

A dark blue background featuring a stylized, light blue map of a city street grid. The grid consists of various line widths representing streets and avenues, creating a complex network pattern.

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Missions in a Post-Pandemic World

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Missions in a Post-Pandemic World

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Editor's Opening Note

Zane Pratt, Executive editor

No one expected a global pandemic. As the Year of Our Lord 2020 began, there were rumors of a new virus spreading in East Asia, but no one thought it would be any more serious than other viruses that have emerged over the years. We were all wrong. COVID-19 turned out to be the most severe global medical crisis since the great influenza epidemic that swept the world at the end of World War 1. In response, country after country closed its borders and restricted the movement of its residents. The impact on international missions was incalculable. Some missionaries were forced to return to their home countries as their visas expired and they could neither obtain visa renewals nor travel to any other countries. Other international workers were forced into isolation in their homes as their host countries enforced “Stay at Home” orders. Both life and ministry were disrupted beyond expectation or experience.

However, God is always faithful to his people and to the task he gave us. Overseas gospel workers and their national partners rose to the challenge. COVID-19 provided a pointed reminder to the world of the brevity of life, forcing people all over the globe to consider their own mortality and to question what lies beyond the grave. Christian workers experimented with the possibilities created by technology, enabling them to share the gospel, disciple believers, and train leaders in spite of their inability to meet with people in person. In the face of a global pandemic, the gospel continued to advance.

In this issue, we explore a variety of perspectives and experiences that came out of the COVID-19 crisis. It seems only appropriate that we stop, evaluate, and record the lessons learned from this unique time in history. We also in-

clude new insights from the world of missionary research, as we constantly strive to hone our understanding of the world God has sent us to reach. Finally, we include reviews of some of the latest books that speak to missionary theology and practice. Our prayer is that this issue will be used by God to advance the missionary task and to sharpen our understanding of it.

FEATURE ARTICLE

God's People Turn to Scripture:

The Post-Crisis Response in Nehemiah 8

Jonathan McGrath

For many Christians globally, the pandemic forced a prolonged period where God's people could not gather in the ways they had gathered before the pandemic. Governments made decisions that limited believers' opportunity to gather—even in small groups.¹ Many Baptists chose not to celebrate the Lord's Supper during this time. This created a sense of mourning as we longed for communal worship and gathered interactions with other believers. The sense of displacement many believers felt mimics the sense of displacement God's people felt at many points in biblical history.

¹ In the author's context, church gatherings were restricted for just under two years. The government placed restrictions on most physical gatherings that restricted the ability even to meet in small groups. Although restrictions have differed from context to context, most believers have faced some period of restrictions on gathering.

Ezra-Nehemiah describes one such period.² God's people had lived in exile because of their lack of faithfulness to God's covenant. In Nehemiah 8, God has preserved an example of the proper response to a post-crisis situation. Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, and with the assistance of the Levites, God's people turned to Scripture. This article will show that communities gathered around the reading of God's word are a proper response to our post-crisis context.

The Political and Theological Background

Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 587 BC. The Babylonians had laid siege to the city for two years following a series of invasions across Judah that had lasted more than a decade. These invasions, which began in 605 BC, had decimated Judean villages and already forced many Judeans into exile. The cities of Judah remained desolate until 539 BC when Cyrus II of Persia brought the Babylonian empire to an end. He subsequently enacted a series of policies that allowed exiles to return to their homelands and funded the reconstruction of their temples.³

The exile in Babylon displaced ancient Judeans from their communities and land, and established forms of worship. The lack of both a temple and Levitical ministry forced the exiles to reassess their covenantal unfaithfulness. Biblical passages such as Lamentations and Psalm 137 reveal that the Israelites mourned the loss of the Promised Land and their displacement from Jerusalem and its temple.

Faithful Israelites knew that their displacement resulted from disobedience to the Lord. Although Nebuchadnezzar was the agent who brought about the destruction of Jerusalem and the Judean forced migration to Babylon, Israelites still proclaimed that "the Lord has rejected his altar," (Lam 2:7 CSB) and "he has wrecked his temple as if it were merely a shack in a field" (Lam 2:6,

² Although split in modern Bibles, Ezra and Nehemiah were one book in ancient sources. For a helpful, recent summary of the arguments in support of compositional unity, see Hannah K. Harrington, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022), 18-21. For a fairly recent argument against compositional unity, see Israel Loken, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, EEC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2011).

³ For the details of Cyrus II's policies, see Kenneth A. Ristau, "The Achaemenid Persian Empire in the West and Persian-Period Yehud," in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 236-43.

CSB). The Lord had proclaimed through Jeremiah that Nebuchadnezzar was his servant who would bring his judgment upon his people (Jer 27:6, CSB).

Faithful Israelites knew the covenantal blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. They knew that the Lord had promised to “reduce your cities to ruins and devastate your sanctuaries ... [to] scatter you among the nations” (Lev 26:31-33) if they refused to keep his covenant. They knew that the Lord had promised that “if you are not careful to obey all the words of this law ... the Lord will scatter you among all the peoples from one end of the earth to the other” (Deut 28:58, 64). The prophets had further reinforced the covenantal threat of exile, but the Israelites had refused to listen.

However, the Israelites also knew that if they repented of their sin and returned to the Lord, he would restore them in the Promised Land and renew his covenant with them:

“But when they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their ancestors—their unfaithfulness that they practiced against me, and how they acted with hostility toward me ... when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember my covenant with Jacob. I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land” (Lev 26:40-42).

They had hope that one day, after they had repented, “even if your exiles are at the farthest horizon, he will gather you and bring you back from there. The Lord your God will bring you into the land your ancestors possessed ... The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants, so that you will love him with all your heart and all your soul so that you will live” (Deut 30:4-6).

The Lord used Cyrus to begin a partial fulfillment of these promises in 539 BC (Isa 45:1-6). Babylon fell, and the displaced peoples were allowed to return to their homelands. But, the Israelites were slow to return. Haggai tells of their lack of obedience in rebuilding the temple. The temple complex only came to completion some twenty years after Cyrus had allowed the Israelites to return and given them provisions to rebuild their temple (Ezra 5–6). Whereas the returned Israelites celebrated the Passover with the temple’s completion, Ezra 7–10 implies that before Ezra the scribe arrived in Jerusalem some fifty years later, the people had continued to disobey God’s covenant. Nehemiah

1–7 further reveals that the Israelites had not repopulated Jerusalem, nor rebuilt the city walls. Jerusalem's walls performed a theological function by evidencing the people's eschatological hope in a restored and renewed Jerusalem (Isa 60, 62; Zech 14). Scholars have argued that "the building of the wall is an extension of building the temple."⁴ The walls marked off Jerusalem as a holy city with the temple as its central point.

After the completion of the city's walls—with the city restored, godly leadership in place, and a desire to repopulate Jerusalem—the Israelites were ready to begin their post-crisis existence in Jerusalem. The Israelites knew that God would restore them if they repented of their sin and the sins of their ancestors and committed themselves wholly to the Lord. Nehemiah 8 describes how Ezra and Nehemiah led the people to commit themselves to the Lord and his covenant in this post-crisis setting.

God's People Turn to Scripture: The Setting

Nehemiah 7:73b declares that the people had settled in their towns and the seventh month had come. The seventh month included the Festival of Trumpets on the first day, the Day of Atonement on the tenth day, and the Festival of Shelters in the latter half of the month. Later Judaism would refer to the first ten days of the month as High Holy Days due to their importance and theological significance.⁵ The people asked Ezra to bring out the scroll of the law of Moses (Neh 8:1).

The scroll of the law of Moses represented God's covenant with Israel. After Joshua had led God's people into the Promised Land, he challenged them to keep God's covenant. In Joshua 23:6-8, he charged the Israelites to "be very strong and continue obeying all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you do not turn from it to the right or left and so that you do not associate with these nations remaining among you. Do not call on the names of their gods or make an oath to them; do not serve them or bow in worship to them. Instead, be loyal to the LORD your God, as you have been to this day." In Josiah's day, the high priest Hilkiah had rediscovered the book of the law in the Lord's temple. In response, the people renewed their covenant commitment to the Lord (2 Kgs 22:8; 23:1-3). Now that the people had rebuilt

⁴ Tamara Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 83.

⁵ Harrington, 359.

the temple and its city, they desired to bring out the book of the law to renew their covenant once again with the Lord.

The text evidences a desire from God's people to hear Ezra recite God's law to them. Most ancient Israelites would not have had access to God's law nor been able to read it if given access.⁶ They needed a competent leader to read it to them, and Ezra fulfilled this role (Ezra 7:10). The text also evidences that everyone capable of understanding gathered to hear Ezra read God's law (Neh 8:2-3). The crowd included both men and women, as well as any children capable of understanding the law of Moses. Whereas God's people knew they needed a competent leader to read the law, they did not restrict its hearing to only a select few. All able listeners gathered. The people's motivation seems organic. The people gathered. The people asked Ezra to bring out God's law. The people listened intently. No extrinsic motivation seemed necessary, as the people themselves desired to gather and listen to God's word.

God's People Turn to Scripture: The Method

A wooden platform had been made for Ezra to stand above the people (Neh 8:4). The text does not state the exact purpose of the platform. Although standing on the platform certainly would have helped Ezra project his voice, the text only notes that it allowed everyone to see him reading from the book of the law (Neh 8:5).

Ezra, with the probable assistance of the other priests on the platform (Neh 8:8), read for approximately six hours. Whereas this would not allow him to read through the entire Pentateuch, we should not assume that this implies he had an abbreviated form.⁷ Instead, verse 3 implies that he "read out of it" the portions that he chose.

Not only did Ezra read God's word to God's people, but others also helped them to understand it. Levites translated and explained the meaning of the passages to the congregation (Neh 8:7-8). Teaching God's law was one of the primary three functions given to Levites (Lev 10:11). Many among the congregation would have been born in Babylon and returned with Ezra (Ezra 8:2-20). They may have become accustomed to speaking and hearing Aramaic in-

⁶ Although studies differ, the consensus is that only elite scribes and priests would have had the ability to read more than simple records.

⁷ Harrington, 362.

stead of Hebrew, and thus needed help with the translation. Others, through intermarriage with the people of the nations around Judah, raised children who couldn't speak Hebrew (Neh 13:24). More importantly, as Ezra-Nehemiah implies, God's people had not lived according to God's covenant, so many would have been unfamiliar with the teachings of the scroll of the law. The Levites ensured that those who had forgotten God's commands during their crisis learned God's law and understood it.

God's People Turn to Scripture: The Responses

As Ezra opened the scroll of the law of Moses, the people stood to honor it and immediately fell to the ground in worship (Neh 8:5-6). Ezra blessed the Lord, and the people raised their hands to declare their commitment. Raising hands could be signs of worship (Ps 28:2; Ezra 9:5) or covenant fidelity (Gen 14:22; Deut 32:40; Ps 106:26). Although the people immediately responded with typical acts of worship, the combination of uplifted hands and the declaration "amen" (Deut 27:15-26) suggests that this was an act of commitment to God's covenant. The people bowed and worshiped with their faces to the ground. This humble action signifies worship throughout the Old Testament (Gen 24:26, 28; 43:28; Exod 4:31; 12:27, et al.). A mass group of people bowed with their heads to the ground out of respect for God's word would have made a significant impression on all who attended.⁸

These combined actions show a reverence for God's word and resolute commitment to obey it. The reason for their reverence does not arise from the words alone, but from the people's knowledge of the God who gave these words to Israel (Neh 8:1).

As the words were read, they provoked an emotional response. The people wept and mourned (Neh 8:9). Why did the people weep and mourn? These were "actions that accompanied loss or any kind of national or individual disaster in ancient Israel."⁹ The people had suffered a crisis because of theological compromise and disobedience to God's law. Upon hearing God's word, they responded with an action typically associated with mourning. Such weeping and mourning often accompanied acts of repentance—fasting, sit-

⁸ Donna and Thomas Petter, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 375-76.

⁹ Johanna W. H. Van Wijk-Bos, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 74.

ting in sackcloth, and tearing one's clothes. One can imagine Ezra reading Leviticus 26 or Deuteronomy 28 and the people weeping and mourning at the memory of God's curses, which had fallen on their parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. The reading of God's word would have reminded them that these curses came in response to their covenantal disobedience.

Ezra responded to their mourning by discouraging it. The day had been sanctified as holy, which was not a reason to mourn but to rejoice (Neh 8:9-10). They should celebrate with food and drink and provide for those who don't have the means to celebrate. They should not rejoice because of their situation, but because of their God. Ezra reminded them of God's character and specifically that the joy of the Lord is their strength (Neh 8:10). The people responded. They ate, drank, provided for the poor, and celebrated (Neh 8:12). However, the text notes that they did so not out of compulsion from their leaders, but "because they had understood the words that were explained to them" (Neh 8:12). Their response of celebration originated from their comprehension of God's word read and explained to them. God's word motivated their obedience.

Nehemiah 8:13-18 shows that on following days, Ezra continued to read God's law to God's people (Neh 8:18) and that the people found new ways to obey it. Upon reading the law, they discovered that the Feast of Shelters came in the seventh month (Neh 8:14), so they obeyed it in accordance with the prescriptions found in God's law (Neh 8:13-14, 18). The people repeatedly responded to the reading of God's word with willing obedience.

Nehemiah 9 shows that the reading of God's law also prompted a day of communal repentance. The people confessed their sins communally and confessed the sins of their ancestors (Neh 9:2). They once again read from the book of the law of God and worshipped as before (Neh 9:3). The prayer of repentance exalted God's majestic nature (Neh 9:5-6) and confessed his covenantal commitment to their ancestors (Neh 9:7-15). The people then confessed the sins of their ancestors (Neh 9:16-30) but also acknowledged God's faithfulness to his promises despite their sin (Neh 9:31). Their prayer pled for the Lord's deliverance, because they still considered themselves slaves in the Promised Land (Neh 9:36-37). They responded to God's word and their confession with a sworn oath to keep specific aspects of God's covenant (Neh 9:38-10:39). Nehemiah 8:14-10:39 shows repeated confession of sin in response to God's law and a renewed desire to obey it.

An Uncircumcised Heart: The Failure of Old Covenant Commitment

After seeing such a positive response to the gathered reading of God's law, the reader of Ezra-Nehemiah might expect the fulfillment of God's covenantal promises according to the blessings in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 30. However, both of those passages highlight that Israel's problem arises not from a lack of commitment, but from an uncircumcised heart. Leviticus 26:41 states that the Israelites must first humble their uncircumcised hearts to renew the covenant. Deuteronomy 30:6 says that only after they had repented completely (Deut 30:2) would the Lord circumcise their hearts to enable complete obedience.

Nehemiah 13 shows that the covenant commitments of Nehemiah 8–10 did not arise from a circumcised heart. Despite their vows in Nehemiah 10 and 12:44–13:3, the final chapter of the book systematically shows how God's people failed to keep their commitments during Nehemiah's return to Persia. Their initial post-crisis repentance and zeal after the rebuilding of Jerusalem and reading of God's law did not remain. Their hearts remained uncircumcised. So, the book ends with a personal plea that God remember Nehemiah, because he alone has remained faithful.¹⁰ The problem remained that an uncircumcised heart could not keep God's covenant.

God's People Should Turn to Scripture with Circumcised Hearts

In Romans 2:25-29, the apostle Paul contends that complete obedience to God's law requires circumcision of the heart and is not a matter of circumcised flesh.¹¹ True righteousness comes only through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:22). Because of Jesus's completed work on behalf of his covenantal people, those in Christ are brought into a new covenant—promised by the Old Testament prophets and brought to reality in Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6). The old covenant was made obsolete (Heb 8:13).

¹⁰ Readers interested in Ezra-Nehemiah's shocking ending, should see Gary E. Schnittjer, "The Bad Ending of Ezra-Nehemiah" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173 (Jan-Mar 2016): 32-56. Also see Ched Spellman, "Nehemiah's New Shadow: Reading and Re-Reading the Ezra-Nehemiah Narrative" *Southeastern Theological Review* 9.1 (Spring 2018): 3-22.

¹¹ Paul, as an Old Testament scholar, agrees with Lev 26:41 and Deut 30:6.

The transgressions of the old covenant that had kept God's people in slavery during Nehemiah's time (Neh 9:36-37) were redeemed through Jesus's death (Heb 9:15). Because of what Jesus has done, Christians are enabled to live obedient lives empowered by God's indwelling Spirit (Eph 2:1-10; 1 Peter 1:15-16)—loving him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength (Deut 30:6; Matt 22:37).

The principles of Nehemiah 8 give an excellent example of how God's people should respond to a time of crisis, even though God's people were not able to live out their commitments at that time due to their uncircumcised hearts. But Christians, whose hearts have been circumcised through the completed work of Christ, are now able to apply the principles of Nehemiah 8 in our churches by the power of the Spirit.

As God's people in Nehemiah gathered to listen to God's word, so **God's people today should gather to listen to God's word**. In our current post-pandemic situation, God's people need renewal through hearing and committing once again to God's word. As God's people in Nehemiah 8 recognized the need for competent leaders to teach, translate, and interpret God's law, so God's people today need to gather under competent leaders who can faithfully teach and interpret God's word to them. The New Testament makes clear that God has provided the churches with teachers, especially those set apart as elders who are distinguished in their ability to teach (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9). As God's people submitted to the teaching and interpretation of Ezra and the Levites, so Christians should submit to their elders who are equipped to teach them from God's word (Heb 13:7, 17).

It should be noted that in Nehemiah 8, Levites needed to give the sense of the text, because the people no longer knew God's law. As they studied the law, they discovered forgotten ways to be obedient—such as the Festival of Shelters. In our current post-pandemic context, many have returned to our churches after two years of minimal commitment to the Lord. Some have forgotten the truths of the gospel; others have forgotten how to live as Christians. **Our gathered churches need competent leaders to explain faithfully the meaning of God's word and show from God's word how believers can apply these truths**. Some, upon hearing God's word, will realize how far they have strayed from the Lord during the pandemic. Like Ezra did, in response to their confession and mourning, competent leaders can point mournful brothers and sisters to the joy of the Lord and the gospel promises of forgiveness and restoration in Christ.

As God's people honored and revered the reading of God's word in Nehemiah 8, so **Christians today must remember that in our post-pandemic world of abundant false narratives, God's word stands above the rest.** We should honor it, uphold it, revere it, and humbly worship the God to whom it points. We should treat it as "inspired by God and ... profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Conclusion

In our post-pandemic context, many continue to struggle with feelings of displacement. They have felt disconnected from their friends, families, and in many situations, from God himself. The Nehemiah 8 solution for a post-crisis situation focuses on gathering believers around the communal reading and teaching of God's word. For those of us tasked to serve as missionaries, our task becomes clear. Many of us live in contexts where people remain cautious to gather due to pandemic fears. Others live in contexts where church members have become accustomed to streaming services and mediated methods. In these contexts, we should encourage God's people to gather and not fear. We should encourage the reading and teaching of God's word under competent leaders. We should encourage God's people to respond to God's word with reverence and obedience. We should encourage gathered churches to have methods of not only teaching, but translating, interpreting, and applying God's word. We should encourage confession of sin and point people to the joy of the Lord. Before and immediately after the exile, God's people had not fulfilled God's mission. God called them to represent him in the eyes of the nations as a priestly kingdom (Ex 19:6). Through the witness of Israel's faithfulness to the Lord, the nations would stream to Jerusalem (Deut 4:6-8; Zech 8:20-22). Today, the gathered church give witness to the Lord (Matt 5:14). The church functions as an embassy of God's priestly kingdom (1 Pet 2:9). Today, as in Nehemiah's day, when God's people gather around God's word, they hear faithful teachers proclaim God's mission and his plan to accomplish it. They remember the biblical stories of God's faithfulness. They encourage each other to persevere and find the joy necessary to endure. In our post-pandemic context, we should encourage God's people to turn to Scripture.

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and taught among God's people for the sake of the nations. He has served with the IMB for twelve years in East and Southeast Asia.

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

Gospel Preaching in a Time of Global Pandemic

A Brazilian Baptist Perspective

João Reinaldo Purin Jr and Wendal Mark Johnson

COVID-19 Struggles, Solutions, and the New Normal

In this collaborative article, the authors intend to reflect on the calamitous effects of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of Brazilian Baptists. The pandemic wrought devastation across the entire country of Brazil, resulting in many being left with deep scars in heart and mind that only Jesus' gospel can restore and heal. But, it also provided an opportunity for Brazilian Baptists to minister to those facing great need and suffering and embrace new technologies as a part of the new reality of local church ministry.

Struggles

Over the past two years, social distancing was enforced everywhere in Brazil, from outdoor spaces to indoor venues. Schools, businesses, and churches were forced to close. As a result, nearly all worship services were transferred to an online format of some sort. These changes in local church practice occurred amid many deaths, rampant fear, and endemic hopelessness.

As a local church pastor ministering in an urban center, I (Purin) experienced first-hand the challenges COVID-19 brought to Christian mission in Brazil.

Overnight, in-person services were suspended, churches were closed, and church members were encouraged to stay at home. A whole nation struggled to quickly adapt to what was called, “the new normal.” As people tried to adjust, the stress was evident in local church ministries, where guidance, comfort, and encouragement were lacking for many.

As a result of this pandemic-created social turbulence, Brazilian Baptist pastors found it necessary to analyze this new ministry context in which they found themselves. The question arose, “How can biblical proclamation and ministry be relevant and faithful amid a global health crisis?” Many found it necessary to revisit the annals of history and study how ministry was done in past times of crisis. Lessons learned from the past helped strengthen the biblical foundations for effective proclamation and ministry in a time of world crisis.

I was freshly reminded that suffering and death have been human constants since humanity’s fall in Eden. From the Brazilian perspective, things like war normally have only been observed from afar. The coronavirus pandemic was different. While it was global in extent and impact, this crisis was in our own homes and neighborhoods as well. Few families were unaffected by sickness, death, and economic difficulties. In the twenty-first century, without warning, humanity encountered a virus that in some ways reminded us of the biblical plagues of Exodus.

The pandemic’s deadly impact spread a sense of worldwide dread. Fear, despair, and disruption of routine led some to search for answers to life’s most difficult questions as the pandemic raged. For many, this led to a deepened desire to participate in a worship service, to discover new ways to worship, or even to experience online worship for the first time. People were searching even if they did not have the freedom to leave their homes.

Finding solutions

While personal contact diminished, many local churches discovered that they could expand evangelistic outreach beyond the confines of their local church and community using technology. The use of new internet technologies directly impacted Brazilian Baptist pulpits and ministries. Ministry channels, live broadcasts, online services, small groups meeting via Zoom, WhatsApp prayer groups, all made for a powerful new set of tools used in gospel proclamation. As a result of these technological advances, local church preaching ministries were brought directly into the living rooms, smartphones, tablets,

and computer screens of a veritable multitude of people, many who had little or no previous local church contact.

As the pandemic's destruction finally lessened, Brazilian Baptists realized the urgent need for churches to return to weekly in-person gatherings and to proactively reengage in God's mission in their local communities. Brazilian Baptists remain convinced that the gathered church is the place where Christian relationships are to be nurtured and biblical instruction concerning God's global mission is to be given. As church members return to their normal lives, local churches can once again reengage in God's global mission of sharing God's love in word and deed. That which was not anticipated was that many of these new technologies would become a permanent component in continuing the local church's mission and ministry.

The new normal

Despite these dire circumstances, many Brazilian Baptist churches experienced unprecedented ministry opportunity in the worst days of the pandemic. Notwithstanding difficulties, through biblical proclamation and ministry, many churches remained alive, engaged, and relevant in their COVID-19 impacted cities.

Amid restrictions and uncertainties, Brazilian Baptists recognized a unique opportunity to bring answers to those asking life's deepest questions. Pastors and leaders took advantage of this God-given opportunity for mission advance. While being in a time of missional advance, these same leaders discovered their churches being tested to the limit. How could the local church community be preserved when it was not permitted to meet regularly? How could local churches minister to a generation impacted by personal hopelessness and deep loneliness?

Before the pandemic, churches had known only one way to live in community: by weekly gathering in face-to-face worship. For many, the experience of the communion of saints was synonymous with "going to the church." Local church life revolved around the church's physical structure and activities connected with it.¹ Even churches meeting in non-traditional locations like hotels or schools were identified by that physical location.² Neriél Lopes in

¹ Thom S. Rainer, *The Post-Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges and Opportunities That Will Determine the Future of Your Congregation* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2020), 20.

² Jorge H. Barro, *O Pastor Urbano* (Londrina: Descoberta, 2003).

his work, *Post-pandemic Christianity*, highlighted the new church reality that had developed, a rapid shift from face-to-face worship to online worship.³ This new reality required local churches to make additional investments in technological resources and rapidly learn how to do online worship without losing sight of true biblical community. Rodrigo Motta describes this situation saying pastors were “challenged to reinvent ... liturgy and, [are] being challenged to [keep] connected as the body of Christ by using a ‘recent new development’ that human intelligence was able to create, the digital world.”⁴

In Brazil, online worship arose in response to these challenges. The goal was nothing less than the local church’s preservation as a vital community and the advancement of God’s mission. During Brazil’s extended quarantine, people could easily and regularly view broadcasts of various church worship services. Transmitting worship services has become common among Brazilian Baptist churches. Worship services are held in various formats; they are transmitted digitally, resulting in services being viewed across the nation.

For many, this was a major paradigm shift. A new appreciation developed for how technology could be used as an instrument to disseminate gospel truth. Access to faithful gospel preaching, prayer and fellowship is now available anywhere, at any time. Churches learned that God’s Word proclaimed could pass from a pulpit to a digital screen, where it would have 24-hour availability. What at first appeared to be a hindrance to God’s mission proved to be an unprecedented opportunity for mission advance. By means of technological advances, fruitful ministries of gospel sowing and discipleship were accomplished by local churches.

Looking to the future – continuing the mission

Today, after two years of pandemic-induced suffering, many people still feel the aftereffects of exhaustion, fear, and uncertainty. Yet, the majority recognize that it is time to return to weekly in-person worship services. Now, the challenge for some, being so accustomed to the digital church experience, is that they feel they no longer need to participate in person in local church worship. This in no way reflects the Biblical pattern.

³ Neriél Lopes, *Cristianismo Pós-pandemia: Impacto e Oportunidades* (São Paulo: Editora Vida, 2020), 8.

⁴ Rodrigo Motta, *Não Existe Igreja On-line* (São Paulo: Editora Quitanda, 2020), 10.

Baptists recognize the New Testament priority that regular worship must take place by the physical gathering of local believers. Hebrews 10:24-25 clearly states: “Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” Gospel transformation creates life in communion with God and with the others.

For Brazilian Baptists, there is much work to be done. Beyond churches simply reopening their doors, it is time again for churches to aggressively reengage the Great Commission at home and abroad. After the hardships experienced by so many, a renewed sense of interdependence and New Testament community must prevail again in the churches.

What have Brazilian Baptists learned about ministry in a time of global health crisis? Angela Duckworth stated at the pandemic’s beginning: “If you are not learning something in this crisis, you are not paying attention.”⁵ Practically, local churches must reflect on their recent experience and ask, “What have we learned to better fulfill the Great Commission?”

Brazilian Baptist churches are learning to reaffirm their commitment to God’s mission to proclaim His redemptive message to all peoples in all places. Brazilian Baptists are once again returning to their places of worship, so that they might in turn prepare to go once again to the nations. Weekly, local churches celebrate and proclaim God’s work of redemption.

During the height of the pandemic, I (W. Mark) met regularly online with numerous Brazilian pastors and Brazilian home missionaries for a time of prayer and encouragement. Many of these servants also felt the pain of personal loss while simultaneously ministering to others suffering loss. One pastor recounted losing 13 family members and being unable to personally attend a single funeral or burial. As pastors commented on their shared experience of national trauma, we noted that for many people, this was just one more trauma among many that they regularly experienced (health challenges, job loss, violence, addiction, family breakdown, just to name a few). Only Jesus’ gospel can restore and heal the brokenhearted.

⁵ Angela Duckworth, “How to Find your Grit in a Crisis” (video, Harvard Business Review), accessed April 27, 2022, <https://hbr.org/video/6154372402001/find-your-grit-in-a-crisis>.

This changed the way I engaged people in gospel conversations. Questions such as, “What happened? How did you feel about that?” and “What was the worst part of this experience?” opened doors for many gospel conversations which focused on Jesus as the ultimate solution for trauma healing. This became evident not only as it related to COVID-19 losses, but also in ministering to anyone who has experienced any form of trauma. The pandemic opened my eyes to the fact that all of us are surrounded by people who deal with some level of trauma on a regular basis. Learning how to talk to people about pandemic losses helped me to be a more sensitive listener and a more effective gospel communicator, tying their pain to the restoring hope of the gospel message. “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3).

In engaging God’s mission, God’s people leave their local church and go to the nations to proclaim God’s gospel message of redemption. Local church life advances on two truths: a worshiping community and a mobilized membership on mission both locally and to the nations. Eugene Peterson defines the church as a resurrection community. He states, “the ... Christian life is a community gathered in an impossible place, a tomb.”⁶ Christ’s empty tomb and his resurrection offer ultimate hope for us all. Trauma healing ministries can, therefore, be part of the local church’s ministry in their community in helping to bring hope and healing to the brokenhearted.

Brazilian Baptists are still dealing with and ministering under the impact of many COVID-19 related deaths. Mass graves and countless tombs across Brazil give testimony to lives lost during the pandemic. Many of those who survived have not fully grieved for the massive loss of life that occurred, including the loss of many Baptist pastors. The bitter taste of death and defeat has been tasted by many. It would be easy to give way to frustration and despair. Yet, it must always be remembered, it was in front of a tomb that the world received the most glorious news - “He is not here, but is risen” (Luke 24:6). Brazilian Baptists are learning how biblical truth helps us to deal with grief and loss.

Local church worship and global mission mobilization complement and cooperate with each other for the purpose of advancing God’s global glory among the nations in all circumstances, including a global pandemic. The

⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 269.

weekly gathering of the local church is the place from which workers are mobilized to deploy in God's mission to the world. The pandemic has reminded Brazilian Baptists of the truth that it is necessary to prioritize regular local church worship for the advance of God's global mission.

To this end, the role of the pulpit assumes an ever-increasing importance: evangelizing those entering the local church, instructing and discipling those who are part of the local church, and mobilizing a new generation of church members to go to the nations. In all of this, discipleship is key. Every church member must take the gospel from the churches to the streets. Brazilian Baptists are learning to mesh traditional evangelism and missions commitments with the use of innovative new technologies in their delivery. The global pandemic introduced many technological innovations which were thought to be short term solutions to an immediate problem. Brazilian Baptists now realize that these new technologies have become a part not only of present ministry, but also of future local church ministry.

Throughout history, God's church has always faced difficult times such as persecutions, schisms, wars, and pandemics. This generation has experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. For many Brazilian Baptists, this has been an opportunity to observe, reflect, and learn more about the local church and its missional role in the world. May God help His people to remain alert and act upon the important lessons that have been learned until He comes again!

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Why We Are in Crete:

Leadership Development as Preparation for the Unexpected

Clark Sundin

The reason I left you in Crete was to set right what was left undone and, as I directed you, to appoint elders in every town.
- Titus 1:5 (CSB)

Introduction

If the world of missions has learned anything through this pandemic period, it should be that life and ministry are unpredictable. Situations change suddenly and thoroughly. Perhaps this was true in the past, but recent years have displayed the reality of change with ever-increasing clarity. And while the COVID-19 pandemic is front and center in most discussions, other factors, sometimes related, are also at play. Governments change, coups throw nations into chaos, security breaches reveal the identities of workers in sensitive locations, religious leaders double down efforts to eradicate the influence of gospel work, and the list could continue. All these challenges have played significant roles in the removal of missionaries from places of service. In such a world, how does one prepare for the unexpected?

Such a complex question defies a simple answer. Indeed, the proverbial “silver bullet” for preparing for the unexpected does not exist. There are multiple ways in which missionaries must plan for continued ministry when circumstances demand departure. In this article, however, I focus on one strategy that, biblically speaking, is essential in all settings and circumstances: the development of local leadership.

In what follows, I begin with a short study of Titus 1:5, focusing on the importance of local leadership in Paul’s mission strategy. In this section, I argue that Paul’s words to Titus in this text reveal the essential nature of leadership development in Paul’s missiological thinking. Next, I turn to a case study from my team’s experience in leadership training through the pandemic and security challenges. Here I present CTS (an underground seminary in a high-security setting) and the ways the missionary team’s commitment to leadership development prepared the way for a relatively smooth transition to non-residential ministry. Finally, the article will conclude with some reflections on lessons learned from both the biblical text and the case study that can apply in other mission contexts.

Why Titus Stayed in Crete

We begin with a few reflections on Paul’s words to Titus.¹ Following the initial greeting, the body of the letter begins in Titus 1:5 with a reminder of Titus’s missional objective in Crete: to complete some unfinished business and appoint elders in the churches. In fact, Paul says that this is the primary purpose for Titus’s continued stay in Crete.

Of particular interest is the appointment of elders in all the churches. While there may have been other tasks included, Paul places particular emphasis on leadership development.² This observation is supported by the fact that Paul elaborates on the task of elder appointment in the following verses with the list of qualifications for church leaders. The exact nature of the appoint-

¹ The authorship of Titus is beyond the scope of this article. In what follows, Pauline authorship is assumed. See Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 3–26.

² I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 152. Marshall notes that the *καί* joining together “set right what was left undone” and “to appoint elders” should be understood epexegetically – “and especially to appoint elders.”

ment remains debated.³ What is clear is that Paul wanted qualified leaders in every church on the island and that his apostolic authority was behind the charge he gave to Titus.

A few key points should be noted. First, it is essential to recognize the missional setting of the letter. Titus 1:5 alone alerts us to the historical context: Paul moved on to another location and left Titus in Crete to carry on the mission. However, the context of Titus 1 further clarifies the cultural situation in Crete. Two features stand out: the existence of false teaching and the dishonesty rampant in the Cretan culture (1:10–16). These two contextual factors spotlight the need for strong church leadership. In Paul's mind, trained leaders were needed to combat theological error and to lead the church into holy living.

Second, and related to the missional setting, the status of the church in Crete at the time of Paul's writing alerts us to his priorities in ministry. That the appointment of qualified leaders was a part of the things left undone clues the reader to the infancy of the Cretan churches. It appears that Paul either preached the gospel in Crete but left before appointing elders or he arrived in Crete to find struggling churches devoid of leadership.⁴ In either case, the church was young and less developed than the church in other locations. Despite this, Paul opens the letter with the urgency of finding qualified leadership. Thus, for Paul, training qualified leaders was an early priority, not an afterthought.

Third, Paul's qualifications for elders are mostly ethical and moral in nature, except for the last thing he mentions: an elder must be one who is "holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it" (1:9). While in general the qualifications in Titus 1 are more abbreviated than those in 1 Timothy 3, this feature is expanded when compared to "able to teach" in 1 Tim 3:2. As Marshall notes, the expanded form here most likely coheres with the Cretan context.⁵ That is, the existence of false teaching in Crete probably led Paul to

³ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 288, argues that the term here means "ordination."

⁴ Historically both are plausible. Cretans were present at Pentecost (Acts 2:11) and probably brought the gospel to Crete in the first instance. See the discussion in William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 626.

⁵ Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 165.

elaborate on this qualification. In any case, the point is that theology matters. The elders in Crete needed to understand sound doctrine so that they could both teach and rebuke. The implication is that Titus must invest time and energy to instruct potential leaders in the truth of the gospel. Of course, Paul makes clear in Titus 3 that the fundamental truths of the gospel should lead to fruit in the lives of believers.⁶ Nevertheless, the essential nature of sound doctrine cannot be overlooked.

Fourth, Titus 3:12 tells us that Titus himself would be leaving Crete in the near future. In fact, Paul encourages Titus to leave Crete to join him in Nicopolis. While easily overlooked, Titus's planned departure further highlights the urgency of appointing qualified leaders for the churches of Crete. To be sure, Paul planned to send another worker to Crete, yet the emphasis remained on appointing and developing Cretan church leaders. We may assume that, on arrival, either Artemas or Tychicus would carry on the work of training the local leaders.

In sum, Titus 1:5 clearly displays the high priority Paul placed on leadership development within his mission strategy. What this verse particularly emphasizes is the necessity of leadership in the absence of the missionary: Paul departed Crete but left instructions for leadership development, and Titus's soon departure pressed the urgency of the work. These observations set the stage for the next section of this article in which we examine the recent work of theological training in Asia.⁷

A Case Study – CTS Asia

CTS (name and location identified only by these initials for security purposes) was launched by a missionary team in Asia in 2010 with the goal of establishing an indigenous seminary dedicated to training leaders for the church. The situation was somewhat analogous to Paul and Titus's context in Crete: CTS started in a nation that had experienced exponential growth in the number of Christians and churches for more than a generation. However, leadership development had not kept pace with this growth, resulting in a

⁶ Chiao Ek Ho, "Mission in the Pastoral Epistles" in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, edited by Andreas J. Kötenberger and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 247.

⁷ I recognize that Paul's instructions were for church leaders and the case study to follow will focus on seminary leadership. Nevertheless, I think this is a valid application of the biblical text.

dearth of qualified leaders for the new churches. Moreover, the growth of the church was accompanied by (1) increased persecution from a hostile government and (2) a rise in the number of cults and quasi-Christian groups. CTS was created to help fill the void of leadership by providing high quality theological education on both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Academic rigor, spiritual vitality, and applied ministry skills were central features of the degree programs. CTS quickly grew into a multi-site, non-residential seminary.⁸

The subsequent history of CTS is complicated with, as one might expect, numerous challenges. The longer story of the seminary need not detain us here; however, two key strategic decisions in the early days of the work proved crucial when security issues and the pandemic forced the missionary team to be removed. First, the missionary team sought out partners among the local churches to help with the leadership and administration of the seminary. In some cases, these partners were also students. At other times, they were simply believers who saw the importance of the seminary's vision. The important point is that the work of the seminary began through partnerships with local churches.

A second key decision was to place an emphasis on raising up a generation of scholars and teachers. That is, while the primary focus of the seminary was to train pastors, missionaries, and other church leaders, the team also had the long-term vision of a fully trained national faculty. As such, all seminary faculty members were encouraged to identify and invest in students showing academic giftedness and teaching ability. Though the necessary structures and advanced academic programs were not yet in place, the goal of national faculty and leadership was firmly communicated. I will elaborate further on this decision in the lessons learned below.

With this brief background established, we fast forward to 2019. As noted above, CTS was established in a country whose government was unwelcoming to such work. However, the years leading up to 2019 brought a significant shift in the nature of government persecution. What had been localized, sporadic crackdowns on unregistered church activities became a centralized, national campaign to bring all religious practice under government sanction.

⁸ Within two years, CTS had expanded to eight locations and nearly 200 students. By "multi-site" I mean that classes were meeting in rented or borrowed spaces in various cities across the country rather than on a traditional campus.

In addition to a few high-profile cases, smaller churches across the country were faced with new difficulties in surveillance and threats. The surveillance included both facial recognition technology and digital monitoring. In addition, foreigners were scrutinized at increased levels leading to interrogations, revoked visas, and police escorts to the airport for expulsion. This led to the departure of some foreign CTS faculty members in 2019, and by March 2020, all foreign faculty were effectively blacklisted.⁹

Of course, the year 2020 carried with it additional challenges with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The government used the opportunity to further restrict religious activities and to remove any remaining foreigners suspected of religious propagation. Moreover, strict lockdowns prohibited most public meetings. Thus, CTS students were left isolated from their professors and mentors and from one another. With the dual challenges of security and pandemic, the survival of the seminary was at stake.

Lessons Learned

Rather than recounting the recent history of CTS, this section of the article will attempt to detail some of the lessons learned through the experience of remote theological training. These will include positive (what we did well) and negative (what we didn't do well) lessons.¹⁰ In so doing, I will argue that key decisions made in the early years of CTS prepared the seminary for survival through the pandemic and security issues.

Develop Leaders by Teaching Theological Processes

First, after about two years of serving in theological education, the CTS team made a paradigm shift in our pedagogy. In the early days, the team realized that many of our students came to CTS with little or no prior theological training. As such, the faculty felt burdened to teach the students as much biblical-theological content as possible and impart all the practical ministry skills that our students would ever need. Of course, we soon realized that this was an impossible goal. Thus, a change was needed.

⁹ This paragraph is largely based on personal experience. While documentation could be provided for several incidents, I withhold references to maintain anonymity.

¹⁰ In this section, I will describe the ideals behind some strategic decisions. It should be noted that each of these areas was imperfect at best.

That change came in the form of a shift in goals which also led to a shift in course delivery. What we needed was not to teach as much knowledge as possible, but to train students to read and interpret Scripture, theologize within their contexts, and apply their newly gained practical skills to their ministries. In other words, our focus shifted from content to process. Thus, we stopped giving all the answers and started teaching students how to answer the questions. This type of training is implied in Paul's instructions to Titus to ensure that local leaders were trained in sound doctrine such that they were equipped to teach and rebuke (Titus 1:9). As Tan and Brooks argue, in every context "it is highly likely that specific and complex theological questions will arise for which no one has previously sought an answer. Western systematic theology textbooks will not likely address those questions. The missionary must train new believers in exegetical skills in order to apply Scripture to those questions."¹¹ This became the new aim of CTS.

Develop Leaders within Functioning Ministry Structures

Second, it was crucial to have functioning leadership structures in place, especially in the seminary context. CTS went through several structural changes over the years as the seminary grew. The shift to a remote, online format brought on through the pandemic also demanded change in structure. Nevertheless, having an existing structure that included academic and logistical arms provided the necessary foundation for continued ministry.¹² Thus, while the day-to-day operations looked very different during the pandemic, we were set up to continue the work.

The lesson in this regard is that it is crucial to think long-term about the ways we establish structures within our teams and ministries. Perhaps the temptation is to simply teach and train in an ad hoc manner, especially when resources and personnel are limited. Yet, giving upfront and ongoing careful thought to the overarching organization of the team and ministry proved essential to continued work when security and pandemic forced dramatic changes among my team. The flexible structure well supported the fluid dynamics of the context. While Paul does not record his entire plan, the facilita-

¹¹ Sunny Tan and Will Brooks, "Theological Education as an Integral Component of World Mission Strategy" in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues*, edited by Scott N. Callaham and Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019),

¹² The academic arm included the faculty and academic oversight of the programs. The logistical arm included financial administration and registrar.

tion of Titus's work in appointing elders and the intention to send additional workers to Crete implies that some level of structure was in place. Thus, for Paul, the structure enabled effective ministry.

Develop Leaders by Recruiting Local leadership Early in the Work

Third, and related to the above point, CTS leadership determined to integrate local leadership from the outset. This often proved challenging in an academic setting because the team was providing theological education to leaders who had little previous academic experience. Thus, few, if any, local partners were academically qualified to take on leadership positions within the seminary. As such, the team made a few key decisions: (1) to include local leadership in the development of academic programs; (2) to work with local leadership in non-academic leadership roles; and (3) to develop academically qualified local leadership.

Practically speaking, these decisions led the team to dialogue with local church leaders and mature students about the curriculum, course delivery, and academic requirements of the seminary. While they may have lacked academic credentials, local leaders possessed a deep and invaluable knowledge of the context and needs of students. These local leaders (mostly local pastors) gave input into the courses included in the curriculum, the delivery format, and other practical issues involved, such as tuition costs. In addition, local leaders took the lead in logistical and administrative duties, including maintaining the teaching locations, registering and interviewing applicants, and handling seminary finances. Moreover, seminary faculty (the missionary team) were strongly encouraged to identify and invest in gifted students. As a result, by the time the faculty team was removed from the context, we had a national faculty member enrolled in a doctoral program through a partner seminary while also teaching courses at CTS. Thus, when the team could no longer be present, we had local partners in place to continue work they were already doing. As Lawless points out, such partnering requires a trust in others to carry out the ministry as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit.¹³ In short, paternalism of any sort must be discarded for long-term health.

Partnering with local leaders follows the Pauline pattern of ministry as seen in his instructions to Titus. As noted above, though the church in Crete

¹³ Chuck Lawless, "Paul and Leadership Development" in *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. John Mark Terry and Robert L. Plummer (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 230-232.

was young, Paul urged Titus to appoint elders, implicitly local leaders from among the church members. Thus, Paul encouraged the engagement of local leaders early in the work on Crete.

Develop Leaders by Facilitating Connections among Students

In addition to training for theological thinking, establishing functioning structures, and co-laboring with local leadership for the seminary, developing close connections among students proved to be essential for the seminary experience, especially when the faculty, though teaching online classes, was no longer physically present. While we believed that our lectures, reading assignments, and interaction in the classroom equipped our students to preach, teach, and lead, we also learned that community is crucial for seminary students. As Bonhoeffer wrote, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”¹⁴ The pandemic has made this clear to Christians across the globe; CTS students learned the lesson early in the institution’s history. When the pandemic and security issues hit, students strengthened these connections further.

In our context, pastors serve in high-pressure environments that are often lonely and exhausting. For most, the expectations of the congregation meant that they were overworked and under supported. The student body became a source of community and gospel partnership. Prior to the pandemic, students from various parts of the country joined forces for the cause of missions. They partnered to send both short-term and long-term cross-cultural workers, primarily ministering among the minority peoples within the country. Learning Scripture and theology as classmates drew these students together in common faith and purpose. After the CTS faculty departed and the pandemic began, several students formed a pastoral network for the purpose of mutual encouragement as well as partnership in gospel ministry. Thus, while the faculty was no longer physically present, the students continued to build strong community among themselves.

The lesson here extends beyond the ministry of theological education. In any context, joining local believers—especially local leaders—together is an indispensable piece of ministry strategy. While missionaries can and should build strong relationship with the people they serve, the relationships be-

¹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 29.

tween national brothers and sisters are perhaps even more important. The reality is that we cannot know the date of our departure from the field, but most missionaries eventually leave the field, even if only in retirement. Serving the local body through helping them build community should be central to our strategy.

Conclusion

The adage “the only constant is change” applies to every mission context. Sometimes the changes are small shifts in strategy, structure, or ministry focus. Other times, the changes are so significant that everything in life and ministry must be reconsidered. Missionaries must prepare as much as possible for changes.

As the world is moving into a post-pandemic phase, more changes appear to be forthcoming. For CTS, the security issues continue to intensify. More broadly, the global shift to online theological education is most likely permanent. Of course, pandemics and security issues are unpredictable and uncontrollable. Yet, this article has argued that missionaries can best prepare for the uncertainty of the future by investing in local leadership in the churches and in the various strategies we start. Such a vision is consistent with the biblical pattern that sets the stage for long-term gospel ministry.

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Innovations for Theological Education in Post-Pandemic Africa:

Fulfilling the Missionary Task through Faithful Teaching

James Bledsoe

The International Mission Board holds that “One of the measures of completion of the missionary task is the development of those who can train other leaders, and even systems for training those trainers, within the churches in a given people group or place.”¹ Their goal is to “leave behind a self-sustaining system of theological and pastoral training.”² Towards that end, a group of IMB missionaries appointed to serve across Sub-Saharan Africa in theological education were called together in 2017 to envision how to best impact healthy churches and influence sound doctrine and practice across the affinity. That vision gave birth to what would become the Africa Baptist Theological Education Network (ABTEN).

This endeavor is yet another example of the contributions Baptists have made to the broader Christian tradition—“We are living and making the his-

¹ International Mission Board, *Foundations* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2018), 101.

² Ibid.

tory of the future. What we teach and do today will be what future Christians consider to be their heritage.”³ Throughout their history in Sub-Saharan Africa, Baptist missionaries have provided theological teaching and training through Bible schools, decentralized theological education, theological education by extension, and seminaries. These programs have had in view not merely the preserving of Baptist heritage, but the maintaining of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Theological education of church leaders must be held as an essential task of the missionary for the development of a movement of God among a people or in a place.⁴ The Africa Baptist Theological Education Network was established with the ambition to move churches towards health and practice as defined by Scripture and for the glory of God.⁵

The first ABTEN conference was held in 2018 in Nairobi, Kenya. Seeking to build momentum, a second meeting took place the following year. Participants voted to charter ABTEN as a cooperating body of Baptist theological institutions and committed individuals who long for and work toward healthy, biblically sound churches that exhibit both Baptist and African identities. The mission statement of ABTEN clearly establishes that the network exists to impact local African churches through Baptist theological institutions, by strengthening and promoting sound, missional, and contextual theological education that is rooted in the Bible and responsive to African socio-cultural realities. ABTEN seeks to accomplish this mission by:

1. creating pathways for collaboration, consultancy, and communication of “best practices” among member institutions,

³ Jason G. Duesing, “Baptist Contributions to the Christian Tradition,” in Matthew Y. Emerson, et. al., eds. *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville: B & H Academic), 348, urges his readers to remember this remark made by L. Russ Bush in his 1994 presidential address to the Evangelical Theological Society.

⁴ Gailyn Van Rhee, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 147, also names evangelism that leads to planting new churches and nurturing of believers toward maturity as essential tasks towards this end. International Mission Board, *Foundations* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2018), 96, calls us to recognize “Biblical leadership is essential to the well-being of every local church.” A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 253, also place a high value on theological education—“Whatever the means, though, the need is ever present and must be a significant part of healthy sending-church mission endeavors.”

⁵ Ibid., 174. Van Rhee laments, “The purpose of missions is frequently nebulous to untrained missionaries. They go to the mission field to do whatever they were sent to do. It is sad that frequently, whenever missionaries fail to prioritize the essential tasks of missions, little is left after they depart.” Thus, he proposes that a blending of formal, nonformal, and informal modes of training is needed to train different types of church leaders.

2. advocating and modeling doctrinal and academic integrity and development,
3. promoting systems of diversified missional theological education across Africa to better serve the local church and to prepare more laborers for the mission field,
4. identifying and disseminating teaching methodologies, “best practices” and curriculum development that are effective, biblically sound, and contextually relevant,
5. facilitating scholarly theological research, discourse, and dialogue.

ABTEN was to meet every two years for a continent-wide meeting and hold regional meetings during the off years. The Steering Committee looked with much anticipation toward the next continental meeting to take place in 2021. However, when the pandemic spread across the globe, everything changed.

Across the continent, everything from basic training for village pastors to high-level theological education came to a halt. How would these institutions survive? More importantly, how would pastors, church leaders, and missionaries be trained? Such questions compelled the Steering Committee to focus on innovations in theological education as the theme for the next ABTEN continental meeting. The meeting itself would have to be innovative in order to take place amid lockdowns and restrictions. In 2021, the next meeting was conducted virtually. A few members of the Steering Committee living in Nairobi set up the conference using Zoom. Presenters submitted a 30-minute pre-recorded presentation and then connected after its airing for a period of live discussion. Participants also were separated into breakout sessions to discuss issues raised in the presentations. French and Portuguese language channels were created to assist those living in non-anglophone parts of the continent. Though there were glitches along the way, overall the event was successful.

Fortunately, limitations were eased and restrictions were lifted in many places across the continent as the pandemic reached an endemic stage. As a result, this year’s regional meetings were able to be held in person. Leadership for each region conducted the meeting in different formats to accommodate the aftermath of the pandemic. It is worthwhile to note some positives and negatives concerning the way ABTEN operated during and after the pandemic.

Innovations in Theological Education through the Pandemic

Theological educators, administrators, and consultants from Western, Eastern, and Southern regions assessed how ABTEN and theological institutions in their areas have operated since the onset of the pandemic and as it becomes endemic.⁶ Understandably, the greatest challenge was that everyone had to shut down operations for such a long period of time. The response to the challenges, however, reveals important lessons for the future of theological education across the affinity and perhaps beyond, by providing some constructive suggestions moving forward not only for the network but also for individual institutions.

Evaluating ABTEN through the Pandemic

When the pandemic forced many institutions and organizations to cease activities, ABTEN pressed forward. The Steering Committee moved to try to stave off the loss of momentum. They utilized WhatsApp to maintain contact and communication with network members. Additionally, they offered the 2021 continental meeting fully online, gathering participants virtually using the Zoom online meeting app and pushing dialogue on relevant topics—namely innovations in theological education. As the pandemic began to abate, ABTEN initiated regional meetings both in person and online. In all, ABTEN operated well within its financial and technological capacities.

Still, there were some negative reflections. For example, the loss of personal contact allowed for a bit of an “out of sight out of mind” way of thinking to develop. Even ABTEN was thrust into a survival mentality instead of a push toward development, especially at a time when the pandemic seemingly would continue indefinitely. ABTEN’s use of online platforms for its meetings wasn’t without challenges. For example, the attempt to create breakout sessions for smaller groups using Zoom’s applications did not go as well as planned. Namely, the sessions had low member participation due to IT com-

⁶ The author is grateful to the reviews given by Chris Schilt (Country Catalyst for Malawi, Theological Education Consultant for Central Africa Cluster, and Faculty at Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi), Trevor Yoakum (Faculty, ESBTAO Seminary and Theological Education Consultant for West Africa Cluster), Eric Lockhart (Academic Dean, Uganda Baptist Seminary), Ronnie Davis (Senior Lecturer, Cape Town Baptist Seminary in South Africa and Theological Education Consultant for the Southern Africa Cluster), and Daniel Lowry (Instructor, Baptist Institute of Theology and Missions, Kenya).

plications, lack of understanding of the technology, and failure by session leaders and participants to follow the general rules of the discussion.

Again, ABTEN is a network of institutions and individual members who choose to participate in annual events. Additionally, the organization operates “virtually” having no physical headquarters or paid staff. In any fledgling organization, hiccups are bound to occur along the way. Perhaps the nature and structure of ABTEN contributed to its ability to weather the storm of the pandemic, so to speak.

Evaluating Theological Institutions through the Pandemic

But what of the individual institutions and ministries dedicated to the day-to-day implementation of theological education programs? How have they adjusted to a post-pandemic world? What innovations did COVID force them to make in their ministry/theological education that will probably be continued in the future?

The pandemic pushed individuals and institutions toward increased use of technology, particularly online and distance learning platforms. In Kenya, educational ministries and agencies, which had been somewhat resistant to accrediting such educational options before the pandemic, have realized the potential and viability of these technological avenues. A significant shift in pedagogy has occurred, as all across Africa, governments imposed regulations that prohibited in-person learning.

As a result, some educators employed the use of WhatsApp, Zoom, or Google Meet to teach their classes. At the Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi, Schilt formed a WhatsApp group for each course, then gave the students short PDF lessons that concluded with discussion questions. Students had weekly fixed times of interaction. He explained, “Much like other distance education options, this gave the students who are more passive in person a chance to speak out more. The discussions were usually lively. Now, I still form WhatsApp groups even for in-person classes to send supplementary material or even continue in-class conversations.”⁷

In South Africa, the Department of Education and Council on Higher Education relaxed some of the restrictions of “contact delivery” which allowed for live streaming of lectures. The administration and faculty of Cape Town

⁷ Chris Schilt, email to the author, 27 July 2022.

Baptist Seminary decided to capitalize on this opportunity and moved to have in-person lectures live streamed instead of simply hosting meetings on a video conferencing platform. This decision required an upgrade of technology including the installation of cameras in each lecture hall. One result of this development was the seminary continued to reach communities outside of Cape Town. In addition, the practice of live lectures has resulted in an additional mid-term intake for the first time since the pandemic began. When upsurges of COVID cases took place, which halted the plan to return to in-person learning, the school continued its online approach. The seminary has expanded its footprint by providing training beyond the campus. For example, they hosted a Church Planter's Conversations for the Baptist Union of South Africa that was also live streamed. Davis lamented, "The hardest element has been maintaining good contact with students. As a result, we have been more intentional in student meetings."⁸ That intentionality includes checking in with students regarding mental health. The seminary added an online chapel service to try and maintain a sense of community. They continue to have music together and then sermons by lecturers, students, and guest preachers. Even when in-person meetings resume, they intend to continue to live stream the chapel services.

Likewise, the pandemic forced institutions in West Africa to expand their reach. The ESBTAO seminary in Togo increased its level of online education. Some instructors also taught online courses for the Liberian Baptist Theological Seminary. The pandemic also pushed individuals to do more beyond the classroom. Yoakum shared how his outside ministries expanded: "I signed up for more writing projects during the pandemic, including working for organizations outside the IMB ... and other clusters. In ministry, we increased our level of humanitarian projects."⁹ He expects these efforts will continue even if they may not be at the same level as during the pandemic.

For those serving in East Africa, moving forward through the pandemic took more of a survivalist identity. Whereas one could argue that the pandemic providentially closed schools that were struggling with doctrinal integrity and fiscal management, some healthy institutions also faced difficulties moving forward, particularly with regard to online education. The

⁸ Ronnie Davis, email to the author, 21 July 2022.

⁹ Trevor Yoakum, email to the author, 22 July 2022.

administration at Uganda Baptist Seminary talked about how to move forward with an online education system. What some might call a lack of action on their part is actually due to a lack of resources. However, the hesitation to jump on board with an online method is also due to the administration not being completely sold on the idea that such a method is the best for them. Lockhart confessed, “Sometimes it felt as though the push [towards online education] was at the expense of brick and mortar, and I find that negative.”¹⁰

Difficulties often push people towards reflection, evaluation, and modification of systems and methods. Each practitioner and program of theological education ought to continue to look for ways of improvement so that biblically healthy programs are made accessible to the majority of church leaders. Charles Van Engen argues, “We need to draw selectively from all the paradigms of the past, for not one of them alone has prepared us for what lies ahead. Our paradigms of ministry formation must be fluid and creative, seeking to remain faithful to the basics of being God’s people in God’s world. Yet searching for radically new ways to form new leaders for Christ’s church.”¹¹

Proceed with Caution

Indeed, technology continues to bring exciting opportunities and possibilities as it becomes more and more available across Africa. And it is important to be innovative rather than to grow stale and stagnant in delivery style and substance. At the same time, however, it is important to be cautious. As with all areas of ministry formation, some pitfalls should be avoided.

First, theological educators, institutions, and networks should regularly monitor and adjust in innovative ways in order to increase the effectiveness in reaching the goal of healthy, missional churches. Yet, missionaries must be careful not to give into the tendency toward paternalism in partnership. Van Rheeën sounds the alarm when he writes, “This tendency towards paternalism is amplified when Western missionaries and agencies initiate a partnership and feel responsible for its success and continuance. As puppe-

¹⁰ Eric Lockhart, email to the author, 20 July 2022.

¹¹ Charles Van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 252.

teers control marionettes, Westerners frequently pull the strings that guide decision-making processes.”¹² Missionaries ought not push an innovation that can (or will) only be sustained by them.

Related to this warning it is equally important that missionaries hold high a standard of biblical excellence to which all followers of Christ must adhere. In utilizing technological innovations, they must not lower expectations for anyone in any circumstance. While issues of personal and/or academic integrity such as plagiarism and cheating are evidence of depravity shared globally, the transactional dynamic in relationships and utilitarianism (or consequentialism) in Sub-Saharan Africa exacerbate the practice. The former is the manner of relating to others for the purpose of receiving something. The latter is the ethic whereby people say or do whatever is perceived as necessary to get something—that is, the end justifies the means.¹³ Thus, there is a danger in rushing to the use of technological innovations when they only create easier avenues for continuing fallen tendencies towards falsehood and dishonest gain, like plagiarism mentioned earlier. Missionaries ought not be indifferent, whether subtly or blatantly, to the lack of integrity that is pervasive among students in higher education across the affinity. While believers ought to show mercy and grace, they must never confuse charity for compassion. Otherwise, missionaries will perpetuate the soft bigotry of low expectations toward African Christians.¹⁴

Second, those invested in church formation and leadership development must be aware of the tension between innovation and patience. Perhaps the most innovative approach for theological education across the region today is to exercise patience, even to resist some innovations. Lowry argues, “In a global culture that expects and demands newer/better methods (innovation), patience and trust might be the actual innovation. Seeking newer ways of doing things is the method of our day. Thus, it’s sort of a change of method to

¹² Van Rheenen, 199.

¹³ John Stuart Mill and Oskar Pietsch. *Utilitarianism*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 77. They postulated “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.”

¹⁴ Terry Stoops, “Overcoming the Soft Bigotry of Low Expectations” *The Carolina Journal*, 2018, <https://www.carolinajournal.com/opinion/overcoming-the-soft-bigotry-of-low-expectations-for-black-males/>. Accessed 18 July 2022. The phrase “soft bigotry of low expectations” coined by President George W. Bush has been used by theologians such as Anthony B. Bradley in combating the paternalism and infantilization practiced by many evangelicals in the USA in their attempts to reach black communities.

be patient. Resisting innovation is in fact innovation if your culture demands the new.”¹⁵

Third, theological educators and institutions must wrestle with whether a given technology is the best way forward. Just because a technological innovation or avenue arises doesn't mean that using it is automatically effective or is to be preferred over traditional modes. The reality remains that many students across the affinity do not have the capacity (access) or competency (skill) to transition to technological platforms for education. Lowry urges that, in light of this realization, missionaries recommit themselves to what has been best practice for all but a tiny sliver of church history.¹⁶ Perhaps it's necessary in theological education to resist the temptation to see technology as *the* path forward. Certainly, doing so carries the risk of moving more slowly, but it also avoids the risk of not leaving behind the technologically least of these. The caution to theological educators is to balance progress with pragmatism. Therefore, it is wise “to remain committed to doing what the church has always done and to believe that this de-innovation is a valid and valuable ministry despite the way it limits our reach. This requires us to believe that the Spirit is the one who will spread his work, and we can be content with our small part in it.”¹⁷

Could some innovative technology potentially extend the reach of a teaching team or institution? No doubt. But caution should be exercised or they might expand their reach at the expense of impact. Indeed, urbanization and globalization continue to reshape the African landscape, bringing greater accessibility to technology that allows students to connect with theologians and ministers of the gospel from around the world in a way unseen a decade ago. Yet, as mentioned already, large swaths of Sub-Saharan African peoples continue to live in rural areas without reliable access to such technology.

¹⁵ Daniel Lowry, email to the author, 21 July 2022. Such caution is also reflected in “Christmas Broadcast 1957”, accessed 9 September 2022 from <https://www.royal.uk/christmas-broadcast-1957> in which Queen Elizabeth II commented on the significance of technological innovations: “...it is not the new inventions which are the difficulty. The trouble is caused by unthinking people who carelessly throw away ageless ideals as if they were old and outworn machinery.”

¹⁶ Lowry.

¹⁷ Ibid., The Kenya Theological Education Team re-committed to what some may deem an anachronistic, non-digital delivery system, by travelling to students for face-to-face teaching and discipleship whether they are in a major urban university, a small rural town, or a remote tribal mountain top.

The missionary pursuit to invest in the theological and spiritual health of churches, individuals, and institutions is a noble endeavor that requires careful consideration of the best avenues for guarding doctrinal integrity and missional focus. For theological educators, the task is to equip students so that they might be approved workers who rightly handle the word of truth, knowing how to interpret it clearly and able to communicate the sense to others so that the people may understand and be doers of it. The hope is that students will be examples of the Chief Shepherd to the flock of God that is among them in the manner in which they pursue holiness and exercise oversight in humility, contrition, and fear at God's word. The ultimate goal of theological education is to mobilize pastors and missionaries to be faithful practitioners of the gospel in the mission of God and his church. These objectives are derived from the Scriptures and will be brought to completion by the Spirit.

The pandemic serves as a reminder that God is sovereign over his work, faithfully completing in his church the good work he has begun and powerfully preserving his gospel and his people. A virus cannot thwart what God is doing in the world. Individuals and institutions need to rely on the One who does not need anything and who supplies everything needed for life and godliness. Though there is much to praise about technological advancement, the levels of accessibility and technological literacy of participants must be a significant point of consideration in each context.

Moreover, innovations and technology must never replace reliance on the Holy Spirit and must always be kept in submission to the Word of God. Being innovative for innovation's sake, or valuing technology as the higher good because it is new/powerful, is idolatry. Lowry, in his email message to the author, sums this up well:

We are in a moment when it is very easy to stumble into idolatry. Money mimics the Father's care, so we seek money instead of relying on Him. Technology mimics the Spirit's ubiquity and immediacy, and so we grasp at technological innovation instead of being content in our limitations and trusting in the unlimitedness of the Spirit ...It is easier to find ways to extend

ourselves beyond the need of God, rather than to recognize our limits while we trust in a God who has none.¹⁸

The higher good is faithfulness and perseverance in the trials and preserving the gospel in the trenches. May theological educators be found faithful.

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¹⁸ Ibid.

Covid as Crucible:

How God Harnessed a Pandemic to Strengthen Cooperative Sending of Global Missionaries

Jennifer Waldrep, Amanda Dimperio Davis, and Hal Cunnyingham

Six Christians in Taiwan aimed to do something about the number of unreached people in the world and the lack of missionaries going to them. The six included two national pastors, one of their wives, and three IMB missionaries. Baptists in Taiwan had a 70-year history plus freedom to proclaim the gospel and make disciples, but no official mission-sending structure. Moreover, many defined missions broadly to mean any ministry done outside their borders, even cleaning up a beach with no end goal of sharing the gospel or establishing churches.¹

On January 13, 2020 they launched Huayu International Missions (H.I.M.)—a Taiwanese national sending agency. Although IMB workers were among the catalysts, local leaders soon took charge, and the Taiwanese Chinese Baptist Convention quickly joined the effort. H.I.M. was set to mobilize missionaries.

¹ Jarod Davis, IMB APAC Affinity Globalization Strategist, interview, mp4, video call, March 28, 2022.

But now the COVID-19 pandemic was raging. Jarod Davis, one of the Huayu founders, recalled, “Our IMB folks were saying, ‘Wait.’...I was wondering, Will things ever get going?”² Davis, his two IMB colleagues, four national board members, and a few local pastors took two and a half days for their annual retreat. Faced with both a burden to send Asians to the nations and a global pandemic, the group sought the Lord with fervor. There was “much talk, prayer, Bible reading, wrestling. Sending is a big responsibility,” Davis said. “God was telling us to move ahead; to go anyway. . . . He told us this through our Scripture reading. The Lord told us in one voice. We were very unified.”³

Strengthened to move forward, these leaders used pandemic down time to shore up the local church. They went through the IMB’s 8 Steps, a consultancy designed to help churches expand their capacity to send and support missionaries, several times.⁴ H.I.M. deployed fewer missionaries than anticipated due to closed borders and stalled activity. However, “we had time to learn on a small scale so we did not make mistakes on a larger scale,” Davis said. “We’re very grateful for that.”⁵ Wiser and stronger for the extra prayer, consultancy, and small-batch experience, the agency is building momentum toward a fruitful future. H.I.M. has assessed, trained, and sent 14 missionaries thus far. Eight more are ready to be sent as of September 14, 2022.⁶

Global Mandate, Global Ownership

H.I.M. is a fresh example of the Great Transition of the locus of Christianity and Christian missionary sending from the West to the South and East.⁷ Agencies in Brazil, South Korea, and Nigeria, for example, have been sending missionaries for decades. 21st Century missionary sending patterns reflect the concurrent increased number of Majority World Christians and decreased number of Western Christians, with more missionaries sent out from the Majority World than Europe and America, and the sending dispar-

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ See endnote.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Jarod Davis, APAC AGS Report, September 2022.

⁷ Paul Borthwick, *Western Christians in Global Mission: What’s the Role of the North American Church?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 36-7. Here Borthwick describes and names the Great Transition.

ity increasing since 2007.⁸ This shift has prevailed against a Great Century template, prominent across the hemispheres, of the West as mission font and elsewhere as mission field. It took an act of God to mobilize the Western church in the 18th Century, and God has acted again to move the Majority World church to disciple the nations. Together, the church global is owning the Great Commission.

The IMB was founded midway through the Great Century⁹ and has facilitated missionary sending ever since. In 2009, responding to the Majority World's emerging prominence in missionary sending, the IMB began a focus on "internationalization," aspiring to mobilize and partner with multinational senders. By 2017, the organization was using the term "globalization" as shorthand for their now-robust effort to help globalize missions sending.

The Globalization Team, formed in 2019, helps national partners develop sustainable missions sending and support. Affinity Globalization Strategists and Missions Catalysts assist in the formation of national sending entities, mobilize missionaries, and match Global Missionary Partners (GMPs) to IMB teams. In 2020, the IMB set a strategic objective to mobilize 500 GMPs to serve on IMB teams by 2025. IMB President Paul Chitwood said, "There are 140 Baptist conventions and unions around the world that . . . are the fruit that remains from 175 years of work. We want to work with those partners and help them send their own missionaries. By strategically inviting and involving 500 global missionaries to work alongside IMB teams, we believe we can help push forward not only the task, but the globalization of the task."¹⁰

As 2020 began, momentum was building for missions globalization. Trainings, consultancies, and meetings were set to move GMPs and expand partner sending. Two were large-scale, involving leaders from Latin America and senders from all over the world, respectively. The IMB was to help form new sending agencies in five Majority World regions. 20 GMPs were set to deploy to IMB teams.

But COVID-19 spread rampant; officials closed borders and mandated quarantine. The IMB and its partners canceled gatherings. Along came a long,

⁸ Missio Nexus, "World (Protestant) Missionary Force" missiographic, 2018.

⁹ As the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, in 1845.

¹⁰ Myriah Snyder, "Global missionary partners vital to Revelation 7:9 vision," <https://www.imb.org/2021/07/08/global-missionary-partners-vital-revelation-79-vision/>, accessed June 2, 2022.

hard season. The Lord wielded the time and hardship to smith this century's new senders.

Covid as Crucible

While churches in the Majority World do send missionaries to open countries, most senders who partner with IMB focus on groups hostile to the gospel, where new life in Christ can come with a mortality gap—where missionaries must be strong and senders must hold the rope.

The pandemic was intense. The scope of trauma was something new. Nobody remembered living through a global crisis that so altered daily life. Its consequences formed a crucible the Lord used to strengthen his people. The testimonies of Majority World GMPs and senders reveal how God built their endurance, faith, and capacity to serve under duress. He bolstered qualities necessary for the marathon of mission work in hostile fields. The following stories detail how the Lord tempered senders and goers through Covid's fiery trials, forming them for further mission service.

Stronger Senders

Ecuador

Ecuadorian mission-sending agency Impacto Mundial, founded in 2009, is headquartered in Guayaquil—dubbed Latin America's Wuhan,¹¹ as the pandemic's severity there mirrored that of the city where COVID-19 originated.

Covid was more severe than anyone had expected. "Three days into the pandemic, Ecuador closed its borders, but it was too late," Impacto Mundial Founder Julieta Murillo recalled. "People started dying—family members, friends, friends' family members . . . and there was no money, not for oxygen, nor for medicine. People died for lack of resources to treat the disease. Corruption kept the treatment from people, too. There was overcharging and hoarding, making supplies inaccessible to many."¹²

¹¹ Maria Lola Moreno, Impacto Mundial, interview, mp4, video call, May 10, 2022. See also, Dominic Waghorn, "Coronavirus: How a city in Ecuador became 'Latin America's Wuhan,' Sky News, <https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-how-a-city-in-ecuador-became-latin-americas-wuhan-11981836>, accessed September 19, 2022.

¹² Julieta Murillo and Maria Moreno, Impacto Mundial, interview, mp4, video call, May 10, 2022.

Most GMPs and their supporters endured the pandemic in countries with limited medical infrastructure. They worried for loved ones, ministry partners, and themselves. Afraid for her immunologically vulnerable ministry partner and housemate, Murillo did the shopping, dressed in personal protective equipment. When Murillo's uncle died of Covid, his body remained in the house eight days instead of being buried within the customary 24 hours. The death toll was astonishing in Guayaquil that March and April. Murillo's father contracted Covid. In his neighborhood, Murillo recalls seeing "two or three cadavers on the street outside each house, three or four stacks of them per city block; traveling across town . . . 2,000 cadavers could be seen on the curbside awaiting pick-up. There was a line that wound 6 blocks long outside the cemetery. I felt a sense of panic!"¹³

Added to the trauma of death and illness, lockdown interfered with wage-earning. Financial security is elusive for many in the Majority World. Subsistence wage earners felt the impact of lockdown more than salaried people. Many members of the churches supporting mission agencies were not food-secure, much less financially secure during the pandemic. Households deprived of wage-earning opportunities translated into lost income for GMPs and their agencies. Half of the support Murillo and fellow-leader Maria Moreno receive comes from consistent donors, while the other half comes from speaking at churches, conferences, and trainings. When the pandemic paralyzed travel and gatherings, they had to cancel speaking engagements. They no longer had that means of raising support.¹⁴

Such was the crucible senders in Ecuador endured. Each of Impacto Mundial's five full-time and 18 bivocational staff suffered loss. Yet the Lord continued to provide for them and their families, and through them for others in the community.

Moreno saw the blessing of having nothing in terms of infrastructure, "Sounds weird, right? But the only thing we have is God. We survived because we don't have anything." Their building is loaned (they rent it for a dollar a year from a ministry colleague), and their projects run on faith. "It sounds foolish, but we begin our projects without a monetary estimate or budget—we just delve in. We start without money and the Lord provides. It

¹³ Julieta Murillo, Impacto Mundial, interview, mp4, video call, May 10, 2022.

¹⁴ Julieta Murillo and Maria Moreno, Impacto Mundial, interview, mp4, video call, May 10, 2022.

is his project after all. Our part is to get out of the boat and start walking, and the Lord calms the sea and makes it firm for us to walk on it.”¹⁵ So the agency did not worry about folding, and the Lord provided.

Moreover, the Lord strengthened Impacto Mundial throughout the pandemic by “the clear call of God upon us,” Moreno notes. Murillo pivoted from pandemic-related obstacles into alternate ministry, leading the organization to serve their “Jerusalem” when closed borders limited work abroad. Impacto Mundial partnered with outside agencies to supply oxygen tanks to Covid victims. The organization moved missionary trainings and meetings online. After the Lord healed Murillo of a two-month Covid bout, she would sing praise to the Lord, read the Bible, and pray for her neighbors out on the patio. After quarantine lifted, some neighbors asked if she was in the house where the sisters sang. She said yes. When they had had Covid—all ten in their house, they had followed her example and had prayed, praised the Lord, and read the Bible. Not one of them had died. “This gave me so much joy,” Murillo said; “To know my prayers had encouraged others to seek the Lord.”¹⁶ God kept Impacto Mundial in shape, sharing Christ in their community until the borders opened to send again. As of May 2022, Impacto Mundial has eight candidates fundraising to deploy to various mission fields.¹⁷

The Philippines

Filipino Baptist entities sponsored missionaries independently, but with the founding of One Sending Body (OSB) in 2008, they discovered that cooperation expands their capacity to send. Still, the system needed refining. The pain and sudden free time that came with the pandemic underscored the necessity of *koinonia* and provided time to shape that fellowship to sustain global missions.

Pain stemmed from illness, death, and sudden destitution as commerce stopped. “The degree of impact is different here than in the US,” OSB founding president Jimmy Fundar explained. “In the US I believe when somebody is hit by the virus, the government has support or at least other facilities, but

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

here in the Philippines, no. It is very hard for us.”¹⁸ Isolation was a particular hardship. “The church wanted to minister to those affected but we could not meet face to face, only leave groceries for them.”¹⁹

The impulse to be together fueled missions momentum as OSB opened online meetings, arranged for missionaries quarantined on the field, for anyone interested. Word spread. Church members participated in mission field “tours” and prayer. Enthusiasm grew. Viewers organized themselves to support missionaries. They established KALMA—the Member Care arm of OSB—and they assigned two “champions” to each missionary to encourage, pray, counsel, and generate funds among the churches for personal and ministry needs. This grassroots support system and enthusiastic missions focus (derivatives of a pandemic in the Master’s hand) strengthened missions sending in the Philippines.

APAC Globalization Catalyst Steve Hagen describes further developments:

In the course of the last two years the really exciting part has been a relaunching for them as far as working together. . . with a vision in mind of what they’re trying to accomplish—of actually sending out people who know what the missionary task is and getting them to the places that are needing missionaries. . . . I feel we are in a lot better place moving forward. It has slowed down our timeline of how many I would have said we’d already have in the field by now, but it feels like we’re going to be moving forward together now with a lot more buy-in. . . . There is a much higher level of recognition of what can be accomplished by working together as well as a Biblical goal, as opposed to just calling everything ‘mission.’²⁰

OSB led an Eight Steps Consultancy during their 5th National Congress for Global Missions, held in Koronadal City August 16-18, 2022, to equip attending churches to embrace their role in the Great Commission. In addition to

¹⁸ Jimmy Fundar and Precy Caronongan, OSB leaders, interview, mp4, video call, May 10, 2022.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Steve Hagen, IMB APAC Affinity Globalization Strategist, interview, mp4, video call, March 28, 2022.

hearing reports from current missionaries and meeting appointees about to go out, attendees witnessed 12 more Filipinos answer the call to missionary service.

Cuba

The church in Cuba understands long, hard seasons. They know God strengthens his people “for such a time as this” to declare his glory to the nations. Some 30 years ago, the Eastern and Western Baptist Conventions of Cuba began to experience church planting movements amidst outpoured prayer in the context of sociopolitical hardship. Now the Holy Spirit was moving Cuban Baptists to make disciples of the nations. Then came Covid, and lockdown, and another outpouring of Spirit-filled prayer.

“I would emphasize again that the greatest movement in Cuba is prayer,” Missions Catalyst Dirce Cooper said.²¹ “When the pandemic hit, they did what they have always done: pray. They expanded their prayer networks and continued to pray for the nations and their missionaries.”²²

[They] started new prayer groups for the missions movement, for the nations, via [social media platforms] that continue to this day,” Missions Catalyst Roy Cooper adds. “That’s the great thing . . . when God’s people are sensitive to what God is doing. Sometimes we see closed doors and really what may seem to be the biggest impediment to the work may be that God is just wanting to retool us or refocus us on what’s really important.”²³

Cubans did take the opportunity to retool. “Cubans are very proactive and excellent in contextualizing, and teach others what they learn. It was their idea to offer . . . training to the next group of candidates when everything stopped because of Covid. They met weekly [via social media] and even the bad connections did not stop them,” Dirce Cooper reported. “As a result, a second group has completed their cross-cultural training and is now going through the selection process.”²⁴

²¹ Roy and Dirce Cooper, IMB AMP Affinity Team Leaders and Missions Catalysts, interview, mp4, video call, May 2, 2022.

²² Dirce Cooper, text message, May 6, 2022.

²³ Roy and Dirce Cooper, IMB AMP Affinity Team Leaders and Missions Catalysts, interview, mp4, video call, May 2, 2022.

²⁴ Dirce Cooper, text message, May 6, 2022.

Within the last eight years, the two conventions officially formed their international missions agencies. The *Agencia de Misiones Mundiales ‘Cubanos a las Naciones’* of the *Convención Bautista de Cuba Occidental* has eight GMPs serving in Colombia and one in Africa; and the *Junta Cubana de Misiones Transculturales* of the *Convención Bautista de Cuba Oriental* has two GMPs serving in Mexico and two leaving soon for South Asia.²⁵

Stronger Sent Ones

Strong agencies sustain missionaries. But the reciprocal of that is true, too.

Persistence in Adversity Catalyzes Support

From 2006 on, a Mexican pastor emphasized missions education in his church through scripture study and ministry opportunities. There, Rose* was formed in ministry and called to missions. “We are a small church with just a hundred members, counting children. We are not rich people. . . . But God shared with us his will to see people go to all nations. . . . I am the first person that my church has sent overseas.”²⁶ In 2018, she served in the Middle East, but had to evacuate. Visa rejections complicated transfer to another team. A way opened to another field in 2020. But the pandemic and civil war delayed Rose and her team in the capital of their host country. Government forces overtook the compound where they were staying, confiscated their devices, accused them of working for the revolutionaries, and detained them under guard. Eventually, they were released. They made plans to leave for their field.

That very day, Rose tested positive for Covid and had to stay behind. She also received word that day that her brother-in-law had been murdered back home. Missions Catalyst Dirce Cooper offered to bring her back to Mexico, but she declined, saying God had called her to the field and, come what may, she was staying.²⁷ “Because I have been sent,” Rose testified, “it has impacted my church in different ways. First, my church has shared this vision with other churches across Latin America, so there are now ten churches who support me.”²⁸ Furthermore, church members increased their monthly giv-

²⁵ Roy Cooper, text message, September 19, 2022.

²⁶ GMP Rose (*name changed), “President’s Call” live report, April 29, 2021.

²⁷ Dirce Cooper, Missions Catalyst, interview, mp4, video call, May 2, 2022.

²⁸ Rose, President’s Call.

ing, cared for her widowed sister (who is not yet a believer), and the eldest generation in the church now gathers weekly to pray for Rose.²⁹

Strength through Consistent Engagement

Rita Kim,* a Korean TCK GMP raised in Taiwan, and her new teammate quickly became close in the weeks of missionary orientation. With much in common, they looked forward to serving together among a UPG. In response to the pandemic, though, their field country stopped granting visas. Kim needed no visa to enter, but the rest of her would-be team never got in. “It was very disappointing,” she admitted, “but God has his plans.”³⁰ She was enfolded into another team, but the team leaders and some other members were stuck in the US for months. She served her entire term without seeing her family.

Despite hardship and uncertainty, Kim did not alter what she would have done if there had been no pandemic. She walked strong in the Lord and fulfilled her call, engaging the lost with the Good News. Kim describes the daily outings of her two-year term, served in its entirety during the pandemic,

I walk in the street and talk to strangers . . . whoever is sitting by themselves, looking bored; and I’ll just sit down . . . Most of the time they are very welcoming, and they’ll talk to me. It is very easy to get into spiritual conversations, so that’s when I talk about Jesus and they listen. It’s an exchange conversation. They tell me what they believe, I tell them what I believe. . . . Ninety percent of the time, they’ll hear the whole Good News all the way through, fully.³¹

Kim’s team has seen several Muslims come to faith in Christ.³²

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Rita Kim (name changed), interview, mp4, video call, May 4, 2022.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Stronger Majority World Senders, Sustainable Engagement

The Lord strengthened the agencies and missionaries mentioned in this article through the extra time afforded to work through issues that hindered sustained missionary presence or rendered mission work ineffectual, and through a deeper communion with the Lord through corporate prayer and Scripture reading provoked by hinderances lockdown posed to missions sending, but moreover by upheaval and pain. Thus strengthened, Majority World senders press on.

As for Western sending agencies, they do not take for granted their own sustainability. Although their nations' affluence buffered Covid's consequences, should another trial by fire burn, will missions sending from the West be strengthened or incinerated?

Whether or not another disaster of pandemic proportions befalls within this century, already Majority World senders are drawing on their renewed strength in the Lord. With the pandemic not even over, Impacto Mundial navigated new threats in Guayaquil last May. "These days, people do not go out much for safety reasons," Moreno explained. First, due to the pandemic; now due to "increased violence from Mexican drug cartels that have moved into the area."³³ So the agency adapted, holding hybrid trainings to maintain their sending momentum.

The Lord strengthens his people through tough times to make his gospel known. To early Christians, the Roman Empire was disastrous, but the Lord moved the gospel along Roman roads to, among other places, Britain, where the Great Century later began.

On the heels of the pandemic, Russia declared war on Ukraine. The Missions Committee of the Baptist Union of Ukraine had 28 missionary units in 18 different countries. Six of the Baptist Union's seven seminaries had missions preparation programs with internships. Vitaliy Sorokun, Missions Committee Director since 2019, had built a sending structure and cast vision for support. He had hosted a pastors' forum in 2021 to show local churches how to partner with the Missions Committee, and Hal Cunnynggham had given them an overview of the 8 Steps. 85% of missions funding now came from

³³ Julieta Murillo and Maria Moreno, Impacto Mundial, interview, mp4, video call, May 10, 2022.

churches within Ukraine, and 100% national funding for nationally sent missionaries was attainable.³⁴

“February 24, 5 AM. . . with the first explosion, everything changed,” Sorokun said. “We immediately lost 100% of the finances that were coming from local churches. Now churches had to deal with devastation, humanitarian needs. We lost all support. Second, the churches immediately lost all interest in foreign missions;” their attention now riveted on lost homes, dead husbands and fathers, incoming missiles.³⁵

Ukrainian senders are in the crucible. Other afflictions will assail other senders. And God will hone his church to reach the lost. “Many people told me foreign missions is over,” Sorokun said. “But I told them the war changed our circumstances, but it did not change the character of God or the essence of the Great Commission. Our God is still the God over the nations, and he still calls his people to go on mission. King Jesus reigns; we will keep missions going.”³⁶

Endnotes:

The *Eight Steps of the Missions Continuum* consultancy is designed to help a pastor, church, or sending agency expand their capacity to fully embrace the Great Commission. The Eight Steps are as follows—The Mission Field: Defining the Missionary Task; The Local Pastor: Expanding the Vision of the Local Church; Church Mobilization; Local Ministry: Establishing Healthy Churches; Raising Up Missionaries; Planning for Cross-Cultural Missions; Selecting and Training Cross-Cultural Missionaries; Developing Partnerships. See Hal Cunyningham and Amanda Dimperio Davis, *Eight Steps of the Missions Continuum: Building a Bridge from the Church to the Mission Field* (Richmond: International Mission Board, 2022).

As of September 2022, IMB personnel have mobilized and received 66 GMPs onto IMB teams. Churches and agencies in Cuba, Taiwan, Korea, Mexico, Ecuador, Philippines, Kenya, and Brazil have sent GMPs to IMB teams. They are engaging unreached people groups in both open and closed countries.

³⁴ Vitaliy Sorokun, Director of the Missions Committee of the Baptist Union of Ukraine, telephone interview, September 21, 2022.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

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The Changing Landscape of Lostness:

Why Global Shifts are Driving the Need for New Engagement Indices

Jim Courson and Wilson S. Geisler IV, International Mission Board Global Research Department

The landscape of lostness is changing. Much has changed since the early 1800s when the Lord used William Carey to jumpstart the “modern missionary movement.”¹ Those who followed in Carey’s footsteps worked systematically for almost two centuries “to evangelize the nation or country to which they were sent.”² In the 1970s, Donald McGavran and Ralph Winter standardized the “concept of seeing the world as people groups,” instead of simply a collection of countries (nations), resulting in arguably “the most significant thought innovation in twentieth century missiology.”³ As Kevin

¹ Jerry Rankin, “The Present Situation in Missions,” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 41.

² *Ibid.*, 41.

³ Dave Datema, “Defining ‘Unreached’: A Short History,” in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 33, no. 2 (2016): 45.

Baggett and Randy Arnett rightly state, “the church owes a great debt to them for opening our eyes to lostness.”⁴ Recently, however, missiologists have begun questioning “the legitimacy of interpreting the Great Commission through the controlling lens of modern anthropology.”⁵ While some of this is due to exegetical differences, the core of this shifting landscape of lostness is globalization.

While current people group engagement scales have been helpful for assessing the status of people groups, a changing ethnolinguistic landscape driven by the modern realities of globalization and urbanization requires new criteria and engagement scales. Using missiological literature and International Mission Board (IMB) documents, this article will examine the current definitions and indicators for people group engagement and unreached status. It will also explore an overview of relevant Scripture and practical issues regarding engagement scales. After defining these concepts, the effects of globalization on the current definition of engagement will be examined. Finally, this article will set the stage for the introduction of new multi-indicator engagement scales, developed by IMB’s Global Research Department and field researchers to address this changing landscape of lostness.⁶

Current Engagement Definitions

Winter defined an unreached people group as “a people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize this people group without outside (cross-cultural) assistance.”⁷ He also categorized a people group as engaged if “work has begun on site or in specific ‘non-residential’ endeavor[s].”⁸ While Winter’s definition of unreached was qualitative, in the 1980s C. Peter Wagner and Ed Dayton added a quantitative

⁴ Kevin Baggett and Randy Arnett, “Redefining Global Lostness,” in *The Southern Baptist Journal of Missions and Evangelism (SBJME)*, vol. 2 (2016): 66.

⁵ Jarvis J. Williams and Trey Moss, “Focus on ‘All Nations’ as Integral Component of World Mission Strategy” in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues*, ed. Scott N. Callaham and Will Brooks, (Lexham Press, 2019), 131-132.

⁶ See “Status of the Task and State of the Church: IMB’s Multi-Indicator Engagement Scales for Peoples and Places” in *The Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions (GCBJM)*, Vol 1, Issue 2, Fall 2022.

⁷ Ralph Winter, “Unreached Peoples: What Are They and Where Are They?” in *Reaching the Unreached: The Old-New Challenge*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1984), 44.

⁸ Ralph Winter, “Unreached Peoples: Recent Developments in the Concept,” in *Mission Frontiers* (1989), <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/unreached-peoples>, accessed 10/10/2019.

20% threshold, based on E. M. Rogers' diffusion of innovation theory, "for the purposes of creating lists of unreached people groups."⁹ For a number of years, IMB followed the 20% threshold. In 1995, however, a committee of evangelical agencies, including IMB, decided on a threshold of "less than or equal to 2% Evangelical – AND – less than or equal to 5% Christian Adherent"¹⁰ for a people group to be categorized as unreached. While IMB initially agreed to this threshold, within five years, they adopted only "the 2% Evangelical criterion ... opting for a more exclusive view of salvation in terms of evangelical faith."¹¹

In 2018, IMB's *Foundations* document returned IMB to a definition more closely aligned with Winter's original definition but also combined Carey's geographical focus with the reintroduction of places. "Unreached peoples and places are those among whom Christ is largely unknown and the church is relatively insufficient to make Christ known in its broader population without outside help."¹² This was primarily in response to a feeling by some at IMB that the AD2000 and Beyond Movement definition "arbitrarily identifies ... the determinate between reached and unreached."¹³ Others share this concern noting "that it ends up including peoples at disparate ends of the spectrum: some that already have a strong Christian presence, and others that have almost no exposure to the gospel."¹⁴

The introduction of two additional categories, Unengaged Unreached People Groups (UUPGs) and Frontier People Groups, is an attempt by the larger missions community to alleviate some of this potential disparity. Many sending agencies define an Unengaged Unreached People Group as having "less than 2 percent evangelical" population and "no existing missionary efforts among them."¹⁵ IMB's definition is stricter, adding that a "people group is unengaged when there is no church planting strategy, consistent with Evangelical faith

⁹ Datema, "Defining 'Unreached,'" 51.

¹⁰ Ibid., 60.

¹¹ Ibid., 60.

¹² International Mission Board, *Foundations v.4: Core Missiological Concepts, Key Mission Terms, the Missionary Task* (IMB Press, 2022), 88. Available at <https://store.imb.org/imb-foundations/>.

¹³ Ibid., 88.

¹⁴ Kate Shellnut, "Why Missions Experts Are Redefining 'Unreached People Groups,'" in *Christianity Today*, (May 2019): 16.

¹⁵ Ibid., 16.

and practice, under implementation.”¹⁶ The Frontier People Group category does not consider engagement but is instead defined as a group with “no indigenous Christian movement of their own” and an evangelical population of “less than 0.1% evangelical.”¹⁷

Since August 2005, IMB has classified people and place data using a seven-point scale that combines the percentage of evangelicals within a people group, along with the group’s access to evangelical resources and reports of church planting. This seven-point scale is called the *Global Status of Evangelical Christianity* (GSEC).

People or places less than two percent evangelical are classified as unreached. People or places greater than or equal to two percent evangelical are classified as no longer unreached. This scale has been the basis of numerous maps and people group lists and has served the evangelical community well, spurring many individuals to pray, give, go, and send to the nations.¹⁸

In addition, since January 2014, IMB has implemented an additional classification of people and place data that combines unreached status with engagement status to form a three-point scale known as the Strategic Priority Index (SPI).

¹⁶ IMB’s Peoplegroups.org website, <https://peoplegroups.org/294.aspx>, accessed 09/14/2022

¹⁷ Shellnut, “Why Missions Experts Are Redefining ‘Unreached People Groups,’” 16.

¹⁸ For current people group lists and map resources built using these existing scales, see <https://peoplegroups.org/Understand.aspx>.

Value	Description
GSEC 0	No evangelical Christians or churches. No access to evangelical resources.
GSEC 1	Less than 2% evangelical. Some evangelical resources. No active church planting within past 2 years.
GSEC 2	Less than 2% evangelical. Initial (localized) church planting within past 2 years.
GSEC 3	Less than 2% evangelical. Widespread church planting within past 2 years.
GSEC 4	Greater than or equal to 2% evangelical.
GSEC 5	Greater than or equal to 5% evangelical.
GSEC 6	Greater than or equal to 10% evangelical.

Table 1 IMB's Global Status of Evangelical Christianity Scale

Value	Description
SPI 0	Unengaged and Unreached
SPI 1	Engaged yet Unreached
SPI 2	No Longer Unreached

Table 2 IMB's Strategic Priority Index

Practical and Scriptural Issues

While setting percentages to determine when people groups are reached is arbitrary, Dave Datema aptly states that although the criteria are “not perfect, wise handling of the lists, and the assumptions behind them, will prevent presumption and promote mature reflection on the overall health of any given people group.”¹⁹ As mission agencies grapple with the practical implications of the current percentage model, some like TMS Global have opted to only use the term “least reached,” stating that they “did not want to follow the path of getting so obsessed with definition and precision that it would negate other missions or cause people to be blind to other mission

¹⁹ Datema, “Defining ‘Unreached,’” 65.

opportunities.”²⁰ Others, like Finishing the Task (FTT), use IMB’s existing people group lists to build quantitative lists, set specific objectives, and seek to see church planting strategies implemented among these “144 Unengaged, Unreached People Groups, over 500 in population and still dwelling in their ancestral homeland.”²¹ Despite the weaknesses of an arbitrary model, quantitative lists of unreached people groups have helped many mission agencies track the evangelical progress of people groups and prioritize missionary efforts to those peoples.

In addition to the differences concerning the term *unreached*, there has been a surprising surge of individuals and groups advocating for a need to change the definition of people group, particularly the use of ethnolinguistically defined groups. Jarvis Williams and Trey Moss argue that the current people group model incorrectly “assumes a modern social-scientific definition for *ἔθνη* [(*ethne*)]”.²² They counter that “God’s promise... should motivate Christians to preach the gospel to all people without ethnic distinction.”²³ Baggett and Arnett, while also questioning the use of *ἔθνη* (*ethne*), argue that while the current people group definition should not be discarded, it should not be exclusive, especially “in an ever-changing world affected by globalization and urbanization.”²⁴ While these are valid points that address exegetical issues held by some at the edges of people group movements, they miss the intent of Donald McGavran’s original practical question, “How do Peoples become Christian?”²⁵ Codifying peoples is less about what should be than about what is. McGavran rightly observes that “People Movements have ... considerable advantages,” including “being naturally indigenous” and naturally “spontaneous.”²⁶ The furthest natural spread of the gospel is at the heart of what it means to categorize a people.

²⁰ Shellnut, “Why Missions Experts Are Redefining ‘Unreached People Groups,’” 17.

²¹ This is directly from the Finishing the Task website, which based on their current list holds that there are only 144 remaining unengaged and unreached people groups over 500 in population. Finishing the Task Website, <https://www.finishingthetask.com/about-finishing-the-task/people-group-list/>, accessed 06/10/2022.

²² Williams and Moss, “Focus on ‘All Nations’ as Integral Component of World Mission Strategy,” 131.

²³ Ibid., 147.

²⁴ For more on this view and alternatives to the GEL (Geo-political, Ethnolinguistic) taxonomy, see Kevin Baggett and Randy Arnett. “Redefining Global Lostness,” in *SBJME* vol. 2 (2016).

²⁵ Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (New York: Friendship Press, 1981), 1.

²⁶ McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, 88-89.

Scriptural Uses of Quantity and Quality

In response to those who argue against either quantitative or qualitative codification, it should be noted that Scripture is replete with examples of the importance of quantity as well as quality. While establishing the borders of Israel, God defined quantitative limits (Exod 23:31). God commanded Moses to take a quantitative census of Israel (Exod 30:11-16). God was willing to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if only ten righteous individuals could be found in the cities (Gen 18:16-33). Jesus also cares about the one as well as the ninety-nine (Luke 15:3-7). The Father knows the number of hairs on one's head (Matt 10:30).

In addition to quantity, God is also very much concerned with quality. The quality of each man's work for the Lord will one day be tested (1 Cor 3:11-15). The quality of a gentle and quiet spirit is precious in the sight of God (1 Peter 3:4). Jesus is concerned with the qualitative spiritual health of the individual (Matt 9:12-13). God makes judgments based on quality (Amos 5:21-24). Finally, Jesus expects the church to be qualitatively healthy (Rev 2:1-3:22). While this sampling of Scriptures is not exhaustive, the point is clear: there is no Scriptural mandate to avoid either quantitative or qualitative assessment. God is concerned with both for the sake of His people and His glory.

Practical Questions

Several practical questions arise when any quantitative schema is deeply examined. For example, many people groups have birth rates that exceed death rates and far exceed evangelical growth rates. In such cases, it is conceivable, under the current two percent criteria, for a group to be reached one day and unreached the next. Similarly, given the conflict over the lists of *ἔθνη* (*ethne*), especially in complex areas such as India, when an agency engages the last people group on their list, is that really the final *ἔθνη* (*ethne*) to be engaged or reached? No one knows the day or the hour (Mark 13:32), so engaging the last UUPG on a list does not necessarily mean Christ will return that day. Winter was right when he wrote "we must not lightly assume that our human, current definitions of completion are exactly what God has in mind."²⁷

In addition, the current definition of engagement, that a worker be on site implementing a church planting strategy, raises practical questions. In May 2019, Christianity Today raised concerns "about whether a single worker is

²⁷ Winter, "Unreached Peoples: Recent Developments in the Concept," 10.

enough to consider a group engaged and take it off the list.”²⁸ What if the worker leaves before any work begins? If the group was marked engaged, will it again be marked unengaged? Even if the worker remains for a while, what if no disciples are made before the worker leaves or dies?

Datema correctly challenges missiologists to “recognize that different percentages will motivate different ministries for different purposes.”²⁹ In many ways, one might argue that both the quantitative pragmatists and the qualitative idealists are right. One might also similarly build a case that Carey was right in his time for his focus on places, while Winter and McGavran were right in their push for peoples. In many ways, Carey was the father of Winter and McGavran, as “quantification, prioritization, and demographics were first applied to missions by William Carey.”³⁰

Scales of quantity are needed to track progress toward making disciples, while scales of quality are equally needed to track the health of those disciples in the context of local church health. In a rapidly globalizing world, scales may be required for both places and peoples. For example, should missionaries *only* use prayer as their guide for where to go and whom to reach in missions? Can agencies know when to move on to other people groups if they only use qualitative indicators, such as “least reached”? Without some quantitative measures can a mission agency or missionary even set goals? To buy groceries to make lasagna, one must have some form of a list. The alternative, to walk the entire store and purchase items based only on their perceived quality and not their compatibility with the food known as lasagna, might give one a cart full of good-looking groceries, but it will not make the desired meal. Can the mission community make its quantitative lists while simultaneously working to produce quality disciples in whichever spheres the Lord places them? Such questions should be at the heart of the discussion, especially in a world of globalization.

²⁸ Shellnut, “Why Missions Experts Are Redefining ‘Unreached People Groups’,” 16.

²⁹ Datema, “Defining ‘Unreached’,” 65.

³⁰ Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen and Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), Loc. 116, Kindle.

The Impact of Globalization on the Current Definitions and Scales

Unlike engagement scales, the globalization phenomena and its impact on missions are undisputed. McGavran foresaw the rising impact of globalization when he insightfully wrote, “the world is in a period of cataclysmic change. During this period the shape of things to come is being steadily determined through the interplay of colossal forces.”³¹ Richard Lewis states, while “the globalization and integration of world commerce is ... difficult and complex, a process that will take decades,” cultural meshing “will be immeasurably more complicated.”³² That said, this article will now examine migration and urbanization, two of the many factors playing into globalization, in reference to their impact on engagement scales.

Immigration and Emigration

As Darrell Whiteman rightly states, globalization has “become a reality the church can no longer ignore.”³³ While it is true that “globalization has developed over centuries as people have engaged in trade, conquest, and religious expansion,” recent “widespread and rapid migrations have the potential to make geographical and nation-state issues seem almost irrelevant.”³⁴ Air travel and the ease by which peoples immigrate and emigrate have changed the world. Whiteman argues that the “world, with its compression of time and space, new categories of thought, and rapid culture change ...,” has “made it more obvious that cultures are changing and that culture itself ...” is no longer “the neat package for analysis that we often assumed.”³⁵

Immigration and emigration, however, are opening doors for the gospel. “Migration,” states Michael Pocock, “brings non-Christians into areas more

³¹ McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, 3.

³² Richard Lewis, *The Cultural Imperative: Global Trends in the 21st Century* (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 2003), 229.

³³ Darrell L. Whiteman, “Anthropological Reflections on Contextualizing Theology in a Globalizing World,” in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 53.

³⁴ Pocock, Rheenen and McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions*, Loc. 320-333, Kindle.

³⁵ Whiteman, “Anthropological Reflections on Contextualizing Theology in a Globalizing World,” 53.

strongly Christian and more open to evangelism and religious change.”³⁶ Of course, the opposite is true as well, with Christians migrating to traditionally non-Christian areas. Both provide tremendous opportunities for mission agencies.

Any scale of engagement must wrestle with the realities of migration. Will the gospel flow through migrated peoples scattered across the globe? How strongly do migrated peoples adopt their new culture? Will social media allow migrated peoples to live in one place yet maintain community in another? If an evangelical people group migrates to another location in large numbers, will the indigenous groups hear the gospel if the new total evangelical percentage removes them from a mission agency’s list? Large-scale immigration and emigration mean questions like these must be realistically examined.

Urbanization

Urbanization is another major factor in the changing face of evangelical engagement. Urbanization is “a complex socio-economic process that transforms the built environment” and shifts cultural identity.³⁷ The United Nations projects that “by 2050, the world will be more than two-thirds urban (68 percent), roughly the reverse of the global rural-urban population distribution of the mid-twentieth century.”³⁸ Rankin rightly assesses that “mission strategies have struggled to cope with world metropolises.”³⁹ He writes, “these cities are not monolithic but rather a maze of self-contained, ethnically distinct communities and diverse social and economic strata that defy any homogeneous approaches to evangelization.”⁴⁰

Borrowing from French sociologist Michel Maffesoli, Arnett and Baggett argue that urban identity is often shaped more by shared interests and lifestyle preferences than by ethnicity, language, or geographical homeland. These emerging “urban tribes” are cosmopolitan amalgamations of people groups

³⁶ Pocock, Rheenen and McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions*, Loc. 346, Kindle.

³⁷ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. *World Urbanization Prospects 2018: Highlights* (ST/ESA/SER.A/421), 2019, <https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-Highlights.pdf>, accessed 11/21/2019, iii.

³⁸ United Nations, *World Urbanization Prospects 2018*, 5.

³⁹ Rankin, “The Present Situation in Missions,” 33.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

spanning the spectrum from unreached to no longer unreached.⁴¹ Given these complexities, when would urban centers be considered engaged or reached? In a city of twenty-five million with no Christian presence, the addition of a single missionary unit running a church planting strategy could hardly be considered engagement. Engaging one people group or segment of complex urban society should not inherently signal a mission agency to shift its focus to another urban area. Urbanization mandates a blending of Carey's and McGavran's thinking and a melding of peoples and places. As such, missiologists need better engagement scales suited to the blending of both realities.

Conclusion

In the increasingly mixed and muddy world of social, ethnic, and urban complexity, global researchers and missiologists must move beyond simple quantitative thresholds and binary toggles. Fortunately, amid this increasing complexity, the Lord has provided technology and tools to His church to begin to assess and track where the gospel and the church are not making inroads and which people groups are truly unreached. IMB's Global Research Department has developed multi-indicator engagement scales designed to function from hundreds of millions of global data points and Great Commission activities and reveal the extent of gospel flow. These new scales are introduced and explained in the article entitled, "Status of the Task and State of the Church: IMB's Multi-Indicator Engagement Scales for Peoples and Places."

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⁴¹ Baggett and Arnett, "Redefining Global Lostness," 81.

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Status of the Task and State of the Church:

IMB's Multi-Indicator Engagement Scales for Peoples and Places

Jim Courson and Wilson S. Geisler IV, International Mission Board Global Research Department

The article “The Changing Landscape of Lostness: Why Global Shifts are Driving the Need for New Engagement Indices”¹ highlights some of the ways that globalization is prompting missiologists to rethink traditional understandings of engagement. Immigration and urbanization, two key drivers of globalization, continually spur questions about how lostness should be measured among peoples and in places where the traditional ethnolinguistic understanding of *ἔθνη* (*ethne*) is blurred. IMB researchers grapple regularly with these issues and recognize the limitations of current indices.² To address the limitations expressed in the companion article, a team of IMB researchers has worked to craft new and more accurate indices and metrics for determin-

¹ Jim Courson and Wilson S. Geisler IV, “The Changing Landscape of Lostness: Why Global Shifts are Driving the Need for New Engagement Indices” in *Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions* (GCBJM), Vol 1, Issue 2, Fall 2022.

² See Courson and Geisler IV “The Changing Landscape of Lostness” to gain a sense of this grappling.

ing engagement and measuring progress in the missionary task.³ The results of their labor are two new multi-indicator scales, the Status of the Missionary Task and the State of the Church, designed to work in tandem to more reliably assess lostness (where the gospel and the church are not present). First, the two indicator scales will be presented separately. Then, the usefulness of combining these two scales will be shown along with concrete and practical examples.

IMB's New Scales

One must acknowledge that regardless of what an engagement scale reveals, the mission agency must prayerfully ask God where He wants missionaries. Holy Spirit prompting always trumps statistics. In our estimation engagement scales must meet four criteria. First, they must be realistic, accurate, and not merely subjective. Second, they must be practical and useful for prayerful decision making about where to send missionaries to make disciples and plant churches. Third, they must allow for tracking of progress along the scales. And finally, their data must be sourced from and validated by the larger evangelical missions community. With these criteria in mind, IMB researchers have developed and are currently implementing two new multi-indicator engagement scales.

Indicator Scale 1: The Status of the Missionary Task

IMB's *Foundations* defines the six components of the missionary task as entry, evangelism, discipleship, healthy church formation, leadership development, and exit to partnership.⁴ These six components arose from study of Scripture and had been widely used in the IMB and throughout missions history, sometimes with varying terminology, long before the publication of *Foundations*. IMB's Status of the Missionary Task (mTask) indicator is a mixed-method scale based on both the quality and quantity of activities reported within each of the six components of the missionary task with ref-

³ The authors would like to thank several additional contributors. Field researchers Nicholas Eardley*, Debbie Porter, Samuel Smallwood*, and James Sullivan* assisted with finalizing and readying these scales for publication and wide-spread use. In addition, the authors thank and acknowledge all the IMB researchers who have contributed over the past decade to the development of these much-needed scales. *Names changed for security.

⁴ For detailed definitions and descriptions of the six components of the missionary task, see International Mission Board, *Foundations v.4* (2022), 93-121. Available at <https://store.imb.org/imb-foundations/>

erence to when the most recent activities within a given component took place. The Status of the Missionary Task Indicator Scale is presented in Table 3.

Table 1 IMB's Status of the Missionary Task Indicator Scale

Value	Description
mTask 0	No Known Missionary Activity Ongoing
mTask 1	Reported Entry Activities Ongoing
mTask 2	Reported Evangelism Activities Ongoing
mTask 3	Reported Discipleship Activities Ongoing
mTask 4	Reported Church Formation Activities (including Health Indicators) Ongoing
mTask 5	Reported Leadership Development Activities Ongoing
mTask 6	Reported Self-Engagement in Any of the Other Components Ongoing

A strength of this indicator scale is that it can be applied not only to individual people groups but also to places, religions, languages, segments, and any possible social or geographical combination. Also, because the data collection method includes qualitative as well as quantitative data, researchers and strategists will be able to make better evaluations of the true health of disciples and churches among the peoples and places of the world. This scale carries with it the potential to tabulate the quantity of each activity type over time, as well as the number of separate individuals involved in each of the activity totals being reported. For example, mTask 2 activity data might report that over the course of a month thirteen individuals on three different teams shared the gospel with seventy-one members of an unreached people group in a single village with fourteen people praying to receive Christ, thirty-three indicating an openness to hear more, and twenty-four indicating no interest. Missiologists and researchers will be able to calculate from this granular detail much more than simply that the gospel was shared seventy-one times.

Indicator Scale 2: The State of the Church

The State of the Church scale is a quantitative indicator scale that can be applied to individual people groups, places, languages, religions, segments, or any other social or geographic grouping. IMB's *Foundations* document speaks to the state of any local church in terms of its relative sufficiency to make Christ known among its broader population without requiring outside

help.⁵ A quantitative-only scale will never adequately be able to provide a complete picture of the state of the church. Therefore, this indicator will not be comprehensive unto itself but will instead provide an indispensable piece of the overall combined picture of engagement and local indigenous church health, especially when combined with the qualitative and quantitative data reported in mTask 4 through the Status of the Missionary Task scale. IMB's State of the Church Indicator Scale is presented in Table 2.

Value	Description
SOC 0	No Known Evangelical Believers and No Evangelical Church
SOC 1	Reported Evangelical Believers but No Evangelical Church
SOC 2	Reported Evangelical Believers and a Single Evangelical Church
SOC 3	Reported Evangelical Believers and Limited Evangelical Church Saturation
SOC 4	Reported Evangelical Believers and Moderate Evangelical Church Saturation
SOC 5	Reported Evangelical Believers and Extensive Evangelical Church Saturation

Table 2 IMB's State of the Church Indicator Scale

Where there are no known believers or churches among a people or place, Christ will be largely unknown. A few evangelicals present among a people group with no local church or a single local church are typically insufficient to make Christ known among the broader population without outside help. Limited, moderate, and extensive evangelical church saturation, however, requires explanation.

Church saturation is determined by a church-to-population ratio. Thresholds and definitions for limited, moderate, and extensive church saturation as currently defined by IMB's Global Research Department are presented in Table 3.

⁵ IMB, *Foundations* v.4, 88.

Value	Threshold as % of Population	Description
Limited	# of churches is less than 0.001% of population (rounded up)	Probably insufficient to make Christ known among the broader population.
Moderate	# of churches is greater than 0.001% and less than 0.01% of population (rounded up)	Possibly sufficient to make Christ known among the broader population.
Extensive	# of churches is greater than 0.01% of population (rounded up)	Probably sufficient to make Christ known among the broader population.

Table 3 IMB's Saturation Scale Relative to Population Evaluated

Using these percentages, limited church saturation is less than one church per one hundred thousand people. Extensive church saturation is more than one church for every ten thousand people. Moderate church saturation is anything between those two ranges. A church saturation scale like this allows for easy differentiation between metrics relative to population, such as the difference between ten churches among a people group of ten thousand (Moderate Saturation on this scale) versus ten churches among a people group of ten million (Limited Saturation on this scale).

Defining saturation in this way allows the State of the Church scale to remain relevant regardless of the population of the group or segment being examined. As additional data begins to flow into this scale, if the church-to-population ratios that set the saturation level require adjustment, such adjustments would be done carefully and with full disclosure to the research community so that people and place lists built on this scale could be compared over time. While the State of the Church indicator scale is primarily quantitative, when combined with the Status of the Missionary Task scale, the results become extremely helpful in determining the true status of engagement worldwide.

Bringing It Together: IMB's Multi-Indicator Engagement Scales

Before moving into examples of the combined scale, a brief reminder of the overall objectives is in order. In the changing global landscape, any combined scale that hopes to help decision-makers prioritize peoples and places needing the gospel and church planting must do the following:

1. Be accurate and applicable for people groups, places, religions, languages, dialects, segments, or any combinations of these.

2. Be able to handle issues of globalization and urbanization, allowing for a variety of people groups and segments to be assessed in both concentrated and scattered places.
3. Be based not only on arbitrary percentages but be relevant amid changing global dynamics.
4. Be based on both quantitative assessments and qualitative indicators of Kingdom growth and church and disciple health.
5. Be able to update in real or near-real time with data flowing in from various sources.
6. Allow for the tracking of combinations of people and places where the gospel is understood and accepted and where the gospel is not penetrating.
7. Provide clarity to the terms “Least Reached,” “Unreached,” and “Unengaged.”
8. Provide a framework that allows for the quantitative and qualitative tracking of progress and metrics showing when missionaries might exit to partnership in a healthy way.

Armed with a basic understanding of the Status of the Task and the State of the Church scales, practical examples will now be provided for additional clarity. These examples will fall into two broad categories. First, examples of using these scales to refine and clarify the terms “Unreached,” “Least Reached,” and “Unengaged,” will be given. Then a few examples of using these scales to assess engagement and progress in the six components of the missionary task will be provided.

Examples of Providing Clarity to Definitions

Since 1995, IMB has classified a people group as “Unreached” if less than two percent of the population is evangelical. The presence or absence of church was not considered. Because the State of the Church scale looks both at evangelical presence and evangelical church presence, it can assist in improving the clarity of this definition. Under the current definition, a people group that is more than two percent evangelical but has no evangelical church would falsely be considered no longer unreached. Using the State of the Church scale, that same people group would be classified as SOC 1 and would then be considered unreached. While this change in definition will initially increase

the number of unreached people groups in IMB's list, it will provide a more accurate assessment of which people groups are "Unreached."

The term "Least Reached" is used in numerous ways by different organizations. Some use the term interchangeably with "Unreached."⁶ Others define it as a subset of "Unreached" based on lack of access to a church.⁷ IMB researchers envision combining the mTask and SOC scales to provide objective measures by which "Least Reached" could be broken out as a subset of "Unreached." Those who are truly "Least Reached" would be those peoples among whom there are no evangelical churches and/or believers (SOC 0 or 1) and among whom there is no gospel witness (mTask 2) activity reported since a given date. Rather than "Least Reached" being based only on more nebulous qualitative indicators, it would be based on a consistent set of mixed-method scales that would allow for tracking progress toward being "more reached."

IMB currently defines engagement as the implementation of a church planting strategy, though *implementation* and *strategy* can both be subject to various interpretations. Moving forward, actual activities from various individuals or mission agencies would update and populate the mTask scale and would then help determine engagement. A people group with no reported mTask activity (mTask 0), or only mTask 1 activity, would be unengaged. Reports of mTask 2 or higher activities would indicate possible engagement. Real-time activities reported over an extended period, from single or multiple sources covering a range of mTask components, would allow researchers to craft a more reliable list of which people groups and places are truly "Unengaged".

Examples of Evaluating Progress in the Missionary Task

First is an example of using the two scales to help discover where the Holy Spirit seems to be causing Kingdom growth. In this case, a list of people groups could be identified within a certain time range, such as three to five years, where there is moderate or better saturation of mTask activities of scale 3 to 5 (discipleship, church formation, and leadership development), and where SOC has grown from level 2 to 3 (from a single church to limited church saturation). This would provide a list of peoples and places where God is clearly at work building His Kingdom and where additional resources

⁶ See "Definitions." Joshua Project website, <https://joshuaproject.net/help/definitions>, accessed 09/16/2022

⁷ See "Frequently Asked Questions About the Least-Reached." Christar website, <https://www.christar.org/leastreached-faq>, accessed 09/16/2022

might be needed to join God at work, expanding the potential for Kingdom harvest.

Second is an example of using these scales to evaluate church multiplication progress and health. A list of people groups could be identified which, over a particular time, have had moderate or better saturation of mTask activities of scale 4 (Church Formation including qualitative health indicators) coupled with progress along the SOC scale. The qualitative and quantitative data behind those mTask activities indicating the health of the churches, their ages, and their church planting generations could be evaluated to determine if, as in the first example, the Holy Spirit is causing healthy generational growth of churches over any given time period and past a particular generation. Because the scale works for combinations, even church planting that is happening among multiple people groups could be evaluated by limiting data to a particular spoken language, place, or segment. The ability to gain insight into where God appears to be at work in the world is a strength of these multi-indicator scales.

The third is an example of using the scales in comprehensive urban church planting strategies. As discussed previously, globalization and urbanization have complicated the people group discussion, making it more difficult to identify where people are located and to track the spread of the gospel. Previous data collection systems focused primarily on people within a country, providing limited capacity to gauge the status of work among multiple people groups in a limited geographic area. New systems that record precise geolocations for mTask activities can assist urban missionaries in strategically evaluating their cities in multiple ways. Consider a city like London. As activities based on combinations of unique people names, languages, religions, and segments begin to be entered into a system based on these scales, the urban team would be able to evaluate, both separately and together, the city and its segments. For example, the British population in London may have a moderate saturation of mTask scale level 6 activities (indigenous British are engaging their own people), and an SOC scale of level 4 (moderate church presence to population). However, the Syrian Arab population in London may have a limited saturation of mTask scale levels 1 and 2 (entry and evangelism) and an SOC scale of 1 (some believers and no churches). Such a view into each combination will provide local teams with scales based on data that can inform prayer into where and with whom God wants them to engage. Because these scales can be calculated for each combination that has been identified within a city boundary, both peoples who need attention and

those who could be equipped to give other groups attention can be identified. In addition, an overall city mTask and SOC scale can be calculated behind the scenes for all people group combinations weighted by their populations to allow mission leadership to evaluate strategic cities across a country or region.

Fourth is an example of using the scales to track the potential for healthy missionary exit to partnership among a people or place. When a particular people group is, over a sustained period, continuing to regularly trigger mTask 6 activities on the mTask scale and the State of the Church is SOC 3 or above, it could be an indicator to begin a deeper evaluation of the state of the work among that people group. The mTask scale could then be applied specifically to the work being done by members of this people group, both within their own people group and cross-culturally. Current systems provide only a check box to report engagement. Data collection systems that support these new scales will be able to gather the details necessary to evaluate exit to partnership in a considerably healthier way based on tangible data.

As seen in these examples, IMB's multi-indicator engagement scales encourage a more complete and accurate evaluation of the status of missionary work among any combination of people, place, language, religion, or segment. While these scales should help mission agencies quickly and accurately determine where the missionary task is progressing well and where it is not progressing well, they are heavily dependent on real-time data.

Current and Future Implementations

Upcoming software tools and systems that gather activity metrics in near real-time are being built to support these multi-indicator scales. Everyone using the software, from front-line mission workers and individual believers to mission agencies, will be able to examine their own work in detail using the scales, while also viewing high-level aggregated results in near-real time that inform the status of the task and the state of the church. As more users enter data, they not only help evaluate their own work using these scales, but they also benefit the larger evangelical community with better and more complete global data. Better informed metrics will change the way evangelical agencies view the world, as myriad combinations of peoples, places, languages, religions, and segments can be evaluated in terms of their need for the gospel, discipleship, churches, or any other Kingdom work.

Conclusion

Datema rightly calls the people group scale debates “messy-ology” and surmises, “field realities are messy and don’t translate easily into mobilization slogans without significant loss.”⁸ While this is true, the complexities of the globalized world and the realities of the urgency of lostness demand solutions. Simple and practical qualitative and quantitative metrics are needed to adequately categorize lostness. Engagement scales must be simple enough that the global evangelical community can easily adopt and integrate them into reporting systems while remaining practical enough to spur urgency and influence the church and the mission agency to mobilize. It is our hope that the scales described in this article, along with IMB’s implementation of these scales in cooperation with the evangelical community over the next few years, will move the Great Commission community to greater faithfulness and fruitfulness in the days ahead. May the Lord grant us wisdom as we seek to take His Gospel to the ends of the earth!

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⁸ Dave Datema, “Defining ‘Unreached’: A Short History,” in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 33, no. 2(2016): 65.

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Grappling with the Impact of Covid on Missionary Life and Practice

Ingrid Woodbridge

The InterCity Express from Hamburg pulled into the Munich train station, coming to a complete stop on the dead-end tracks. The engine would be detached from the passenger cars, and another engine attached to the opposite end to pull the train out of the station again and continue the journey. Experiencing COVID-19 in Europe was like riding the train from Hamburg to Munich.

At the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, missionaries felt as if the church ministry train had pulled into a dead-end station. Some, for a variety of reasons, returned to the United States, while others just stayed put under lockdowns due to government regulations. Some ventured out but could not travel. My husband and I moved to Germany in the second year of the pandemic, and we currently serve at *Bibelseminar Bonn*. Despite the challenges, field workers saw God at work during the pandemic. Nevertheless, it is important to reflect on the difficulties COVID brought to the missionary—and then suggest some ideas for engaging post COVID. This article will examine some of the difficulties in the areas of living overseas and working in the church, and will also look at some of the family struggles experienced by missionaries. In conclusion, it will address suggestions for moving forward post COVID.

Living overseas is stressful and COVID and the ensuing regulations augmented this stress. In Europe, COVID was first announced in Milan, Italy. The reports of severe symptoms and deaths and the insufficiency of the medical system spread fear and anxiety. As the trauma and the tragedy of COVID raged in Italy, other nations closed their borders and secured medical masks and ventilators. But these steps were seemingly not enough, and governments implemented more severe measures.

Entire nations were deprived of close contact. In many of the countries where missionaries serve, they not only experienced this separation, but also witnessed it among their friends and partners. Nursing home visits were not allowed. Delayed funerals hindered grieving and closure. Restrictions were implemented on shopping, playing team sports, or simply getting together as a group of like-minded people. Huge fines were imposed for violations of these rules. The stay-at-home orders felt like house arrest that restricted people's freedom and changed the dynamics of families and societies. The topic of lockdowns still shakes some people's emotional stability because the experience was so difficult. All over Europe, member care consultants heard the repeated phrase, "But then came COVID!"

During the two plus years of the COVID pandemic in Europe, delayed medical treatment was the norm as many procedures were declared non-essential. Missionaries and their friends were also impacted by this reality. Diagnoses were delayed and this too caused stress.

Mask mandates were enforced in most places. Vaccinations were greatly encouraged, with much pressure from governments and private organizations. Tests and vaccines were slow to come to many countries, and in some places in Europe with past histories of tainted vaccines, there was extreme reluctance to be vaccinated. In many countries vaccinations were required and those not vaccinated were discriminated against. Intense discussions about vaccines sadly divided households, families, and churches.

Powerful economies shut down due to COVID, and general economic hardships befell ministry partners in country.¹ People still talk about the hard-

¹ For example, church planters in Boston closed their coffee house business, which was their ministry platform and their meeting room for Sunday services.

ships, panic, poverty, food banks, unemployment, and closed businesses. COVID caused stress for people on all levels.²

Many conspiracy theories were passed around. Scandals of government leaders making rules but not keeping them were reported in the news. Demonstrations and vandalism occurred in some countries. Unfortunately, domestic violence and abuse increased.³ In the German dictionary, new words for the COVID situation were added.⁴ In English, missionary conversations were cluttered with new buzz words and phrases such as *social distancing*, *Zoom*, and *you're muted*.

Missionaries reported that their language competency declined because they could not practice with locals or even meet for language lessons. Online language learning, available in some areas, was great, but was not a substitute for personal interaction with native speakers. Some workers found time to focus on other areas of language learning, namely reading and listening.

Language acquisition was not the only area that suffered. Some missionaries experienced physical health issues as well. Some missionaries contracted the virus, others watched as their friends became ill. Others had pre-existing health problems and contracted COVID, some even several times. Some are still suffering long-term effects. The fear of either being contagious or getting the virus from others became a driving force in behavior in the places where missionaries serve and among the people to whom they minister.

Missionaries experienced the effects of COVID like everyone else. COVID impacted ministry partners, caused stress, fueled arguments about regulations, masks, and vaccines, and led to discouragement and sometimes even depression. Not only did COVID impact the living conditions of missionaries, but it also impacted ministry in the local church.

² Joshua Knabb, Moving From Stress to Gratitude in the Covid-19 Era by Meditating on the Psalms, Jan 06, 2021 Blog: <https://www.aacc.net/2021/01/06/moving-from-stress-to-gratitude/> Accessed September 15, 2022.

³ News European Parliament, New Eurobarometer survey highlights severe impact of COVID-19 pandemic on women, March 04, 2022, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20220223IPR23904/new-eurobarometer-survey-highlights-severe-impact-of-COVID-19-pandemic-on-women>, Accessed September 15, 2022.

⁴ Peter Breslow and James Doubek, Pandemic Inspires More Than 1,200 New German Words, March 6, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/06/974179580/pandemic-inspires-more-than-1-200-new-german-words>, Accessed September 15, 2022.

Some of our workers in Europe observed a decline in church attendance. Programs, meetings, activities, and outreach were forbidden in many places. Church gatherings stopped suddenly, ministry came to a standstill, and fellowship with the family of faith was detached from the work. Assemblies were threatened with fines if they met. Some churches were more technologically ready than others to provide online streaming of worship services. The common consensus among the missionaries in Europe is that they lost people during the pandemic.

The mandatory lockdowns encouraged isolation and separation from families of faith. Many people became passive, sofa-surfing church members who stayed in their seats at home. There was no visiting one another in homes, no small groups sharing life and attending Bible studies. Everybody stayed in their own world, managed their household and home office, and tried to stay sane. While some people were able to meet online, they recognized that online was not the same as meeting in person or worshipping together in a central location.

During the lockdowns, ministry projects were put on hold. Often local partners were disillusioned with the lack of progress and abandoned projects such as church planting. Mission teams from the United States, focused on helping churches with evangelism, were cancelled. Missionaries could not receive the teams due to COVID regulations.

Technology became a challenge that some workers mastered, and others did not. Zoom lessons, meetings, and conferences became the new normal—so much so, that the term *screen fatigue* is now a recognized diagnosis.⁵ For missionaries, the effort made by organizational leadership to stay connected and to encourage personnel was, at times, a bit overwhelming. Who hasn't muttered in desperation, "Please, not another online meeting!"?

Clearly, COVID created challenges for the local church. Missionaries had to transition to online services, handle disappointments with cancelled church planting projects, and work without the support of mission teams. While there were difficulties with the local ministry, there were also difficulties in the missionaries' own families.

⁵ Nicole Lee, Why is video conferencing so exhausting? April 27, 2020, <https://www.engadget.com/online-conferencing-video-chat-fatigue-172357939.html>, Accessed September 8, 2022.

Missionary families experienced similar effects from COVID as national partners. The normal routines of sharing life with friends were suddenly deemed unsafe due to COVID concerns. Even parks and playgrounds—great meeting places under normal circumstances—were closed off with police tape. At the height of the lockdowns in Germany, only one person from per household could visit another family. In other countries, even this type of contact was not allowed.

Missionaries are living in small apartments in Europe, and they were definitely close together. The lockdowns and social restrictions caused tensions. Individuals, couples, and families grew tired of being at home, but they had no other options. If workers visited friends, the government would fine them. Especially affected in such a crisis were the children, the elderly, and the missionaries whose ministry depended on personal contact.

Being at home had consequences for the mental health of parents and children.⁶ Teenagers in Central Asia spent months indoors because of lockdown restrictions. Mothers of teenagers reported that young teens ages twelve to fourteen were greatly affected by the lockdowns.⁷ Prolonged isolation from their friends was not only painful, but also developmentally damaging.

In Germany, where homeschooling is not allowed, public teachers told parents, “You don’t qualify to teach your children.” So, children were instructed by their teachers on screens for four to five hours a day, even at the elementary school level.

Parents all over Europe observed that their children were easily distracted and often interrupted during their online classes. In the course of two years, many students lost the equivalent of at least one academic year. Parents shared that the motivation to study declined greatly. Why? The student was home, isolated from friends, and Mom and Dad were often their teachers. Children’s separation from their friends caused everybody to be stressed. Many families adopted a pet as a playmate.

Parents recognize that development of social skills has been delayed and already-anxious children are now very anxious. COVID made uncertainties more apparent, and the lack of structure (e.g., in a regular school day) in-

⁶ American Association of Christian Counselors, Resource Guide for COVID-19, January 10, 2021, <https://www.aacc.net/2021/05/02/resource-guide-for-COVID-19/> Accessed September 1, 2022.

⁷ Personal communications with the author.

creased anxiety in highly empathetic children. Mask requirements in most school settings decreased the students' abilities to read facial social clues, to smile at each other in appreciation or encouragement, and to be free and not anxious.⁸ Important school traditions and rites of passage also fell victim to the pandemic. Proms and senior trips were cancelled. Graduating seniors did so in absentia. In our family, our high school senior and our college graduate received their diplomas during on-screen ceremonies.

Mothers and fathers had to work from home while their kids ran in and out of their workspaces, trying to release pent-up energy. The race for the device was on as students of all ages were expected to attend online classes at the same time their parents needed the computers and laptops for work. The home office became a place of challenge and chaos. Balancing the demands of work and home was challenging, as everything happened at home. Moms had no time for themselves; the only way to get time alone, it seems, was to schedule a medical appointment!

While missionaries struggled, they also adapted to the new reality. For example, creativity was expressed in creating digital resources and connecting with people online. Prayer meetings and discipleship moved to online formats. Workers embraced Media to Movement (M2M) as a digital effort to reach people who are looking for Jesus.⁹ People did accept Jesus during the COVID crisis, and some churches grew. Churches which previously did not have an online presence, started to stream and reach new people. Missionaries used their time wisely to learn new skills.

Missionaries are not exempt from the challenges of COVID. It impacted their lives, their ministries and their families. Yet, even though there were challenges and increased stress, there were also encouraging moments and positive steps forward in ministry. Post COVID, what do missionaries need to consider as they carry out the six elements (entry, evangelism, discipleship, healthy church formation, leadership training, partnership and exit) of the missionary task?

⁸ American Association of Christian Counselors, "Covid-19 and the Mental Health Crisis in America Christian," *Counseling Today*, Spring 2020, http://flashpaper.aacc.net/NewsLetter/CCT/CCT_SpecialEdition/index.html, Accessed September 1, 2022.

⁹ Media to Movement website: <https://www.mediatomovements.org>

Entry

The good news is that people want to connect, meetings in person are happening, and missionaries are free to reach new people. Language skills can improve in person rather than on a screen. However, to be best equipped, missionaries ought to understand the impact of COVID on themselves.

COVID was dramatic for some. What can we do to restore a sense of well-being? The Trauma Healing Institute has some suggestions.¹⁰ To help with the emotional side of our well-being, recognize that the pandemic was a traumatic situation; accept your feelings as normal. By paying attention to what your feelings are telling you, you can respond better. Make a list of your losses and take time to grieve each one; it is normal to feel sad when we have losses. Learn ways to calm your strong emotions such as breathing slowly and deeply. Imagine scenes that help you feel calm. Pay attention to where you feel stress in your body. Try to relax any parts of your body that feel tense. Talk about your feelings with people who are safe and know how to listen. Tell God honestly how you feel (biblical lament). Take a walk or do something that requires physical effort. Spend time outdoors because being out in nature can be calming. Remember times when God has cared for you, to help you trust him now. Sing or listen to music. Establish routines to restore a sense of order. Do something you enjoy. Find some meaningful activities to fill your time. Make the effort to connect with people. Tell those you care about how important they are to you. Read Scripture verses that remind you of God's love for you. Look for small things that remind you that God is caring for you. Bringing God into the center of our lives is always necessary, especially now as we reengage in culture and society. There are other resources to help.¹¹ As you understand what you experienced, it will help you understand your people.

Evangelism and Discipleship

Fear still lingers in society. What will happen in the future? Is COVID over? When fear is disguised as being cautious and considerate, it enforces un-

¹⁰ Bryan Varenkamp, Marilyn Davis, and Cami Robbin, "Living with the Lingering COVID-19 Pandemic," Trauma Healing Institute, January 2021.

¹¹ Mike Emlet, "COVID-19: Living by Probabilities or Providence" Christian Counseling and Education Foundation, March 25, 2020, <https://www.ccef.org/COVID-19-living-by-probabilities-or-providence/> Accessed September 1, 2022.

healthy behaviors such as avoidance, ridicule, belittling, demanding one's own way, divided opinions on reengagement, and discouragement from contact. For example, someone might say they do not want to meet because they are cautious in their own words rather than admitting to being afraid.

People expressed hopelessness when another lockdown was announced, and discouragement when the vaccine was not available or did not work as efficiently as promised. Questions have been raised about the effects of the vaccine and the conditions for safely meeting in groups. These doubts must be overcome through socialization and the acceptance of COVID as a constant part of our lives (like the seasonal flu).

In evangelism and discipleship, missionaries desire to give people hope through the Gospel and minister to people who may have been impacted by COVID. The Trauma Healing Institute summarizes typical effects of COVID: People have **physical** effects from COVID (e.g., exhaustion, pain, brain fog); physical effects from the demands of caring for others who are still suffering the aftereffects of COVID; weight gain or weight loss; eye problems from increased use of technology; and grief symptoms caused by the death of family members, friends, and colleagues. The long-term effects of COVID deserve a separate article as the medical research indicates significant problems, but the full picture is still forming.¹²

The **economic** effects for many people are loss of income, higher expenses, price inflation, little hope of returning to a previous job, and businesses suffering from loss of employees. The **emotional** effects are significant: helplessness, anger, fear, loss, frustration, and confusion. **Social** effects include isolation, hesitancy, changes in schooling and childcare, and a significant increase in domestic abuse. There are also **spiritual** effects from the COVID pandemic: people doubt God's love or protection; there is disappointment or disillusionment and shifted beliefs about God; some people question their faith; many are left without the sense of a spiritual community around them; many feel stressed about getting together again, as concerns for safety continue to keep people away.¹³

¹² Mayo Clinic Staff, COVID-19: Long-term effects, June 28, 2022, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/coronavirus-long-term-effects/art-20490351>, Accessed September 8, 2022.

¹³ Bryan Varenkamp, Marilyn Davis, and Cami Robbin, "Living with the Lingering COVID-19 Pandemic," Trauma Healing Institute, January 2021, 3-5.

Pastor Lutzer closes his book *Pandemics, Plagues, and Natural Disasters* with thoughts on lessons learned from the pandemic.¹⁴ He concluded that the uncertainty of life means we should be diligent in evangelism; our values have been clarified, and we need to keep first things first; money can't keep its promises, and you cannot buy health, so don't trust the lies of advertising and propaganda; the danger of self-delusion has been exposed; and we remember that we desperately need God.

Workers can comfort people with the comfort they have received, point people to Jesus, encourage the weak, bear their burdens, serve in practical ways, and listen to their struggles (1 Thess. 5:14).

Healthy Church Formation, Leadership Training and Exit to Partnership

Increased isolationist behaviors are becoming huge concerns in the mental health world. Phobias, risky behaviors, and depression are some of the rising symptoms. Dr. Matthew Stanford calls the mental health crisis a silent pandemic.¹⁵ Many people struggle with phobias and lack the skills to socially reengage in society.

One way churches can help with isolation is with their small group ministry. Ensuring that these groups start again is important for building relationships and encouraging people to engage again. Several workers observed that the small group ministry was put on hold during COVID or diminished even with online groups. Another practical way to combat the effects of COVID is to practice hospitality again.

Some churches are coming out of COVID and are struggling. Nearly two years of not meeting together, or sporadically meeting plus health issues, death of members, and disruption of some ministries are challenges for the pastoral team. For missionaries, there is the opportunity to encourage, equip, and cast vision again post COVID. Missionaries can be a catalyst to move the church in a healthy direction.

¹⁴ Erwin Lutzer, *Pandemics, Plagues, and Natural Disasters* (Chicago: Moody, 2020): 68.

¹⁵ Dr. Matthew Stanford, "Introduction Lecture to Mental Health Coaching" (lecture, Course C-MHC 101: Foundations of Mental Health Coaching, LightUniversity), March 2022.

In terms of partnerships, opportunities exist now to create new partnerships or build upon local and international partnerships formed during COVID. Mission teams are able and eager to come again and support missionaries on the field. Missionaries can also cultivate and nurture partners among local believers and church leaders for the eventual time when the missionary can step back and allow the local believers and church leaders to carry out the missionary task.

Conclusion

The train of missionary work in Europe is gaining speed again. New people are sent to join current workers to engage those who don't yet know Jesus and help with the Great Commission. Those who have returned to the compartments of the train are healthy, but there may be lingering effects that need time to heal. We need to give each other much grace for the journey, assume positive intent, labor diligently, rest well, and trust in our sovereign God, who controls the engine. We have hopefully left the train station for good and are off to new horizons. We need good attitudes and good motivations. We hope that nothing else will derail the train or delay the journey.

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Resources:

In the resource section of this article are podcasts, articles, ideas, and video clips to help you focus and be ready to reengage. You can learn to overcome screen fatigue, adopt new skills in technology, help your kids return to church after COVID, and take care of your marriage. And along with the Scriptures, I affirm that laughter is good medicine, so I have included a video clip that should make you smile.

A *Sound of Music* parody video about vaccination: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMBh-eo3tvE>

Awareness and action steps about loneliness, even before COVID: <https://www.aacc.net/2020/12/09/the-loneliness-epidemic-research-influence-and-its-effect-on-everyone/>

Free book from John Piper: <https://www.abwe.org/coronavirus-and-christ-john-piper-free-ebook-audiobook-download>

Hope in a contagious world: <https://www.membercare.eu/articles/vibrant-possessor-of-hope-in-a-contagious-world/>

Ideas for kids returning to church after COVID: <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/04/28/helping-kids-return-to-church-after-COVID/>

Ideas for overcoming virtual meeting fatigue: <https://research.lifeway.com/2020/04/15/6-tips-for-overcoming-virtual-meeting-fatigue/>

Living in a post-COVID world - Christian Counseling and Education Foundation (CCEF) conference (in the fall of 2022): <https://www.ccef.org/event/dealing-with-depression-and-darkness-in-a-post-COVID-world/>

Marriage counseling during COVID: <https://www.ccef.org/immunizing-your-marriage-during-COVID-19/>

Mental Health Coaching from American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC), no counseling background required (scholarships available): <https://www.lightuniversity.com/product-category/mental-health-coaching/>

Podcast about Fear in COVID: <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/fear-in-pandemics/>

Podcast on COVID: <https://www.ccef.org/coronavirus/>

Summit Church Resources on COVID: <http://bradhambrick.com/COVIDanxiety/>

Talking about COVID: <https://booksbeyondwords.co.uk/coping-with-coronavirus/#MH-resources>

Learning Like a Soldier

Missions in a Post-Pandemic World

Kevin Brown

The COVID-19 global pandemic gave evidence of a world uncomfortable with dying, being sick, or having things out of their control. The aftermath of the spread of COVID-19, though, was very different from the Hong Kong flu in the 1960s. The author of one article thinks that was because more of the population during that era had served in war and considered death a more accepted part of American life.¹ I am a veteran of twenty years in the US Marine Corps, both active duty and reserves. Those years affect the way I see the world, including the more practical side of Christian missions. I offer these lessons for a post-pandemic world to serve as a guide for missionaries to be prepared to endure hardship to the point of death, be content in any season, and develop cultural humility.

Pandemic Lesson #1: Be Willing to Die

One of the clearest scriptural comparisons of being a soldier to being a Christian (and/or missionary) is when Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:3-4: “Endure hardship like a good soldier in Christ Jesus. No soldier gets involved in

¹ Eric Spitznagel, “Why American life went on as normal during the killer pandemic of 1969,” New York Post (16 May 2020). Cited 25 July 2022. Online: <https://nypost.com/2020/05/16/why-life-went-on-as-normal-during-the-killer-pandemic-of-1969/>.

civilian affairs in order to please his commanding officer.” Paul did not spend much time contemplating the hardships he encountered, but he had instead a bias for action. He was marked by the attitude seen in Acts 14:19-20. According to that text, he was taken outside of the city and stoned, then stood up and walked back into town when they were done.

Believers need to be ready to endure hardship for Christ, especially in a post-pandemic world. Expectations like “being safe” can disqualify them from becoming soldiers for Christ, because being a soldier is more about being willing to die than anything else. Those who enter the military have always done so understanding that their life may be required in the service of their country. Most outsiders think that the core requirement for members of the military is that they need to kill well, but a more fundamental requirement is a readiness to die, even when you do not understand why. Believers, too, must be willing to press forward despite hardship and even die if their service for Christ demands it.

Followers of Christ also know that being willing to die is not just about keeping their hand to the plow in the face of disease and uncertainty (Luke 9:62). Missionaries must also put to death their pride, submit to the will of the Father, and carry their cross outside of the spotlight in order that those of other cultures and organizations may take the lead. This dying to self, or displaying humility in life and work, is hard to evaluate, but it can show itself in relationships especially with national partners. Many missionaries come from prosperous nations, have world-class educations, and are supported by internationally respected organizations; yet, they may not know how to deal with an issue better than an Indonesian farmer who has recently come to faith. The pandemic taught missionaries more about what it means to let go of the reins in their own lives. God used situations and national brothers and sisters to teach them lessons they may not have otherwise learned had they remained in control.

Pandemic Lesson #2: Learn to Be Content in All Situations

Paul learned how to be content whether suffering or having abundance (Phil 4:11-14). His seasons of life as a Pharisee, as a recently blinded follower of Christ, and as a missionary to the Gentiles probably all shaped his ability to adapt. The Lord uses seasons of life that may be hard to understand (e.g., the

pandemic) to mold believers into who he wants them to be. All life experiences should be considered teaching moments.²

Life on the mission field (and in the military) rarely moves at a steady and predictable pace. Boot camp, for example, is intense and short-lived in the career of a Marine. It serves a very specific purpose—to make Marines. The height of this initial training for Marines in bootcamp is called the “crucible,” where they are called upon to apply all that they have learned during a time of increased stress and physical exhaustion.³ Likewise, the pandemic may have been a “crucible” for many in the missions community, who learned how they would respond under increased pressure. This “crucible” analogy could also be more broadly applied to the time they moved to their actual place of service and began ministry after a year or two of “boot camp” in language school.

While in Reserve Officer’s Training Corps (ROTC) in college, I wondered why I spent all my time polishing boots and ironing and starching camouflage uniforms. All the pictures I saw of Marines in World War II showed the dirtiest, most ragtag group of individuals I had ever seen. As I ironed and polished, I longed for the day when I could low crawl through the jungle and go weeks without a bath. That was not what was most important in my early years. I needed to learn discipline and attention to detail. Being a Marine was something I had to earn.

For the missionary, working in another language and another culture requires some tools that are somewhat elementary and reproducible. These tools are not just for the new believers, but for new missionary personnel working in another language and culture. After missionaries (and soldiers) get to a point where they can really be effective on the field, they usually come to understand that the works of God cannot be boxed up into a nice little package. The hard truth, though, is that most missionaries never make it this long. This is similar to the Marine Corps in that 75% of first term Marines are discharged every year, requiring roughly 36,000 new Marines to be recruited each year to

² Caroline Anderson, “Missionary faces pandemic without fear after war, genocide, coups and terrorist attacks,” IMB (13 May 2020). Online: <https://www.imb.org/2020/05/13/missionary-faces-pandemic-without-fear/>.

³ Jim Garamone, “The Marine Corps Crucible,” n.p. [Cited 30 July 2022]. Online: <https://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/marine-corps-crucible.html>.

fill the ranks.”⁴ In international missions, one article claims that about half of all missionaries leave the field within their first decade.⁵

Missionaries and soldiers want to commit their time to “important” things, but at times tasks feel menial. Life in the military and on the mission field requires flexibility. Soldiers and missionaries benefit from working through many different scenarios during times of “peace” so they are ready for “war.” Initiative and resolve during initial training or “crucibles,” including those that are unplanned (like the pandemic), can contribute to future success in both endeavors.

Pandemic Lesson #3: Develop Cultural Humility

The decentralized nature of Baptist work has always been one of its distinguishing features. The pandemic reinforced the importance of the local church. As a result, missionaries received an important reminder of how their presence can be tenuous. For long-term health, their ministries should be integrated with local churches and built on the work of others as much as possible. Cultural humility, evidenced in establishing a “light footprint” on the ground, working well with others, respecting other institutions, and recognizing and supporting leaders is important.

In 2003, Donald Rumsfeld wanted Operation Iraqi Freedom to involve as light a force as possible, and one that could advance with unmatched speed deep into the heart of Iraq. While this can achieve immediate results referred to with terms such as “shock and awe,” the long-term goals are not so easily achieved. Key decisions made in the early years of nation-building that followed “regime change” in Iraq had an outsized impact on the success of the long-term mission. In the US’s handling of Iraq, one fatal mistake was the disbanding of the Iraqi Army. This decision left a power vacuum to be filled, which Iran immediately helped fill. It also left a large force of bitter

⁴ Philip Athey, “Here are some of the ways the Marines are trying to improve retention” Marine Corps Times (15 Nov 2021) Cited 29 July 2022. Online: <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2021/11/15/treat-people-like-human-beings-here-are-some-of-the-ways-the-marines-are-trying-to-improve-retention/>.

⁵ John Hawke, “When Missionaries Regret Being Missionaries,” n.p. (12 Mar 2020). Cited 29 July 2022. Online: <https://omf.org/us/when-missionaries-regret-being-missionaries/>.

and disenfranchised former Iraqi military members who had nothing better to do than start an insurgency.⁶

An outgrowth of the autonomy and independence of American culture is that many American missionaries seem to like the idea of “not building on another person’s foundation” (Rom 15:20). As exciting as this sounds, plans for engagement of a Unreached People Group should not overlook the lasting institutional churches in the area, the language and media resources already available, national partners involved in church planting, and other believers in the area. Partnership with these groups helps missionaries avoid the same mistake the US government made by disenfranchising and needlessly offending former Iraqi soldiers in 2003. The key issue may not be the level of missionary involvement, but how effectively they can work together with those of other cultures in true inter- or mutual dependence on one another. While the characteristics of independence and autonomy in America can be positive, in missions work overseas these attributes can be a liability.

Another parallel lesson that can be drawn for missions from a recent experience of the US military is in the withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Afghan army and government left in place after the withdrawal did not have the will to stand against the Taliban. Both the US and the Afghan government that worked with the US lost as a result. Perhaps it would have been worth the US keeping an ongoing small footprint in order to shore up a more positive Afghan government and enable the military to sustain itself long-term.

As missionaries, we need to foster long-term, inter-dependent, mutually beneficial relationships with others. This needs to start while we are on the field, and not just when we are ready to leave. One challenge in missions is how to help set a framework so near culture missionaries and new believers can earn a living while also having time for ministry. Meaningful “secular” work and margin in life for ministry are both important for the bi-vocational leader. In most areas, temporary subsidies from foreign missionaries are not sustainable long-term. Much of my team’s long-term ministry with national church planters in the country where we serve is tied with efforts at social entrepreneurship. Schools such as Oklahoma Baptist University are support-

⁶ James P. Pfiffner, “US Blunders in Iraq: De-Baathification and Disbanding the Army,” *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 1 (February 2010), 76-85. Cited 29 July 2022. Online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228161771_US_Blunders_in_Iraq_De-Baathification_and_Disbanding_the_Army#.

ing the ability of missionaries to think in this way.⁷ Short-term missionaries can also play a crucial role in regularly engaging hard-to-reach places and sustaining national partners.⁸ The pandemic challenged this business model by prohibiting foreign visitors for two years, but national partners built locally supported businesses during this time as well.

Evaluating the role of American missionaries pragmatically, it could be argued that their most critical impact is in three areas: international networks, Western education, and financial resources. Missionaries leverage all these assets overseas for the good of new church plants and future church planting. They should be content to pour out their lives, relationships, and resources to reach the people where they have been called. They minister in anonymity in the eyes of the world, but with satisfaction that they have been chosen as ambassadors for Christ. The pandemic made this difficult for those who needed to temporarily leave their place of service, but it also helped clarify ways missionaries might support national partners on the ground long-term, with a “light footprint.”⁹

In the Marine Corps in 2010, the concept of the “Strategic Corporal” was popularized. This term acknowledged how in the world today even the actions of low-level leaders can have strategic implications overseas.¹⁰ This “Strategic Corporal” was often illustrated with examples of how mistakes by any member of the military could have far-reaching negative implications. In a positive light, however, this concept can promote sufficient equipping of leaders

⁷ Brian Bus, “OBU social entrepreneurship major,” *The Journal Record* (22 May 2015). Cited 28 July 2022. Online: <https://journalrecord.com/2015/05/22/obu-social-entrepreneurship-major-general-news/>.

⁸ Grace Thornton, “Alabama now home to Nehemiah Teams’ second AOT site,” *The Alabama Baptist* (13 Sep 2021). Cited 19 Sep 2022. Online: <https://thealabamabaptist.org/alabama-now-home-to-nehemiah-teams-second-aot-site/>.

⁹ Kelsey Dallas, “First, the pandemic forced Christian missionaries home. Then, it transformed their work,” *Deseret News* (14 Apr 2021). Online: <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2021/4/13/22372058/pandemic-forced-missionaries-home-then-transformed-their-work-methodist-mormon-evangelical-christian>.

¹⁰ Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marines Magazine* (January 1999). Online: <https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/1999-Jan-The-strategic-corporal-Leadership-in-the-three-block-war.pdf>; Rye Barcott, “The Strategic Corporal,” *Harvard Business Review* (21 Oct 2015). Accessed online at <https://hbr.org/2010/10/the-strategic-corporal.html>; Lynda Liddy, “The Strategic Corporal: Some Requirements in Training and Education,” *Australian Army Journal* 11, no. 2 (Summer 2014), 139-148. Accessed online at <https://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/liddy.pdf>.

at all levels to have maximum helpful impact.¹¹ On the mission field, early training and development of leaders should be done with long-term health and impact in mind. The pandemic required many missionaries to rely more on “Zoom” meetings for discipleship, while national partners were able to continue to be more active “on the ground.” The pandemic also fueled the rise of social media and online applications. This technology allowed individuals, even at “low-levels,” to impact the lives of millions with the right (or wrong) message at the right time. These norms will probably continue to shape the future.¹²

Missionaries need to have a sober view of how they interact with the leaders of local churches overseas, both in small house churches and larger traditional churches. Creating a relationship as true peers will pay benefits long-term. This relationship might even need to continue after the missionary leaves. Just as the US contemplated leaving Afghanistan, it might be most beneficial for all involved for missionaries to maintain an ongoing relationship with their partners overseas at some level. This might help sustain the work of the Lord in ways that might not serve missionary ideals, but may be part of the Lord’s sustainable, mutually beneficial solution long-term.

Conclusion

A pressing concern for missionaries is how we can better use our resources in a way to develop a healthier interdependence with believers in other countries where all bring to the table the “talents” the Lord has entrusted to us as fellow “soldiers in Christ” (Matt 25:14-30). We are part of the same army—a spiritual one that knows its commander—and we know our roles. We do not always need to take the lead, and we may need to surrender our pride and expectations as we serve Christ and others well. Foundational to serving Christ and others well is finding our contentment in Christ, regardless of our circumstances, and our willingness to die for His sake.

¹¹ Thomas M. Felty, “Debunking the Myth of the Strategic Corporal,” National Defense University Joint Forces Staff College: Joint Advanced Warfighting School, Master’s Thesis (13 Apr 2014). Accessed online at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA621690>.

¹² Sumathi Bala, “Zoom executive says hybrid work will continue to drive growth after the pandemic,” CNBC (19 Dec 2021). Online: <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/12/20/zoom-exec-says-hybrid-work-will-keep-driving-growth-after-the-pandemic.html>.

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VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Learning through Loss

Karen Pearce

COVID. Its expansive reach connected us to the world around us in an unprecedented way. Though we were masked and isolated physically, we bonded emotionally with every other person on the planet in the common elements of loss, sickness, death, and fear. As we recover from that period of loss, we thought it would be helpful to hear from missionaries who have experienced loss in different ways to consider the ways our common experience affects us, what we learn, and how we can move forward. I interviewed a few co-laborers about the losses they weathered in the recent past.

Those who shared their stories include:

- Rob in Central Asia, whose life and ministry was completely turned upside down because of COVID.
- Melissa in Europe, who has lost her physical health through Lyme's disease and cancer.
- Staci in Africa, who lost her husband unexpectedly and returned to the field.
- D. Ray in Richmond (formerly in Africa), who lost his wife very suddenly a few years ago. He is remarried and continues serving.
- Erica, who was expelled from her country of service in Asia and then lost her husband unexpectedly. She and her children are planning to return to the field.

- William* in Africa, whose child has embraced the LGBTQ lifestyle and distanced herself from family.
- Ryan, expelled from his country of service after being interrogated and stripped of his family's possessions.

These missionaries live in different parts of the world. They are in different life stages. They are in various stages of recovery, but there are some definite commonalities in their stories. Here are five nuggets of wisdom gleaned from their stories to help us when we experience loss and learn to grieve well.

Loss should be respected and lamented

Loss is hard, and to survive it, we must experience it with all its *warts*. We are prone to think that if we love Jesus enough, we will not grieve anything that is taken away. We are made in God's image, and he grieves. Genesis 6:6 says, "And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." Jesus' experiences in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross also capture the grief that our Savior bore.

The Bible teaches we are to share in the sufferings of Christ (Phil 3:10). Through this suffering we are made more like him (Rom 8:28-29). We read in Scripture David grieving for Absalom (2 Sam 18:33-19:8), Mary and Martha grieving for Lazarus (John 11:1-37), and Hannah mourning her barrenness (1 Sam 1:9-18). Grief is painted in broad strokes all throughout Scripture.

Missionaries who have experienced loss have all gone through a difficult journey, but in it they found that God not only allows us to grieve, but He also grieves with us.

D. Ray lost his wife, Kim, suddenly and unexpectedly. In his loss, he took five weeks away to begin the process of healing. He leaned into God as comforter. Healthy grief and lament involve us turning to God in our pain. As he comforts us (2 Cor 1:3-4), we become more intimate with our savior. Here are D. Ray's words: "Lament is born in brokenness. Biblical lament leads us to turn to God alone, risk the discipline of complaining to God, turn our complaint into a request and ask of God, and then rest in faith by trusting God."

Only by our turning to God will the loss we experience be made into something beautiful. Isaiah 50:11 warns us that finding comfort in places other than Him leads to more loss and darkness. Romans 8:28-29 however, tells us that God can and desires to use our pain for good, for our sanctification. This

turning to God means that you and I can express our emotions to him. Wrestle through your thoughts and feelings with Him. He understands and will minister to you in a way that only He can.

Here are other examples of missionaries expressing their emotions. Erica admits that when she was forced to leave the country she called home, she was angry: “I can honestly say I was angry at God when we left. I had to hold my children while they wailed themselves to sleep at night. The Lord had done that to our family.” For William*, experiencing his daughter walking away from faith and family left him with a sense of betrayal by God: “I battled with trusting God in the same way. I had *trusted* God with my daughter and did feel that he had failed me.”

In each of these stories, as these missionaries expressed their emotions and their fears to the Lord, He drew near, and he comforted like no one else could. He knows the agony of losing a child or being rejected by them. He knows the pain of death and loss. He knows the humiliation and hurt of rejection. As our high priest, he knows (Heb 4:15-16) how we suffer and intercedes for us (Heb 7:25).

As we lament with God, our hearts are intertwined with His. So, in a time of loss, grieve. Feel everything you feel. Embrace the pain. Share it all with the Lord, and let him bring hope and healing.

Loss strips us of our idols and reminds us of our true identity

Loss strikes us at the core. God gives us good things as his children. It is right that we love those things and enjoy them. But when he takes them away or allows them to be taken from us, the gaping hole results in our feeling empty and confused, alone and grasping for answers and direction. As we begin a journey toward healing, we must realize again our identity. Our dependence on God becomes greater as he strips away the very thing that we had grown to depend on. This process reveals our identity anew.

Melissa in Europe has struggled with her health every day for years. She was first diagnosed with Lyme’s disease and then with cancer. Her medication leaves her in weakness and pain. She sums up her experience as a true identity crisis. She said, “if I’m honest, I would have to say that I have experienced a loss, my loss is – me, or at least me in the flesh. But that is a good thing.”

She explained as her health dwindled and her body was wracked by pain and weakness, she became ever more aware of God as her strength. She came to understand in a new way how this treasure is in a jar of clay for His glory (2 Cor 4:7), and anything she does is clearly because this all-surpassing power is from God and not from within herself.

Ryan had to leave a zero-to-one ministry in an Asian country. Through leaving, he realized anew how his ministry really was not about him at all. “I have learned to maintain the perspective that I’m not the answer. Jesus is the answer. I’m not the answer for their church or faith but I’m here to point them to Christ and I can do that from anywhere,” he said.

Loss brings these truths home to us as it strips us of the things that prop us up. It forces us to rely upon the Lord alone to fill those empty places.

Loss, death, sadness, and grief are part of life in a fallen world. But because God uses everything to bring Himself glory (Col 1:16) and to make us into the image of his Son (2 Cor 3:18), we can rest knowing that He is going to make this loss into something beautiful (Isa 61:3). He helps us remember again that our identity is in him.

Recovery from loss requires time in the Word

When our lives are upended by loss, it throws our normal rhythms into chaos. Whatever good thing God takes away leaves us a bit spun around. We may have difficulty making sense of our experience. But, each of the people interviewed reported that leaning heavily into God’s Word was pivotal in righting themselves.

D. Ray said on the morning after Kim passed away, he woke up and “In the beginning...” came to mind. “It was like I was freefalling and then I landed on a bedrock.” At the loss of his wife, he “doggedly pressed into faith and literally preached the gospel to myself,” D. Ray said.

Melissa, in Europe, said that the only book she has energy to read anymore is the Bible. “Being sick saps my energy. I don’t have time for anything extra.”

As Ryan was being interrogated about his job in a closed country, he was undergirded mostly by Scripture. “I remember lying in bed the night of my interrogation. I had to sleep over at [the interrogator’s] place. Having a healthy understanding of suffering. I was lying there thinking, ‘Well, if God is good and sovereign over all things and everything he gives us is for our good, he

gives good gifts, then that means that Rom 8:28 is true. This is given to me to conform me more into God's image."

Erica in Asia felt completely overwhelmed after her husband David died, but she found her strength in the Word: "I daily abide in him and his word. It's my manna. I don't put one foot on the floor before I commit my day to the Lord because I'm not doing this in my strength. If it were up to me, I would be crawling in a hole with the covers over my head. It's the strength of the Lord." Staci in Africa echoed the same sentiment at her husband's passing. "I felt so overwhelmed, so what did I do? I preached the gospel to myself."

A clear understanding of calling is pivotal to surviving the loss

A missionary's sense of calling can be both a comfort and a source of confusion when loss occurs. Most missionaries have an unwavering sense of calling to our life's work. Because God helped us get where we are, doing what we are doing with whomever we are doing it, we are sometimes disillusioned when God allows a change to take place. The sudden loss of a spouse or health or children or ministry throws everything into a tailspin. In this place, we are forced back to our knees to figure out what God is doing.

The Lord used such a time to test Erica's faith and to redefine calling when her family was expelled from their country. "We were no longer among the people we were called to. So, what are we called to?" she asked. "We are called to relationship with God. We are called to share the truth of the gospel to the nations and to go out and minister to those who are hurting and in need. No matter where we are. God taught us that he had called us to first to Himself, secondly to be the church, and finally to the people he puts you with." Likewise, when Ryan and his family were expelled from the Asian country where they had lived for 10 years, God taught them that "he doesn't call us to a place. He calls us to himself."

When Rob and his family were isolated during COVID lockdowns, the calling God had placed on their lives helped them wait patiently and trust that God was not taken by surprise. "Over the course of our 17 years of serving in Central Asia, we have often looked back to the clear and obvious ways that the Lord has moved to get us to the exact location (country, city and neighborhood) where He wanted us to be. So If I ever found myself lapsing into questioning our situation about where we were planted and what we were

doing, my wife was good about reminding me about how God had moved to put us right where we were,” he said.

William also found comfort in the security of his obedience to the call God had placed on his life when his daughter walked away from her family and God during college. Just before this situation began, he and his wife had prayed through the Voluntary Retirement Incentive decisions and felt certain they were to be right where they were. But when his daughter began to distance herself and make lifestyle changes, he was tempted to think that maybe things would’ve been different if they had not been overseas during the tumultuous time in their daughter’s life. God then reminded William of this clear calling. “The certainty of our obedience helped tremendously,” he said.

For Erica, D. Ray, and Staci, losing a spouse forced them to ask hard questions. But in each case, God reminded them that their calling was still valid, even if everything looked different going forward.

“My circumstances have changed but my God and calling haven’t,” said Erica. Likewise, Staci was certain of her call before she met her husband, and she had loved Africa since she served as a journeyman. The decision to return alone was not a hard one to make, because her calling was so strong. “This seemed to be the place where his death would matter,” she said. “Anywhere else I would just be a widow. But these people walked through his illness and death with me, and I thought God would use that here more than anywhere else.”

As D. Ray was grieving the loss of his wife, God reminded him of his call: “After telling *our* story from the past twenty-seven years, I was reminded of something keenly important: Kim and I had been co-laborers. This mission calling was *our* calling. It was not simply my calling or her calling. I was tired, grieving, and weak, but I had a glimpse of a renewed spirit that just might be out there on the horizon. I was sensing a rebirth of purposeful service.”

Loss highlights God’s faithfulness

In every testimony of these missionaries was a common theme—God is good and faithful. It is paradoxical how we experience such pain and grief yet come through it stronger and more sure of the goodness of God. God does this for us in several ways.

We see it through the way His people, our community, step up to support us in times of need. We see it in the way that good things result even through something difficult. In the midst of loss, our colleagues have seen ministries flourish, people saved, churches started, and love poured out generously in Christian fellowship. And, God is consistent to let us use all that we learned through loss to bless others.

The most important way that God is faithful is that he continues to walk through the fire with us. Just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3) experienced, God is there with us. Said Staci, “It’s one of the upside-down things about our faith. God didn’t answer the way I would have wanted, but my faith has grown. My dependence on the Lord increased and I’m grateful that I had to depend on him. The Lord has been very near.”

As missionaries, we are not immune to the suffering and pain that come through loss. In fact, we are most uniquely equipped to survive and even thrive in its wake because of Jesus. While the profundity of loss does not escape us, it does not define us, either. Melissa summed it up well: “I think to the world it appears as a loss, but, in reality it’s a huge gain. To know Christ more deeply. To want less of self and more of Him. As believers, we know that is the goal, but He is gracious to nudge me towards that goal every day.”

Books the interviewees found helpful:

Cuyler, Theodore. *God’s Light on Dark Clouds*. Kansas City: Gideon House Books, 2015.

Dallas, Joe. *When Homosexuality Hits Home*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004.

Keller, Tim. *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*. London: Penguin Books, 2015.

Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *The Life of Joy: A Exposition of Philippians 1 and 2*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989.

_____. *The Life of Peace: An Exposition of Philippians 3 and 4*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993.

Miller, James Russell. *The Ministry of Comfort*. Palala Press, 2018

Ortlund, Dane C. *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*, Wheaton: Crossway, 2020.

Vroegop, Mark. *Dark Clouds Deep Mercy*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2019.

Wright, H. Norman. *Experiencing Grief*. Nashville: B&H Books, 2004.

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RESOURCE REVIEWS

Resource Review: Mission Affirmed

Clark, Elliot. *Mission Affirmed: Recovering the Missionary Motivation of Paul.* Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2022.

Reviewed by Bo Parker, IMB Field Personnel, Asia Pacific Rim

Mission Affirmed is a work that focuses on the strategy of the Apostle Paul and the motivation behind Paul's mission practice. Elliot Clark proposes that the motivation behind Paul's ministry goes beyond the urgency of evangelism and the advance of the Kingdom. Paul's missionary motivation was driven by a desire to stand affirmed on the last day and to know that the work he had done would be approved by his Master. Paul preached the whole counsel of God and sought to bring all disciples to maturity in Christ in a way that would bring greater glory to God and thus stand affirmed. We also ought to be motivated by our satisfaction in knowing God and Him receiving that glory.

Clark takes the reader through the various epicenters of Paul's ministry and focuses on how the principles and motivations of Paul's ministry were carried out in each place. It is a refreshingly unique approach to highlighting



the comprehensive nature (from entry to exit) of his ministry. He highlights how misplaced motivation can also lead to compromise in mission practice. In addition to demonstrating Paul's approach to ministry, Clark also presents ways in which the modern church has fallen short or become near-sighted in her approach to equipping and sending out those who are called to cross-cultural work. Longevity and sustained gospel presence should be our target rather than urgency to send anyone who may sense a call. In addition, Clark includes a careful examination of the western church's reticent and inadequate theology pertaining to suffering for the sake of Christ. He also tackles issues related to a missionary's partnership with existing national churches and issues of dependency. Though short in length, *Mission Affirmed* is comprehensive in scope and pointed in application.

Strengths and Weaknesses

As a field practitioner, Clark applies a seasoned and experiential look at current missiological trends. His keen focus on the Scriptures and sound application within modern context is the primary strength of his book. He provides important critiques of current missionary methods and approaches, while also providing a strong course correction that can be applied regardless of denominational background. Clark does not single out the proponents of the methodology he is critiquing. Instead, he addresses the methodology and offers a solution. This is refreshing considering our current cultural trends of criticizing without providing practical alternatives. He is genuinely concerned with the why and how of missions and seeks to encourage the church to grow in her understanding of what God wants to accomplish.

While I applaud Clark's concise approach, one area worthy of further discussion is his criticism of obedience-based discipleship and reproducibility. In chapter 4 entitled "Seeing the Invisible," Clark suggests these cannot be the benchmarks of evaluating missionary work. It is unclear in the chapter what markers signify genuine faith and growth in knowledge of Christ. A person's doctrinal fidelity is not the clearest way to evaluate whether that person is growing as a disciple of Christ. While true, that simplicity and reproducibility cannot merely be the marker of a comprehensive discipleship approach, neither can complexity of doctrine and knowledge alone. Both can be of the flesh. Not all those who desire reproducibility do so to the detriment of Spirit-filled, Spirit-led obedience nor aim for reproducibility through a shallow, hands-off discipleship. We need not create a dichotomy between grace and obedience in discipleship. The two do not exist independently but jointly

demonstrate the reality of a transformed life. This chapter addresses an issue that requires more discussion.

Significance as a Resource for Cross-Cultural Work

In *Mission Affirmed*, Clark presents a work that is relevant for both the individual missionary and the church who sends the missionary. He sets before us a reasoned evaluation of Paul's motivation and strategy from both the equipping and field practitioner standpoint. It would be advantageous for church leadership (pastors, mission leaders, mission committees, sending boards), those considering long-term cross-cultural work, and those currently on the foreign field to read and interact with this work both individually and collectively. In an age when everyone is looking for the latest novel missionary strategies, this work deserves attention for its commitment to biblical orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Recommendation for Additional Reading

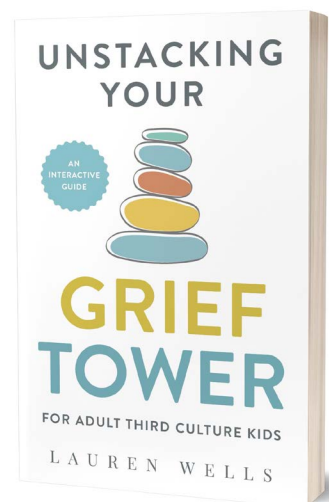
This book is a valuable tool to further sound missiological conversation. Clark does a calculated job of presenting the issues at hand and providing a biblical and practical response. He humbly provides the opportunity for his work to drive discussions across the broad evangelical landscape of missions. *Mission Affirmed* continues the tradition of works like Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, John Nevius' *Methods of Mission Work*, and Roger Greenway's *Cities: Missions' New Frontier* by focusing our attention on biblical patterns with contemporary application.://serials.atla.com/gcbjm/\$\$\$call\$\$\$api/file/file-api/download-file?submissionFileId=15656&submissionId=3230&stageId=5

Book Review: Unstacking Your Grief Tower: For Adult Third Culture Kids

Wells, Lauren. *Unstacking Your Grief Tower: For Adult Third Culture Kids*. Fort Mill, SC: Independently Published. 2021.

Reviewed by Suzie Rodgers, IMB Field Personnel, Africa

Unstacking Your Grief Tower was written by Lauren Wells, who spent her teenage years in Tanzania. “She is also the author of *Raising Up a Generation of Healthy Third Culture Kids* and *The Grief Tower*. She specializes in practical, preventive care for Third Culture Kids (TCKs) and their families.”¹ In *Unstacking Your Grief Tower*, Wells notes that while life on the mission field can be a wonderful experience for TCKs, many experience loss and trauma during their developmental years (birth-age 20). These losses include numerous *goodbyes* and various hardships children in cross-cultural contexts face. Wells believes these difficulties stack up like



¹ From the back cover of the book

blocks on a tower. If TCKs do not process the grief, trauma, or pain as it happens, these blocks continue to stack until they have a tower that can crash them in early adulthood. This book offers practical activities that parents and TCKs can use to identify their *blocks* and then begin a healthy process of dismantling their tower.

As a mother of 3 adult TCKs, I can see this resource's value. When we moved overseas 25 years ago, we were not given a handbook on how to walk our children through the difficulties they would experience on the mission field. As issues arose, we tried our best to work through them with the help of God's word, prayer, and advice from other colleagues. However, I believe this book would have helped me be more aware of potential issues my children might face in Africa. We can make the mistake of making light of an issue by saying such things as everyone goes through this without taking the time to help our kids process things healthily. Wells notes, "By processing these memories, we are taking the time and space to think through them and consider how they have impacted us in the past and continue to impact us in the present. This diminishes the hold that they have on both our current and future reality" (70). This book contains several strengths. First, it is an easy, quick read; but it will require ample time to work through the activities. Second, at the end of every chapter, there are helpful questions for the reader to consider and work through before going forward. A third strength is Well's instruction on how to make a grief timeline. This timeline becomes the blocks of your grief tower, and then the author helps you think through how to process each of those blocks. Finally, Wells does a good job of identifying issues many TCKs face while insisting this is just a first step. She wisely suggests that if someone needs help, they should talk with a trusted counselor. In addition, she also provides resources at the end of the book, including workshops, access to TCK caregivers, and websites.

While I benefited greatly from the book, I noted a couple of minor weaknesses. The first is an understandable level of subjectivity on the author's part. Her African experience was only four years, and she went to the mission field as a teenager. Many organizations discourage taking teenagers to the field because of the very challenges she mentions. One would expect her to have difficult transitions as a teenager moving to rural Africa. Much of her thesis revolves around the grief towers people build during their *developmental* years. Yet, most of her developmental years were spent in the U.S. While her experiences are helpful, the book would be even better if it also included

interviews with others who had grown up overseas and parents who raised their children on the mission field.

A second minor concern revolves around her perception of trauma. TCKs face difficulties overseas, and those things should be processed. Yet, Wells tended to equate somewhat difficult things (like being a new kid in school) with genuinely traumatic things like watching someone being burned alive (30-35). While she admonishes the reader not to create a hierarchy of grief but validate every source of pain (10), it is also essential to help kids distinguish between difficult and traumatic. If everything is trauma, then nothing is trauma, and TCKs must learn how to process both appropriately.

As a TCK parent, I recommend that every missionary parent read this book to better help their children recognize and process grief or other difficulties they might face on the mission field. If you have adult TCKs, I recommend giving them this book as a gift and engaging in a healthy discussion about any difficulties they experienced. As I worked through this book, my eyes were opened to many things, and I believe this is a valuable resource for any TCK or TCK parent.

Book Review: Strange New World

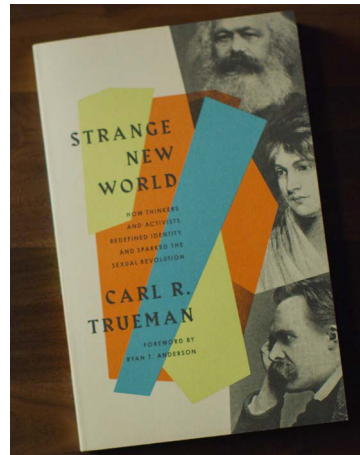
Trueman, Carl. *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution.* Foreword by **Ryan T. Anderson.** Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022.

Reviewed by Preston Pearce, IMB Field Personnel, Europe

Carl Trueman (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is professor of biblical and religious studies at Grove City College, Pennsylvania.

Strange New World is a shorter and more accessible version of Trueman's *Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. He describes the world in which we now live: today people find ideas plausible that would have been rejected a generation ago, and what were once virtues are now regarded as more like vices.

Trueman shows this shift is not random by tracing the contributions of various thinkers over the last three centuries. Some captured the spirit of their times; others were more clearly influential in shaping the way people thought. What emerges is a new understanding of the "self": not simply a self-conscious being whose identity is shaped by external factors (e.g., Scripture, communi-



ty, responsibility to others); it is one's inner feelings, where the "real me" is found. To be authentic, one must act outwardly on those inner feelings and desires. Further, this authenticity is to be celebrated by society in general; therefore, anything can take on political significance.

Significance and Value for the Cross-Cultural Worker

One might question the value of *Strange New World* for cross-cultural ministry since it describes basically a western phenomenon. However, the globalization fueled by technology and social media means that nothing western stays in the west. Cross-cultural workers who read *Strange New World* and look carefully at their host culture are likely to recognize some of the things Trueman describes. The book has much anthropological insight for us, wherever we are and serve.

Further, the expressive individualism that results from the new understanding of "self" is now deeply embedded in the missionary's home culture, even in their sending churches. The "world" they left in order to serve in missions is not the "world" to which they return, and it is not the world to which their children return as young adults. Readers may also find as their children approach adulthood that this thinking has influenced their worldview much more than they realized.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Trueman says in chapter 1, "Welcome to this strange new world. You may not like it. But it is where you live, and therefore it is important that you try to understand it." He is very insightful in the way he traces the development of thought over the last three hundred years to help the reader understand how this strange new world came to be the way many people think, almost instinctively.

The book is not just an academic cultural analysis. The strange new world is not just "out there" in the bastions of liberal academia; it is at the family dinner table. The book's contribution is that it provides not ammunition for battle (i.e., to win an argument) but an understanding of the battlefield (i.e., to understand why people speak the way they do, what they mean, and how to communicate clearly). It equips the reader to understand, engage, and communicate.

The book also models balance in communication. The contemporary context is deeply polarized; it's a reflection of the "politicized self". Trueman models fairness in assessment as he engages with the values of this strange new world. It helps the reader realize the complexity of the times in which we live and provides a model for engaging others wisely and graciously.

Another strength of the book is the final chapter. Trueman observes some ways the church in general, by compromising with the spirit of the age, has been complicit in the cultural shifts discussed in the book. He suggests this should stir us to humility as we engage with others on these issues. He also encourages us to recover the historic strengths of the church – worship, fellowship, community, and teaching the whole counsel of God.

For further reading:

Trueman, Carl. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway, 2020.

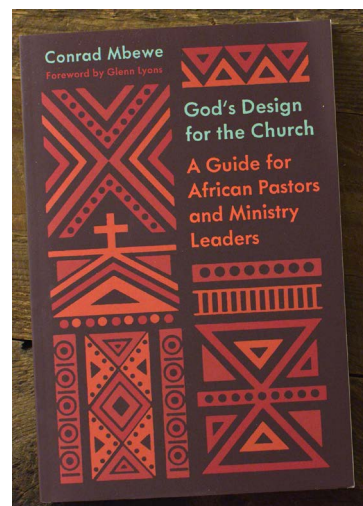
"Expressive Individualism in the Church," 9 Marks Journal March 2022.
<https://www.9marks.org/journal/expressive-individualism-in-the-church/>

Book Review: God's Design for the Church: A Guide for African Pastors and Ministry Leaders

Mbewe, Conrad. *God's Design for the Church: A Guide for African Pastors and Ministry Leaders*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.

Reviewed by Kevin Rodgers, IMB Field Personnel, Africa

God's Design for the Church is a relevant, readable ecclesiology written by Zambian pastor and popular preacher Dr. Conrad Mbewe. Mbewe is the pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church in Lusaka, Zambia, and the founder of African Christian University in Lusaka. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Pretoria and has authored over nine books. Mbewe is a gifted speaker and theologian sometimes referred to as "the Spurgeon of Africa." In *God's Design for the Church*, he delivers a thorough treatment of the necessary theology and praxis of healthy churches in the African context. While developed for an African audience, this work is a helpful tool for any church in any context.



Missionaries worldwide would do well to use this resource to help churches they plant as well as existing churches with which they partner. As I read the book, I found myself nodding and affirming with every page. Mbewe has said, in this single volume, things I have been teaching new churches for years. Yet, as an African pastor with years of pastoral experience, he speaks with a winsomeness and cultural adeptness that is unequaled. This ecclesiology is extremely thorough, covering every aspect of a healthy church, but it is also engaging and readable with illustrations, stories, and examples drawn from around the continent. This volume would be an excellent addition to every pastor's library and would help promote sound ecclesiology, biblical fidelity, and Baptist theology in their church and ministry.

The strengths of *God's Design for the Church* are many. Today's African church faces a host of theological challenges, from syncretism to Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel. These threats affect the theological grounding of church members and the ecclesiological praxis of the church as a whole. Mbewe's work offers a much-needed biblical counterbalance to this drift, and he does it as an African speaking to other Africans. His writing is academically and biblically sound but easily accessible for any reading level. Additionally, each chapter ends with a helpful study guide and discussion questions, allowing small groups to utilize this book as a Bible study tool if desired.

Most striking is Mwebwe's realization that Africa is now poised to be "the next major sender of missionaries to the rest of the world" (162). His cry is that the African church would embrace this perspective and step into the role of senders instead of receivers. Having influential African theologians like Mbewe promote this vision is the key to the future of the church in Africa. It is encouraging to see African theologians at the helm and exciting to see the African church owning the mission. It starts with books like *God's Design for the Church*.

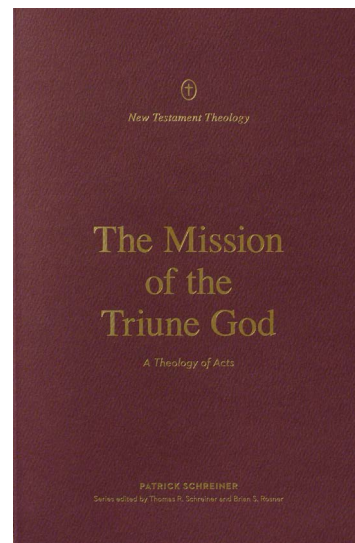
If you are looking for a healthy, contextualized ecclesiology covering everything from membership to worship to cooperation in missions and beyond, this work is for you. This book is one you will want in your library and will want to give to all your national partners. Mbewe has written a book that will be used for years to come to help the African church get back on course practically, theologically, and missionally.

Book Review: The Mission of the Triune God

Schreiner, Patrick. *The Mission of the Triune God: A Theology of Acts*. New Testament Theology. Crossway, 2022.

Reviewed by Anthony Witten, IMB Field Personnel, APAC

In *The Mission of the Triune God: A Theology of Acts*, Patrick Schreiner helps readers see that Acts is a unique book in the Bible. It serves as both “a *transitional* and a *programmatic* book” (author’s emphasis, 21). Acts is transitional in that it documents events that are not intended to be repeated in the foundation of the new covenant church. It is programmatic in that it “provides guidance for the church in every age” (21). This guidance is based upon the truth that the Spirit at work in Acts is the same Spirit at work in churches today. Schreiner asserts that “Luke tells these stories so the future church can emulate the virtuous acts and avoid the shameful ones” (25).



Schreiner identifies God as the main character of Acts. He also locates seven theological aims that run throughout the narrative: “(1) *God the Father* orchestrates; (2) through *Christ*, who lives and rules; and (3) through the

empowering *Spirit*; (4) causing the *word* to multiply; (5) bringing *salvation* to all; (6) forming the *church*; which (7) *witnesses* to the end of the earth” (author’s emphases, 26). In seven chapters, he takes an identified aim and traces its development throughout the book. Each chapter is concise, clear, and helpful in seeing how Acts is telling a comprehensive narrative of the gospel spreading globally.

The conclusion of the book is key as Schreiner ties all these aims together to show what God through Luke intended to communicate to all believers. He relates that the abrupt ending of the book “compels readers to ask about their own role in the narrative” (149). He then asserts how Acts is to be viewed as a programmatic book. He explains, “it encourages the church to press on in its own agency as it is compelled by divine agency. God is building his church. Therefore, the church must welcome all, speak of salvation in Jesus’ name, and witness to the ends of the earth” (149).

Missionaries may benefit from reading this book by being reminded God is the primary actor in our missions endeavors. Yes, we labor and strive to evangelize, disciple, plant churches and train leaders, but God is the one doing the work. As Paul stated: “On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor 15:10). Ultimately, the advancement of the gospel depends on God, not us.

Missionaries can also find encouragement in their own personal Bible study through reading this book. Too often, missionaries are tempted to approach Acts is like a playbook for missions. Schreiner acknowledges that Acts does serve a programmatic end, but it is not to be mimicked because the recorded events are foundational and not necessarily repeatable. Rather, missionaries should be driven to the text to find encouragement to endure in their missions activities. We can also find comfort in the truth that the Spirit is working ahead of us. We should also find correction from the Lord when our motives and practices are not aligned with his in the advancement of the gospel.

While many books on Acts have been written, *The Mission of the Triune God* stands out for its clear and concise treatment of the theological themes of the book. It is fewer than 155 pages. Some may prefer a more thorough treatment of the subject, but this work achieves its purposes of pointing the reader to the text of Acts and more importantly to the divine author of the mission we are graciously called to participate in. I recommend this book to you for your spiritual edification and vocational equipping.