: The Personal Letters and Love Story of Jim and Elisabeth Elliot* by Valerie Shepherd, the daughter of Jim and Elisabeth, is a book of letters written between Jim and Elisabeth. The letters show their faith, love, and commitment to the Lord.

Vaughn's book, *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot*, helped me to see the strong faith of this amazing woman. I feel this book would be a great encouragement to others who are serving overseas, as they see the ways Elisabeth, though facing both inward and outward struggles, continued to seek the Lord and follow Him in obedience. Many missionaries would find it helpful to see the realistic portrayals of how Elisabeth processed each of the struggles she faced. There was so much authenticity in the feelings, questions, and doubts expressed in this book. *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot* gives a great picture of a life where "the only measure of any human action came down to one thing: *obedience*" (259).

"The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill Podcast." *Christianity Today.* Producer Mike Cosper. May 2021-December 2021, 15 episodes.

Reviewed by Karen Pearce, IMB Field Personnel, EP/CAP

"The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill" is a podcast produced by *Christianity Today*'s Mike Cosper. It is a journalistic history of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington, which started with a handful of people in a living room in 1996, grew into one of the most influential cultural movements in recent evangelical history, and then collapsed in 2014 when its pastor Mark Driscoll resigned amid allegations of spiritual abuse, bullying and un-Christlike behavior.

Cosper spotlighted how the culture both inside and outside the church contributed to its growth as well as its ultimate demise. This story serves as a cautionary tale for churches today who fall prey to celebrity and don't hold their leaders accountable, as well as leaders today who might seek celebrity and avoid accountability. He also aimed to create a safe public forum for those affected by the church's 18-year roller coaster ride to talk about what happened, why we as a Christian community allowed it and how it affected us, and to give us space to collectively grieve together.

He expertly framed episodes, helping listeners understand the context that created the phenomenon. Episode 2, in particular, *Boomers, The Big Sort, and*

Really, Really Big Churches turns the tapestry of Mars Hill upside down, exposing how the church reflected secular culture much more than Christian culture.

That view of the underside is what makes this podcast an invaluable asset for church leaders and missionaries. It is imperative that we ask the questions: what kind of churches are we creating? Do they look like us? Do they look like the newest popular trend, or like the body of Christ?

Another invaluable take-away for missionaries and church leaders is to learn from the kind of transparency Cosper fosters. Churches in our lifetime have been rife with hidden sin, be it sexual abuse, power dynamics, or secret trauma. We are coming out of an age of cover-up. But Scripture shows a God who never protected his own reputation by covering sin. We need to stop protecting ours and call sin out.

Cosper did this and should be applauded, but we would be naïve not to question the motive and method just a bit, if only to give that accountability to CT that was remiss in Driscoll's ministry.

Although Cosper gave nuanced coverage to tough subjects and hurting people, we must remember that he is not an unbiased observer. As a young man, he was personally involved with the Acts 29 network that Driscoll helped popularize. In fact, it seems to be a bit of a personal healing journey, and we're along for the ride. Maybe that's what makes it so good. You feel his struggle with the "cultural phenomenon" that shaped his young Christian life.

But occasionally, it felt like Cosper and those he interviewed were enjoying themselves a little too much and the people listening were lapping it up. Cosper expertly showed how Mark Driscoll's celebrity led him to seek more celebrity instead of seeking more of God, how his persona and branding ran ahead of his character. But in that light, might CT have been seeking celebrity as well? The production was professional and polished, appealing and popular, celebrated and creative. In fact, it reminded me a bit of a church I once heard about.

As it rose in the charts, production slowed down and the intervening weeks were filled with bonus episodes that chased the rabbits that would draw in more listeners—what should have been 6 weeks turned into 6 months. Incendiary and provocative intro clips of Driscoll yelling at his congregation,

"Who the hell do you think you are?" served as a constant reminder of who the bad guy really was.

Why did we listen? Why did we become addicted to the point of pushing the podcast up to the #3 spot for multiple weeks in August? Was it for healing, or was it for the pure pleasure of the public spectacle?

These questions will prove invaluable as we head into uncharted waters. The popularity of this podcast will undoubtedly lead to copycats exposing other trauma in the church. We as the church culture need to make certain we aren't too eager to hear, that we're grieving and not gossiping. We need to do the hard work of keeping all of us accountable because whether we realize it or not, we are already blindly living the next chapter of the story. How are we letting our cancel culture, our love of public shaming, our obsession with calling out anything that hints of toxicity drive our churches? We must let only Scripture drive our churches, not culture.

I liked Cosper's own description of what the podcast set out to be: "It's a story about power, fame, and spiritual trauma—problems faced across the spectrum of churches in America. And yet, it's also a story about the mystery of God, working in broken places." Let's remember that ultimately this is about God being at work in us, through us, despite us, and for His glory.