FOLLOWING JESUS AND LOVING THE WORLD



GREAT COMMISSION GREAT COMPASSION



PAUL BORTHWICK

FOREWORD BY CHRISTOPHER J. H. WRIGHT

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The degree to which I have actually succeeded in living a Great Commission, Great Compassion lifestyle is directly proportional to my great co-traveler in the journey of faith, my wife, Christie. Her compassionate heart, wise insights and dogged endurance have helped shape my life and the words I've written here. I joyfully dedicate this book to her.

CONTENTS

Foreword by Christopher J. H. Wright

Introduction: Choices

Part One: Biblical Foundations

1 How Should We Then Live?

2 Commission and Context
Living Out Jesus' Final Imperatives

3 Five Great Commissions, One by One

4 The Great Commission
Three Takeaways

5 The Great Compassion
Caring for the Disadvantaged

6 The Great Compassion
Eight Takeaways

Part Two: Lifestyle Imperatives

7 Choose
Committing to Kingdom Mission in Our Personal Choices

8 Learn
Developing an Ongoing Posture of Learning and Discovery

9 Look

Opening Our Eyes and Responding to Needs and Opportunities

10 Pray
Remembering That We Have Access to the Throne Room of God Almighty

11 Welcome and Celebrate
Looking for Ways to Welcome the Stranger

12 Simplify and Give
Making a Generous Lifestyle a Priority

13 Stand Together
Finding Like-Minded People and Advocating for Others

14 Go
Serving Crossculturally and Leaving Our Comfort Zone

Epilogue: Witnessing to All the Senses

Acknowledgments

Recommended Resources

Appendix: One Hundred Ideas for Great Commission, Great Compassion Outreach

Notes

Praise for *Great Commission, Great Compassion*

About the Author

More Titles from InterVarsity Press

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FOREWORD

Christopher J. H. Wright

"This God thinks of everything." He was a young Indian man, telling me his story after I had taught on Old Testament ethics at a seminar in Andhra Pradesh. He came from a Dalit (outcaste) background, experiencing poverty and injustice. He managed to get to university, where he found a Bible in Telugu on his bed (put there by Christian students of the Union of Evangelical Students of India). He opened it at random and read the story of Naboth. "That was my story," he said, "theft of land, false trials, killing of our people." Then he read in the next chapter about some god he had not heard of, who sent a prophet (Elijah) to condemn the oppressors—the king and queen! He could not believe it. "I never knew such a God existed." So he started to read the Bible from the very beginning. And when he got to all the details of the law in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, he was astonished and full of admiration. "This God thinks of everything!"

This God gets practical. He did not leave the Israelites with high-sounding principles only—wonderful though they are ("Love your neighbor . . . love the foreigner . . . do justice")—he fleshed it out in a detailed, practical, systemic, down-to-earth, culturally specific way. God gave us a working model of how to embody justice and compassion, in a people whom he had created to be the means of carrying out God's own mission of blessing all nations on earth and ultimately healing the whole broken creation.

And Jesus not only endorsed that scriptural model, he fleshed it out even further with his own teaching, often even more radical, demanding, countercultural and subversive. And then he built that into the so-called "Great Commission": . . . "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (which is pure Deuteronomy).

But I’m just a Bible teacher, trying to help people see that they need *the whole Bible story* for their understanding and practice of mission. I get stumped when people ask me, “So what should I do? What practical advice can you give me and my church in order to have a truly holistic, integrated mission that includes word and deed, evangelism, social action, creation care and all the rest?” Now I needn’t be stumped again. I can simply recommend (or give) Paul Borthwick’s book, for *Great Commission, Great Compassion* is designed to answer exactly those questions and does it brilliantly well.

Oh, by the way, that Indian man? The Indian evangelical students came to his room and led him to faith in Jesus. He had just reached reading the book of Isaiah. Sound familiar?

INTRODUCTION

Choices

I was teaching an adult Bible class where I was articulating our church's global involvement. I spent forty-five minutes describing our church's generous and strategic response to the Great Commission. As I taught, I saw a young man sitting off to the side who seemed confused. I knew he was new to the life of faith, having committed himself to follow Jesus only a few months earlier.

After class, I approached him and attempted what missionaries call "back translation." Rather than reviewing what I had said, I wanted to know what he had heard. Since I had used the phrase "great commission" many times without clarification of its meaning, I asked, "What do *you* think is the Great Commission?"

His blank facial expression indicated that he didn't know. But he took a guess: "I'm guessing it must be maybe 30 percent."

Now I had the blank expression. "I don't understand," I replied.

"Well," he said, "I come from the world of sales. Ten percent would be a good commission. Twenty percent would be a better commission. So I'm guessing that 30 percent would be considered a *great* commission."

We laughed together as I explained the term, but I learned my lesson. Not everyone knows what Jesus' Great Commission is. The most familiar Great Commission is found in Matthew 28:18-20, where Jesus says: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." But that's not all there is to the Great Commission. There's much more.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus walked the earth and invited a group of people we call *disciples* to follow him (Matthew 4:19). With that invitation, he also asked for a commitment that they would walk with him and learn from him (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus issues the same invitation and asks for the same commitment today. In short, he invites us to follow him and live as his disciples.

Jerry White describes the whole-life, open-ended commitment that we are asked to make: "We make the commitment and leave the results to God. In a sense, it's like signing a blank check and allowing God to fill in the amount. It can be a frightening adventure. But God will never demand more from us than we have to give."[1]

Although we may make a lifetime commitment, the decision to live as a Christ-follower confronts us in a myriad of ways every day. Will I look at my resources as a gift entrusted by God, or as something that is mine to be used for my selfish purpose, with God getting the leftovers? Will I listen to God through Bible study, fellowship and prayer, or will I get preoccupied before the day starts with my own to-do list? Will I care more about the friends I know only through virtual connection on Twitter or Facebook or some other social media, or will I care for and reach out to the people right in front of me? Will I speak and live as a follower of Jesus, or will I simply try to blend in with the crowd?

Every day we make choices. Will we turn inward and focus on the life that Jesus gives us only as it benefits our own lives? Or will we live a lifestyle that illustrates that we see and relate to the world around us through the lens of Jesus' compassion for people and the world?

Choices

In one of the classes I've taught at Gordon College, we focus on global issues facing the global church. We cover topics related to hunger, poverty, disease, street kids and more—and we wrestle with Christian responses to these issues. At some point early in the course, I'll ask students, "What is the greatest expression of our affluence in North America, or even in the Western world?" (I would specifically be thinking of North America,

Europe or Australia, as most of my students come from middle- to upper-class families from these regions.) Their answers vary:

- discretionary money that we spend on toys, junk food and other non-necessities
- credit cards and the availability of credit
- the size of our houses, cars, streets or closets
- incredible access to communication and technology
- mobility—highways, air travel, etc.

But then I give my answer (which appears on the final exam, by the way): *affluence of choice!* I submit to them that the affluence of choice expresses our wealth more than anything else. An economically poor person has few if any choices. What to wear today? No stresses here when I have one outfit. Where to go to college or what to study? Not even under consideration. What food for breakfast or lunch or dinner? Whatever stomach-filling carbohydrate I can find! Where to live? Anyplace with shelter from the weather will suffice. Economic poverty and the conditions that surround it have taken away poor people's choices.

The ultimate plight of the poor is that they are without choices. They often cannot decide their living areas, diet, wardrobe or vocation. Unlike us in the affluent areas, the world's poorest of the poor spend little time wondering, *What are my plans for the week or month?* Their goal is to survive the day or the week.

In contrast, consider our American lifestyle as illustrated by an article about choices that appeared in *USA Today* in 2004 (I'm sure the options have increased since then):

- Dreyer's Ice Cream offered 34 flavors in 1977; they sell 250 today.
- Arby's, which offered one sandwich when it was founded in 1964 (Roast Beef—thus the name), now offers more than 30, most of which aren't even roast beef.
- When Whole Foods opened in 1974, it sold two kinds of lettuce; now it sells 40. Its stores sell 15 kinds of mushrooms, many of

which weren't sold in the USA five years ago.

- Frito-Lay started with two chip varieties—Frito's corn chips and Lay's potato chips; now it has 60, and there are 24 varieties of the Lay's potato chip.
- Tropicana even sells orange juice with three different consistencies of pulp.[2]

To add to these dramatic stats, a Starbucks website states, "Did you know there are over 87,000 different drink combinations at Starbucks? Why not try a syrup in your morning latte, or try soy in your mocha? A drizzle of buttery caramel on the top of your cappuccino? The possibilities are endless. . . . Discover your favorite."[3] Customers can choose from five types of milk—whole, nonfat, half and half, organic and soy. We can choose sizes, foam or no foam, three types of artificial sweetener, and even extra hot (180 degrees versus 150 to 170).

In my middle-class, American lifestyle I face hundreds, even thousands of choices daily. And even if I decide to forsake my comfy lifestyle and move onto the streets with the poorest of the poor in some megacity like Calcutta, India, and even if I contract hepatitis and die an early death on those streets, I still *chose* to be there. The person dying next to me had no choice.

Ultimately, this book is about choices. Will I choose to live as a full-on, 24/7, passionate follower of Jesus—with a lifestyle that expresses that commitment through my words and through my concern for others? Or will I look to the Bible for personal comfort, pray only for my friends and my personal needs and wants, and consciously (or subconsciously) look at Christian faith as a way to get God on my side?

In a world where Christian books with titles like *Becoming a Better You* and *Your Best Life Now* will sell much better than something titled *Take Up Your Cross Daily and Follow Me* or *The Cost of Discipleship*, the choice is tough.

Back to my Gordon College class: as I said earlier, the "greatest affluence" question with the answer "affluence of choice" appears on the final exam. The second part of the question builds on this: "Given this greatest affluence, what is the lordship decision that every follower of

Christ faces?" Answer: *What will I do with my choices?* We might not choose the streets of Calcutta, but we could.

In the pages that follow, we'll examine Scripture and explore ongoing lifestyle issues that will confront us with choices. Some of these choices will be countercultural. Others will be crosscultural. Many will be challenging, and some will be costly.

So I put the question to you: What will you do with your choices?

Where This Book Came From

As I've aged, I've noticed our ability in the Christian community to swing toward one side or the other on various pendulums. In my lifetime, I've been part of a number of swings:

- Hyper-interest in the apocalypse (the end of the world when Jesus returns) versus preoccupation with living in and affecting the world we're in right now.
- Leading a presentation of the gospel with, "If you were to die today, do you know you'd go to heaven?" versus "Are you fulfilled?"
- Propagating the miraculous sign of speaking in tongues versus fighting anyone who does.
- Preaching an absolute reliance on the sovereignty of God versus calling Christ-followers to responsible action.

Throughout the decades, the pendulum between preaching the gospel and concern for human need has swung widely. It takes on various terms —"evangelism versus social action," or "the gospel in word versus the gospel in deed," or "preaching justification versus advocating justice." Each of us lives in a different context, so the side of the swing that we might favor depends on our context. Where I live in the northeastern United States, political correctness rules the day, making us Christians almost fearful of the verbal proclamation of the gospel. We prefer to quote the phrase associated with Francis of Assisi, "At all times preach the gospel; if necessary, use words."

In other communities, people favor the preached message but seem to prefer to leave the care of human need to other organizations or even the government—or perhaps they see poverty and human suffering as a sign of the end times. One church that I'm familiar with in Nigeria has an aggressive plan for church planting and for "getting as many people into heaven as possible," but social concerns are secondary at best, and no such concerns appear in the church's purpose statements.

Thankfully, these pendulum swings are ultimately a call for the Christian community to find balance—to realize that the Christian answer is often not one extreme or the other but rather a midpoint, not either/or but both/and. Femi Adeleye, an African leader who hails from Nigeria but has had a global ministry, once stated that the evangelism–social action dichotomy is "an old debate in need of burial."[4] John Stott used the illustration that the biblical blend of evangelism and social action are like the two pieces of scissors: if one part is absent, the scissors no longer function as scissors.[5] York Moore of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship promotes what he calls "justice evangelism"—preach justification through Christ alone while drawing students to Jesus by advocating student involvement in standing against injustices such as human trafficking.[6]

This is my hope in this book: to call us all to a sense of biblical balance. Part one lays the foundation by examining the Great Commission imperatives of Jesus—to go, to preach, to baptize, to make disciples, to witness. Then we consider the Great Compassion, examining biblical teaching on the poor, the disenfranchised, the hurting people of our world, and what God calls us to do.

Part two moves to the theme of choices—practical lifestyle choices that we all can make, which can help us move in the direction of what I call a "Great Commission, Great Compassion lifestyle." I use the phrase "move in the direction" because the thought of global outreach or responding to human need is overwhelming. My hope is that the ideas of part two help us all move toward a lifestyle that is more in keeping with Jesus' design for our living out the gospel in word and action.

Finally, the book concludes with a summary call to live a demonstrable Christian life that touches all of the human senses: hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, smelling.

I invite you to choose this life of commitment, to fulfill the Great Commission and live out the Great Compassion. Let’s begin!

PART ONE

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

In one of my Gordon College courses, Biblical and Historical Foundations for Global Mission, I start the semester with an informational quiz. Most students in this course take it as an elective. Some choose it to follow up on a Christian conference such as Passion or Urbana, where they have been challenged to think globally.[1] Others choose it because their thinking about global missions has been stimulated by a short-term mission trip or a summer read of a book by John Piper or David Platt.[2] Still others (I think) choose it because it's once per week and they've heard that I'm an easy grader.

All of the students profess to be Christians, and many have grown up in Christian homes, attending Christian churches and youth groups. More than 80 percent of these students have been on some sort of crosscultural service trip—either while in college or in a church youth group as a high school or middle school student.

Why is this significant? Because when I ask on the introductory quiz for them to reference or quote or summarize any of the five Great Commission statements of Jesus, less than 20 percent have an answer. In other words, they have attended mission conferences, they grew up involved in church life and they have served on crosscultural mission teams, but they have little knowledge of the specific biblical foundational "why?" of outreach and crosscultural mission.

I'm not singling out my Gordon College students; they are not alone. While many Christians have an intense desire to serve, they often have a weak understanding of the biblical "why we serve" or how this service corresponds to the commands and promises of Jesus.

All this is to introduce part one of this book, where we examine the biblical “why?” of our going into all the world in obedience to Jesus’ commission and our responding to a needy world with acts of compassion.

- 1 -

HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

In the 1970s the Christian leader Francis Schaeffer gave lectures, wrote a book and eventually produced a film series simply titled *How Should We Then Live?*[1] The title raises a question for the ages. Many Christians respond biblically by quoting the succinct summary that the prophet Micah gives. As the Lord reminds his people of his deliverance of them and calls them to repentance, Micah asks:

> With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? (Micah 6:6-7)

In other words, how can I find forgiveness and show by my life that I have repented to the Lord? Micah's conclusion summarizes his understanding of God's ways: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

How shall we then live? With lives characterized by justice and mercy and built on a humble walk with God. Micah's words echo words stated by Moses centuries earlier as he called the Israelites to a life that would be pleasing to God: "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you

today for your own good?" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). Micah starts with a call to justice and mercy in human relationships but founds it on a humble walk or relationship with God. Moses begins with a strong emphasis on a whole-hearted vertical relationship with God (fear him, obey him, love him, serve him), but we know from reading the Old Testament that "observing the Lord's commands and decrees" is carried out in horizontal human relationships.[2] Obeying these will obviously be for everyone's good.

Love of God and Others in the New Testament

In response to the "how shall we then live?" question asked by a religious man, Jesus illustrated vividly that a relationship with God is always demonstrated in a life of mercy.

> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
>
> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"
>
> He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"
>
> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." (Luke 10:25-28)

The expert of the law specialized in living out the technicalities of the religious teachings, so he asked for clarification, apparently to show himself righteous to Jesus and to the listeners.

> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
>
> In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came

> to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'
>
> "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"
>
> The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." (Luke 10:29-37)

The religiously righteous "passed by on the other side." Perhaps they were late for services at the temple, or they simply did not want to render themselves unclean by touching this beaten stranger. And besides, who knows? Maybe he had been beaten because he deserved it? Or perhaps he was faking so that when a merciful person came to his aid, his hidden accomplices would rob the helper.

We don't know why they didn't stop, but a merciful man did. He bandaged the victim and took him to an inn and basically left his credit card account open, telling the innkeeper, "charge his expenses to me." Jesus said that this is what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. And, to the shock of the religious Jewish law expert, Jesus identified the merciful man as a Samaritan. The religious man couldn't bring himself to say "the Samaritan." Instead he simply said "the one who had mercy on him." For a religious Jew of the first century, Samaritans were outcasts, religiously unacceptable and not part of the chosen race.[3] Yet it was this man who demonstrated mercy.

"Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise'" (Luke 10:37). Jesus' response—the two great commandments and the parable—illustrate that a life pleasing to God is built on a personal relationship with God that flows outward toward others. James expresses this concept as he articulates the balance of faith and deeds:

> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
>
> But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”
>
> Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.
>
> You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.
>
> In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (James 2:14-26)

The apostle John puts it another way:

> Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them. (1 John 2:9-11)

Mercy and justice, faith and works, love of God and love of others. The pairs are inseparable. And, as we’ll see in the chapters ahead, we are called

to a life that shares Jesus Christ verbally and demonstrates the good news of the gospel with tangible action.

Justice, Peace, Truth, Freedom

On Christmas Eve 2014, Dr. David Epstein, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in New York City, spoke the Christmas story into the immense racial tensions dividing his city at the time. The city and the nation were in the midst of racial tensions caused by conflict related to black men killed by white policemen, followed by the assassination of two New York City policemen (Hispanic and Asian) just before Christmas. Dr. Epstein built his thoughts off of one of the slogans of protestors, "no peace without justice." He agreed:

> Indeed, there will be no peace without justice. But there will be no peace and justice without truth and grace, because the truth sets us free, and only free people can bring peace and justice, and only gracious people can bring reconciliation. And there is no truth and grace without worship of the One who is the source of all peace, justice, truth and grace.[4]

Standing for justice and peace and reconciliation flows from a living, vital relationship with God through Jesus. The follower of Jesus—the disciple—relates to the issues of the day in the world because he or she sees that world through the grace and truth found in Jesus Christ. Grace to care for those in need coincides with the desire to demonstrate Jesus as truth by deeds and share him by words. Practice and proclamation are the two hands of the gospel. Christians sometimes try to live a one-handed lifestyle, but a complete Christian lifestyle requires both hands.

In these next few chapters, we'll find biblical responses to the question, How shall we then live? By evaluating the final imperatives that Jesus gave us and examining biblical teaching on living compassionately, we'll have a scriptural foundation for the Great Commission, Great Compassion lifestyle.

- 2 -

COMMISSION AND CONTEXT

Living Out Jesus' Final Imperatives

Right around the turn of the new millennium, my Boston region and even the nation followed with morbid fascination the story of the disposal of the remains of deceased baseball legend Ted Williams. Surviving family members couldn't agree whether to bury him or preserve his remains in a cryogenically frozen state in the event that future researchers discovered a way to conquer issues of aging and death and eventually resuscitate Mr. Williams.

The story illustrates a problem that should cause everyone age fifty and above to review his or her will. The conflict over the disposal of Williams's body evidently occurred because *he did not make his last wishes clear!*

A "last will and testament" states as clearly as possible what the person wants done with resources, properties and even his or her body after departure. Why? So that survivors have no questions as to what their loved one desired. When my mother died, she had laid out everything for us: her will, her burial wishes and other details, right down to planning the hymns, speakers and soloists for her funeral. It made our actions easy because she had clearly outlined what we were to do. Unlike Ted Williams, my mom had made her last wishes clear.

The Last Wishes of Jesus

Jesus' last wishes appear at the end of each of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) as well as just before Jesus' ascension recorded in

Acts 1. Jesus did indeed make his wishes, his commands and his promises clear to all of us before he ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit. We have these so that we, as his children, know exactly what we should be doing.

These words, especially as they appear in Matthew's Gospel, are often called "The Great Commission." Let's review the five passages.

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

Given that this is the passage most likely to occur in your Bible under the words "The Great Commission," it's worth reading Matthew 28:18-20 again from another version—Eugene Peterson's *The Message*. He paraphrases:

> Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."

> ***Mark 16:15-18.*** He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

Luke 24:45-49. (Luke's first volume) Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Acts 1:8. (Luke's second volume) **"**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

John 20:21-23. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Combine these statements and the conclusion is unavoidable: Jesus wants us to go. He calls us to be on mission, to be 24/7 available as witnesses and to join the work he started. We might respond, "I'm on the go enough. I need to slow down." But these are not verses about intensifying our schedules, or getting more activity out of every moment, or maximizing the use of schedulers and planners so that our busyness can increase. These verses are Jesus' closing imperatives that call us to greater purpose—which is far different from busyness.

To help associate Jesus' imperatives with the idea of being sent by him into the world, I like to refer to these passages as Jesus' "great GO-mission" statements. Before we evaluate the where, the how and the what details of these statements, let's review their context.

Original Context

To understand the gravity of these words, we need to remember that all of these statements are post-resurrection. Jesus made them all during the forty days he walked the earth after his resurrection and before his ascension into heaven.

It's important to note that these are not one teaching recorded in different ways by different authors. Jesus gave these commissions in various times and settings. Matthew's is definitely in Galilee; Mark's is in either Jerusalem or Bethany; Luke's is definitely in Jerusalem and the Acts account is definitely in Bethany; John's is in Jerusalem, but the wording is completely different from all of the other statements. John's record occurs on Easter night immediately after the resurrection, and Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 immediately precede his ascension. The other statements occur over those forty days.

Why is this important? Jesus is, in effect, repeating and rephrasing his statements as if to say, "if you didn't get this the first time, let me repeat it again in a revised way." In light of the fact that we have very little post-resurrection material, the fact that these instructions appear several times underscores their importance.

We also need to keep Jesus' listeners in mind. Jesus gives all of these statements to people whose failure and denial of Christ is fresh in their minds. They had denied or abandoned Jesus hours or days before. They were not standing in front of Jesus hoping for a new challenge. They were bruised and ashamed of their cowardice. When he commands them to be witnesses or to preach the gospel to everyone everywhere, I can imagine them thinking to themselves, *You have got to be kidding, Jesus. We couldn't even stand up for you right here in Jerusalem, and you're talking about the "ends of the earth"?*

And don't forget, Jesus' audience was almost entirely Jewish, with some like Simon the Zealot part of a group that absolutely wanted Jesus to overthrow Rome. It's safe to say that all of Jesus' disciples were highly ethnocentric and resistant to the people to whom Jesus wanted to send them. They likely would have understood phrases like "all nations" (Matthew and Luke), "all creation" (Mark) or "to the ends of the earth" (Acts) as referring to dispersed Jews all over the world. But when Jesus gets specific and mentions both Judaea *and* Samaria (Acts) they would have known that

Jesus was taking them outside their comfort zone. Samaritans were despised half-breeds that their parents had taught them to avoid.

Again concerning context: all of these statements come very soon after Jesus' resurrection—within hours or days. We need to keep this in mind when we hear the words that Jesus uses. When he says "authority" (Matthew 28), the disciples (who had seen his miracle-working powers already) immediately realized that Jesus has just demonstrated God's authoritative power over death and indeed over the Roman government. *The grave could not hold him.* I imagine the picture Matthew gives of Jesus talking to his disciples. As he begins what we have recorded as Matthew 28:18, stretching out his arms and saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," I envision the disciples' awe as the daylight behind Jesus shines through the nail holes in his hands. All authority indeed!

Luke's word *power* (Luke, Acts) reminded the disciples of the earthquake that accompanied Jesus' death and tore open the Holy of Holies in the temple.[1] They remembered the neutralized soldiers and the stone rolled away from the grave. The power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is being promised to them.

Luke also uses the word *witnesses* in both Luke 24 and Acts 1. The disciples knew that they were first and foremost witnesses of the resurrected Christ. It is this risen Savior to whom they would bear witness, even to the point of death.[2]

Finally, we should remember that the last words of a leader are given extra importance in the Bible and the cultures of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Genesis 49 records Jacob's words of blessing and prophecy to his twelve sons. We have Moses' last words to the people of Israel and to Joshua in Deuteronomy 31–33. David's last words to his son Solomon appear in 1 Kings 2. Elijah and Elisha's final conversation is written in 2 Kings 2.

The pattern repeats in the New Testament. Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian elders appears in Acts 20:17-35, and Paul's second letter to Timothy serves as Paul's last will and testament. The fact that all of the Gospels culminate in commissions underscores these last words of Jesus to

his disciples and to us. Again, in effect Jesus is saying, “This is what I want you to remember most!”

Sent Out with Superlatives

The most famous of the Great Commission statements of Jesus occurs in Matthew 28:18-20. A few years ago, while serving as a guest speaker at a church pastored by a friend, I took a fresh look at this familiar passage. My friend had asked me to challenge his congregation toward outreach as a new church season started. As I pondered these last words of Jesus, the superlatives simply jumped off the page.

The resurrected Jesus begins by establishing our *platform* for outreach: his supreme authority. “*All* authority” is his. Our commission into the world is not denominational or local church based. It is not primarily motivated by human need or by strategic opportunity. We’re sent out by the authority of Jesus. And it’s no small authority; it’s *all* authority—in heaven and on earth.

Knowing that we stand on his authority gives us boldness to speak (look at the disciples in the book of Acts). It gives us courage because we realize that the authority behind us is the power that raised Jesus from the dead. It empowers us to address the pluralistic spirit that proclaims all “truths” are equal and none are absolute. When we go out in outreach and proclamation to others, we stand on the superlative authority of Jesus.

Jesus goes on to give the *content* of our proclamation: teaching others to obey all that he taught. As we are going into the world, we are supposed to teach *all* things that Jesus commanded. We cannot pick our favorite texts at the expense of the tough ones. Nor can we serve people just the sweet parts of biblical faith, a sort of Christianity lite.

Our commission is to teach everything that Jesus taught and exemplified. We cannot avoid the stuff about standing strong in the face of hardship, the challenges to take up our cross daily and the exhortation to forgive the people who have hurt us. We need Jesus’ superlative authority to enable us to teach his superlative truth.

Then Jesus articulates the *destination* of our outreach: all nations (or all ethnic groups). We cannot focus just on the people who look like us or fit

into our culturally specific enclave. Jesus wants no one to be left out. His superlative vision is for all the peoples on earth.

With all the diverse ethnicities of the world in mind, our outreach includes our closest neighbors; but Jesus likewise opens our eyes to the Cambodian woman at the supermarket, the gang member on the bus, the Muslim who owns the 7-Eleven and the physically handicapped person who we might find easy to overlook. Jesus says, "God so loved *the world,* and I want you to love the world too."

The platform of Jesus' authority stands strong, but teaching "all things" and going to "all nations" seems overwhelming. To keep us from being intimidated by the challenge, Jesus closes with a superlative *promise:* "I am with you always." In other words, Jesus says, "There's no place you can go that I won't go with you. I'll give you the words to speak and the love to share. I'll be the one empowering your words, and I'm the one who can break through to enlighten peoples' hearts."

We're sent out on a superlative mission by a supreme Lord. All his truth must be proclaimed. All people must have a chance to respond to his love. But don't worry—he's not just the supreme commander, he's also the supreme companion.

- 3 -

FIVE GREAT COMMISSIONS, ONE BY ONE

On a long journey home from Hong Kong to Chicago, with a fourteen-hour flight, I boarded the plane and sat down in 35C. I immediately prayed for the people who would occupy 35A and 35B; I prayed that we could have a worthwhile conversation and that I might be able to share my faith. A woman, Nancy, returning home to Ohio sat in 35A, and we exchanged cordial greetings. Then a man, Bob, entered to sit in 35B; he was going home to suburban Chicago. Bob was quite drunk as he entered, and he started making loud, rude and crude jokes, many of which were sexual in nature.

Bob's vulgarity created discomfort for Nancy as well as for several nearby flight attendants. At first I thought, *Really, Lord? Is this the guy you've sent me to?* His crudeness continued, so I decided I had to say something. When Bob stopped for a moment to take a breath, I quickly remarked, "Bob, I'm so glad to be seated next to you because I'm an evangelical pastor and I cannot wait to get to talk with you for these next fourteen hours!" I think Bob just wanted to get something more to drink, but I had succeeded in shocking him.

The five Great Commissions show me how I am supposed to think about the Bobs and Nancys of the world. If we look at each of these five statements individually, we can see the unique thrust of each writer. They can shape the way that we live and think about God's call on our lives every day as disciples.

Matthew: Make Disciples as You Go, Teach and Baptize

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

The superlatives stand out in Matthew. He bookends our tasks—making disciples of all nations and teaching disciples to obey all things—with the foundation of our mandate ("all authority") and the assurance of his companionship along the way ("I am with you always").

In Matthew's Gospel, Greek experts point out, the imperative is "make disciples," surrounded by three participles—as you are going, as you are teaching, as you are baptizing. In other words, Jesus assumes that we will be on the go—not just on some sort of "official" mission trip but on our way to work, to the marketplace, to the neighborhood, to the school.

The imperative "make disciples" presents us with the challenge. Our goal is not simply to make converts or to solicit evangelistic decisions. Our goal is to work with people (and ourselves!) to produce whole-hearted, integrated, obeying-all-things disciples of Jesus. The call to discipleship means a lifetime decision, and not just a calling to receive forgiveness and gain heavenly assurance.

The phrase *panta ta ethnē*—"all nations"—expands our mission beyond simply nations (that is, geopolitical entities that we see on our maps). The call includes the discipling of all of the world's ethnicities. So rather than thinking of India, for example, as one "nation," Jesus calls us to disciple people from every one of India's more than fifteen hundred ethnic groups.

Why does Jesus focus on baptism? Because in that society (and in many Christian-minority contexts today), baptism expresses a public identification with the community of believers and commitment to a local body of believers (a church or Christian fellowship). Jesus' words in Matthew identify his desire for the ethnic expansion of the kingdom, which presented a distinct challenge to the ethnocentric Jewish audience to whom Matthew was written. We can assume that, like all of us, these readers were okay with the idea of Jesus as Savior for *my* people, but what about those outside my socioethnic sphere?

Mark: Preach the Good News, Believe and Be Saved

In the context of Jesus' resurrection (Mark 16:9), Mark writes a rendition of Jesus' imperatives that is difficult to understand and even more challenging to apply to life today:

> He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well." (Mark 16:15-18)

Mark's emphasis on preaching the good news to "all the world" again directs Jesus' followers to go out to the people who have never heard about Jesus. Mark is not simply advocating the passive disciple making of the already saved. He calls people into the entire world and (literally) all creation.

The word *go* is once again a participle—"as you are going." "All creation" is a geographic rather than an ethnic focus as in Matthew. This means Jesus calls us to a task that is ever expanding! Think of it: in AD 33, the world population (all creation, if you will) was 250 million. By 1500, it was 500 million, having taken fifteen hundred years to double. By 1800, the population was one billion, doubling in three hundred years. By about 1900, it was two billion—one hundred years to double. By 1974, four billion (sixty years to double). In 2002, six billion.[1] As of this writing, global population exceeds 7.3 billion. "Preach to all creation" is a vast task, even in a world where more than two billion identify themselves as Christians.

Like Matthew, Mark emphasizes the necessity of being incorporated into the church ("believes and is baptized"). Taken in the entire context of Scripture, the correlation of belief with baptism underscores the assumption that true belief will result in identification and association with a Christian community. Baptism does not save, but a person who has put his or her faith in Jesus makes that commitment public to the world.

Mark also emphasizes the contrast of believing versus being condemned. We live in a world where pluralism and universalism dictate for many their perspective on salvation. Pluralism in its simplest form means that all faiths and philosophies can save—that all rivers lead to the same ocean. Universalism often means that Jesus' death on the cross is effective for all people, with or without a personal relationship, response or even knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Mark's reference to condemnation reminds us of the biblical teaching on judgment. For the good news to be good means that there is bad news—that is, that disbelief or wrong belief will have devastating, eternal consequences. Put another way, if there is no hell or condemnation to be avoided, the "good news" is only "news."

My friend Jack believes that everyone is going to heaven. He doesn't necessarily believe in God, but he believes everybody's going to heaven. I tried explaining the logic that you cannot really go to God's place if you don't believe in God. He said, "Oh yes, I can." Welcome to the world of self-made religion.

Jack and I work out at the same location, and years ago, after the attacks of 9/11, I asked Jack, "Did everyone who perished on 9/11/01 go to heaven?" He responded, "Absolutely." Then I stated, "That answer troubles me."

He responded, "I figured it would since you believe in Jesus as the only way to heaven."

"No," I replied. "What troubles me is your belief that those terrorists, who were among those who died on 9/11, went to heaven."

Jack quickly answered, "Oh, they didn't go to heaven. They went to hell."

"Really?" I asked. "Based on what criteria or standard?" Jack is a lawyer, and I was asking for his basis for judgment. I continued, "After all, the architects of 9/11 lived by a belief system that told them that what they did was heroic and even worthy of earning paradise."

Judgment is real and Jack knew it instinctively, but he doesn't like the idea of absolute or limiting truth.

Back to the passage in Mark: we really cannot move on without at least commenting on the problematic portions of the passage.[2] Some commentators refer to Mark 16:9-20 as one of the largest textual problems in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). Taken at face value, it

reads that miracles (speaking in tongues or handling snakes or drinking poison) are normative for all Christians everywhere.

Thorough investigation of Mark 16 could require a different book, but I'd like to suggest that Mark was written after the start of the early church. The book of Acts does describe many such miracles (with the exception of eating poison). Perhaps Mark is writing this retrospectively to the events of Acts, highlighting these things because he has seen them follow the apostles' ministry and the early church's experiences.

ETERNAL SOULS ALL AROUND US

Dr. Ron Blue of Dallas Theological Seminary gives a global perspective on people's deaths: by using various extrapolations, including death rates, world populations and religious affiliation, he estimates that every ten seconds, twenty-six people die. Of these twenty-six,

- two are Buddhist
- four are Hindu
- six are Muslim
- seven are Christian (of all the different Christian categories)
- seven are "other," including agnostic and atheist

Luke–Acts: Witnesses to All Nations

> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the

> forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:45-49)
>
> "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Jesus' last words in Luke volume one (the Gospel) occur right after the resurrection. The words in Luke volume two (the book of Acts) occur forty days later, just before Jesus ascended. Luke's emphasis on being witnesses and the promise of power illustrate a Lukan theme—that of going to all the nations (*panta ta ethnē*, all ethnicities) as witnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke's words reflect Isaiah 49:6, where Isaiah reminded the people of Israel that concentrating on the people of Israel alone was "too small a thing." God designed circumstances so that his people could serve as a light for the Gentiles, that all the ends of the earth might fear him.

Luke describes the gospel as repentance and forgiveness, a theme consistent with Scripture but unique in the Great Commission passages. In addition, Luke is the only Gospel writer who connects the Great Commission with the Old Testament (Luke 24:46).

In both passages, Luke uses the words *witnesses* (*martyres*) and *power* (*dynamis*). We are sent out with Holy Spirit "dynamite" power, but we'd better be ready—it will cost us. Every witness will become a "martyr" in some sense: socially, economically and in some contexts physically.

At the Cape Town 2010 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, I met Pastor Farshid. He was among a very few participants at the conference from Iran. His stories mesmerized me as he described his conversion from Shiite Islam to following Christ, and now the planting of several dozen house churches (small Christian gatherings designed to draw minimal attention to themselves from the government)—all in Iran! Farshid illustrated vividly what it meant to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Several months after the conference, in December, I got word that a government crackdown in Iran had led to Farshid's arrest, along with

several dozen others. To this day, Farshid remains in prison, having suffered immense physical and emotional pain. This is what it means to be a witness —truly a martyr.

Luke reiterates “to every ethnicity” in volume one, but his emphasis in Acts 1:8 is not so much on a geographic expansion, but rather an ethnic progression—from Jews to those separated from the Jewish community. Acts 1:8 could serve as a summary of the book of Acts. In Acts 1–7, the early church focuses on reaching their peers in Jerusalem and Judea. A great persecution in Acts 8:1 launches them out to the world of the Samaritans. And then Peter shares the gospel with Cornelius in Acts 10, thus opening the door for full Gentile inclusion in the church, a theme that dominates the rest of Acts.

John: Sent by the Spirit

John’s record of Jesus’ final challenges lacks some of the specificity of the three other writers, but he keeps it brief:

> Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” (John 20:21-23)

On Easter night, when the disciples are deeply shaken and unsure of almost everything, Jesus comes to them. Knowing their fears, he says the equivalent of “Don’t be afraid”—“Peace be with you.” He knew that the Spirit would need to calm them before they could hear much else.

He issues the mandate, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” The focus is uniquely John’s. Matthew, Mark and Luke refer to Jesus most frequently as the “Son of Man,” but in John the term most used is the “sent” one. John refers to Jesus as being sent or the sent one over forty times. “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world” (John 3:17); “As you sent me into the world” (John 17:18); “Righteous Father, though the

world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me" (John 17:25).

Now in John 20–21, the one sending and the ones being sent changes. The resurrected Jesus moves from being the sent one to being the sender. The things he did, we're now commissioned to do. We are sent as Jesus was sent—under God's love (John 3:16); to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10); to care for the poor (Luke 4:18-21). If we want to know the posture we should have in entering the world, then we need to study Jesus. As he was sent into the world, he now sends us.

The image of God sending Jesus and Jesus sending us reflects the great biblical truth that our God is a pursuing God. He is the God who goes looking for Adam and Eve after their blatant rebellion, calling, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). In Luke 15, Jesus describes a lost coin, a lost sheep and a lost son, and describes God as the homeowner who sweeps clean the house in search of the lost coin, the shepherd who leaves behind the ninety-nine in search of the one lost sheep, and the father who breaks with social conventions to run to welcome back his wayward son. Four chapters later, Jesus gets accused of hanging out with sinful people (in this case, the tax collector Zacchaeus) but responds with his mandate: "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). And now, after his resurrection, he commissions us to join him in the pursuit of lost people.

Joining the pursuing God brings great comfort because it reminds us that God is going ahead of us, pursuing and preparing people to receive the gospel. He calls us in as witnesses in the case he is building in people's lives.

I mentioned my flight with Nancy and Bob, who was drunk and crude. Bob sobered and we three did eventually have some nice conversation in which I was able to share about my faith and what it means to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Now, I know that this is the part of the story where people expect me to report that Bob and Nancy both became Christians that day and now they are missionaries in Mongolia, or something like that. But that's not what happened. I did point them to church possibilities in their communities where they could hear more about Christian beliefs, but there were no conversions—at least that day!

What did happen, however, reminded me of God's pursuit of lost people. As we were deplaning, Nancy and Bob both spoke to me, each independently of the other. Nancy remarked, "I've got to tell my friends about our conversation." "Why?" I asked. "Because they are evangelical Christians just like you, and I know they are praying that I meet Christians as I travel."

Bob said something similar: "I think God must be after me, because I have these two neighbors that keep telling me that they hope I'll hear the message about Jesus as I travel. Wait till I tell them about you!"

God is building his case in Nancy's and Bob's life. I was just being sent by the pursuing God as a witness. That's what happens when we respond to the Great Commission.

- 4 -

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Three Takeaways

With all of these five commissions understood, what's the application? In other words, what are we supposed to do with these words in terms of understanding how we should live? Consider three major themes that are evident in these passages as we take them together.

A Mindset: Living as a Sent Person

The fact that the words we translate "go" in Matthew and Mark are actually participles implies that Jesus assumes that the life of discipleship has an active component: "as you are going" preach, make disciples, baptize and be witnesses. Bob Jacks refers to this as "24/7 availability" to God.[1] As our lives in Christ proceed, we will ask God *where* he wants to send us, but on a daily basis we don't need to ask *if* we are sent. Jesus makes it clear: we *are* sent, starting right where we are.

My wife enters her microbiology lab early on a Monday morning and prays over the work stations. Like Isaiah, she prays, "Here I am, Lord, send me"—send me to the Gujarati Hindu fellow; to the Orthodox Christian woman who long ago became disillusioned with faith; to the coworkers from East Asia who have no apparent faith.

A student enters his high school and prays over the lockers of his fellow students. He knows that this is where he is sent. In the future he might end up in Kathmandu reaching out to Tibetan or Bhutanese refugees, but today he's sent to the high school. His daily mindset of being sent has led to many

evangelistic conversations, and it has encouraged other Christians to be bolder in their faith expression.

Larry and Linda walk around their fifty-five-plus community and pray quietly household by household. They have served in the past in Papua New Guinea and in Moldova, but they know that this community is where they are presently sent. The prayer walks have resulted in new relationships, a neighborhood Bible study, and three friends deciding to come to church with them weekly in an effort to understand Christian faith.

The world into which God has sent us includes our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our friends and natural contacts, our fellow students, and our families. The person seated next to us on the bus or airplane, the person waiting in the unemployment line with us, or the homeless guy we walk by every day on the way to the office are all those to whom God sends us.

Living as a sent person is a mindset: we hear Jesus' voice daily saying, "As the Father has sent me, now I'm sending you."

Living sent might mean inviting people to Christian events, discussion groups or some introductory course like the Alpha program. The biblical phrase "come and see" (see John 1:39) reminds us that offering people an invitation to meet Jesus might help them start on the journey of discipleship.

"Go and tell" offers another biblical model of being on mission (see Mark 5:19; Luke 8:39; John 4:39). On the local level, being assertive about our faith without being obnoxious certainly has its place. The life of discipleship is more than simply acting Christianly toward others. It also has an equally important component of proclamation.

On a global or crosscultural level, there are billions of people living today who have no near Christian neighbor or church who will invite them to "come and see." The only human way that they will learn the awesome message of the gospel or receive Jesus' invitation into a relationship is if sent Christians "go and tell." This is not a simple act of proclamation but a long-term investment in language learning, cultural adjustments and relationship building.

In the book of Acts, Philip is a great example of living as a sent person. His lifestyle reminds me of an international student from Uganda who, according to the members of his Chicagoland church, "shares the gospel with anything that moves." Philip truly demonstrates understanding of 24/7

availability. We meet him in Acts 6 when he is appointed as one of the team given responsibility to care for the feeding of widows. He is obviously full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3), and he knows how to serve the disadvantaged, demonstrating the "Great Compassion" that we will examine next.

Philip could have thought to himself, *I'm living out the gospel by my deeds, so that's enough.* However, he reappears in Acts 8, where we discover that the persecution in Jerusalem has dispersed him to a city in Samaria where he "proclaimed the Messiah" (Acts 8:5). In his life as a persecuted refugee, Philip is told by an angel to go south on a desert road (Acts 8:26). So he goes, shares the message of Jesus with an Ethiopian eunuch and baptizes him—thus helping introduce the gospel to the African continent (Acts 8:27-39). After the baptism, Philip is translated (or beamed over, like in *Star Trek*) to another city called Azotus. What does he do there? He "traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea" (Acts 8:40).

Philip gets pushed out of his position of leadership in the Jerusalem church because of persecution, finds himself with outcast people (the Samaritans), and he shares Christ. He gets bumped out of his comfort zone into a conversation with an important Ethiopian official, and he shares Christ. He gets taken away by the Spirit to Azotus, and he shares Christ.

Remember: Philip was in one circumstance after another that he had not chosen, but he saw each transition as a new opportunity to share the good news of Jesus. He was living with a mindset of being sent.

A young man named Peter reminded me of a modern-day Philip. I stopped in to a McDonald's in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and I noticed Peter working the counter. I recognized him from our young adult ministry at church, and I knew he had just graduated from Harvard University with a master's degree. I greeted him and managed to get him to break free for coffee together.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, knowing that Harvard master's degree students don't usually aspire to work the counter at McDonald's.

"Well," he explained, "I graduated in May but I went four months without finding a job, so I said to myself, 'I need some income to pay bills.' So this is where I've ended up—at least for now."

"Sorry to hear that. It must be hard . . ." I replied, but Peter cut me off.

"No. Don't be sorry. *God has me here.* This place is giving me awesome opportunities to share my faith. I'm on a shift that includes a Buddhist guy from Sri Lanka, a Muslim fellow from Lebanon, a Hindu lady from India and a fellow Christian from El Salvador. It's awesome. I get to be a global missionary to my coworkers while asking 'would you like fries with that?'"

He laughed and so did I. Like Philip, Peter found himself in a setting he never would have chosen as part of his long-term plan, but his mindset of living as a sent person shaped the way he looked at his circumstances and at the people around him.

A Worldview—Don't Leave Anyone Out

If we synthesize all of the commissions, we hear the heart of God for people outside of the community of faith. As the Bible affirms, God "wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

In other words, our going or living as sent people is not limited to reaching people just like us. Jesus sends us out crossculturally and internationally. Remember the commissions? As we are going, the goal is all nations (*panta ta ethnē*) or all ethnicities (Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:47). We start at home (our Jerusalem) but we don't stay there. The sending ripples out from our home base (Acts 1:8):

- To Judea—our wider region, but basically similar culturally and linguistically.
- To Samaria—those who are geographically near but culturally distant, including those we have been taught to fear or even hate. Who are our Samaritans? For some it's undocumented immigrants. For others it could be prisoners or former prisoners. Some fear or hate people from other religions—especially those who we might assume are "radical" or extremists. And for many it's the LGBT community.
- To the ends of the earth. We are blessed to be a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3; Psalm 67) and called to be a light to the nations. Caring only

about ourselves is “too small” for the purposes of God (see Isaiah 49:6). In his devotional classic *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers writes, “The church ceases to be a spiritual society when it is only on the lookout for the development of its own organization.”[2]

The commissions call us to grow in our willingness to cross cultures. As we’ll see later, God may call us to some of the more than two billion people on planet Earth categorized as either unreached or unengaged.[3] These are people who will never receive an invitation to believe in and respond to Jesus Christ as Savior unless someone crosses a culture to tell them.

But for all of us, the migrations of peoples serve as God’s wake-up call to start thinking crossculturally now! During a recent Christmastime trip to New York City, balmy weather brought out unusual numbers of residents walking, enjoying the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree or visiting the Central Park Zoo. By observation and listening, my wife, Christie, and I saw the nations right there in front of us. I’d ask people in the crowd politely, “What language are you speaking?” The answers came back: Dari (Afghanistan), Punjabi (India), Creole (Haiti), Urdu (Pakistan), Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, Mongolian, Armenian. We lost count of the number of languages we heard! And these people were not thousands of miles away. They were standing right in front of us. The God who “so loved the world” (John 3:16) brought them here to hear.

When my mother-in-law was in the hospital for a seven-month period, we were awakened to the fact that many of the hospital workers were first generation immigrants to the United States. Over those months, starting up conversations with these folks led us to people from twenty-four different nations—countries where they might never have heard the gospel.

The worldview that understands that no one should be left out invites us to start learning about our neighbors, becoming friends, sharing meals. In chapter eleven, “Welcome and Celebrate,” we’ll examine ideas of how to do this; but it starts, like my “What language?” question, with genuine interest, humble curiosity and respectful initiative.

While visiting a church in another part of the country, I joined the church’s global mission team for lunch at a local restaurant. They told me that this was their favorite restaurant and that they came here regularly as a

team. Over lunch, they pointed out a young olive-skinned woman behind the counter washing dishes. She was wearing a hijab, and they whispered to me, “That girl over there, she’s a Muslim, you know.”

I asked them her name. They didn’t know. Country? Type of Muslim (Sunni, Shiite, Sufi)? Don’t know. Was she a student? Where did she go to the mosque or the prayer center? Don’t know, don’t know, don’t know. Why? None of them had ever actually spoken to her—ever! And these folks made up the global mission team dedicated to their church’s involvement in reaching unreached peoples!

In the parking lot, the mission team realized that they had lost me. I stayed back, went over to the young woman, and I introduced myself. I greeted her in the only greeting I know in Arabic, and she was warm and friendly. Her name was Aisha, from Lebanon, and her father taught at the university. She was a Shiite who didn’t go to the local prayer center because they were Sunnis, but she prayed at home with her family. And sadly, she had no Christian friends who had reached out to her.

We need to open our eyes. Start the conversation. Ask a question. In a Sunday school class on world religions at my home church, I invited class members to reach out to the Cambodian Buddhist women who were cashiers at the supermarket down the street. During the Q and A time, a woman asked me, “How did you know that these ladies were from Cambodia? And Buddhist?”

I think she thought that my travels had enabled me to profile people based on their name or face shape or religiously oriented jewelry. I surprised her with a much simpler answer: “I asked them.”

Don’t be afraid. Look for the opportunities. When you see someone who doesn’t fit into your culture or social group, don’t run away. Reach out! God brought them here for us to love, serve and invite to Jesus!

In other words, our going is purposeful. Living as sent disciples does not mean movement for movement’s sake. We’re on the go to do our part to expand the kingdom of Christ, to every *ethnē*, every people group. This is not just a one-time “meet and greet” calling. Jesus sends us out to give everyone an invitation—not just to make some sort of momentary decision, but rather

- to become disciples with a living, vital relationship with God (Matthew 28:19),
- to become identified with Christ and the Christian community (Matthew's and Mark's emphasis on the identification mark of baptism),
- to join the Christian community in living as people sent into the world (John 20:21),
- and to understand and preach with us a gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47) as Spirit-empowered witnesses (Acts 1:8).

An Assurance: Jesus Is Always with Us

The commissions call us to a changed view of ourselves: we are sent into the world. The commissions send us out so that every person understands Jesus' invitation to a relationship with him—beginning at home, crossing cultures, to the ends of the earth. But we don't go alone. Jesus repeatedly reminds us of the following:

- I am with you always to the end of time (Matthew 28:20).
- I'll send you the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49).
- My Spirit will be your source of power to be my witnesses (Acts 1:8).

Too many times I look at the world in fear. Jesus speaks and says, "Don't be afraid. I am with you *always*." The dynamite power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is ours! We need it because living a sent life can be overwhelming: the needs and hurts of people can push us to tears. We need it because going to the ends of the earth or to the family down the street or to the guy in the apartment down the hall can be scary.

In the face of the unknown, Jesus says, "I am with you." In the face of fearful, out-of-control situations, Jesus says, "be strong and courageous." When we call, he is there. Many times I have entered a fearful moment with

Psalm 138:3 on my lips: “On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul” (NASB).

Dr. Peter Kuzmic serves as professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and president of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, Croatia. He grew up under the pressures of Yugoslavian socialism and Soviet communism. He stayed with his family in the former Yugoslavia during the Serbian-Bosnian war of 1994. Dr. Kuzmic knows police interrogations and huddling in the stairway covering his children while bombs fall nearby. Yet he also knows that Jesus’ promise to be with us always is real. He knows that *all authority* ultimately resides in the risen Savior. In his words, “We don’t need to live in fear. The final word of history will not come from Washington or Moscow or Beijing; it will come from the Lord of history and the Lord of heaven.”

The gift of the Holy Spirit means that our going is empowered. We don’t just psych ourselves up to be on the go. We go with the accompanying power of God. Again synthesizing the commissions:

- We go because Jesus, the one who sends us, has all authority (Matthew 28:18).
- We go because the resurrected Jesus reminds us of God’s power (Mark 16; Luke 24:46).
- We go because Jesus empowers us by his Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; John 20:22; Acts 1:8—*dynamis* power).

In summary, the resurrected Lord of heaven is always with us. The One who says “so send I you to the nations, to the whole of creation, to all peoples” promises to be with us always. In the words of a old hymn, “We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go.”[4]

- 5 -

THE GREAT COMPASSION

Caring for the Disadvantaged

In an article titled "Christians and the Loss of Cultural Influence," Peter Wehner wrote,

> As the dominant culture moves further and further away from traditional Christian beliefs, particularly in the area of sexual ethics . . . [it] is causing tremendous fear, uncertainty, and anxiety among many people of faith. . . . "We used to be the home team," one person of Christian faith said to me. "Now we're the away team." The challenge facing Christians in America is to remain deeply engaged in public matters even as they hold more lightly to the things of this world; . . . to react to the loss of influence not with a clenched fist but with equanimity and calm confidence; and *to show how a life of faith can transform lives in ways that are characterized by joy and grace*.[1]

How shall we live? As empowered, multiculturally sensitive sent ones. But how does that play out in human relationships? And most challenging, what do we do with a world filled with poverty and suffering and oppression? When I'm confronted with these kinds of questions, it inevitably provokes in me:

- Guilt—so I'll report that we support two children with World Vision, or that I went on the Walk for Hunger to raise money to help the homeless, or that I give this much money to this many ministries serving those trapped in sex trafficking.

- Deflection—so I'll refer to peers who are richer than I who have bigger houses and better cars, and I'll imply that I think they seem stingy. Or I'll tell the various ways that I'm poor—by which I mean "not as rich as the people next door or the professional athletes or the actors."
- Denial—so I'll use statistics about the burgeoning middle class in Bangalore, India, as an example of how the stories of the poor in India are exaggerated just to get us to give money.
- Rationalization—so I'll tell you that I read *When Helping Hurts* or *Toxic Charity* and I decided that the best thing I could do in response to poverty was—nothing! After all, I don't want to hurt the poor by demeaning them by throwing money at them.
- Ignorance—so I'll say that I really don't know how to help because the really desperate people live so far away from me, and they are victimized by systems that I cannot affect.

If you're reading this book, you most likely join me as part of the top 10 percent of the world's wealthiest people. According to Gregg Easterbrook in *The Progress Paradox*, we are in the top 1 percent of all the human beings who have ever lived in human history in terms of sheer comfort.[2] This staggers us because most of us don't feel wealthy. We compare ourselves upward. We say, "Well, I own a car, but I don't have a BMW. I have some nice clothes, but not like his clothes. Or her shoes. Or her purse."

There was a TV show years ago called *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. It followed the narrator as he went into houses where superstar athletes or famous movie stars or CEOs of Fortune 500 companies lived. Viewers got to see the celebrity's twelve water fountains, pools and indoor basketball courts. Why is there no reality show called *Lifestyles of the Poor and Indigent*? We don't usually find shows featuring the long-term homeless or a family living out of a station wagon in chronic poverty. And we certainly don't want a show that takes us into the slums of Manila or Calcutta or Lagos or Rio de Janeiro. It's much more fun to watch some unreal "reality" TV.

Coveting comes easily. Caring for the disadvantaged creates discomfort.

With that in mind, we have a troublesome biblical text to consider: Matthew 25. It's a text that receives quite a bit of attention in Richard Stearns's book *The Hole in Our Gospel* (which I commend to you). It's a tough text but it's among the last words recorded from Jesus in Matthew, in the final days before Jesus' trial and crucifixion.[3]

Peter Kuzmic, the Gordon-Conwell professor I quoted earlier, is the first person I ever heard refer to this passage as "The Great Compassion."

> When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.
>
> Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."
>
> Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"
>
> The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."
>
> Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me."
>
> They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did

not help you?”

He will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. (Matthew 25:31-46)

In this passage, in the prophecy recorded in Matthew 24:14 and in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew uses the phrase we looked at earlier: “all nations,” or “all the nations,” or better (*panta ta ethnē*) “all the ethnicities.” So it’s not just all of the geopolitical boundaries, it is all the ethnic-specific groups within the United States and other places.

In Matthew 24:14, Jesus says that in spite of coming persecution, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”[4] Matthew 25:32 picks up the phrase again with the judgment of all the nations. Some try to escape this passage by asserting that it is about the judgment of nations and governments: they will be judged based on how they treated their poor. Although that is an interpretation I would like to use so that I could be free from considering the words as applied to me, I’m convinced that the passage speaks too much to individuals—specifically the sheep and the goats—for that to be the complete explanation. The third *panta ta ethnē* we have covered already. It appears in Matthew 28:19: “Make disciples of *all nations*.”

Same phrase, three different times. *Panta ta ethnē* is a very significant theme in the ending days of Jesus’ ministry. Matthew 24 and 25 are usually considered part of what is called the Olivet Discourse. In this message or messages, which might have been delivered over several days, Jesus is giving a description of the end of the world. He speaks these words days before he himself will go to the cross, the grave, the resurrection and the ascension. It is likely that Matthew 24 and 25 were spoken during Passion Week (between the triumphal entry and the resurrection, maybe on Monday or Tuesday).

In the parable of Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus raises the issue of judgment. Think of the categories of how he says we’re going to be judged: how did we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned and the

stranger? I read this and feel intimidated because I sense my failures in every category. How can I ever live this out? Or in other words, how does my lifestyle respond to the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned and strangers of the world? Obviously, there ought to be something of a compassionate Christlike nature that characterizes our lives. But the question is, how does a disciple tangibly respond to this teaching? How does a family respond? How does a person like me, living my nice American middle-class existence, respond?

I need practical examples. Is God asking us all to become like Mother Teresa and move to the slums of Calcutta? If not, how do we deal with this passage? What does it actually look like to care for the hungry, sick, imprisoned or stranger?

Let's start with a statement that I first heard from a former president of World Vision US, Dr. Robert Seiple. He observed, "Guilt is a paralytic emotion." In other words, if I consistently bombard myself or readers with guilt, eventually we will be overwhelmed and we won't know what to do so we'll sit stunned into inaction. For example, if I observe that in the time it takes to watch two TV shows, 13,000 children will die of hunger or hunger-related diseases, how do we respond? It paralyzes us like a deer in the headlights, and we sit in silence thinking, *There's nothing I can do except feel bad.*

A silly example from my childhood: to provoke us to eat, my mother used to say, "Eat your food; children are starving in . . ." and she'd mention some faraway poorer country. My siblings and I would think to ourselves, *Please, Mom, can we mail these lima beans? Or this liver and onions? We'll gladly sacrifice our unwanted food for these hungry kids.* Our thoughts were sarcastic, but they illustrated the fact that we didn't know what to do with the guilt she was imposing.

Matthew 25 can actually paralyze us with guilt—or fear of judgment—so that we fail to think about how we need to respond.[5] What do we do with this passage? One of my students at Gordon College responded immediately, "Ask God to give us a heart of compassion." Good answer. A heart of compassion, or empathy, is the opposite of apathy. Apathy does not mean that we don't care. It means that we don't feel (*a* = negative; *pathos* = feeling). Illustrating that point, George Bernard Shaw said, "The worst sin

towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them."[6]

One reason why this is tough is that we are bombarded with more messages than any generation in human history. So, how do we sort out the messages? (See "1 John 3:17 Meets CNN" in chapter nine.)

How many of us have gone on a short-term mission trip to an economically poor area and been approached by beggars? In such situations, cultivating a compassionate heart might start by getting personal. Poor people have names.

Park Street Church in Boston is across the street from Boston Common, where many homeless people spend their days. One man frequently stood in an unused doorway of Park Street Church. Christie and I saw him on the first evening of a fifteen-week course that Park Street Church was hosting. On our first visit, his presence and fragrance startled us. On our second visit, we gave him some coupons for food at a local fast food restaurant. By the ninth or tenth visit, we no longer noticed him. Apathy had set in—no feeling. This man represented an apparently hopeless situation, so all we could do was to pass him by. Then I realized something terrible. I didn't even know his name, a sign of his God-given uniqueness, identity and dignity. So on the next visit I stopped to meet him. I learned his name. No more passing him by or just dropping my food coupons. I could now greet him as Bob, my fellow human being, and no longer see him as the fragrant homeless guy in the door jamb. I have not solved his homeless problem, but Bob humanizes homelessness for me. He has a name.

The problem with suffering that we see in others is that we get used to it. The first day we see the poor person we get nauseous with compassion; the fifth day we just step right over him. I once preached a sermon on Matthew 25:31-46 with the theme "For Christ's sake, do something!" Just because we can't fix a problem doesn't mean we should dismiss it and do nothing.

One thing this passage does to me is change the way I look at people. In Richard Stearns's book, he challenges us with this modernized paraphrase:

> I was hungry while you had more than you needed. I was thirsty and you drank bottled water. I was a stranger and you deported me. I needed clothes but you needed more clothes. I was sick and you

> pointed out behaviors that led to my sickness. I was in prison and you said I was getting what I deserved.[7]

Let's consider how we look at and respond to people suffering from these various problems.

Hungry

How do I live my middle-class, happy life while responding to the world of hunger? It's very easy for people with a hyper-conservative viewpoint to say, "These people are not eating because they won't work," or "Don't encourage their panhandling. Who knows if they really have need?"

We won't resolve the complexities of sociology and economics with a gift of food, but we can stay soft and cultivate compassion. If we give to someone whose poverty is a result of laziness or who actually has enough food already, who is going to know their situation besides God? And God can judge them. I've given money to people who probably didn't need it, and I didn't ask them for their tax statement to justify the donation. If someone says they need something, be kind.

I realize some readers might be more economically limited than others, but everyone can do something. For example, you go together with friends and adopt a child through Compassion International.[8] I guarantee that whatever most of us are paying for our cell phone packages can help support a child. If we can find the money for one thing, why can't we find the money for the other? For us who live in a richer world it's *both/and*, not *either/or*. How much does it cost to go to the movies? Twelve dollars or so, plus popcorn? Three trips to the movies can support a child with World Vision or Compassion for a month. This kind of thinking is what I call dynamic equivalence.

In the year 2000, my wife, Christie's, brother Bob died. He had named beneficiaries in his retirement account, and Christie received half. It wasn't a lifestyle-altering inheritance, but we came into about $20,000. We thought and prayed about what to do with it. Our car was rusting, and we thought this was God's provision to help us buy a new car, which we saw as a totally justifiable expense.

As we prayed, we began thinking in terms of dynamic equivalence. We asked ourselves, *What else could we do with this money*? We saw a brochure about bombings in South Sudan. A medical clinic run by World Relief had been destroyed so service to the malnourished victims of that war had ceased. But, the letter told us, for $10,000 the clinic could be replaced. Then we heard from friends in Ghana about the building of water catchment systems in villages that had inconsistent water supplies. A catchment system holds and stores the water that falls during the rainy season so that it is available all during the year, not just for drinking but for watering crops and preventing local, seasonal famines. Our friends told us that a water catchment system could bring fresh, clean water for the whole year for 170 families. It cost a little more than $9,000 to build.

My wife and I prayed about it, and without any second thought or guilt we released the $20,000 for a medical clinic and a water catchment system. Both were built in honor of my deceased brother-in-law. And we kept our old rusting car.

Don't think we can't do anything because we have only a little. Lest we ever forget, it's five loaves and two fish that appear in the most famous miracle of the Bible (outside of the resurrection). It is the only miracle besides the resurrection that appears in all four Gospels. And it is basically a story about not how much we have, but to whom we give it.

Thirsty

How about people who suffer because they don't have access to clean drinking water? For me, one of the first issues related to water is gratitude. Gratefulness is a wonderful place to start. The United Nations estimates that 782 million people worldwide do not have access to clean drinking water. In sub-Saharan Africa, they estimate, 40 percent of the population does not have such access.[9] In much of the world, people can't drink the water out of the tap; bottled water saves lives and prevents millions of intestinal issues. But in the United States we can drink the water that goes into the back tanks of our toilets if we wanted. (I don't know why we'd want to, but we could because it's the same pure water as flows from the tap.) The water with which I wash my car, my dishes or my clothes is all drinkable water. It's

simply amazing, especially when we realize how many people are sick because of waterborne diseases.

For some readers who are successful businesspeople, perhaps giving money to water treatment facilities globally is a way to respond to this passage. Others in science could discover new or cheaper ways of water treatment and purification. Ministries such as Echo have developed ways to refine muddy water with a clean bottle in the sunlight.[10] Some might give money for wells to be built. Others might train communities in how to take care of those wells. Still others might commit themselves to creation care to help prevent the further pollution of global water supplies.

When we talk about these things, we are going to hear the word *sustainable*. If we are in a village in Senegal and we pipe the water in from Mali, it might solve an immediate need, but it is not necessarily sustainable. If, however, we help villagers dig their own wells or figure out a way to collect water using everything from roofs to dew, we are creating sustainable solutions.

Can I offer a personal challenge about water? My wife studied for a master's of public health at Boston University. One of her classes was on epidemiology (the study of the transmission of diseases). I learned from her that the water that comes out of our tap in the United States is more carefully monitored (by the EPA) than water that goes into bottles (monitored by the FDA). Let me repeat: the water out of our tap is just as good and potentially better for us than the water out of a bottle. (I know firsthand that this is not true in some locations around the world, where we thank God for purified bottled water!) I'm convinced that somebody was thinking about how to get money from gullible people so they decided to put already good water in a plastic or glass bottle. It always strikes me that the word *Evian* is *naive* spelled backward. Will they be selling bottled air next and calling it negyxo? Get a Nalgene bottle, fill it up from the tap and be thankful. It saves on money and helps the environment by keeping hundreds of plastic bottles out of our trash.

Strangers

“I was a stranger and you invited me in.” Does this mean that our family should take in international students? Should we be adopting orphaned or abandoned Chinese girls? Does hosting an immigrant family for a Thanksgiving meal count? Advocating for the citizenship of first-generation Americans? The answers here might be yes and more! We’ll revisit this theme in detail in chapter eleven.

Reaching out to the stranger, the alien, the foreigner or the immigrant is basically about living with eyes of compassion. If apathy means no feeling, empathy means to feel along with. Compassion means to suffer along with or alongside of. In compassion, we enter into somebody else’s suffering.

When I was at seminary, one of the assignments for a class on urban ministry was a weekend in the city. We were given five dollars and no ID. Our assignment was to join the homeless and live on the streets. It was a radical lesson in compassion building. We were all accustomed to having all these safety nets like credit cards and phones, and all of a sudden we were living like genuine street persons. Like them, we became *invisible* to passers-by as we sat on city park benches. We were everyone’s stranger; no one cared who we were. The experience forced us to learn empathetically.

Needing Clothes

What do we do about the naked—those with inadequate clothing? To begin: don’t give a needy person our discards. Elisabeth Elliot tells the story of the “missionary barrel,” a place where people at her church could donate old clothes to give to missionaries they supported. When Elisabeth became a missionary to Ecuador, her team would receive things like used tea bags or clothes suitable only as rags. When she was younger, she had decided to give away a blue blazer with brass buttons on it, but first cut off the buttons because they were too valuable. Later, as a missionary she received something without buttons on it. She sadly laughed and apologized to God for her stinginess years earlier. Simply put, don’t give away garbage.

One of the items of used clothing we can never donate to the Salvation Army is underwear. Maybe a simple response to the issue of nakedness is to go buy a large pack of underwear. It’s obviously not the most glamorous donation we can give, but it’s needed and deeply appreciated.

"Naked" also has to do with lack of protection from the environment. Some people use this concept as a springboard to be involved in ministries such as Habitat for Humanity. A ministry in Guatemala City called Potter's House works with the poor to build better dwellings for them. These dwellings keep them safe, protected from the elements and often protected from unscrupulous thieves who prey on the homeless.

Sick

What about the sick? What does the passage say? "I was sick and you looked after me." A friend in Sri Lanka once challenged me: "You Christians in the United States always talk about the fact that you don't go through the same suffering as we do in the Third World. But God has given you the opportunity to suffer and you don't take it. It's the way you treat your elderly people. In most of the non-Western world we don't put people in homes for them to die. We let them live in our homes where they end their years with dignity."

In my friend's case, his parents and in-laws all lived out their lives and died in their own homes. Both my mother and my father-in-law had to go to nursing homes. There were factors involved beyond my family's selfishness, but my friend's words deeply challenged us. If nursing home care for the elderly is necessary, then don't forget them. Nursing care residents are among the most forgotten people in our country.

When I served as a youth leader, one group of our high schoolers created a ministry called the "Adopt a Granny Campaign." A group of three or four teenagers would go to a nursing home and ask a nurse, "Who never gets a visitor?" They would find these folks and simply go and sit with them, hear their stories and, if asked, pray with them.

In Prison

What about the imprisoned? Like the elderly, don't forget them. When a person at our church is diagnosed with cancer (a physical imprisonment of sorts), everyone starts praying. But after two or three months or a year of

treatment, we tend to forget them. The same is true with prisoners. The challenge is to maintain compassion permanence (see chapter seven).

Prison ministry coordinated with organizations such as Prison Fellowship can reach people who live forgotten, angry lives. For some Christians, prison ministry calls us to advocacy and defending the rights of the unjustly charged who languish in prison without defenders. Being a voice for the voiceless might take us to prison ministry through engagement with legal systems.

MORE ABOUT THE DISADVANTAGED

The marginalized

- no (or few) *resources*—usually they are economically deprived
- no (or few) *options, choices* or *rights*—often called "non-persons" or "shadows"

The vulnerable

- lack of access to education
- physically vulnerable to disease
- socially vulnerable to loneliness and deprivation
- The marginalized are also vulnerable:
    - to physical exploitation (such as the sex trade)
    - to economic exploitation (such as "sweatshops")
    - to legal exploitation (like the woman caught in adultery, John 8:2-11)
    - to social exploitation—even to the point of genocide

Advocacy opportunities on behalf of the marginalized

- Dalit Freedom Network (dalitnetwork.org)
- Evangelical Immigration Table (evangelicalimmigrationtable.com)
- International Justice Mission (ijm.org)
- Bread for the World (bread.org)
- VIVA (viva.org)

- 6 -

THE GREAT COMPASSION

Eight Takeaways

In response to the local and global challenges related to the need categories of Matthew 25, consider with me eight foundational thoughts. The imperatives for commission and compassion living will come in part two of the book, but for now let's build on these.

Stay Soft

First, when it comes to the world's suffering people, let me reiterate, *try to stay soft*. Dr. Robertson McQuilkin of Columbia International University tells a story about visiting his son in India. His son was working and living in the slums of Calcutta (a city of fifteen million) not far from the ministry of the Sisters of Charity, the group Mother Teresa began. McQuilkin was a seasoned world traveler, but here the squalor of poverty that he witnessed on the drive from the airport simply overwhelmed him. The smells of humanity and sewer water combined with a million people living on the streets brought him to tears.

His driver noticed this and said to him, "Don't worry, Dr. McQuilkin. In a few days you'll get used to it."

McQuilkin responded, "That's exactly what I *don't* want to happen. I don't want to get used to it." When Jesus looked over Jerusalem, the city that would soon rise up to crucify him, he wept because of the brokenness he saw (Luke 19:41-42). He persevered in lamenting over the suffering of others.

Don’t get used to it. I’m not suggesting that we should lose our minds over all the human suffering around us, but I am saying, don’t hesitate to let it bother you. Rich Stearns has a chapter in *The Hole in Our Gospel* titled “One Hundred Crashing Jetliners.” It’s his way of reminding us that if we saw one hundred plane crashes in a day, we’d do something to stop it or fix the problems. But, he says, this is the number of people dying daily of preventable diseases! It should bother us!

Target Your Actions

Second, in response to human need, we need to target our actions. None of us has the capacity to care for the whole world, but we can choose some need we know to which we can respond. It might start in our own city or our own neighborhood, but it helps for us to focus.

Along with focusing, try to be present. When you go into a hurting situation, enter into the suffering. Be present. Eat with the homeless person at the shelter. Listen to the old person’s story at the nursing home—and turn the mobile phone off for an hour. Be fully there.

In the pre-smartphone era, if I was walking down a street and I saw a beggar, my response was to cross the street. That was the way we avoided our discomfort “in the old days.” Now, there’s no need to cross the street. All we have to do is keep looking at our mobile devices because these allow us to stay oblivious to needs around us, acting like no one else exists.

Instead, be present to everyone around you. Greet people. I’ve lived in the Boston area all my life, and we have a reputation for not being very friendly or outgoing. For me, being present means looking at people and even surprising them with a smile and a greeting. Who knows, maybe the person I greeted was Jesus!

Transform Your View of Others

Third, let Jesus transform your view of others. Maybe we don’t have to be dramatic and say, “That might be Jesus,” but we can at least say to ourselves, *This is a person created in the image of God.* Terrorists are

people created in the image of God; the Boston Marathon bombers are people created in the image of God. The homeless fellow, the woman engaged in prostitution, the corrupt politician—all are people created in the image of God. The image may be tainted because of decisions and sin, but we first acknowledge their God-given value.

If I remind myself that every person is a valuable human being created in the image of God, it changes the way I respond to them.

Do Something

Fourth, do something. Related to the idea of focus (takeaway two), take some sort of action. We might not be able to do everything, but we can do something.

There's a parable I first heard in Southeast Asia about a father and son walking down the beach during low tide. As they are walking, they see hundreds of starfish that have washed ashore, and they are dying on the sand. The son begins to pick up starfish and throw them back into the sea. And the father says, "Son, look at the beach. There are hundreds of starfish here. What possible good does it do to throw one back?"

The boy picks up another starfish, and before throwing it into the deeper water he says, "Dad, for this one I can make a difference."

We won't solve all the problems of the world, but if you can help one community of 170 families get access to fresh drinking water, do it. If you can help one prisoner not feel forgotten, go for it. If you can support a child with Compassion, go for it. God isn't commanding us to solve the problems of the world; that's what God does. He just invites us to be engaged in the work that he is doing. Do something.

Live Out Love

Fifth, memorize 1 John 3:16-18 and live it out. It begins, "This is how we know what love is." If we examine the background behind John's first letter, we discover that it was written to refute the Gnostics, people who taught that knowledge (*gnosko* in Greek means "knowledge") is all that

matters. Practical outworking of one's faith didn't matter. The physical universe was not significant to them, only knowledge, so they advocated a belief system that had no real behavioral implications. They believed the physical world is illusionary, or in simplest terms, matter does not matter.

In his letter, John contradicts their teaching by writing about the tangible evidence of love. He writes, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:16-18).

In other words, if we can help someone, and we have the resources, time and access to help, and we don't help, then where is the reality of our love? The application of this verse gets complicated because of our exposure to too many needs (see "1 John 3:17 Meets CNN" in chapter nine), but for those of us who often fall into the category of the materially wealthy "haves," we demonstrate our faith tangibly when we use our resources to serve the "have-nots."

A personal story of demonstrated love: a few winters ago, we had fifteen significant snowstorms between December and March. I happened to be traveling during about twelve of these (it's not good for your marriage, trust me). One morning after fourteen inches of snow, my wife, Christie, was up early to shovel and go to work. When it was snowing she'd leave for the hospital where she works by 5:30 a.m. or so. She walked outside before 5:00 to get ready to shovel our steep driveway. As a service to both of us, a friendly neighbor had risen even earlier and shoveled her out. That is tangible love. He had something (strength and time); she had a need. He saw her need and acted.

I remember a visit to Harvard Square. Generally, I resist responding to beggars and panhandlers unless I can give food or coupons, but not cash. As I was going out of the subway station there was a man begging. He held a sign that stated he was a homeless veteran. He also looked like he had an alcohol problem, so I passed him by. As I walked out of the station, there was a ten dollar bill caught in a stair. I sensed the Lord speaking, telling me to give it to that guy. I don't know who this fellow was. Maybe he was

Jesus. Or maybe just a homeless veteran who could use some encouragement.

In keeping with the desire to stay soft, I need to see my resources as gifts for helping others.

Make Time to Care

Sixth, make time to care. All of us have that feeling that we are too busy to do something more, but I've found that if we don't make time for living compassionately, we won't do it. My university business management professor used to say regarding personal priorities, "We will always do the things we *really want* to do."

Can we give an hour to tutor a student struggling in high school? Can we have an international student over for dinner or perhaps help her with conversational English? Can we thin out our closets and donate some clothes rather than just stuffing the new stuff in? Are we willing to find the time to listen to somebody's story? Or to learn about the needs of the world?

Be a Good Samaritan

Seventh, remember the story of the Good Samaritan (see chapter one). Two religious guys crossed the street because their religious schedules or traditions were more important. One guy stopped. What's interesting about that guy? He gave not only one-time mercy, but a sense of trust. He left the robbed man at the inn and told the innkeeper to put anything he needed on his account. The point is this: he put himself at risk.

If we greet the biker on the street he might mug us, or he might be a Christian on the street who is witnessing. We never actually know. For example: my brother Scott is eight years younger than me. In his twenties, he went a bit wild (an understatement). He became a biker and the president of his gang. He got tattoos up and down both arms, and he sported a big bushy beard and a ponytail.

One day he roared into a church parking lot on his big Harley-Davidson. Dressed completely in black, including a skull and crossbones T-shirt, he put his helmet under his arm and came into the church office. He had a chain attached belt-to-wallet so he jingled as he walked. With his motorcycle boots and his muscular, tattooed arms on full display, he walked into the offices of Grace Chapel, where I was then serving on staff.

You might not know Grace Chapel, but suffice it say, tattooed biker dudes are not the normal office visitors. Grace Chapel is not really a biker haven. The receptionist buzzed me and said with a very nervous voice, "Paul, there is somebody here to see you." I think she thought my life was in danger. I walked out, smiled and hugged the visitor. I surprised the receptionist and said, "This is my brother Scott." I didn't see this fellow the way she did. To me, he's family!

My point is this: people often aren't exactly what we think they are when we size them up by image or stereotype. That person to whom you are talking might be somebody's brother or son, sister or daughter. Live with the eyes of the Good Samaritan. See people differently.

Give out of Your Pain

Eighth, don't hesitate to give out of your own pain. All of us have something unresolved inside of us; it could be relational, emotional, physical or financial pain. Some people say, "I can't give, I have too many challenges already." Or, "I've got too much dysfunction here." Or, "I'm dealing with too much stuff in my life." After I asked a woman who attended our church to serve on a committee, she replied, "I can't be involved; I can barely manage my own life as a single mom with two jobs."

It's very challenging, but we can ask God for Holy Spirit–empowered strength to give, even in spite of life's pains. I offer this challenge because of the example of Jesus on Good Friday. After a mock trial, severe beatings and false accusations, he is crucified. On the cross Jesus speaks seven times. A few of the times he is articulating his own pain: physical (thirst) and spiritual/emotional (abandonment). I'm not suggesting that we deny real pain and pretend it's not there. Don't deny the pain that is really a part of us. Jesus doesn't. He says, "I am thirsty" because he's in real physical

pain (John 19:28). He cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” because of the spiritual suffering he’s experiencing (Matthew 27:46).

And yet, of the seven last words of Christ, three of them are directed to caring for other people. From the cross and through his own pain he speaks

- to his persecutors: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). In the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, director Mel Gibson depicts Jesus speaking these words from the cross with the high priest right in front of him.
- to the pleading thief: “Today you will be with me in paradise,” caring for the spiritual well-being of this dying man (Luke 23:43).
- to his traumatized mother who has endured the horror of seeing her son suffer: “Woman, here is your son”; and to the apostle John: “Here is your mother” (John 19:26-27). He takes care of his mom, even in the midst of his own pain.

Let God work in the midst of your own pain. If we feel loneliness, maybe it is God’s way to trigger our attention for the homeless person or the international student or the refugee. If we’ve felt abandonment issues, maybe that’s our trigger to get involved in prison ministry. If we live with regret over years spent before knowing Jesus, maybe God can use us to reach out to people who have not yet heard about him.

Paul summarizes this idea for the Corinthians: God “comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Corinthians 1:4). People with abusive childhoods have a unique capacity to care for the abused. A formerly homeless veteran knows the pain and loneliness he experienced. The recovering alcoholic can uniquely serve as a counselor in the Alcoholics Anonymous program. And the single mom with two jobs whom I mentioned earlier? Church committee involvement was definitely not the place for her, but when the church started a support group for working moms who were newly divorced, she became a coach.

True Religion: James 1:27

As one committed to professional ministry, I find there are dozens of ways that people evaluate me. Some critique my sermons: are they relevant enough? Are they theologically deep? Biblically accurate? Others look at the way I counsel: does Pastor listen well? A few simply enjoy picking on superficial things, like the church member who drove by our home on trash-collection day and inquired a week later, with amazement, how a childless couple could generate so much trash!

But how does God evaluate us? We could point to biblical texts on faithfulness or character issues, integrity or witness, but the question remains: What's God's measurement?

James, one of the bluntest of the New Testament writers, speaks to God's evaluation in James 1:26-27. He starts with the issue of speech: "Do you consider yourself religious? Then keep your tongue under control" (my paraphrase). James 1:26 presents an awesome challenge to those of us who make our living talking!

Then he goes on to describe true religion: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). Simply put, God evaluates us by our compassion to the underprivileged and by our holiness of character.

The next issue that James addresses (remember that his thoughts weren't originally divided into chapters) relates to favoring the rich over the poor. In giving examples of holiness of character and being unpolluted by the world, James tells us that favoritism is an atrocity in God's sight! True religion means compassion to those in need, and holiness of character means viewing every person as equally valuable to God—whatever their economic status in life.

When God evaluates our lives and our outreach,

- He examines our compassion: are we giving to those scorned by society (such as widows and orphans)?
- He looks at whether or not we treat people equally rather than favoring some because of worldly wealth.
- He wants true religion, which is giving to others without reciprocation.

That’s the Great Commission, Great Compassion lifestyle God is calling us to. Now let’s live it out.

PART TWO

LIFESTYLE IMPERATIVES

A simple, daily prayer:

In response to all that you have done for us, Lord, may the commission that Jesus gave us send us into the world today, and may the compassion that Jesus demonstrated shape the way we see and treat the people we meet.

- 7 -

CHOOSE

Committing to Kingdom Mission in Our Personal Choices

Christian leaders often try to expand people's understanding of their role in evangelism, outreach or missions by simply stating, "We're here to do the work of the kingdom of God." This statement sounds great, but what does it mean?

To understand our work as citizens of Jesus' kingdom, we must first understand the mission of the King. If we understand his mission, then we'll grasp the mission of the kingdom. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus often clarifies his mission by stating, "I have come . . . for this purpose." Four of these statements directly affect our perspective on outreach as Great Commission, Great Compassion disciples.

Biblical Reflection: Jesus' Kingdom Mission

Luke 4 portrays the beginning of Jesus' ministry in his hometown of Nazareth. Jesus goes to what we might call his "home church" (or here, his home synagogue) as was his habit. He stands and reads from the prophet Isaiah: the anointing of the Spirit will mean good news for the poor, release for captives, recovery of sight for the blind and freedom for the oppressed. The mission Isaiah describes entails proclaiming all these things and, in so doing, proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus finishes reading, sits down and then declares that he is here to fulfill this Scripture. He is the Lord's anointed, and the ministries described by Isaiah will be his ministries. This statement causes a stir, especially

among hometown friends who had watched Jesus grow up in Joseph and Mary's house. Jesus responds to the stir by predicting his local rejection; but for our purposes we see in Jesus' words a declaration that the work of his kingdom is good news, compassionate action and a general spreading of a sense of God's favor. We know that we are now sent out on Jesus' mission (John 20:21), so good-news declaration and compassionate action become our calling too.

Later in Luke, Jesus clarifies his kingdom mission of redemption: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). All that Jesus did served this goal of inviting lost people into a reconciled relationship to God. He's looking for lost sheep, lost sons and spiritually sick people in need of a physician (see Luke 15:1-32 and Matthew 9:12-13). When we comprehend Jesus' kingdom mission of redemption, we citizens of his kingdom go looking for lost people.

In Mark 10:45 and Matthew 20:28, Jesus states his kingdom mission of servanthood: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus' purpose was not self-exaltation but service and sacrifice for the sake of others. Imitating his kingdom means entering the world with a dedication to serve, to listen to needs and to lay down our lives for others in an effort to invite them to experience the kingdom of Christ.

In John 18:37, Jesus explains that his kingdom mission brings confrontation: "The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." This purpose led Jesus and it will inevitably lead us into conflict; people in a pluralistic society don't like being confronted with truth. For this reason, Jesus further articulated his kingdom mission: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34; see also Luke 12:51). Proclaiming Christ's kingdom means edifying some and upsetting others.

Do you want to do the work of the kingdom of God on earth? Then imitate the mission of the King!

Choices Ahead

In the introduction I described our “affluence of choice” and the corresponding question about the lordship of Christ, What will I do with my choices?

In this second half of the book, we move from our biblical foundations —a life of discipleship expressed in word and deed—to imperatives (some might call them disciplines) designed to help us determine our answers to the question, How shall we then live?

To begin, we need to make two baseline personal choices. First, we need to decide purposely to take our eyes off of ourselves. We choose to prioritize our relationship with Jesus and see our lives through the lens of that relationship:

- So that we can join the apostle Paul in stating, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).
- So that we can offer ourselves fully because we understand that we have been bought (purchased) with the price of Jesus’ death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 6:20).
- So that we can overcome our fears and take the necessary risks to be involved in the care of the needy because we do not consider our lives dear to ourselves, but our goal is to fulfill God’s kingdom purposes for us (Acts 20:24).
- So that we can live in a way that identifies us with Jesus’ spirit of servanthood (Philippians 2:5-11).
- So that other priorities fade by comparison and knowing the Jesus life becomes our goal: “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like

him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:7-11).

- So that we can say with Paul, "For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Romans 14:7-8).

Second, we dedicate ourselves to a lifetime of growth. The Christian life is often described as a journey. We're in this together and we want to be headed in the Jesus lifestyle direction. I'm not as compassionate as Jesus wants me to be, but I'm much more compassionate than I was in 1971 when my personal commitment to a journey of faith commenced. I don't take every opportunity to share my Christian faith like I should, but I'm much more aware of being a 24/7 follower of Jesus than I was when I was just getting started. When I read some of the passages covered in part one about care or compassion for the poor, I get discouraged with how far I've yet to go—yet the encouragement comes when I remember how far I've come.

Each of us will be at different stages on the journey as we go through these imperatives or disciplines. Some will be ready for a silent retreat and weekend of prayer for the nations. Others will be starting with five minutes a day of prayer for a nation, a global issue or a local need.

As we consider these imperatives or disciplines, keep Paul's words in Philippians 3 in mind. Continuing his challenge to make knowing Jesus a top priority, he writes:

> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

The choices we make are the difference between a temporary trend and a long-term commitment. We need to make the Great Commission, Great Compassion lifestyle permanent.

Compassion Permanence

In his book *Good News About Injustice*, Gary Haugen, founder of International Justice Mission, describes the lack of object permanence in children. Child psychologists have discovered that infants evidently do not have the ability to understand that something exists even when they don't see it. Dangle it in front of them and it exists; take it away and it ceases to exist.

Haugen goes on to say that an infant's response to objects parallels the way many of us responsed to human need. Dangle the news report about an earthquake in Central America before us and we sit transfixed with our mouths and checkbooks open—but change the channel and, in our minds, the earthquake and its victims cease to exist.

Various examples illustrate this vividly. In October 2001 the plight of Afghan women filled the editorial pages. More recently it was ethnic minority groups suffering at the hands of ISIS in Syria or Iraq. Don't forget those in Ebola-affected countries in Africa, or the Filipinos in Tacloban still recovering from a devastating typhoon. Do we know how they're doing now? In our techno-rapid world, it's easy to forget the suffering of others and move on.

That's why Haugen advocates "compassion permanence," the ability to stay focused on specific needs of others and work until we make a difference. He defines compassion permanence as "a courageous and generous capacity to remember the needs of an unjust world even when they are out of our immediate sight."[1] For Haugen and International Justice Mission, this means advocating for the freedom of children held in bonded labor or in houses of prostitution. For the folks at Habitat for Humanity, it means slowly trying to elevate the economic status of the poor by working with them to make affordable housing available. For one man at our church, compassion permanence has been outreach at a local prison almost every Wednesday night for the past thirty years!

Compassion permanence is distinguished by two words. *Compassion* means coming alongside people in pain in an effort to serve or empathize or relieve the suffering. *Permanence* implies duration: we stick with this ministry even after the need is no longer publicized and long after our tearful emotions have worn off.

After a service project in the African nation of Zambia, we leaders knew that it would be easy for our team to come home and put the images of poverty they had seen behind them. A month after our return, we sent each team member a picture of one of the village children we had met, a young boy who suffered from long-term malnutrition. The only caption: “Don’t forget.”

Compassion permanence can involve acts of mercy, verbal outreach to people suffering from hopelessness, financial response to crises or diligent, concerted prayer. It means lasting relationships and cooperative efforts toward long-term solutions (development, not just relief).

Compassion permanence builds off the example of Jesus, who “while we were still sinners” (long before we responded affirmatively) demonstrated the love of God by dying for us (Romans 5:8). We demonstrate long-term love toward others because Jesus saw us in our need, and he didn’t forget us.

The Importance of Names

We Christians—especially those in the Western world—love to count things. We count the number of unreached peoples, the number of languages with no Bible translation and the number of megacities in Asia. Those like myself, who spend time trying to mobilize the church toward greater global concern, often try to reduce the world to statistics. We talk about one billion of this and two billion of that. Chinese, Muslims, Hindus, Kurds, street kids and more—give us a need and we have (or can find, courtesy of David Barrett, Patrick Johnstone and others) a statistic.

But the sheer volume makes us numb. We discuss masses of people and a plethora of needs, but the size alone overwhelms us into stunned inactivity or unfocused guilt. Perhaps the key to keeping soft and compassionate is to remember that every Muslim, every hungry person, every street kid, every Chinese citizen has a name.

The self-revealed God of the Bible sets himself apart from other deities in the pantheon of religions by his immanence. He knows our names. Our names are written in the Book of Life. We may not be Jeremiah, but each one of us believes that God knew us before he formed us in our mother’s

womb (Jeremiah 1:5). The Bible affirms (meaning it's not just an offshoot of Enlightenment individualism) that we are fearfully and wonderfully made—one at a time, name by name (Psalm 139:14).

Emerson Boyce, veteran of more than twenty years of missionary service in the Caribbean, attended one of the Urbana student missions conferences looking for ideas on how to mobilize Caribbean young people for missions. After the conference, I asked him the highlight of what he had learned. I expected to hear something about facts or data or developments in missions. Instead, he referred to one of the worship songs. He said, "God knows my name." In the face of global need and worldwide evangelistic opportunities, the most profound lesson for Emerson was that the sovereign God of the universe knows his name.

Malcolm Muggeridge expressed the Christian perspective succinctly. He says, "Christianity is not a statistical view of life. That there should be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over all the hosts of the just, is an anti-statistical proposition."[2]

On September 25, 2001, a rabbi speaking at the post–September 11 "prayer for America" in Yankee Stadium made the point profoundly when he referred to the individualized grief of each bereaved family. He said, "On September 11, it wasn't three thousand people that died. One person died three thousand times." I knew he was right. I didn't think of statistics dying on September 11. I thought of Mrs. Holland, a member of our church who was on the American Airlines flight that hit the first tower. And I thought of my acquaintance Jesus Sanchez, who served on the Boston Logan Airport staff of United Airlines and who was on the United flight that hit the second tower.

Statistics become real when we know their names, their stories, their families. On my first visit to Nigeria, my host was delayed because his brother, age thirty-seven, had entered the hospital because of a "blood infection." Several days later, he died. I saw his family's grief; I heard the young man's story. I had often spoken in my Current Events in Missions class on the huge numbers of people in Africa with HIV/AIDS. On that day, however, HIV/AIDS in Africa moved from being a statistic or a graphic in a PowerPoint presentation. HIV/AIDS in Africa has a name. His name is Jacob.

While visiting Sri Lanka, my wife and I were talking with Ben Manickam, then the principal of Lanka Bible College, about the impact of the more than twenty-year civil war there. I asked, “Is it true that seventy thousand people have died over these past twenty years as a result of the war?” He responded affirmatively. We then asked if he actually knew anyone who had died, and he told us the story of his father. While his father was on his way to work, he was waiting for a bus in Colombo. He and twenty-five others were killed when a bomb-laden car exploded as it stalled in front of the bus stop. The deaths in Sri Lanka as a result of the war have a name. He is Ben’s father.

I recently taught a short course at the Alliance Biblical Seminary in Manila. Every day on the way to class, I walked past a thirty-something-year-old man sitting by a plywood table along the sidewalk. He was selling candy, gum and cigarettes, probably earning the equivalent of a few dollars a day. He is married and has three children. I recognized him. I had met him four years earlier—in the same location at the same table! When people tell me that 70 percent of Filipinos live beneath the poverty line, I no longer think of the statistic. Poverty in the Philippines has a name. He runs a sidewalk table selling gum and cigarettes. His name is Jose.

Those of us who deal with the volume of data about our world available to us need to remember that the world is not made up of statistics. The world is made up of people, who each have names. The victims of the violence in Israel and Palestine are not statistics. They are people with names like Moishe and Yacob and Ibrahim. The earthquake victims in Gujarat and the factory workers in Malaysia and the homeless of Calcutta and the fearful people on the druglord-controlled streets of Colombia—each one has a name.

How can we keep from getting desensitized about world need? How can we combat our own apathy? Perhaps the best way is to get to know a few names.

World Vision captured the idea years ago and mobilized thousands of people by personalizing a billion hungry kids through the “adoption” of individual children. Perhaps we should seek to get a name or two of people affected by the crises and needs that we read about. It reminds us that God is not concerned about “the world” as some sort of impersonal unit. He is concerned about each name.

Bryant Myers writes, “We may forget that the poor are not an abstraction, but rather a group of human beings who have names, who are made in the image of God, and for whom Jesus died. The people who live in poverty are as valued, as important, as loved, as those who do not.”[3] God knows your name, and theirs. Compassion is not a difficult choice when you know people by name.

- 8 -

LEARN

Developing an Ongoing Posture of Learning and Discovery

Biblical Reflection: Self-Image in the New Testament

When I served as a youth pastor, several topics got included every year on the "things we must cover" list: sex, drugs, music and, without exception, self-image. We knew that a student's understanding of his or her own worth before God provided an essential foundation for life and hope.

God knows that this is true for children, youth and mature adults. How we see ourselves shapes our actions. What self-image propels us into the world as witnesses? Before we start learning about the world into which God calls us, what do we need to understand about ourselves?

In the Scriptures, God refers to his followers with certain names or titles, all designed to let us know that God not only loves us and values our lives, but also values and invites our contribution to his kingdom work. God deigns to do his work on earth through us. That's how much he esteems us! I'll never forget these dynamic words from Elisabeth Elliot summarizing this truth in a seminary class: "Of all the mysteries of the Bible, perhaps none is greater than this—that the sovereign God of the universe should ordain my participation."

God calls us his "workers" (Matthew 9:36-38).[1] A worker accomplishes the will of the boss. God calls us "laborers," a term that in New Testament times referred to those hired by a master of the vineyard to work the harvest. God calls us "servants" (1 Corinthians 4:1; Philippians 1:1),[2] often an unpopular word in the language of self-esteem, but a biblical word

nonetheless, used to remind us that the One who purchased us by his own blood owns us!

God calls us “stewards” (1 Peter 4:10), referring to one who managed the resources of someone else. Followers of Christ are called “soldiers” (Philippians 2:25; 2 Timothy 2:3-4; Philemon 2); a soldier’s role was to carry out the orders of the commander-in-chief. And God calls us “ambassadors” (2 Corinthians 5:20), a political term describing one who spoke or acted on behalf of the king or potentate who sent him or her.

All of these titles and terms point to one basic truth. We live at the disposal of our Superior. He is the boss; we are the laborers. He is the owner; we are the servants. He has the wealth; we are the stewards. He is the commander; we are the soldiers. God initiates his love through Christ; we are the witnesses. God values our lives so much that he assigns ministry to us.

Paul summarized his own self-image this way: “This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed” (1 Corinthians 4:1). When we see ourselves as God sees us, we’ll understand that we truly are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2:10), God’s work here on this earth.

Biblical Learning

Several years ago, I wrote an inductive Bible study simply titled *Missions: God’s Heart for the World*.[3] After it was published, a friend inquired, “Outside of the obvious Great Commission statements of Jesus, what did you include?” Then I showed him the chapters, which study passages from Genesis to Jonah, Matthew to Revelation and a variety of others in between.

Our first commitment as those desiring to understand and respond to God’s world is to discover that the heart of the Bible is the story of redemption. Our God is the God who pursues lost people, loves, forgives, heals, reconciles, judges and ultimately redeems. To understand our mission in the world, we start by understanding the God who sends us. And to understand the heart of God, we go to the Scriptures.

To illustrate that the whole Bible is our foundation for Great Commission, Great Compassion living, Dr. David Howard states,

> The missionary enterprise of the church [and therefore of all Christians] is not a pyramid built upside down with its point on one isolated text in the New Testament out of which we have built a huge structure known as "missions." Rather the missionary enterprise of the church is a great pyramid built right side up with its base running from Genesis to Revelation. All Scripture forms the foundation for the outreach of the gospel to the whole world.[4]

When we commit ourselves to understanding the Bible, we will discover

- the heart of God for the alien, the stranger, the outsider, the lost
- the patience of God with his people as they succeed and fail in living out his mission
- the power of God to turn small boys into giant-killers, prostitutes into worshipers and fearful disciples into preachers willing to die for their faith
- the justice of God in punishing sin and unrighteousness
- the mercy of God in healing the demon possessed
- the kindness of God in using some seedy characters to accomplish his purposes (see the list of characters in Hebrews 11 for some encouragement)
- the grace and truth of God expressed in the incarnation of God—Jesus Christ

We need to keep learning from the Bible so that we do not grow weary in doing good. We need biblical understanding so that we remember that though we serve the purposes of God, he is the one who will ultimately accomplish this purpose—even if his timing seems painfully slow to us! John Stott reminds us that the Bible is the foundation for pursuing our commitment to being involved in the cause of Christ locally and globally:

> Without the Bible, world evangelization is impossible. For without the Bible, we have no Gospel to take to the nations, no warrant to take it to them, no idea of how to set about the task, and no hope of any success. It is the Bible that gives us the mandate, the message, the model, and the power we need for world evangelization. So let us seek to repossess it by diligent study and meditation. Let's heed its summons, grasp its message, follow its directions, and trust its power. Let's lift up our voices and make it known.[5]

Historical Learning

The reformer Martin Luther is credited with reminding us that the God of the Bible is a "two-handed" God, referring to God's hand in executing the biblical plan of redemption and God's hand in sovereignly ruling over human history. To Luther, too many Christians worship a one-handed God. We forget that God is both working through the church in the world *and* working through kings and rulers, kingdoms and nations.

The first reality, God at work through the church, is often easier to comprehend even though we know the church's failures throughout history. The second reality, God at work through human history, is often more challenging because it introduces a host of "Why did God allow that?" or "Where was God when this happened?" questions. Nevertheless, historical learning is part of our learning discipline because it will teach us from the mistakes of others, help us see God's redemptive work through the ages, and give us ideas of how to respond to the needs and opportunities we see in our world today.

Reading a book such as Thomas Pakenham's *The Scramble for Africa* will help us understand why some African nations speak English, Portuguese, French or Spanish. And to our sadness, it will show us how wicked intentions of colonial powers helped divide the people by playing one ethnic group off of another. But reading Ruth Tucker's wonderful history of the growth of the church, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, will show us how God has done his work through simple people and significant

movements as his purposes were being fulfilled—in spite of human frailties and mistakes.

Vishal and Ruth Mangalwadi's *The Legacy of William Carey* or Lamin Sanneh's *Translating the Message* will help us see the positive influence of Christian missionaries on indigenous cultures (perhaps helpful in responding to the secular anthropologist's claim that "missionaries destroy culture"). The Mangalwadis assert that missionary Carey laid the foundation for the transformation of modern India. Sanneh, himself a West African originally from the Gambia, asserts that Christian missionaries, by translating the Bible into indigenous languages, actually served to affirm indigenous culture and in so doing helped launch indigenous rebellion against colonial rule.

Historical biographies of people God has used, a "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1), can inspire, instruct, motivate or warn us. Interested in being an agent of political change? Study Joseph, Daniel or Esther in the Bible and then read about William Wilberforce and his lifelong work to abolish slavery. Suffering from some form of abuse in the past? Explore how Amy Carmichael or Mary Slessor turned the pain of a difficult childhood into care for child prostitutes in India or abandoned twins in Calabar (Nigeria).

Historical learning can also take us to testimonies of God's work in the world today. Such stories can offer us encouragement that if God is doing something *there* he could do it *here*. The carefully documented book *A Wind in the House of Islam*, by David Garrison, serves as a great example. The author travels around the Islamic world to nine geocultural "rooms"—including North Africa, the Arab states and South Asia—and documents movements of thousands of Muslims to follow Jesus. Reading a book like this provides spiritual encouragement and perhaps ideas as we reach out to Muslim coworkers or neighbors. I've described this book as "stories that you won't read on CNN."

Current Events Learning

Effectiveness in demonstrating or declaring the gospel requires us to learn about our world. When I was in college, a group of us students got together

regularly to learn about our world. Our theme was “Something about everywhere and everything about somewhere.” We wanted to have at least a general knowledge of the world (geography, current issues, world leaders’ names) and know everything (or at least a lot) about some place or issue that specifically interested us. For our group, specialization included apartheid in South Africa and Soviet communism. Today, topics might include religious extremism, the impact of globalization or world economies.

The point is this: current events learning helps us understand something about the world into which God calls us—from our own “Jerusalem” to the ends of the earth. It might include the following:

- Going to the city hall and finding a local need to which our church or small group could respond.
- Meeting with friends who may not understand the Christian faith and asking them questions designed to help you understand what they think it means to be a Christian.
- Taking a class or reading a book on understanding world religions so that we can be equipped to talk with people of other faiths. In a seminar I led at a local church, I asked the participants, “How many of you have an opinion about Islam?” Every person did. Then I asked how many had taken a course or read a book on understanding Islam or responding to Muslims. Fewer than 10 percent had. And how many had an actual friendship with a Muslim? Fewer than 5 percent. We need to be better informed so that we can respond intelligently, compassionately and discerningly.
- Learning to share the gospel message through the Alpha program or the Groups Investigating God strategy.[6]
- Learning the countries of the world. I often ask international students, “What is the stupidest question that a host family has ever asked you related to geography?” Responses have ranged from “Is Austria near Australia?” to “Surinam is next to Vietnam, right?” to “What’s the capital of Africa?” But Robson, a student from Malawi in a class I was teaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, topped them all when he told the story of how his host family in a rural American community inquired about his upbringing in Malawi.

They asked, “When did you start wearing clothes?” Robson thought the family was joking because the question to him was so far-fetched. Responding to the joke, he replied, “After I cleared customs in New York, I saw that everyone else was wearing clothes, so I thought I should buy some.” The family was shocked! Only then did Robson realize that his hosts were very ignorant about life in modern Africa.

- Getting “the other side of the story” by trying to hear from both sides of an issue. Palestinian Christian leader Alex Awad’s *Through the Eyes of the Victims* gives a Palestinian view of the Israel-Palestine conflict since the 1940s. If nothing else, it helps us understand the complexities of the conflict. Reading books about Islam written by Muslims offers a view that is often different than a Christian author’s telling us how to reach Muslims. Listening to the BBC or reading a magazine like *The Week*—news media that often offer multiple views on topics—will help us try to understand different sides of an issue.
- Reading books such as *Half the Sky*, by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, in an effort to understand the oppression and challenges facing women around the world.
- Reading a book or taking a class on crosscultural understanding—not just in preparation for a crosscultural mission trip but so that we’re better equipped to befriend a neighbor, coworker or fellow student from another country.[7]

When our learning increases, we are encouraged and inspired to see the people God uses and to see the sovereign hand of God in history. We are better informed to respond and pray more effectively (see chapter ten on prayer). We learn about past mistakes in hope that we can avoid them. And we understand the complexities of the world a little more.

WORLD STATS: IF THE WORLD WERE 100 PEOPLE

The following information from the 100 People Foundation reflects the current global population of over seven billion people.* Source information for each of the categories is available on the 100 People website. Obviously these statistics are subject to change, but they do give a picture of this world that Jesus calls us into as people of good news both demonstrated and proclaimed. If the world were 100 people . . .

- Gender: 50 would be female; 50 would be male
- Age: 26 would be 0-14; 66 would be 15-64; 8 would be 65 and older
- Geography: 60 would be from Asia; 15 would be from Africa; 11 would be from Europe; 9 would be from Latin America and the Caribbean; 5 would be from North America
- Religion: 33 would be Christian; 22 would be Muslim; 14 would be Hindu; 7 would be Buddhist; 12 would believe in other religions; 12 would not be religious or identify themselves as being aligned with a particular faith
- First Language: 12 would speak Chinese; 5 would speak Spanish; 5 would speak English; 3 would speak Arabic; 3 would speak Hindi; 3 would speak Bengali; 3 would speak Portuguese; 2 would speak Russian; 2 would speak Japanese; 62 would speak other languages
- Overall Literacy: 83 would be able to read and write; 17 would not
- Literacy by Gender: 88% of males would be able to read and write; 12% of males would not be able to read and write; 79% of females would be able to read and write; 21% of females would not be able to read and write
- Education: 76% of eligible males would have a primary school education; 72% of eligible females would have a primary school education; 66% of eligible males would

have a secondary school education; 63% of eligible females would have a secondary school education; 7 would have a college degree

- Urban/Rural: 51 would be urban dwellers; 49 would be rural dwellers
- Drinking Water: 87 would have access to safe drinking water; 13 would use unimproved water
- Food: 15 would be undernourished
- Infectious Disease: <1% would have HIV/AIDS; <1% would have tuberculosis
- Poverty: 48 would live on less than $2 USD per day; 1 out of 2 children would live in poverty
- Electricity: 78 would have electricity; 22 would not
- Technology: 75 would be cell phone users; 30 would be active Internet users; 22 would own or share a computer
- Sanitation: 65 would have improved sanitation; 16 would have no toilets; 19 would have unimproved toilets

Taken from "Statistics: 100 People," www.100people.org/statistics_detailed_statistics.php*.*

*For up-to-date population info, go to the world population clock at www.census.gov/popclock.

Staying Current: Some More Practical Ideas

As followers of Jesus Christ, we know that we're supposed to be interested in the world beyond ourselves. But the world is vast (over seven billion people), and the needs immense. How can we stay current with the world we live in and God's work in it?

A global prayer plan. Our primary impact on the world beyond ourselves will be through our prayers, but trying to cover everyone everywhere every day leaves us frustrated. To help traverse the world in prayer each week, focus on a different continent or region each day: for example, North America on Mondays, Europe on Tuesdays, Latin America and the Caribbean on Wednesdays and so on. This does not mean that a tsunami in south Asia on Sunday gets ignored until "Asia Day"; allow for flexibility and spontaneous response. This prayer plan helps us pray with weekly regularity for countries in the news or Christian workers that we know.

A news source. God at work in the world intersects with the stories we hear in the news, so staying informed means learning about the events that are shaping lives all across the globe. A global news source helps, such as BBC World News, CNN World or a reliable news magazine.

A website. The home pages of Christian organizations often feature news related to the counties in which they work. Other groups cover a wider perspective, so setting our Internet home page to one of these sites will introduce us daily to headlines, stories and links related to events affecting Christians around the world. Some sites to consider include the following:

- urbana.org (stories and links related to global events)
- worldwatchmonitor.org (news about the persecuted church)
- worldea.org (updates on issues affecting the church globally)
- operationworld.org or globalchristianity.org (data about countries and research on Christians around the world)

Connectivity. Develop the practice of connecting to the world by observing things in front of you. The bananas on my table were grown in Costa Rica. A shirt was made in Sri Lanka. The basketball player on TV might be from Nigeria or Latvia or Venezuela. Observing these things prompts "arrow prayers"—the Sri Lankan shirt invites prayer for the Buddhist or Hindu person who made it, and the Nigerian basketball player brings to mind Muslim-Christian tensions in the north of that country. The "global village" opens doors for us to connect to global realities in our daily routines.

Open eyes. (See chapter nine, “Look.”) It is amazing how God will meet us in unique ways as we stay current with the world. A Scripture passage referring to “all the earth” or “the whole world” or “all nations” will appear in our daily reading, and we’ll pray for some far-away place. And then later in the day we’ll hear a news story about that place, or we’ll meet an international student from that country, or we’ll find a piece of clothing that was made there. It all serves as a reminder that we’re joining forces with the Lord of the universe!

Global villagers. Old Testament prophets and poets exhorted the people of God to think beyond themselves. The people of Israel suffered from ethnocentricity—the belief that the world (and our “tribal God”) revolves around our ethnicity or nationality.

The psalmist wrote “Declare his glory among the nations” (Psalm 96:3) to highlight the fact that God rules the earth; he is not some tribal deity for Israel’s exclusive benefit. The prophets reminded readers that they were created to be a “light for the Gentiles” in order to bring salvation “to the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6). They attempted to mobilize God’s people beyond their cultural restraints for outreach, acts of compassion and crosscultural missions.

We face the same task—to enlarge our view of God and ourselves as the people of God at work in the world. As the prophets found, this task can be challenging. Fellow Christians resist actively (“I’m facing too many needs here”) or passively (applauding our enthusiasm with no personal response).

To stir people to think about our global commission as followers of Christ, I often start a sermon or Sunday school lesson by stating, “You’re part of the global village whether you like it or not.” To illustrate, I ask them to find another person and turn down the back collar of his or her shirt or blouse to see where it was made. In a group of twenty-five, there are often ten or twelve countries represented. Then we take ten minutes to pray for these countries (including our own), for the strengthening of the church and the effective witness of God’s people. It’s a small action, but it serves as an effective antidote to ethnocentricity—reminding us that we’re called to declare God’s glory to the nations.

- 9 -

LOOK

Opening Our Eyes and Responding to Needs and Opportunities

Biblical Reflection: 1 John 3:17 Meets CNN

When John wrote about the demonstrated love of God through Jesus Christ, he urged believers to imitate Jesus by laying down their lives for others (1 John 3:16). To place this action in the context of daily living, he asked, “If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?” (1 John 3:17).

“It’s this simple,” John says. “If you want to test your understanding of the love of God, then ask yourself: When you have and you see someone who has not, do you respond with generosity and compassion? This demonstrates love in deed, not just words.”

I hope that John’s readers struggled with this rubber-meets-the-road exhortation to love others, but I wonder if they lived in a simpler world. When they returned from the marketplace with two loaves of bread and they walked past the neighborhood beggar, the verse challenged them: *Does the verse mean that I need to give up one of my loaves?* But their smaller world did not require them to encounter beggars one thousand miles away.

I struggle in larger ways to apply this verse. On the one hand, I seldom encounter beggars—because I live in a country where we hide our poor better than they did in Jesus’ day. The economically poor don’t live near me, so I can effectively avoid them and pretend that everyone lives as comfortably as I do.

Unlike John’s readers, I seldom encounter the needy at my doorstep or in my marketplace. I see them through the media. CNN brings the flood

victims of Mozambique into my living room. *Time* magazine ushers famine victims in the Sudan or Bangladesh into my kitchen. I can sit munching on junk food while their emaciated bodies roam before me in a special report from a refugee camp.

I obviously have material possessions. They obviously have material needs. Even as a person serving in full-time Christian ministry, I'm still wealthier than 90 percent of the world. What does 1 John 3:17 mean for me? Does CNN make me now responsible for the whole world?

These tough questions burden the compassionate but already overloaded caring type. Guilt offers no cure; it only paralyzes us or stirs us to impulsive action. Hardening our hearts couldn't be the solution either; this leads to apathy (remember: "no feeling").

How do we respond? At the least, my wife and I stop to pray. Often, we look for ways to invite fellow Christians to respond: Is it time to suggest a spontaneous offering at church for the people in the Congo? Sometimes we respond immediately by sending a financial gift—in an effort to be part of the solution, to be obedient to 1 John 3:17, and to keep our hearts soft toward those facing need that exceeds anything I've personally encountered.

Most of all, we stay involved in mercy ministries. Even though we may not be able to respond financially to the current crisis crossing our TV screen, we've devoted ourselves to generosity and sacrifice on behalf of the poor. A generous lifestyle allows us to live with the assurance that we're applying 1 John 3:17—by using our material resources to serve our brothers and sisters in need.

CNN expands our response to 1 John 3:17 because it makes the world our neighborhood.

Look for Opportunities and Needs at Hand

Whether we're thinking of the demonstration of the gospel through practical acts of compassion or we're looking to share verbally about a relationship with God through Jesus Christ in the process of disciple making, we will need to take some sort of action. Looking for opportunities, taking the initiative in conversation and going out of way to start a

relationship all involve action, and the first action (after prayer, of course) is to go looking.

How? Ask God daily for "divine appointments" where he guides us to people right in front of us who have a need or could use a friend. It could be as simple as raking a neighbor's lawn or helping that person boarding the airplane get his bag into the overhead bin. It might mean reading a person's Facebook or Twitter post citing some challenge they are facing and following up with a response or phone call to offer a word of support or encouragement.

Unfortunately, we live in a world of a thousand distractions. Sometimes living out the Christian life simply means being observant to the needs right around us. My seminary professor Elisabeth Elliot taught that common courtesy (opening the door for someone else, giving someone else the right of way, deferring to another person waiting in line) is our first expression to the world that we live with the Jesus-imitating value, *I will sacrifice that you might benefit.*

To live this way, we need to look up from our texting or Instagramming with our cyberworld associates so that we can *see* the people right in front of us. The book of Acts describes Peter and John and their interaction with a lame man who called to them. Modern translations state that they "looked straight at him" (NIV) or "looked intently at him" (NRSV) (Acts 3:4). The NASB is even more vivid: "Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him." In short, Peter and John were fully attentive to the need in front of them.

I remember talking with a friend who's a pastor in Trinidad about the challenges of navigating personal one-on-one ministry with the ongoing demands of technology. In his rural church, it was his habit to visit any sick or elderly shut-in people who had missed church services the week before. One week he was visiting a lady who had missed several weeks of services because of her age and sickness. His phone beeped to indicate he had received a text. The pastor looked to see who it was and then looked back up to continue his conversation with the woman. Then the phone rang; he looked to see who was calling, and let the call go to voicemail. Then another text beep. When he glanced again to see who the sender was, the elderly woman said, "Pastor, you can go . . . because I see that you're not

really here.” My friend learned his lesson. On his next visit, he silenced his phone and left it in the car.

Let’s learn to be fully where we are! Fix our gaze. Give full attention to the needs right in front of us.

Look for Global-Local Opportunities

“World missions” usually sounds like too large a topic for a Sunday school group, Bible study, small fellowship or even a large church. We need to break the global tasks down into manageable tasks so that people get an understanding and experience of where we fit in the worldwide, crosscultural spread of the gospel. Consider the following four action steps of looking for global-local opportunities.

1. Go to a local high school, school board or municipal office and ask about English Language Learner (ELL) classes. By investigating in my community, I discovered that there were over 160 students at our local high school in ELL classes, representing more than forty languages, from Chinese and Korean to Woluf (from Senegal, West Africa).

With this knowledge, we can volunteer and get involved—either teaching English or simply helping people with understanding colloquial phrases or the pronunciation of words. It’s a great way to build friendships with first-generation immigrants, many of whom might be wide open to hearing about Jesus.

2. Go through the community telephone book (yes, these still exist!), look for ethnically distinctive names and start praying for neighbors by name. Look for a way to meet these people (a note might be better than a call—a call sounds like “telemarketing”).

A ministry to Muslims in New York City started when a missionary who was home from serving in the Middle East simply sent dinner invitations to all the people with Arabic names in his neighborhood. Only a few responded at first, but word spread about hospitality, common foods and an American friend who could answer their questions—in Arabic!—and soon the missionary had a larger outreach than he had had in the Middle East.

3. Go where international people might be. One couple at our church prays for and meets scholars from the People's Republic of China by hanging around the Chinese vegetable section of a supermarket in a university community. If someone seems to be struggling with reading or looking for help, they introduce themselves and try to start a conversation. God has guided them to many Chinese students, and at least once per month you can find this couple in church with scholars from China whom they met by the ginger root.

4. Don't let accents and names go unnoticed. If an accent sounds foreign, inquire graciously with a question like, "Do I detect a little accent? What is your mother tongue? (or, What is your country of origin?)" If you meet someone whose name you cannot pronounce, try anyhow and ask, "Can you help me with pronouncing your name?" Doing this at the supermarket or the mall or even in places like the hospital has given my wife and me opportunities to meet people from over fifty countries. Some of these folks have been visitors or students or new immigrants from countries where there is very limited knowledge of Christianity. Others have been Christian brothers and sisters looking for fellowship!

Look Through Both Windows

To confront Christians in the Western world with global need, missiologists present the "10/40 Window," a geographic block ten to forty degrees north of the equator from West Africa to East Asia. In this window live 90 percent of the world's people who have never heard about Jesus Christ, close to 90 percent of the world's poorest of the poor and a host of other superlative percentages, which should stir our urgency for prayer, evangelism, compassion and missions.

Most of my readers, however, don't live in the 10/40 Window. Many of us could name fewer than ten countries in the region. With the exception of CNN reports of breaking crises, we scarcely understand that this window with all of its challenges even exists. Addressing our own need to learn about the unreached constitutes a great challenge.

A second challenge emerges related to local outreach. If we struggle to consider the 10/40 Window, can we at least look out our own window?

What about those who do not know the love of Christ in our own neighborhoods? Busyness, preoccupation with Christian activity and lack of time replace lack of knowledge as the problem. The opportunities for local outreach present similar invitations for prayer, evangelism, compassion and missions. The magnitude may be less here than in the 10/40 Window, but the immediacy is greater.

I spend much of my life mobilizing others for the 10/40 Window. Recent ministry trips have taken me to countries where Christians survive as a tiny percentage of the population, living under oppressive regimes. The needs of the 10/40 Window inspire me to action.

But I live here, in the West. Out my own window I can see the homes of people who never think about God, seldom attend any form of worship and often suffer the consequences of a Christ-less life.

If I desire to be God's witness in the modern world, I need to learn to look *out* one window (my own) and look *into* another (the 10/40) so that I can respond appropriately with prayer, evangelism, compassion and missions.

Look for Practical Ways to Demonstrate the Gospel

Maybe I write this next thought because I live in the secular Northeastern part of the United States. In our region, Christians already realize that we need to demonstrate the gospel first *so that* people might see the credibility of our faith. Then they might be willing to discuss our faith and what it means to live in relationship with Jesus Christ.

But Philip Yancey's book *Vanishing Grace: What Ever Happened to the Good News?* tells me that my secular Northeast foreshadows a secular, often anti-Christian sentiment across the country.[1] In an interview with Amy Julia Becker in *Christianity Today*, Yancey observed, "Sociologist and researcher Amy Sherman has said that Christians tend to have three models for interacting with society: fortification, accommodation, and domination. To put that in layman's terms: We hunker down amongst ourselves, water down our witness, or beat down our opponents. For many reasons, those aren't New Testament models."[2]

In short, the withdrawal-compromise-argumentative/condemning approach to sharing the gospel will not work. So what does Yancey suggest?

> We need to create pioneer settlements that show the world a different, grace-based way of living. . . . A few generations ago, Billy Graham would fill the largest stadium in any city, stand up, and say "the Bible says," and have the audience nod along. Today, belief in the Bible can't be taken for granted, so appeals to the Bible won't have the same power. *The new paradigm, in this culture, is that you reach out with acts of mercy that touch people's hearts, and hopefully they want to know why.*[3]

The gospel demonstrated leads to the gospel proclaimed. It can happen as we look into the needs around us—or the needs of the world.[4] Yancey's interview concludes, "Imagine what would happen if we organized ourselves in the neighborhood, in the city, and in the world as people existing for the sake of outsiders. . . . The more we act like Jesus, not beating people down but showing a better way to live, the more outsiders will look back and say, 'Those Christians are different.'"

Look for Hooks to Start the Conversation

Christie (my wife) and I have had several opportunities to camp at the beautiful Cinnamon Bay Campground on St. John in the US Virgin Islands. With the close proximity of living alongside others (even closer than we live with our suburban neighbors), as well as the shared experiences of camping (think cold showers, mosquitoes and tropical rainstorms), we have excellent opportunities for conversations.

Given our faith and our desire to preach the gospel to everyone everywhere, one might expect that we launch right into gospel conversations, but we don't. Living evangelistically might start with carrying someone's water bucket or loaning them a needed rope. Talking about the best hikes or the best snorkeling can also get us started. Casual

conversations inevitably lead to conversations about our love of bird watching or our travel to faraway places.

When asked why we chose bird watching, I might tell people, “It’s the hobby Jesus commanded,” referring to his instruction in Matthew 6:26 to “look at the birds of the air.” When talking about travel, we love to startle people with the observation that 70 percent of the world’s Christians live in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In general, our approach is to provoke curiosity in the hope that people will want to hear more about our Christian faith or about Jesus.

By listening and waiting in conversations, we also have opportunity to surprise people out of their stereotypes. At this campground one year, our next-door neighbors Russ and Lynn engaged us in conversation, and introductions somehow launched quickly into politics. They seemed to enjoy hearing some of our political perspectives—especially about care for the poor, the United States’ influence on the world stage and the issue of immigration reform. Assuming that we had all the same views as they did, they launched into a lengthy tirade about stupid evangelicals with their hyper-conservative views and belligerency against change.

Christie and I later admitted to each other that we were both chuckling inside while listening to this tirade, because we knew that the “So what do you do?” question would eventually arise. Sure enough, after they had exhausted their ammunition against all things Christian and evangelical, Russ and Lynn asked, “So what do you do?”

When we revealed that we were evangelicals, we were able to explain that not all evangelicals have the views of those who pontificate and get noticed by the media. We explained the difference between following Jesus and being Republican or Democrat. We shared about the life of sacrifice and service to which Jesus calls every Christian. And we shared about a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Russ and Lynn did apologize profusely for their stereotyping, and we had several good discussions with them. We don’t know if our testimony had any lasting effect, but we believe that God brought them to us so that they might have a clearer understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.

Look for What's Next in God's Priorities

Those of us raised on the original *Star Trek* television series know how Captain Kirk and his crew set their Federation mission priorities. They purposed to "boldly go where no one had gone before." Kirk, Spock and the others get no credit for originality. They were merely parroting priorities already established almost two thousand years before the TV show (more in *Star Trek* years) by Paul the apostle.

To the Romans, Paul summed up his evangelistic priority this way: "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation" (Romans 15:20). His plans included preaching to the western extremes of the Roman Empire by going on to Spain (Romans 15:24). If there was a place where people had never heard of Christ, that's where he wanted to go. If faced with the choice of preaching again to those already resistant to the message of Christ or going to give someone the opportunity to hear the good news for the first time, to Paul it was a no-brainer: "I want to boldly go where no one has gone before."

Our evangelistic outreach needs such a focus. This might mean visiting the family who operates the Vietnamese restaurant rather than inviting already churched people to our programs. Maybe we should go out visiting in homes, malls or recreation areas on Sundays between 9:00 a.m. and noon in an effort to reach those untouched by church. Perhaps we should refocus our international missions giving on the ethnic groups of the world who've yet to have an opportunity to respond to the love of God expressed through Jesus Christ.

If we want to imitate Paul's evangelistic model or to reflect God's love for lost people, we must be willing to boldly go where no one has gone before—so that everyone has a chance to respond to God's love in Christ.

Look: let's open our eyes to see needs, opportunities and challenges to which we can respond.

Jesus Stinks

While I was attending a conference in Cairo, Egypt, our host took us on a trip to the "Garbage Village," one of the more amazing testimonies of God at work in the Middle East. In this urban area overlooking one of the largest mosques in Cairo, a population of people—the garbage collectors—all live together. They provide most of the trash collection services of this city of over fifteen million. Going from high rise to high rise and industry to industry, they collect garbage and bring it back to their "village," where they sort through tin, plastic, paper and glass for recycling.

The people of the village are historically Coptic Orthodox, but many were Christian in name only until a remarkable priest showed up. Over twenty-five years ago, a young evangelistic Coptic Orthodox priest had a vision from God that he should move into the village so that he could reach out to the garbage people. He obeyed.

Starting with Bible study combined with health care, education and other social services, he began his ministry. The people responded. The fellowship of serious followers of Jesus Christ began to grow. They eventually refurbished a cave to be their church sanctuary.

Though this "Cave Church" held three thousand people, it has now become inadequate. Today they worship in an amphitheater carved into the side of a mountain—with seating for ten to twelve thousand. On Thursday nights the garbage village people come, Bibles in hand, to be led in worship and teaching by Coptic Orthodox priests whose words, outlines and images are projected onto a screen high on the wall of the mountain.

As amazing as all of this is, however, the place stinks. Garbage is everywhere. People climb through the piles of refuse in front of their homes. Children join in the work, sorting through the waste in search of recyclable resources. The smell of fermenting waste hangs in the hot air and lingers on your clothes and in your nostrils long after you leave.

On the bus ride back to our conference hotel, with the smell of garbage on our clothes and shoes, I started thinking about Matthew 25—the "whatever you did for one of the least of these . . . you did for me" passage. I knew that Jesus was present in the garbage village. I knew that the ministry today has grown because an evangelist decided to move into that village and love these garbage collectors as if they were Jesus himself. Today, the church serves not only the spiritual needs of these "Jesus in

disguise" people; it also facilitates education, health care, economic empowerment and societal reform.

But with all these good things, it's still tough to get past the fact that the place stinks. Many of the people stink. And if you work there, you'll stink.

That's when it hit me. The garbage village aroma made me reflect on other smells that we encounter as we reach out to the "least of these"—the body odor smell of the street person, the urine smell of the homeless shelter, the stale aroma of the nursing home or the prison. If this is where Jesus is, then maybe we'd better start accepting the fact that sometimes Jesus stinks.

- 10 -

PRAY

Remembering That We Have Access to the Throne Room of God Almighty

Biblical Reflection: Compassionate Praying

In our excessively practical, hands-on emphasis in ministry in Western culture, we often forget the fact that, in the words I've used to summarize the exhortations of E. M. Bounds, "Prayer *is* the ministry."[1] We pray before ministry, as we plan for ministry and for results in ministry, but we seldom pray as if prayer *is* the ministry. And yet realistically, especially as we look at global ministry or ministry in cultures that neither our churches nor we will ever encounter, prayer is our primary ministry. Paul knew that as he wrote to the Romans. He probably guessed that few of his recipients would ever undertake the risks and efforts that occupied him daily, yet he urged them to "join me in my struggle by praying to God for me" (Romans 15:30).

To the Corinthians, Paul recounted his tumultuous life and then spoke assuredly: "[God] has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, *as you help us by your prayers*" (2 Corinthians 1:10-11).

The writer of the book of Hebrews takes it a step further. He urges us, "Remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering" (Hebrews 13:3). He challenges us to empathize with these brothers and sisters.

Leaders of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (see idop.org for data and related links) estimate that 150,000 Christians are

killed every year for their faith, two million are persecuted (meaning active oppression, not someone snickering in the restaurant if we bow to return thanks) and millions more live where freedom to worship and evangelize is restricted or repressed.

Why not consider mobilizing your congregation in empathetic prayer for these maligned brothers and sisters this year? Praying empathetically stretches our vision and our sense of God's global purposes as it takes us places that we might never otherwise go—places such as China, the Sudan, Iran, India and Indonesia.

Several years ago, as I was preparing to fly home after being part of a quiet gathering of young Christians in a country where Christians are severely oppressed, their leader gave me a photo of the group. His eyes pleaded as he spoke, "Please—don't forget us." He was asking me to join in the struggle, to help them by my prayers, to empathize with their plight as I brought them before God. Can I echo my brother's request? Please, don't forget these people.

Prayer: Because the Task Is Too Big for Us

Matthew's account of Jesus facing the crowds in Matthew 9 reminds us of our need to make prayer a priority. Jesus' ministry demonstrates the balance of the gospel in word and deed that we're after: he traveled about teaching, proclaiming *and* healing (Matthew 9:35). Then Matthew describes Jesus' view of the crowd: he saw this myriad of people as "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). We don't know exactly what Jesus saw in this crowd, but he looked deeply with his discerning spirit, and he saw the needs of people.

Then Jesus turned to his disciples to use the surrounding crowds in a teaching moment. He observed that "the harvest is plentiful"; people were ready to respond to the love of God as the solution to their harassed and helpless state. "But the workers are few"; the lack of willing gospel workers meant that the ripe harvest might be neglected (Matthew 9:37).

This scene reveals three things. First, the *needs of people* are evident: they are "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." We don't know how the crowd looked externally, but God knows that people

internally are needy. Second, the *need for people* is evident: the harvest needs laborers.

Put me in this situation with the disciples, and I'd be calling for action: "Look at those people's needs. Look at the harvest opportunity. Now go out there and do something. Burn yourselves out to bring in the harvest." But Jesus did not compel the disciples to a life of rescue or recruitment. The third part of the account is *Jesus' call to prayer*. Needy people plus a ripe, laborer-lacking harvest equals a call to prayer: "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers" (Matthew 9:38).

When we consider the overwhelming number of people in the world who need teaching and proclaiming and healing, or when we think of the millions who live harassed, helpless and shepherdless lives, we can easily be overwhelmed. Like these disciples we need to turn our attention upward in prayer, so that we remember that the harvest has a Lord, and it's not us. We pray to remind ourselves that God is the one who can ultimately work the miracles, give the wisdom and call the laborers forth into his great global harvest.

Every once in a while, I am vividly reminded of God's call on his people to pray for laborers for the global harvest field. On a ministry trip to Cameroon I met Pastor Taku, the pastor of a medium-size church in a moderately sized city. He asked me to preach at the Apostolic Church of Buea (pronounced Boy-ya) where he served.

As I often do in the midst of a globally minded sermon, I was encouraging people to expand their prayers and start praying for other nations and for unreached people groups. In the first service, I was trying to help people make connections from the immediate world they live in to the nations, so I mentioned the many Chinese workers in their midst. (China is spending billions of dollars and sending thousands of workers across Africa to build highways, airports and infrastructure, and Cameroon is one recipient.) I mentioned that many of these Chinese people have perhaps never heard the gospel and that God was bringing them to Cameroon so that they could hear the gospel from Cameroonian Christians.

Then, to promote more global praying, I encouraged the congregation to learn geography so that they could pray for nations. I illustrated this point by saying that when I met their pastor, Pastor Taku, I immediately prayed

for Azerbaijan. Why? His name reminded me of Baku, the capital city of the Central Asian, mostly Muslim nation of Azerbaijan.

I expected that I was introducing this congregation to a new idea, but after the first service I made the amazing discovery that Pastor Taku had already been passionately praying about all of the "stan" countries: Pakistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and others. And he was encouraging his congregation to do the same, so that God would call forth laborers from Cameroon to go to these places.

My spontaneous illustration came to Pastor Taku as a great "Holy Spirit moment" affirmation. And, in the language of the Apostolic Church, we had made a "prophetic connection." Perhaps the next time I meet Pastor Taku it will be in Azerbaijan. For now, I am praying for Pastor Taku-for-Baku, and for the church he leads to send out laborers.

Prayer: Because God Grants Boldness as We Pray

There are risks and dangers ahead for those of us who choose to live the Great Commission, Great Compassion life. The life of being "witnesses" (*martyres*) may actually involve martyrdom for some, or prison or torture for others. All of which reminds us why we need to pray. We remember the words of David, "When [not *if*] I am afraid, I put my trust in you" (Psalm 56:3). We pray because we need courage to face the challenges ahead.

The church in the book of Acts provides a great example of prayer linked with boldness. As the church awaited the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, "they all joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14). When new converts started multiplying, they devoted themselves to community, to learning and to prayer (Acts 2:42). When they were threatened and opposed and facing persecution, they prayed and God shook the room and sent them out with boldness (Acts 4:31)—so much so that when they were beaten, they rejoiced at their identification with the suffering of the Lord Jesus, and they preached all the more (Acts 5:41-42).

In short, prayer was at the foundation of the expanding, threatened, persecuted church.

For persecuted Christians in many countries, prayer is the cry of their hearts—for courage, for faithfulness in the face of opposition, for the ability

to love and forgive their persecutors. Even their songs, often in a minor key, reflect a longing, a yearning, a crying out to God. These sisters and brothers join for hours: crying out in desperation in places like Sudan or South Sudan, or in impoverished nations suffering from the effects of corrupt governments; lifting their prayers from prison in places like Iran or the Middle East; asking God for boldness to live and preach the gospel across China or North Korea.

As we cry out for boldness for ourselves, let us not forget to ask for boldness for these brothers and sisters, remembering those in prison as if we were in prison with them (again, see Hebrews 13:3).

Prayer: To Influence the Nations of the World

Given our commitment to both the lived-out and the proclaimed gospel, I'm dedicating the longest section of this chapter to prayer for the leaders and governments of our world. These prayers can have the greatest impact of any of our global actions because governments, kings, rulers and presidents establish policies that can empower or hurt the poor, allow for or resist the spread of the gospel, and affirm or deny kingdom of God values of compassion. (Before continuing, it's worth pausing to read 1 Timothy 2:1-6 to introduce this section.)

Early on a Monday morning, my phone rings. With morning raspiness in my throat, I pick it up and say "Hello?"

"Mr. Borthwick, this is the White House calling. Please hold for the president of the United States."

"Is this a joke?" I ask, but silence on the other end indicates I'm on hold.

The next voice I hear begins, "Paul, this is the president. I'm entering this week with some huge decisions to make, both domestically and internationally. I'm wondering if you could stop and pray with me for wisdom so that my decisions foster the greatest long-term good in our country and across the world."

Obviously I agree, and I hang up, stunned at the call, but the phone rings again. This time it's the secretary general of the United Nations calling with a similar request. Then the president of China calls, followed

by the prime minister of Israel, the sultan of Oman and the president of Venezuela.

Sound far-fetched? In one respect, it is. Neither the president of the United States nor any of these other leaders has ever called me, and I'm pretty sure they never will. But they really don't need to call me. God has already called. God calls all of us to pray for our government's leaders and our world leaders. Paul exhorts us in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 to offer "petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving . . . for all people—[and especially] for kings and all those in authority."

I'll get to some of the details on how to pray shortly, but first, a question: *Why do we fail to pray for political leaders?* Many of us may be reticent to pray for these leaders because we feel inadequate or too small to make a difference at the national or international leadership level. Others, however, fail to pray because we simply don't like some of the people who lead our nation and our world. We may see them as "too liberal" or "too conservative." We may see their political positions as unbiblical. We may view national leaders as enemies of the gospel or as obstacles to our own interests.

But the Bible doesn't give us the option not to pray.

During a time when the current US president was alienating a large portion of the Christian population because of his public stance on some volatile social issues, I was urging a congregation to remember our political leaders in prayer. An audible snicker echoed across the audience, most of whom, I'm guessing, identified with a different political party than the president. It was as if they were responding, "You've got to be kidding! Pray for that guy?"

I paused and reminded my brothers and sisters that the commands concerning prayer for those in authority and submission to the authorities were written by New Testament writers who were living under the horrors of Roman emperors like Nero, leaders who would ultimately persecute, displace and kill many first-century Christians. In other words, the New Testament writers don't give us license to stop praying for our political or international leaders if we don't like them or they are not from the party we favor or they are not people that we wanted elected.

It's obviously a greater challenge to pray for those who are unjust or do not share our personal convictions. Christians around the world testify of

the challenge to pray when the political rulers are despots, oppressors of Christianity and advocates of un-Christian or even anti-Christian behavior, but the command is still clear: God calls us to pray for those who lead us politically. And the plural form in 1 Timothy 2:2—"kings"—indicates that we must incorporate the leaders of other nations into our prayers.

Biblical foundations. Prayer for political leaders flows from a perspective built on the foundation of the sovereignty of God. We pray believing that the whole earth is under his sovereign control. He is the Lord of history: past, present and future. The people in positions of leadership are somehow incorporated into his sovereign plan.

According to Paul in Romans 13:1, "there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God." The Scriptures repeatedly teach that every political leader rules at God's command (2 Samuel 12:7-8; Job 12:18; Proverbs 8:15-16; Isaiah 41:2-4; 45:1-7; Jeremiah 27:4-7; Daniel 2:21, 37-38; 4:17, 25). It may seem unfathomable to us to consider the dictators and immoral and lying leaders of our world as under God's sovereign plan, but the Scriptures affirm that these historical leaders and the events that they shape are part of God's long-term design and directive. Even the beast of Revelation 13 is ultimately given his power by God (Revelation 13:5, 7, 14-15). We may not comprehend God's long-term plan, but the Bible clearly affirms it.

Nigeria is a country torn by tensions between Muslims and Christians, especially in the northern part of the country. At a student mission conference sponsored by the Nigeria Fellowship of Evangelical Students, I was impressed by the students' sense of God's sovereign work in history expressed in the prayer guide that they had created.

Expressing their belief that God is the Lord of the whole world, they urged prayer for their president, their government officials, their judges and the local legislations—even the ones supporting the imposition of rigid Islamic *Sharia* law, something very oppressive to Christians. The guide went on to encourage prayer for the sustaining of the democracy, the improvement of the economy, the defeat of corruption and the spread of the gospel. I brought that prayer guide home to direct my prayers in my own region, state and country, as well as for leaders in other nations of the world.

So how do we pray? First of all, we can *pray confidently*. Proverbs 21:1 reminds us that "In the LORD's hand the king's heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him." The president or king or prime minister might not be calling us and asking for direction, but the King of kings and the Ruler of all rulers invites us into his presence to intercede on behalf of these leaders. As mysterious as it sounds, God invites us to turn his hand as he directs the hearts of rulers.

In the summer of 1989, a fifth-grade teacher from a Christian school visited what was then known as East Berlin. The sight of the Berlin Wall and all that it symbolized concerning human and religious oppression overwhelmed her. She returned to her school that September and urged her fifth graders to start praying every day for the Berlin Wall to come down. In October and November 1989, that wall came down, beginning a process that eventually dismantled Soviet communism.

I'm sure that those fifth graders were not the only people praying for the wall to come down, but because they prayed, they gained a confident understanding of God at work in the world through the prayers of his people.

Our confidence in God's global sovereignty encourages us to pray for leaders around the world as well as our own national leaders. For this reason, I try to choose at least one leader from another country to pray for every day. The newspaper or CNN might provoke my prayers through a breaking story, and I turn it into an opportunity to influence global events by approaching the throne of God.

Second, we can *pray humbly and repentantly*. When Isaiah caught a vision of the Lord, he confessed not only his own sin but the sins of his people: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). We too must look at our leaders and realize—especially in locations where they are elected through democratic processes—that these leaders often reflect the best and worst of our nation. A materialistic leader often reflects the materialism of his culture. A violent leader might reflect a spirit of violence sweeping the nation. Leaders who get to positions of power through deception often come from a culture built on lies.

During the time in the United States when President Clinton was lying publicly about his affair while in the White House, a humble, repentant

pastor led his congregation in prayer. He prayed for our president to repent and to experience God's forgiveness, but he went a step beyond the president. He also invited the congregation to repent on behalf of the nation for our sins of immorality and deception as a culture. He saw our president's sins as a reflection of the spiritual state of our nation.

We also pray humbly and repentantly because there are times when the people in power are put there as part of God's judgment. Jeremiah quotes God as referring to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar as "my servant" (Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6; 43:10). Isaiah reminds those facing exile that God considers the Medo-Persian king Cyrus as "his anointed" (Isaiah 45:1), and God affirms that Cyrus "will accomplish all that I please" (Isaiah 44:28). When invasion by the Ottoman Empire loomed at the gates of Europe, Martin Luther referred to the threat as God's judgment on the church for its unfaithfulness. He declared that the Turks were the "rod of God's anger" against the apostate church, so opposition to them must begin with repentance, prayer and preaching God's word.[2]

When a political leader's stance on issues contradicts our own and what we believe the Bible teaches, we need to step back humbly and ask, What is God teaching us about the spiritual state of ourselves and our nation?

Third, we should *pray biblically and strategically*. We can be sure that God wants our leaders to exercise biblical ideals such as righteousness and justice. We also pray for them in the administration of societal peace. In the early days of the Christian church, Tertullian urged Christians to pray for the emperor to have "long life, secure dominion, a safe home, a faithful senate, a righteous people, and a world at peace."[3]

Romans 13:1-7 instructs us to pray that our leaders will do good, defend good and punish evil. Peter echoes the same idea when he writes that the emperor is "the supreme authority" and that governors are "sent by [God] to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right" (1 Peter 2:13-14). The instructions of 1 Timothy 2:1-4 mandate that we pray for political conditions that will seek to advance the gospel. Our prayer for "kings and all those in authority" is so that "we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." But this is not the end in itself. We pray this way because "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

Strategic prayer provokes me to pray for our president and other political leaders that they will enact laws that protect the needs of the poor and defenseless. It challenges me to pray that governmental leaders protect a culture that allows for the preaching of the gospel. And it reminds me to pray that leaders in oppressive countries change their positions and allow greater human and religious rights—especially the freedom to choose Jesus Christ.

Fourth, when we pray for our political leaders we should *pray historically*, remembering that God is in control. Praying with historical perspective, though, requires patience. God seldom works in history and in political leaders as quickly as we'd like.

Commenting on Paul's and Peter's perspective on submission to the horrific regime of Nero and other dictators, William Barclay writes, "Emperors might be persecutors, and those in authority might be determined to stamp out Christianity. But the Christian Church never, even in the times of the most bitter persecution, ceased to pray for them."[4] Barclay then goes on to trace this sense of submission and support throughout the earliest centuries of Christianity. By AD 311, he observes, the emperor was *asking* for the prayers of Christians.[5]

In the days of Paul the apostle, the Roman government did indeed torture and kill many Christians, but persecution actually provoked the spread of Christianity (see Acts 8:1). Historians also note that it was the *Pax Romana*, the Roman peace, that gave early Christian missionaries the chance to do their work. Without the communication, travel and social systems established by the Roman Empire, the spread of Christianity might have been much slower.

When former US president Ronald Reagan died, I remembered the significance of keeping a historical perspective during prayer. In the early 1980s, one of the greatest fears of our culture was that President Reagan's actions against the USSR would provoke nuclear holocaust. Now, more than thirty-five years later, Mr. Reagan and his counterpart, Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR, are given credit for changing world history by the dismantling of Soviet communism. These leaders remind me who the ultimate Lord of history is.

Finally, we should *pray faithfully*. Our prayers should not just surge at election time, nor in the midst of national crises, nor in response to political leaders we either love or detest. The passage in 1 Timothy reminds us to incorporate our political leaders into all sorts of prayers. As we make our *petitions* and *prayers*, we should remember our governmental leaders. As we offer up *intercession*, we come to the throne of God as advisers to the president or king or prime minister. When we list our *thanksgiving*, we thank God for the rulers we do have, and we thank God that he is the ultimate power behind them all.

To encourage faithful prayer, I try to pray for leaders in my own nation daily—starting with the president, then members of Congress, then governors and so on. In addition, as I mentioned earlier, I match a continent (or subcontinent) with each day of the week. On Monday, I pray for countries and leaders in Europe. Tuesday I focus on Latin America and the Caribbean, Wednesday on North Africa and the Muslim world, and Thursday on the rest of Africa. Friday takes me to Central and South Asia, and Saturday to East Asia. Sunday leaves opportunity to pray for global leaders who influence many nations—such as the leaders of the European Union, the secretary general of the United Nations and the pope.

Confident, humble, strategic, historical, faithful prayer. The president or other political leaders in our country or internationally most likely won't be calling to request prayer. But we cannot let that stop us. God has already given the mandate!

Compassionate, Global Prayer—One Example

Scott Taylor, part of the global family related to College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, offered the following prayer during a Global Awareness Sunday in late 2011. It's a wonderful example of worship, confession and intercession related to our nation, the nations of the world and the Lord of all nations. Scott was generous enough to allow me to share it here:

> Sovereign of all peoples, we come before you as a redeemed family in joyful worship. You've made every nation to live on the earth, choosing the times, and the boundaries of where we all would dwell

[Acts 17:26]. It's too small a thing for you, O Christ, to be considered merely a local deity, whether in Palestine, or in Europe, or in Wheaton [Isaiah 49:6]. *All* dominions are your inheritance! While the nations rage, your kingdom is like yeast that works through flour until all the world is leavened with the knowledge of Christ, and brought under your benevolent rule [Matthew 13:33]. We see the wonder of this, and with the seraphim we cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of your glory!" [Isaiah 6:3].

Yet like Isaiah we are unclean and undone before you. We haven't proclaimed your excellency as love for God and neighbor demand. We're held back by selfishness, cowardice, and a love for fleeting comfort over eternal glory. We've made our lives more about self-actualization than Christ exaltation. Forgive us for prayerlessness, for pride and apathy that silence our witness, for faithless fear that leads to so many compromisings of your holy standards. Ultimately we confess unbelief. Unbelief that those who lose their lives in this world for your sake will find them. In light of these sins, we plead, "Lord have mercy!" [Pause] And we know our prayers are answered. The Lamb of God has interposed his blood. Risen with Christ, we are no longer debtors to the flesh, but are free to live by the Spirit.

In that standing we intercede for your people and this world. Father, be with those who are sick or in danger today. Remind them of your promises and satisfy them with your peace. Guide your servant [crosscultural worker, name withheld] as he trains pastors in South Asia. Give him discernment, and unction in his teaching. We ask that your Church would thrive there and in every dark corner of the world. Give each one of us here an active compassion for unreached peoples. Raise up many more laborers from among us [Matthew 9:36-38], to devote the best years of their lives to places like the islands of Indonesia, the jungles of Brazil, the mountains of Morocco, and the cities of Japan. Raise up parents and friends to give freely of these sons and daughters, praying and speeding them

on their way. Lord, arrange our lives in such a way that knowledge of Christ goes out from among us with the utmost speed and orthodoxy, generosity and creativity, boldness and sacrificial love. We ask these things because it is to Jesus that the glory, honor, wisdom, beauty, and wealth of all nations rightfully belong. Amen.

- 11 -

WELCOME AND CELEBRATE

Looking for Ways to Welcome the Stranger

I was a stranger and you invited me in.

Matthew 25:35

Make disciples of all the world's ethnicities.

Matthew 28:19, paraphrase

Biblical Reflection: Acts 10

Peter's encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10 signifies a dramatic turning point in expanding the Jewish-dominated church to become the church for all peoples. Cornelius represents the Roman world in particular but also the Gentile world in general. The story conveys the full invitation for Gentiles to enter the church, but it also shows the Spirit-driven transformation that had to occur in ethnocentric Peter. Peter's worldview, like Jonah's view of the Ninevites, incorporated no interest in including the Gentiles in the merciful plan of God. They were unclean and, as far as Peter was concerned, still relegated to the "outer courts" of the action of God.

But Acts 10 is the story of two conversions. Will Willimon asks, "Is this the story of the conversion of a gentile or the conversion of an apostle?" He then answers, "Both Cornelius and Peter need changing if God's mission is to go forward."[1]

The point of this extraordinary passage is that the salvation God offers is for all humans everywhere, regardless of racial background or

characteristics. Peter had to learn that "God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (Acts 10:34-35). James Eckman makes the point succinctly: "Racial hatred or discrimination is impossible when one sees people the way God does."[2] Sri Lankan theologian Vinoth Ramachandra reiterates the same thought: "Since the gospel affirms all human beings as created in the image of God and as the objects of their Creator's seeking love, we must accord them the respect that their created dignity requires."[3]

Acts 10, therefore, is a critical turning point because the Holy Spirit provokes Peter to engage and even stay with those he had considered outsiders. Peter then must report to other church leaders about the work of the Spirit that was taking the ethnic and cultural expansion of the church out of their hands. As he reports, he shares his own surprise that "these uncircumcised pagans have been made part of God's household. So the Church is moved one step on the road toward becoming a home for people of all nations and a sign of the unity of all."[4]

The foundation for welcoming: a transformed view of others. The story of Peter and Cornelius provokes an obvious question: How does God change a person's worldview—especially regarding people who are different? The outsider, the stranger, the foreigner, the alien?

God was always at work changing his people to give them a wider view of himself and the world into which he sent them. He worked with the Israelites incessantly trying to get them to understand that he was the God of all nations and that they were to be his "light for the Gentiles" (Isaiah 49:6). The psalmists referred frequently to "all nations," "all peoples" and "all the earth," but the people of God just didn't get it. They turned inward and insular. They ran away from their mission motivated by hate and racism —like Jonah—not wanting their pagan enemies to have a chance to respond to God's mercy (see Jonah 4:2).

By New Testament times, the people of God were an inward-looking, ethnocentric, defensive minority. During his ministry Jesus broke stereotypes by healing Gentiles and conversing with Samaritans, but even by the time of the resurrection the disciples still didn't get it. They were still looking for a political takeover (Acts 1:6), and when Jesus commissioned them to witness in "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends

of the earth" (1:8), they had no idea what to do. They retreated to a room and prayed. Even after the Holy Spirit came in power, they stayed primarily in Jerusalem and ministered primarily to Jews.

In this context we find God at work changing the worldview of Peter and the New Testament church toward the Gentiles. The Samaritans had already received the gospel (Acts 8), but now the real pagans will be included. Acts 10 gives a number of concrete principles from which we can learn how God works to transform our view of others in order to enlarge the peoples and cultures of the church.

Nine principles from Acts 10. *Principle 1: prayerful preparation*. God is at work to prepare people on the receiving end (10:1-8). Cornelius was practicing disciplines that put him in the place to hear God: Luke describes him as devout, God fearing, generous, prayerful, sensitive to God's presence and obedient. Similarly, God was preparing Peter on the sending end (10:9). God intervened by granting visions, reminding us that transformation such as Peter's may require a miracle.

Principle 2: repeated confrontation of stereotypes. God confronted Cornelius with a bold vision (10:3-6), refuting his stereotype that because he was a Gentile he was inferior or second class before God. Cornelius had an "outer court" mentality, and God was calling him closer. On the other hand, Peter's stereotypes about his ways being "clean" and everything else being "unclean" got demolished in the three visions God sent. God whacked Peter's stereotypes about God—namely that God was more concerned about ritual and legalities than about people (10:10-16).

It's worth noting the phrase "he fell into a trance" (10:10). Peter was out of control! Often God does his greatest teaching in our lives when we are no longer in control. Ask anyone who can testify of transformational growth on a crosscultural service team: the context of growth is often one of feeling lost, getting sick, losing passports or some other crisis where they were forced to trust God.

Principle 3: stepping outside comfort zones. For Peter and Cornelius to change, they both had to step outside their culturally defined comfort zones. Peter had to go (10:23-24). Cornelius had to receive him (10:24-25). The Jewish men had to come into a Gentile house, something they had never done before. A transformed worldview for individuals, groups and churches

means stepping into the risky spots! We need to go into other cultures because in the challenges we find ourselves in the position of learning.

Principle 4: firsthand encounter. They met, they dined and they listened to each other's stories as Peter stayed with Cornelius's family (10:48). By the grace of God, they laid their stereotypes to the side and met at a place of equality: the meal table (see "Welcome to the Table" below). The shared table is a major theme throughout Luke's writings—starting with the accusations that Jesus dined with sinners. How we eat together often reflects our ability to draw together across cultures.

Principle 5: humility and service. Peter served his Gentile guests, a radical departure from maintaining stereotypes (10:23). His actions force those who perceive themselves as having power or the upper hand over a minority or looked-down-on person to ask the question, Are we going to serve or do we insist on being the prominent guests?

Principle 6: testimonies. Peter told his story of God transforming his cultural assumptions, a story that testified to the Gentiles that God was intervening on their behalf (10:27-29). Cornelius told his story of God at work (10:30-33), and Peter could not refute the common work of grace that he saw in their midst. Peter confirmed in his own heart what he already knew to be true (10:34-43). In the reconciliation process, we need to listen to each other telling stories of God at work in our midst. It reminds us that the God of the universe is working in many cultures; but more importantly, it reminds us that we have a common Creator and therefore are together part of the human family, and, if all parties are Christ-followers, part of God's redeemed family.

Principle 7: getting God's perspective on the world. It took four visions (three for Peter, one for Cornelius) and a firsthand encounter, but Peter finally got it (10:34-35). He had heard phrases like "Lord of all" (10:36) and "everyone who believes in him" (10:43) before, but he had probably heard them as "Lord of all Jews" or "every Jew who believes." However, because of his meeting with Cornelius the phrases took on new meaning for Peter. Whenever we encounter some brother or sister from another culture, we need to ask, What is God teaching us here about himself and about his love for the whole world?

Principle 8: letting the Holy Spirit work. When God works to bring unity out of diversity and healing out of conflict, get ready to be

“astonished” (Acts 10:44-46). And when God surprises us, we can testify about and affirm God’s work in our midst (10:47-48).

Principle 9: continuing to live by grace. The complete story of Peter reminds us that some change happens slowly. Peter was prepared to reach out to outsiders while walking with Jesus for more than three years. And then God intervened to change him dramatically through visions and a personal encounter with a believing Gentile. But a few years later we find Peter backsliding into his ethnocentric ways again by refusing to eat with Gentiles, an action that Paul rebuked openly (Galatians 2:11-21). People change slowly, and some biases take years to undo. We shouldn’t give up when we struggle with cultural differences or when we see the struggle in others.

Our goal, imitating the experiences of Acts 10, is to create contexts where we can encounter each other and God to the point that our stereotypes are refuted and we understand that “God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (10:34-35).

Welcome: Take the Initiative

Welcoming others is an active discipline, but most of us don’t get the divine kick in the pants that God gave to Peter. For most of us, welcoming the stranger will mean actively looking for opportunities to meet, serve, reach out to and care for the crosscultural newcomers in our midst or the outsiders in our communities who don’t typically get touched by the Christian community.

Rick Wood is the editor of *Mission Frontiers*, a magazine dedicated to getting the gospel message out to and making disciples of all the unreached peoples of the world. The magazine typically focuses on the unreached in other lands, but in one editorial Rick challenges us to take action starting in our own communities.

> By means of his sovereign will, God has brought many unreached peoples into our midst *so that they will have access to the gospel*. But how many churches are even aware of the ethnic diversity that

> surrounds them? And if they are aware do they really care to reach people who are very different from themselves? Will we ignore them, preferring the company of people who are like us? Or will we obey God's command to disciple all nations and equip ourselves to reach out to them with the gospel? God gives us the choice of whether we will be on mission with him or simply a passive listener of sermons for our own edification. The church must change its focus from just sermon delivery to equipping disciple-makers if we are to make progress in world evangelization.[5]

Rick knows, as we all do, that staying with people from our own comfortable cultural group or church fellowship or Bible study will always be easier than crossing cultures to make friends and learn. Like Peter, we'd rather live in our stereotypes and in the comfortable world we know than enter into friendships that involve awkward cultural mistakes, thick accents, other religions and unusual foods. We often prefer our own homogeneous cultural bubble.

Rick goes on to urge us to take the initiative toward outsiders:

> We must change the way we think about church and our role in it. Every believer needs to have the identity of a disciple-maker not a church member or attender. Every believer must see that he has an active role to play in fulfilling the Great Commission. Every believer has already been called to be involved in ministry and it is his or her job to discover the specific role that God has for him or her. We have to get away from the idea that all God expects of us is to go to church on Sunday and give our tithe.[6]

Welcome to the Table

As with Peter and Cornelius, the starting point might be a meal together. For the Nelsons and the family from India in their neighborhood, it started with an invitation to dinner. In my relationship with Dr. Mustafa from Libya, I invited him to a join me for dinner at a nice restaurant (my cultural

way of honoring a guest); he reciprocated by inviting me to his home where he could cook me a meal (his cultural way of honoring me as a guest).

An experience in Trinidad reaffirmed to me the importance of shared meals. Christie and I sat in the city of Arima eating at the table of our friends Ashoke and Stephanie Bachew. We were talking about the divide between the rich and the poor and between differing ethnic groups—in their country, and in every country. Ashoke responded, “If you come to my house and you eat at my table, then we are friends, then we are equals.”

Economics and ethnicity were not the issues in this experience. What was important was what biblical scholars call “table fellowship,” a shared meal that communicates that our fellowship together supersedes our cultural or national or financial or gender or age or even linguistic differences.

Sharing a meal says, “I value you. We are equals. I will receive your hospitality and I ask you to receive mine.” In crosscultural settings it says, “I value our friendship so much that I’ll trust you and take the risk and eat the food you have prepared for me—food that might be quite unfamiliar to me.”

Crosscultural table fellowship taught the Gentile Cornelius that the God of the Jews had heard his prayers. That same table fellowship taught Peter that his God was not bound to Peter’s cultural traditions nor did he show favoritism to Peter’s ethnic group. Table fellowship can change the way we look at ourselves, the way we look at others and the way we look at God.

At the conclusion of a seminar in Ibadan, Nigeria, I asked the participants what they valued most about the week we had spent together. I suppose I was hoping to hear accolades about my teaching or some profound response I had made to one of their tough questions. Instead one of the pastors stated, “You came to our place, you sat with us at meals and you ate our food with us.”

Welcome: Go Looking

A ministry that involves traveling takes my wife and me to visit ten to fifteen churches across North America every year. As a former church staff member, I love observing the publications of these churches and the

programs they promote in their services. The church calendar and the Sunday morning announcements underscore the truest values of the church.

I think the churches I visit have the same problem that my home church does. The calendar reveals that many of us think that more and better church-based activities and programs will be the key to drawing people to Jesus Christ.

The error of our ways is not sincerity: we *want* to reach out. The error of our ways is not qualitative: many churches have great facilities, staff, programs and delivery systems. Reggie McNeal in *The Present Future* points out that large churches with awesome programs succeed in drawing people, but the draw is usually from smaller churches to bigger—so that church growth is mostly already-Christian people moving "from the dinghies to the cruise ships."[7]

Our error is one of direction: we think that the purpose of church outreach is to get those who do not know Jesus to come to us. Our programs and activities say, in effect, "Come and get it." We plan our events, invite people to come to our classes or join our small groups, promote our speakers and pass out our brochures—all with the implicit message of "come to church to see what we're about." We direct people inward—to our activities and our facilities.

As we saw in part one of this book, the mandate of Jesus sends us in the other direction. Rather than establishing a "come and get it" approach—building a Christian community where we invite the world into our fellowship—Jesus tells us to "go and tell it." This is not to say that Christian worship is not a powerful witness; it is only to say that those outside of the community will only come after we've gone into their world, built relationships and demonstrated the love of Christ in the world.

A "come and get it" approach will attract some, but rarely will it help reach across cultures to the immigrant or international student or resettled refugee or person who does not "fit" in our church culture. The "come and get it" approach will work best with the already-churched or people returning to a faith that they had abandoned. The "come and get it" church serves to reform those with a religious predisposition, but a "go and tell it" church has no such limits.

“Go and tell it” churches can touch people who have no idea that God loves them. By going into their world, we can reach people who will never “come and get it” at church: prostitutes, tax collectors, social misfits, HIV/AIDS patients, bikers, philanderers, the self-sufficient wealthy and the overly dependent poverty-stricken. This may explain why we hesitate to get going: we’ll begin to meet with and welcome into friendship people whose cultures and values and worldviews might be quite foreign to ours. In other words, the very people Jesus came to reach.

Welcome the Alien and the Stranger

Look almost anywhere in North America and you’ll notice a cultural and demographic change: in the words of one book title, missions have come to America.[8] The people who once were exclusively “across the sea” are now across the street in our neighborhoods and across the cubicle in our offices.

A student who worked in a summer internship at the United Nations told me that an internal newsletter reported that the United States is the only country on earth with residents from every other country. A teacher at an urban high school in Chicago told me that there are over one hundred languages spoken in that city’s school system. A campus pastor at Ohio State University reported that the school has more than 4,300 international students from 130 countries—including countries such as China, India and Saudi Arabia where traditional missionaries are not allowed.

How do we respond? Do we lament the changing face of our communities, echoing the words of cartoon character Bart Simpson as he shouted from the Statue of Liberty to a boatload of immigrants, “Go away, America’s full”? (Remember the inscription on the Statue of Liberty to get the full irony.)[9] Do we reply with irritation to the new citizen whose broken English is tough to understand in the supermarket?

Or do we welcome the outsider as Jesus himself (Matthew 25:31-46)—into our communities, into our homes and into our churches? The Old Testament teaching on how to treat foreigners doesn’t leave us with a choice (for example, Exodus 22:12; Leviticus 19:10, 33-34). Moses commanded grace and generosity to outsiders because the Israelites had

themselves been aliens in Egypt. In other words, remember where you came from and treat others as you would like to have been treated.

In the United States especially, where almost all of us are the children of immigrants (some of whom came here against their wills) and refugees, we ought to be the most generous and welcoming to foreign visitors and new residents.

Look at it this way: missions in the past was going into all the world. Missions in this world of migrating peoples is going into all the ethnically different people in our midst. The Thai Buddhists who run the restaurant in the center of our town, the Turkish Muslim family who owns the Sir Speedy a few miles from my house and the Gujarati Hindu who works at the lab with my wife—all of them deserve an opportunity to hear and experience the love of Jesus through us.

In Revelation 7:9, John the apostle sees in the future a great service with people from every tribe, nation and language worshiping Jesus. Maybe we can see this verse's partial fulfillment by organizing a prayer meeting in the Chicago school system—or better, by opening our homes and churches to the crosscultural mission field in our midst.

Welcome with Practical Help

The staff of World Relief often work in the United States helping to resettle refugees, people coming through the advocacy of the United States government for political or religious asylum.[10] They might be ethnic Nepalese who were exiled from Bhutan, or peace-loving Somalis escaping a state of dangerous anarchy, or citizens of Myanmar who come from a persecuted ethnic minority group.

These new arrivals come from cultures vastly different from the urban or suburban American cities and towns where they get placed. They first need friends who will help with everything from understanding English to going to the supermarket to enrolling children in the school system. Basic life questions might include how the toilet works, or the electric can opener or the thermostat. More complicated questions can involve government paperwork, learning to drive or opening a bank account.

Matt Soerens is the field director of the Evangelical Immigration Table, a ministry dedicated to bringing Christian compassion and a biblical understanding of the "alien and stranger" into the public arena.[11] Matt shared with me two stories of welcoming outsiders that show the value of offering practical help. The first story involves one of his colleagues who came to the United States from China. Matt writes:

> She became a Christian after she and her mom arrived here in the US because of several believers who helped welcome them when they first arrived. They were invited to and began to attend a Chinese Christian Church, but part of what built her own faith was the way that her church community embraced her and supported her during some immigration legal challenges, which included giving her rides when she wasn't eligible for a driver's license as a high schooler, as well as her youth pastor advocating with her Member of Congress to change laws in ways that would help her get established on the road towards citizenship.[12]

In the second story, Matt describes welcoming an Iranian refugee family to his Chicagoland community:

> In the neighborhood where I live, there was an Iranian refugee family resettled a few years ago. A handful of folks from my church, particularly my friend John, focused on befriending them, helping them adapt to a new culture, etc. Over time, their youngest son, who was probably sixteen when he arrived in the US, began asking questions about Jesus, and John and several others were able to help lead him to Christ.[13]

Welcoming means looking for ways to welcome the stranger, including international students, refugees and new immigrants.[14] The leaders at Global Friendship House in Norfolk, Virginia, have developed this basic strategy for hosting internationals: good deeds build good will, which leads to good discussions, which lead to good decisions.[15]

Welcome in Spite of Our Awkwardness

Welcoming the crosscultural stranger is one thing, but what about the "outsider" whose lifestyle or choices leave them outside the normal reach of the church? Earlier I referred to people including prostitutes, tax collectors, social misfits, HIV/AIDS patients, bikers, philanderers, the self-sufficient wealthy and the overly dependent poverty stricken. What about them?

Crossing the street for this kind of welcoming can take us into awkward settings. Bill Henson, leader of a ministry called Lead Them Home, dedicates his life and ministry to helping evangelical churches reach out to the LGBT community. Bill relates the following story about a church's journey of learning to welcome by navigating their way through awkward cultural, social and relational waters:

> Lead Them Home often hears from pastors when a crisis hits a member of their church. In this case, a crisis hit Pastor Mark's family after his oldest son announced he is gay. In the past, Pastor Mark had simply gone through the motions of church discipline. If someone came out, they could no longer serve in any role and they would lose their membership status if they persisted in identifying as gay. They would still be welcome to sit in the pew (since the sign in front of the church reads "Everyone Welcome"), but that's about it.
>
> Suddenly, however, homosexuality was no longer a theoretical issue—it was now a person . . . a beloved son named Adam.
>
> Pastor Mark and his wife Jessica were broken in grief. On top of spiritual concerns for Adam, they also worried that this revelation would cost Mark his 25-year ministry career. He had developed much of his evangelical credentials by staking a biblical truth claim against homosexuality for many years. Now, he feared people would view him as a hypocrite—unfit to lead his church.
>
> At first, Mark and his wife asked us typical questions fraught with misunderstanding, bias and fear. Why would my son choose this horrible lifestyle? God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve! I know I am called to love sinners, but I hate this sin! Someone surely molested my son—how can I find out? Doesn't he

realize he will go to hell? How can I convince him to repent? All these questions are understandable, but they are efforts to “fix” when what is needed is a commitment to “relate.”

We spent dozens of hours helping Pastor Mark, Jessica and Adam’s siblings come to a more authentic place of understanding. They learned that accepting Adam and loving him well does not mean they approve of gay relationships—or have abandoned their biblical beliefs. They learned that it is the Pharisee spirit that tends to take a hard truth and apply it selectively (Romans 2:1-4). They learned to invite Adam into family activities. They learned to include Adam’s partner in their family activities. They slowly stopped worrying about what others would think and focused on living out the gospel and extending Jesus. They came to understand that a “gospel of rejection” is no gospel at all. The gospel requires relational trust.

After their initial grieving subsided a bit, Pastor Mark felt that he must disclose his family situation to his elder board. After sharing, he offered his resignation. Instead, his elders said they wanted to pray about this. At the next meeting, an elder shared about his lesbian daughter. Another elder shared that his father is gay. They seemed to capture the spirit of the whole board by saying that they were trying to get answers to the same questions Pastor Mark was asking.

The elders asked Pastor Mark to invite us to conduct our Posture Shift training for church leaders. After the training, the elders told Pastor Mark the following: “We need you more than ever. Let’s hold to orthodoxy firmly, but with equal passion let’s learn to radically love people. You have our full support to go engage, serve and love Adam well, but let’s go love gay people in our community too—and help other families in our congregation to do the same. The Gospel is for gay people just as much as it is for anyone and yet this is the one community we have always chosen to ignore and exclude. We believe God will use your family situation to transform our church to radically love people and nourish faith identity in Christ.”

Today, several pastors and elders routinely lunch with LGBTQ persons in their community. They are quietly expanding the Posture Shift training within their church to ensure that other families can learn to relate well to LGBTQ loved ones. This is complex work due to many relational, language and belief gaps to navigate. The bridge never seems to cross all the way, but relational trust and proclamation of the gospel is quietly happening. For Pastor Mark, he sees Adam's face in the many LGBTQ young people his church engages.

This church's work is neither a ministry program nor a restatement of church policy. It is simply one church's "posture"—to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, strength and mind; and like unto it, to love their neighbor as themselves. As partakers of an "amazing" grace, they aim to love gay people against a backdrop of decades of misunderstanding and judgment. This posture has not changed their biblical beliefs; it has simply ensured that a strong biblical belief does not tempt them to turn God against the very people He is seeking to reach.[16]

Welcome: Celebrate God's Diversity

Read the heavenly worship described in Revelation 5:9 or 7:9, and it's easy to get excited about the multicultural family of God worshiping in a vast array of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. A trip to most churches, however, on any given Sunday morning provokes the question, Why do so many of our church services look so little like the congregation John describes?

"Homogenous units" may accurately describe our tendencies in forming congregational groupings. We instinctively prefer to be with people who are just like us in culture and appearance. But is this what God wants? Did Jesus die to break down dividing walls and create "one new humanity" out of diverse peoples so that we would still stay separated from each other this side of heaven (see Ephesians 2:14-19)?

The Great Commission mandates in the Gospels and Acts send Christ's followers outward to all the diverse peoples on earth. This global mission, however, must be read in the context of Jesus' prayer for unity in diversity in John 17. An often neglected mission passage, John 17—Jesus' prayer for his disciples and those who would come after them—twice connects the unity of the body of Christ with worldwide proclamation—that the world may know (John 17:21, 23).

Is this prayer for united diversity only referring to theological unity, urging a sort of evangelical ecumenism for the purposes of fulfilling the Great Commission? The church in Acts demonstrates the answer. While that early church illustrates a unity in the essential doctrines related to salvation (and diversity in the nonessentials), they also illustrate a racial and ethnic unity—expanding outward across historical and ethnic barriers, to Samaritans, Africans and other Gentiles.

Antioch, the greatest sending church in the book of Acts, started with people who preached across ethnic lines (Acts 11:19-20). As a result, the Antioch church was healthy, outward looking and committed to taking the gospel to all peoples from its outset. It also featured a multicultural leadership team that included a Cypriot, a Cyrenian (from modern-day Libya), an African and others from various strata of society (Acts 13:1-3). A diverse church with diverse leadership became the preeminent missionary-sending church in the book of Acts. The Antioch fellowship sent the crosscultural missionary team of Barnabas and Saul, who launched the church into the Gentile world.

All of this leads to the challenge to us: have we missed the point that unity in ethnic and racial diversity is a foundation for mission—not just a long-term goal? Is pursuing intentional diversity a challenge for sending churches? If we from the West hope to go to ethnically diverse people in other lands and encourage their racial harmony, will they look at us and say, "How can you—living in an ecclesiological system that still is dominated by racially divided churches—teach us?"

Tim Dearborn, in *The Local Church in a Global Era*, observes that learning intentional diversity is one of the greatest challenges facing local congregations. Given the realities of urbanization and immigration, he writes, "The church will have global credibility only to the extent that it has

local diversity."[17] In other words, if we're going to be effective in proclaiming Christ across cultures, let's start seeing Revelation 7:9 now!

- 12 -

SIMPLIFY AND GIVE

Making a Generous Lifestyle a Priority

Biblical Reflection: Psalm 67

We all want God to bless us. Even if we have a tough time defining the term *blessing*, we know it's something good. Listen to prayer requests, read the prayer list in a church bulletin or sit in on a small group prayer time, and you'll hear about prayers for blessing. Economic: "Help Jim find a job." Relational: "Guide Mike and Beth as they consider marriage." Physical: "Please heal Joanne's cancer."

I wish we heard more prayers for effective outreach, but we don't. The objective listener might think that Christians go to God as some sort of cosmic Santa, sitting on his lap, making our requests and really, really hoping that he will come through for us.

Praying for God's blessing is perfectly biblical—provided that we maintain the bigger picture. Consider Psalm 67. "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us" (v. 1). This prayer sounds like an obvious plea regarding personal blessing, but the psalmist has something bigger in mind. His prayer is that God will bless *so that*

- God's ways might be known on earth, his salvation among all nations (v. 2)
- the peoples of earth might praise him (vv. 3 and 5)
- the nations might be glad and sing for joy (v. 4)

God's blessing—symbolized by the psalmist as an abundant harvest (v. 6)—has the end that "all the ends of the earth will fear him" (v. 7).

What's the point? When we pray for God's blessing, pray with a bigger perspective! Let our prayers echo the psalmist's as we invite God's blessing *so that* others—especially those outside of God's family—might be blessed. Psalm 67 prayers might sound like this:

"Help Jim find a job, Lord, so that his witness might expand and his generosity increase."

"Guide Mike and Beth as they consider marriage; make their relationship a testimony of your grace to others. Help their love for each other to be multiplied into love for hurting people that they can serve together."

"Please heal Joanne's cancer so that she demonstrates your healing power; in the meantime, please bless others as she exhibits your peace in this storm—especially in front of her doctors, her fellow patients and the caregivers who attend to her during chemo treatments."

God wants us to ask for his blessing, provided we understand that he blesses us *so that* we in turn can be his blessing to the people and the world around us.

To Live More Simply That Others May Simply Live

In a culture driven by desire for money, possessions and security, perhaps the most challenging Great Commission, Great Compassion lifestyle choice pertains to the way we see and manage the resources that we have. For over thirty-five years of marriage, my wife, Christie, and I have tried to keep in mind the bumper sticker we saw years ago that read, "Live More Simply That Others May Simply Live."

In our option-overload world, we face the daily choice of how to use our money, our time, our gifts, our home and our very lives as we live as followers of Jesus Christ. A person might examine our lives and point out our inconsistencies (and we know that these are there), but suffice it to say we try to see ourselves as stewards of the gifts of God that we have been given. We have been blessed to be a blessing.

The wisdom of Agur. One of the best summaries of a lifestyle prayer for the follower of Christ appears in Proverbs 30:7-9. The writer, identified as Agur son of Jakeh, provides sane, biblical guidelines on living with a balanced view of our economic lifestyle:

> Two things I ask of you, Lord;
> do not refuse me before I die:
> Keep falsehood and lies far from me;
> give me neither poverty nor riches,
> but give me only my daily bread.
> Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you
> and say, "Who is the Lord?"
> Or I may become poor and steal,
> and so dishonor the name of my God.

Agur has two requests of God. First, he wants to be delivered from self-deceit. This is a great prayer request in a materialistically laden world where I can simply substitute the word *want* with *need* and rationalize almost any new purchase. I might want an upgraded mobile device, but do I need it? I might be not as full as usual, but do I ever have the right to say "I'm hungry"?

Then Agur asks for economic moderation: "neither poverty nor riches." He observes that extreme poverty will lead to desperate measures such as stealing, and extreme wealth (so as to give one the impression of self-sufficiency) will lead to arrogant self-reliance. Either extreme inhibits a right relationship with God. In a society where want is sometimes perceived as need, we may have to practice discernment to know the difference.

The real sin of Sodom. Perhaps the most frequent flashpoint in discussions between conservative evangelicals and mainstream society erupts around the issue of sexual identity and behavior. In the most hateful speech, the conservative camp will accuse others of sodomy or the sins of Sodom; but I wonder—do we who supposedly live by the Bible know how the prophet Ezekiel described the sin of Sodom?

Ezekiel's prophetic exhortation actually relates to simpler living and generous giving. The sin of Sodom involves lack of physical self-control, humility of spirit and compassion toward the poor—and not sexuality issues

(at least not as the starting point): “This was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy” (Ezekiel 16:49). Another translation unpacks Ezekiel’s description even more vividly: “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy” (NRSV).

I think that the formula of arrogant + overfed = unconcerned to help the poor and the needy serves as a great challenge to those of us who live with the excesses and affluence of the North American middle class (or higher).

If we surveyed church leaders, my guess is that most pastors would cite “prayerlessness” (or at least not enough prayer) among their congregants as a concern. Few of us, however, worry much about the spiritual state of the overweight and obese people in our fellowship. Yet overindulgence that leads to obesity seems to be one of the few acceptable “sins of the flesh” in many Christian churches. We’ll condemn drugs, drinking, sexual promiscuity and smoking as sins against our bodies, the “temple of the Holy Spirit,” yet few preach against overeating, poor diets and obesity.

My point is not that we all need to go on the South Beach or Atkins diet. My point is that we forget that our bodies, our spirits and our actions are intertwined. If we grow arrogant or complacent in our hearts, our prayers wane and we forget about the needs of others around us—whether across the street, across cultural barriers or across the ocean. And if we allow ourselves to live as “overfed” or self-satisfied people—with no apparent curbing of our physical appetites—it follows that we will lose a sense of concern for others. All of us know how apathetic and sleepy we get when our bellies are too full.

The sin of Sodom might not be what we think. Ezekiel does point out that the arrogant–overfed–unconcerned for the poor equation eventually led to haughtiness and “detestable things” (Ezekiel 16:50—the things we usually equate with Sodom), but I wonder if we rush ahead to condemn sins that might not tempt us while we forget that God looks deeper into our hearts. The greatest evaluation of whether or not we’re combating the sin of Sodom is our commitment to humility, physical self-control and an ongoing lifestyle of treating the poor and needy with compassion.

Ezekiel's condemnation of those who were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned for the poor has forced me to scrutinize my own life, to make sure my appetites are not dulling my spiritual senses and numbing my compassion for the poor.

The admonition of Paul. Paul offers another perspective to those of us who are comparatively wealthy (and readers, on a global scale that's just about all of us!). He instructs Timothy,

> Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Paul doesn't condemn wealth. He simply wants Christ-followers to change their views on wealth. Whatever God has entrusted to us serves as gifts for our enjoyment (so Christians do throw an occasional feast or visit beautiful places), but beyond our own enjoyment, money and resources are an opportunity for kingdom investment as we give generously, share with those in need and manage our "treasure" as a stewardship that God has entrusted to us.

Steps Toward Simpler Living

With all that we know about the Christian life, sharing the gospel and demonstrating the compassion of Christ in our broken world, how can we move toward a simpler lifestyle that can better serve the purposes of God? Consider these five ideas.

First, grow in gratefulness. The essential spirit of thanksgiving serves as a wonderful antidote for complaining or coveting (wanting something we don't currently have). "Give thanks in all circumstances" was Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians (1Thessalonians 5:18), and almost all of

Paul's letters begin with effusive thanksgiving—for salvation, for forgiveness from God through Christ, for faithful friends and coworkers, or for the work of God in the world.

Even in prison, Paul flowed with gratitude, using the word *joy* or *rejoice* over a dozen times in his letter to the Philippians. And at the core of his life (then in prison or under some sort of house arrest) was the discipline of learning "to be content whatever the circumstances" (Philippians 4:11).

Gratefulness builds contentment, and contentment lays the foundation for a generous life. In a simple moment of gratitude for the fresh, drinkable water out of our tap, Christie said spontaneously, "Let's give a financial gift to a ministry that works to develop healthy wells for some of the places we've visited in Africa." So we did our research and gave—freely and gratefully.

Gratefulness also beats down the culturally acceptable norm of coveting because when I am grateful, I concentrate on what I have rather than what I don't have. Global learning certainly helps because we learn how fortunate we are economically with our surrounding creature comforts. Gratitude on a global scale calls us to remember those less fortunate, so that we turn our attention away from the 10 percent of the world's wealthiest who are richer than us.

Second, tame the "monster called 'more.'" Bill Hybels's books introduced me to this phrase, and it has stuck in my mind. Every day in thousands of different ways, advertisements assault our conscious and unconscious thoughts. They tell us what we need so that we can be

- more beautiful, handsome or youthful
- more popular or successful
- more effective parents or more attractive singles
- more connected electronically
- simply happier and more fulfilled

The multiple demands we respond to in the media provide one of the major sources of dissatisfaction that distracts us from living a simpler, more generous life. We end up chasing the elusive promises of the advertiser only to find ourselves with less time and money to serve the purposes of God.

And perhaps most profoundly, our lives of possessing often separate us from the poorer people in our midst.

Much of the advertising that bombards us has one main goal: to create either a sense of need or dissatisfaction with what we already have. The most effective ads use images and phrases designed to encourage us to act without thinking. Producers want us to feel hungry so that we will consume. Craig Blomberg, author of *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*, writes, "It is arguable that materialism is the single biggest competitor with authentic Christianity for the hearts and souls of millions in our world today, including many in the visible church."[1]

Third, expand your friend base. St. Francis de Sales, in the book *Introduction to the Devout Life*, encourages Christ-followers to pursue empathy with the poor by sharing life together. His words offer great ideas for simpler living:

> If you love the poor, you will share their poverty and be poor like them. If you love the poor be often with them. Be glad to see them in your own home or to visit with them in theirs. Be glad to talk to them and be pleased to have them near you in church, on the street, and elsewhere. Be poor when conversing with them and speak to them as their companions do, but be rich in assisting them by sharing some of your more abundant goods with them.[2]

He calls us to generous friendship, not condescending charity: camaraderie based on shared tables, shared fellowship and shared resources.

Fourth, think counterculturally. If we are living with kingdom of God values ruling in our lives, we will be culturally out of step with our society. We will give more time to service, even using vacation days to serve in a local city or go on a service trip. We will look for needs, recruit others to join us and become known as action-oriented people. We will (as our friend base expands) be known for hosting a socioeconomically diverse group of friends at our home. And we will give away money that others spend on themselves.

Our tax accountant, Greg, helps my wife and me with our taxes every year. To the best of our knowledge, he has no serious religious commitments, but he is an excellent accountant and over the years he has

come to know our spending habits quite well. He knows that we try to give away a significant percentage of our income every year to our church, Christian ministries and missionaries. A few years ago, Greg noticed that our giving total for that year was less than the year before and he pointed this out with some concern. He knew that our lives were dedicated to generosity, so he was rebuking what he saw as a downgrade of generosity.

Greg's rebuke reminded me of a quotation from C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* about the countercultural economic lifestyle of the Christian:

> If our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc. is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditures exclude them.[3]

Put simply, if our economic standard of living is no different than our nonreligious neighbors', we're not being generous enough!

Fifth, remember that our lives are called to imitate Jesus. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). We know that Jesus voluntarily left the glory of heaven to become one of us; and beyond that, a servant, and beyond that, a crucified Savior (Philippians 2:5-11).

Our simplicity and sacrifice and stewardship is responsive. We look to live and do as Jesus did. We give because he gave. And as we do so, the world might see this Savior alive in us!

A Case Study in Empowering the Poor: 2 Kings 4:1-7

Most of us get overwhelmed when confronted with poverty. Whether it's the homeless of America or the two billion people worldwide living on two dollars per day, many of us have no idea of how to respond. We might breathe a prayer or send a financial gift, but too often we're simply paralyzed by the enormity of the need.

Instead of paralysis or inaction, consider the example of Elisha and his response to the destitute widow (2 Kings 4:1-7). In a situation that mirrors the state of many homeless families in America, the woman's husband's death had launched her into the poverty of an indebted single mother. Feeling fundamentally helpless, she faced a future at the mercy of others, in her case the demands of a cruel creditor. Without the intervention of Elisha and the provision of God, her two sons would have grown up in chronic poverty as indentured slaves.

Elisha takes action in three ways that all of us can imitate in responding to poverty.

First, he gets involved. The prophet asks, "How can I help you?" (2 Kings 4:2). He does not ask, "How can I rescue you?" He knows that God could have fed this woman and her family with miraculous food delivered by ravens, but he pushes the decision back to her.

Second, he helps her see the resources she has. Elisha asks the widow, "What do you have in your house?" He forces her to identify her own resources; in her case, it's oil.

Sometimes we need to help the poorest people realize that they are not absolutely destitute. Their circumstances have beaten them down to the point of demoralization. They have resources—including skills, experiences and gifts—which can help them solve their own problems, but they need someone else to help them see these resources.

Third, he calls her to go to her community in faith and action. Having identified the resource, meager as it may be, the prophet instructs her to go and borrow as many vessels as possible to fill with oil (2 Kings 4:3). He encourages her to have faith: "Don't ask for just a few" (in other words, think big!). He is the man of God, the voice of faith, but he still gives her something very practical to do. Her faith, her actions and the resources of the community must work together.

This part of the story reflects Luke's description of the economic interdependency of the early church community: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need" (Acts 2:44-45).

The widow returns and starts pouring. Her actions and obedience get rewarded and the oil flows, miraculously filling all of the vessels. With the oil in her vessels, the widow embarks on a new life. Rather than abject

poverty and her sons in a life of servitude to her creditor, the prophet has led her to independence, self-support and dignity. Her new life includes selling some of the oil, paying off her debts and living freely on the ongoing income from oil sales.

The prophet Elisha introduces this destitute widow to something that parallels what we call micro-enterprise development (MED), one the most practical tools available for breaking the cycle of poverty. Rather than nonstop donations of charity, MED provides people with a sustainable source of income that will help them break their poverty, establish self-supporting dignity and even transform their community.

So when we look local or global poverty in the face, remember Elisha: start with the resources we have, act in faith and join together with a community. The synergy of community not only multiplies our resources; it also helps keep us from the potential hopelessness that accompanies overwhelming need.

Simplify: Lessons from Chad

In my book *Simplify*, I relate the lessons taught by Jeff and Judy Heath, an American couple who have dedicated their lives to serving the people of Chad through literacy-related work. Jeff and Judy once taught a young couples class in our church about living more simply. They defined simpler living this way: “To live a simple lifestyle means to live intentionally beneath your potential standard of living for the purpose of sharing your excess with others. ‘Lifestyle’ includes housing, clothes, transportation, food, use of time, and future plans.”[4]

Bringing their perspective from life in the very poor country of Chad, the Heaths pointed out that people begin to think about living more simply for various reasons. It might be that our pace of life becomes hazardous and we want to slow down. Perhaps the news or a short-term mission trip awakens us to the reality that millions of people in other countries (or in urban centers in our own country) live in extreme poverty, and this knowledge convicts us of our own wastefulness. Or maybe we discover that our abundance is causing spiritual dullness, and we want to seek a biblical

detachment from possessions; as the well-known slogan states, we discover that “the best things in life aren’t things!”

The Heaths intentionally simplified their lifestyle long before they left to serve in Africa because they knew that their future service would be among people who were much more economically limited than they. To the surprise of this class of young, upwardly mobile professionals, the Heaths cited the benefits of living more simply.

Personally, they shared that it helped them focus on more important things. Simpler living decreased their stress. A more manageable pace improved their physical health. Seeking simplicity helped them break away from compulsive buying habits. It also benefited their relationship with God because they had more time for him and it heighted their sense of dependence on him. Most of all, a simpler, more possession-free life taught them to receive their self-worth from God rather than from possessions or accomplishments.

Relationally, they shared the benefit of more free time and energy for relationships. They found that simplifying freed up funds to give to those in need. And it closed the gap between rich and poor allowing them to become equals in Christ.[5]

Choose to Be a Giver

The Bible reminds us that God loves a cheerful giver, and one outcome of deciding to follow Jesus and love the world will obviously involve giving. As we choose to live a generous and giving lifestyle, let’s hold on to the following points.

Give generously and wisely. Impulsive reaction to need will only make us poor and frustrated. Good stewardship will mean investigating the people and projects into which we want to invest: Is it a credible ministry? Do they work with integrity in the way they manage money and the way they relate to local people? Are they accomplishing something that is strategic and sustainable? Do the research, and then give—so that we don’t (in the words of Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert) hurt the poor and ourselves.[6]

Remember that giving is more than money. Many times I find it easier to give a gift of money than to get involved, but I am consistently reminded that *God wants my life first*, not my money. Time might be more sacrificial. Risk taking to be with people might be a greater expression of generosity. Offering a skill might be a better contribution than extra dollars.

In 2013, I joined with colleagues Michele and Tim and the staff of World Relief Kenya in a ministry in Kibera, one of the largest slums in Africa. Part of our trip included three days of seminars in a Kibera church followed by a Saturday prayer march across the expanse of the slum. My friends Tim and Michele have been amazingly successful in business, and as a result they have been exceedingly generous in their financial giving. But on that Saturday's three-hour walk across Kibera with the pastors from the slum, I saw them offer something greater than money: themselves, in solidarity with the pastors, in a place that involved both risk and some discomfort.

Give sacrificially. With all that we know now about living as compassionate witnesses in the world, we know that giving might cost us. It might cost us *socially*, making us unpopular as we share Jesus, putting us at odds with our neighbors as we maintain a welcoming perspective to those in our midst from other world religions or cultures, or putting us in crosscultural situations where we feel awkward and unsure of ourselves.

It might cost us *comforts* because we give up the pleasures of normal retirement to go and serve using the skills and wisdom we have acquired over our lifetime. It might cost us *time* as we commit to prayer, take the time to learn how to share our faith or invest in a crosscultural friendship. It might cost us *financially* in the process of living more simply or because we choose to go as medical doctors to a remote location in South Sudan rather than stay at home in a comfortable practice here. And candidly, the generous life of following Christ might cost us *our lives*. It sounds dramatic, but as we follow Jesus, he might lead us to prison (like my friend Farshid in Iran) or to our deaths (like Dr. Tom Little and his colleagues who served Jesus by serving the health care needs of the very poor in Afghanistan and were martyred in August 2010).

On a trip to China, Christie and I visited with local leaders who took us to their church. Everything was in Mandarin so we understood very little, but we did think the aged pastor was not a very dynamic preacher. After the

service, we asked our friends, “Is your pastor a good preacher?” They responded, “Oh yes, he is a very good preacher; he spent many years in prison for Jesus.” What mattered to them was not his preaching gifts but his sacrificial life!

- 13 -

STAND TOGETHER

Finding Like-Minded People and Advocating for Others

Biblical Reflection: Stories of Advocacy

The great challenge of living a compassionate lifestyle arises when we hear or read of the disadvantaged, the maligned, the marginalized and the disenfranchised, and we ask, What can I do in response?[1]

People of faith respond in prayer. Some donate to organizations or causes that dedicate their efforts to alleviating suffering. Occasionally, opportunities arise for direct involvement through service. But the three people in the following stories—Esther, Jesus and Paul—illustrate the response of advocacy. Standing with those in need, giving a voice to the voiceless and speaking on behalf of the undefended all come under this general term. Read the accounts of advocacy in Esther 4, John 8:1-11 and the book of Philemon.

In Esther's story, she stands for her people, the Jews, who are in danger of a politically maneuvered genocide. She considers her privileged position as part of the king's entourage in the palace, evaluates the threat to her people (who in this case were functionally voiceless) and takes a life-risking step to speak. Through the encouragement and wisdom of Mordecai, she takes her stand (Esther 4). Her courage saves the Israelites and brings justice down on those conspiring against them (Esther 8–9).

In the account of Jesus with the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11, Jesus sees religious leaders manipulating the law of Moses to fuel their own self-righteousness. In this case, Jesus responds by saying little. Scholars often conjecture that Jesus was writing out the Ten Commandments as he drew in the sand—perhaps to underscore the fact that

all of the religious leaders had violated God's laws at some point. When he encourages those without sin to cast the first stone, they all eventually retreat because they knew of their own failures. Then Jesus forgives the woman and exhorts her to flee from the sinful life she has been leading. Jesus' advocacy allows for mercy to triumph over judgment (James 2:13). He both confronts the religious leaders and invites the woman to understand something of God's grace. In addition, his stand for the woman affirms her value as a human being created in the image of God—a truth that had perhaps escaped her in a cultural context that might have taught her that she was worthless.[2]

The letter of Paul to Philemon about Onesimus requires a little more background in order to understand Paul's advocacy. Apparently, Onesimus had been a slave of Philemon, a leader in the church at Colossae and a disciple of Paul. Onesimus had robbed his master and escaped to Rome. Somehow Onesimus had met Paul in Rome and had become a disciple. But Paul then exhorted Onesimus to follow the Roman law and return to his master, an action that by law could have meant his death. To help him, Paul writes a cover letter to accompany Onesimus on his journey of repentance back to Philemon. Paul makes himself liable for Onesimus's expenses (Philemon 1:18: "charge it to me") and urges Philemon to receive Onesimus as a useful brother.[3] Like Jesus with the woman caught in adultery, Paul speaks grace and forgiveness into a tense situation. Thankfully, Philemon responds with grace, which brings healing to Onesimus and to the church in Colossae.[4]

All three accounts include people willing to risk loss on behalf of hurting people. Esther risked her life. Jesus risked his reputation as a law-abiding rabbi (and probably contributed to the accusation that he was a "friend of sinners"), and Paul risked the loss of money. All three individuals used their privileged positions to advocate for those who could not speak for themselves: Esther in the palace and known by the king, Jesus as a rabbi and Paul as the spiritual father of Philemon. All three stories leave us with this question: What positions of privilege or power has God given us that we can use to stand for those whom hardship, oppression or injustice has silenced?

What Does Advocacy Mean?

In short, advocacy means speaking for those who cannot speak for themselves. It means defending the rights of others, standing against oppression and using whatever resources and skills we have to assist others in need.

To be most effective, we must choose an issue that has special interest to us; there are simply too many needs to try to respond to everything we see or learn about. Travels in Africa have made Christie and me keenly aware of the plight of those without access to clean drinking water. Dr. Dorothy Boorse, biology professor at Gordon College, dedicates her efforts to analyzing effects of environmental decay and climate change on the world's poorest people.[5] Ed Brown and his team at Creation Care advocate for responsible stewardship of the environment.[6] Anny Donewald gathers her team at Eve's Angels to reach out to strippers and prostitutes because this is the world out of which she was saved.[7] Marcel Serubungu and his team advocate for justice in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) because this is his country.

And then, knowing that we cannot possibly take on these great issues alone, we invite and challenge others to join with us by using story, information and our personal passion. Marcel Serubungu, for example, at The Justice Conference 2014, introduced us to the ongoing tragedy in the DRC.[8] Over six million have died in recent conflicts there and a staggering number of women have been raped—especially in the northeastern sections where anarchy seems to rule. Marcel told us that if we googled "women raped in DR Congo" we would read reports so horrific that they have earned the DRC the titles "rape capital of the world" and "the most dangerous place in the world to be a woman."

But Marcel also reminded us that biblical justice and fighting for advocacy means working to liberate the oppressed and the oppressors from oppression. Most of us listeners were shocked by his admonition to consider all involved in this crisis, including the violent and horribly lost rapists. He reminded us that "hating God's creation does nothing positive." When Marcel finished speaking, dozens decided to get involved, standing together for the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Advocacy in Action

At that same Justice Conference, Bryan Stevenson, a lawyer from the Equal Justice Initiative (eji.org) based in Montgomery, Alabama, gave some very concrete ideas of *how* to be an advocate.[9] He offered five suggestions, building off his own experience advocating for the disproportionately large number of African American young men who are incarcerated without opportunity or resources to defend themselves. Bryan's five themes are as follows:

1. *Remember that people are more than their brokenness or their crimes.* In other words, don't dehumanize people by our verbal categories, stereotypes or assumptions. The man is *first* a God-created image-bearer man, not a felon or criminal or con. The woman is *first* a God-created image-bearer woman, not a prostitute or junkie or thief.

2. *Commit to proximity.* Get close to the people and communities we're trying to touch.

   This exhortation reminded me of ministries committed to incarnational living with the very people they are trying to reach. The term *incarnational* reflects the life of Jesus, who became flesh and lived with us to show us God's love (John 1:14). Eugene Peterson paraphrases this verse: "The Word [Jesus] became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood" (*The Message*). These folks serve as Christian advocates and witnesses by literally moving into the neighborhood.[10] For examples of incarnational ministry, check out Word Made Flesh (wordmadeflesh.org), MoveIn Toronto (read about and connect to this ministry through the blog at https://togethercanada.wordpress.com/2011/04/01/movein-an-incarnational-ministry) and Servant Partners (servantpartners.org).

3. *Change the narrative behind injustice.* Don't stereotype people and assume "this is just the way things are." Get serious about issues such as civil rights, racism, urban poverty, street kids, and race and class inequalities in our legal systems. One of Bryan's statements caught me off guard. Regarding the state of our legal system, he observed, "It's better to be rich and guilty than poor and innocent."

4. *Commit to be hopeful.* Bryan challenged us, “It’s easier to be faithful than it is to be hopeful.” Faithfulness might just be a dogged determination to persevere, but hopefulness works (and believes!) for positive change. He noted that “injustice thrives where hopelessness prevails.”
5. And finally, *choose to be uncomfortable.* If we choose to advocate for the underdog, the disadvantaged or the disenfranchised, we will inevitably end up in locations or in relationships where we feel insecure. And on top of this we may find ourselves at odds with the systems that we might threaten by our advocacy.

Stand Together with Like-Minded People

Maintaining hopefulness, absorbing resistance from strong forces and choosing to be uncomfortable calls us to seek strength from fellowship. When we join with others who are looking outward and willing to undertake these types of challenges, it fuels our zeal.

Find like-minded people and join them locally and across cultures. This might not be easy. The Baptist preacher Vance Havner said it this way: “The problem today is that the spiritual situation is desperate, but many of God’s people are not.”[11]

I know I need others who care about the unreached, the poor, the hurting. Their passion fuels my own. If I’ve lost my sense of urgency in reaching out to my neighbors, I know I need to get together with my long-time friend Richard Rhodes. Richard loves Jesus and he loves people—especially those outside the Christian faith. I meet with Richard just to listen. He always has a new outreach idea and a new testimony of someone whose life has been transformed by Jesus Christ. He’ll give me an update on his relationship with his Jewish-Universalist neighbors—who recently asked Richard and his wife, Dori, to study the Bible with them! Richard frequently serves as God’s agent to me—to fan my flame or stoke my fire.

The same is true with Operation Mobilization’s George Verwer, whose passion to pray for the world stirs me to do the same; or with my InterVarsity colleagues Scott Bessenecker and Adam Jeske, whose example

of concern for the poor and simpler living helps me recommit to staying out of step with the societal norms that surround me. The staff of World Relief exemplifies to me that commitment to hopefulness that Bryan Stevenson urged, and studying in our small group a book such as Richard Stearns's *The Hole in Our Gospel* serves as a powerful catalyst to live a Great Commission, Great Compassion lifestyle.

Standing together is not just about taking action. It's about heart and zeal. It builds off of enthusiasm from seeing the life-changing power of Jesus Christ at work in someone else's life. It hears stories of community transformation as fuel on the fire of initiative and perseverance. And if we intend to keep that passion strong, we need the help of like-minded people.

Where do we find these people? Most of us look immediately for the person who is uniquely gifted as an evangelist, speaker, strategist or organizer. But there are others who are equally stimulating. Look for the new Christian, whose zeal about being forgiven bubbles over. Look for the person who has been dramatically saved, the person who, like the apostles in the book of Acts, "cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Look for the person who knows about triumph over poverty, release from captivity or transformation because someone welcomed them as a refugee.

We need to come together—"not giving up meeting together," in the words of Hebrews 10:25. The Bible teaches and life testifies that we need each other for a host of reasons. We have varied gifts. We together make up the whole that is the body of Christ. Our corporate worship brings us together before God in a way that individual worship cannot. All of these reasons mandate our participation in the Christian community, but consider five specific reasons why we need each other as it applies to standing together against injustice and living as Great Commission, Great Compassion Christ-followers.

We need each other's encouragement. Hebrews 3:13 reminds us to "encourage one another daily . . . so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." Try to live without Christian encouragement, and we can become so tired or grieved at the effects of sin in our world that we want to withdraw into holy seclusion. We no longer want to touch the unclean or care for the needy. We withdraw. And we need fellow Christians to encourage us to keep our hearts soft to those outside the faith—seeing

them compassionately as Jesus did, “like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).

Mark Acuff, a local area pastor, dedicated himself to creating an atmosphere of encouragement in his church. He wanted to see people strengthened in their worship, but he also wanted to help them stay soft to the world into which they were sent every week. He actively encouraged his church members to evangelize unchurched people. Mark says,

> I told them, “Jesus went to the parties of ‘sinners’; therefore, we should choose to cut back on church activities so that we can go into the world of those outside the Gospel.” They listened but didn’t take me seriously until I missed a church reception (another “nice” gathering of those already in the kingdom) to go to a party with some couples my wife and I were trying to reach.[12]

Without Mark’s encouragement, many of his church members would have been content just to stay with their Christian friends.

We grow stronger through corporate prayer. It has always impressed me that the Sisters of Charity, made famous by their founder, Mother Teresa, and their lives of compassion for the suffering of Calcutta, India, begin the day with lengthy corporate prayer. Why? In prayer together, we can identify the challenges and opposition we might face as witnesses in the world, and we can bring all of this to God. When the task is too large, too overwhelming and too discouraging, we go together in prayer.

Corporate prayer leads to corporate courage. Turning our attention upward reminds us of who is in charge in the world—our Sovereign Creator God. It reminds us of how he brings forth his purposes, even through hardship. And it puts us in the position of intentional dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit.

On several occasions, I’ve had the privilege of being in prayer meetings with George Verwer, the dynamic founder of Operation Mobilization, a global ministry with more than two thousand staff. When we pray, George remembers the works of God in the Scriptures. He recounts the miracles of God in recent mission history. And then he presents his petitions—boldness for witness in the Muslim world, courage in the face of opposition in China, willingness to go and even to die if necessary so that Jesus Christ might be

proclaimed to all the nations. He identifies global needs—sex trafficking, lack of access to fresh water, children dying of preventable diseases or the unjust treatment of women. He leads us in crying out to God.

After we have prayed, the place is shaken like it was in Acts 4:31. We're not afraid anymore. We're fired up and ready to go—across the street or across the Great Wall of China. Our zeal to stand for the purposes of God is renewed. Corporate prayer builds us up and gives us cooperative courage in the God who sends us out.

Corporate worship and fellowship assure us that we are not alone. I need the fellowship of other Christians because the needs and challenges of the world simply overwhelm me. I need to know that I'm part of a bigger team: God's team.

The writer of Ecclesiastes understood this when he wrote that "two are better than one" because when one falls, the other will lift him up (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). Our camaraderie in the body of Christ helps keep us from stumbling. We grow stronger because we discover that we are not alone.

Consider the disciples in the days preceding and following Christ's death and resurrection. When they got scared and ran, they all scattered. They abandoned Jesus, and they abandoned each other. After the resurrection and ascension of Christ, they were still scared, but this time they stayed together and they prayed. God came in power and they testified to Jesus Christ. The church came into being out of a corporate time of prayer and worship.

Worship precedes compassionate witness and worship provokes compassionate witness. Worship precedes witness because our ministry in the world overflows from our relationship with Christ. And worship provokes witness because when we're together, we realize that we have glorious good news to share with and demonstrate to all people. From our worship we must go out to tell others about the God who loves us so much.

We need others to help recharge our spiritual batteries. Living as God's people in the world puts us into spiritual battle "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). Serving as light that pushes back darkness exhausts us. Proclaiming truth against falsehood wears us down. It's easy to get tired in being the salt of the earth

or the fragrance of Christ (see chapter fourteen). We need to come together to find strength in our fellowship, our prayer, our study of the Scripture and our corporate experience of the person of Jesus Christ.

Why do you think Christians in persecuted countries risk their lives in order to meet and worship together? Why did Paul and Silas decide that their prison cell could be transformed into a worship center? Why do we need our regular times of gathering?

The answers to all these questions are the same: God has made us to need fellowship. In our community gatherings he recharges our spiritual batteries. Our growth together empowers us to go back out again into the world.

Our corporate fellowship cleans us up to send us out again. Neither my wife nor I smoke. But several of our friends do, and when we meet with them or drive them in our cars, the smell lingers. On one occasion I came into the house after some meetings, and Christie immediately asked, "Who have you been with today? You smell like you've smoked two packs of cigarettes!"

When we spend time confronting the challenging needs in our world, the world inevitably gets on us—like the lingering smell of cigarette smoke. If I avoid Christian fellowship for long stretches because I'm running around trying to meet needs, I find it easier to use profane language, or I start thinking about off-color jokes I've heard, or I fall prey to coveting after the material possessions that others covet after. I become like the people I'm hanging around with.

If I'm in the world (as I'm supposed to be as Jesus' disciple), I get the world "on me." That's why I need to come regularly to the gathering of fellow Christians. Christian fellowship is where I'm supposed to confess my sins and realign my purposes with the purposes of God. I come into the corporate worship of the people of God to get scrubbed up spiritually—*so that* I can go out as a redeemed, forgiven witness for Jesus Christ.

The Bible's Teaching on Caring for the Poor

What is our responsibility to those in need?

- To maintain and promote justice (Leviticus 19:15; Psalm 82:3-4; Proverbs 21:3; 29:7, 14; 31:9)
- To be openhanded and freely lend (Deuteronomy 14:28–15:11)
- To set the oppressed free, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisoner and the sick (Isaiah 58:6-10; Matthew 25:31-40)
- To excel in the grace of giving (2 Corinthians 8:1-7)
- To do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:10)
- To look after orphans and widows in distress (those in need) (James 1:27)
- Love with actions as well as words (1 John 3:18)

How do we help those in need?

- Build relationships rather than merely give: Jesus ministered to Simon's mother-in-law and then received from her (Mark 1:29-31); the poor can teach us about faith in the midst of dire circumstances (James 2:5).
- Restore and maintain the dignity of the poor: giving is anonymous, and the poor come and take what is theirs from the leftover harvest (Deuteronomy 24:17-21); the Lord raises the poor and seats them with princes (1 Samuel 2:8; Psalm 113:7-8); being kind to the needy honors God (Proverbs 14:21; 19:17).
- See people through redeemed eyes: Jesus sought out and dined with "tax collectors and sinners," and he called Matthew, a tax collector, to be one of his disciples (Matthew 9:9-12); serve and relate to people as if they were Jesus himself (Matthew 25:40).

Promises and blessings if we reach out to the poor include the following:

- We will be richly blessed (Deuteronomy 15:4; Proverbs 14:21; 22:9; Luke 14:13-14).
- We will lack nothing (Proverbs 28:27).
- We will receive healing and our needs will be satisfied (Isaiah 58:5-11).
- God blesses a generous church with the power of the Spirit, effective evangelism and overflowing joy (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7).

Accounts of people relating to the poor include

- David: 1 Samuel 18:23
- Job: Job 29:11-16; 30:25; 31:16-28
- the wife of noble character: Proverbs 31:20
- Tabitha: Acts 9:36
- Cornelius: Acts 10:1-4

My former colleague at Grace Chapel, Mary Ann Mitchener, then pastor of Institutional and Urban Ministries, helped create this list.

Being a Peacemaker: The Hard Work of Reconciliation

When I returned from my first-ever trip to Israel and Palestine (including Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Bethlehem, Nablus and Beit-Jala), I reflected on the complexities of living a life that stands against injustice. Though I had done my reading about the deeply complex issues of that region, nothing quite prepares you for the immense challenge of encouraging peace between these diverse peoples and resolving thousands of years of animosity. Culture,

history, religion, economy and global politics all collide in this relatively tiny area of the world.

This journey awakened me afresh to the fact that the gospel is a message of reconciliation, but it's not just about the reconciling of people to the relationship with God we call eternal life. True reconciliation means the healing of relationships between people, especially our historical enemies—people that reconciliation specialists simply call the "Other."

In Christ, the way we view the Other gets transformed so that we no longer see anyone from a worldly point of view (2 Corinthians 5:16). Through Christ's death the dividing walls of hostility get torn down, and out of historical enemies Jesus creates a "new humanity," making us "fellow citizens" alongside all of the other Others in our lives (Ephesians 2:14-22).

Whether we're talking about Jews and Palestinians, white Americans and African Americans, or old-style worshipers and new-style worshipers in our churches, theoretical or theological reconciliation needs to be brought down to the ground level—where all of us live—so that it becomes genuine, life changing and transformational in our local and global society.

In Israel and Palestine, I met Christians devoted to the ministry of reconciliation, and from them I took away several lessons on reconciliation with the Other from which all of us can learn. First, *reconciliation is hard work*. It takes time, courage (especially courage to be alienated from others on your "side" in the argument) and perseverance. Most of us would rather abandon an unreconciled relationship than do the hard work of reconciliation or peacemaking.

Second, *reconciliation requires a lot of listening*. We have to hear the Other's story and do our best to keep from defensive responses. To one group, the land has been reclaimed; to the other, the land was stolen. To one group, racism is a dead issue; to the other, racism might be the defining issue of our society. To one group, contemporary worship is reaching out to lost people; to the other, it's abandoning tradition and doctrine. Both sides must listen—even if it means agreeing to disagree.

Finally, *reconciliation involves sacrifice on both sides*. The process of reconciliation requires confessing sins of the past and releasing and forgiving hurt. Both actions involve sacrifice. Even in our reconciled relationship with Jesus, sacrifice is at the foundation. To invite us to reconciliation, he had to lay down his life for us and our sins. To respond to

his invitation, we must give him rule in our lives. He lost his life for us; we lose our lives to him.

So whether you're facing gigantic issues like peace in the Middle East, or local issues like racism at the department store, or church issues like families feuding with each other, think of reconciliation as a basic foundation of gospel ministry. Jesus reconciled us—and now he commits to us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19).

- 14 -

GO

Serving Crossculturally and Leaving Our Comfort Zone

Biblical Reflection: Luke 19:10 and John 3:16

Keeping balanced is one of the great challenges of the Christian life. Family time versus ministry time, meditative time versus time with people, and study time versus administrative time represent only a few of the areas that we try to keep in proportion to each other.

But how about the way we look at others, especially those outside the Christian family? The people to whom the commissions of Jesus call us to go? The people toward whom we are called to act compassionately? How do we keep a balanced view of those to whom we reach out, whether locally or across cultures?

On one side of the pendulum swing are those who emphasize that people outside of Jesus Christ are *lost*. They quote Jesus' mission statement "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10), but they focus on just how bad people are without Jesus. Those on the far side of this view focus on the condemnation coming down on those without Christ and the fact that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory (John 3:17-18; Romans 3:23). The emphasis is more often on the "bad news" of hell and judgment than on the good news of life offered through Jesus.

When I swing to this side of the extreme, I find myself being practically hopeless about the world. The crimes and violence and corruption reported in the newspaper illustrate the sinfulness of our times. For some who emphasize lostness, world religions get lumped into the realm of the

demonic. If I stay exclusively on the lostness theme, I can get a hopeless, negative, let-the-world-go-to-hell-in-a-hand-basket attitude.

On the other side of the pendulum are those who emphasize that people outside of Jesus Christ are *loved*. John 3:16 stands as the most frequently quoted verse, as it highlights that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." The outstretched arms of God, who loves us so much that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8), are the arms of comfort, not the gavel-wielding arms of the judge of the quick and the dead.

When I swing to this side of the extreme, I want to see the good in everyone. I see those in other world religions as those seeking after God. I want to be inclusive and tolerant. I become a practicing Universalist. I want to emphasize the "good news" of the gospel—while selectively forgetting the fact that the love of God through Jesus is good news only in contrast to the "bad news" that the holy God exacts a payment for sin.

To stay balanced, I focus on the fact that God sees people as both loved *and* lost. Without Jesus Christ, we are dead in our trespasses and sins (Romans 3:23; 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-10). But God doesn't leave us there. The holy Judge of sin chooses—because he loves us—to pay the penalty that we miserable offenders deserve.

Keeping God's perspective helps me keep my vision of others focused. Realizing that people stand before God as lost souls in need of redemption and salvation motivates me to urgency and compassion. It also helps me understand the cumulative effect of sin in the world. Realizing that people —all people—are invited to receive God's love as expressed through Jesus Christ motivates me to hope. No person or persons is outside the realm of God's love. There are no hopeless cases. God desires to win people through the demonstrated love of Jesus and through me as one sent into the world (see 1 Timothy 2:1-4; 2 Peter 3:9).

As You Are Going

At the beginning of this book we looked at the Great Commission statements of Jesus, and several of them carried the assumption that going

into the world is a basic part of the Christ-following life. Paraphrasing Jesus' instructions during his last days with his disciples, we are reminded:

- From Matthew: As you are going to all the ethnicities in the world, make disciples, teach and baptize people into the Christian community.
- From Mark: As you are going into the entirety of God's creation, preach, teach and demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit.
- From Luke: You are now my witnesses, empowered by the Holy Spirit and sent out to the ends of the earth, starting with your own hometown and crossing cultures along the way.
- From John: Live as I have lived—sent by God into the world. Live sent.

Once more, we don't need to ask *if* we are sent. We only need to ask where—for today, for the future, for our lives. The Great Commission, Great Compassion lifestyle means taking the initiative to share Jesus, demonstrate his life and live with others.

Keep in Mind: God Goes Before Us

As we are going, we need to always remember that those commission statements assure us that we do not go alone. God goes before us, with us and behind us. *God is the great initiator*. The old hymn "Come Thou Fount" reminds us of God's pursuing action in bringing us into his family: "Jesus sought me when a stranger. . . . He to rescue me from danger bought me with his precious blood." But we also remember that God reaches out to us through people: a teacher, a relative, a youth pastor, a broadcast, a friend or an anonymous street preacher. God does his reaching out most often through his people.

The fact that God is the source and the sender of our mission reminds us that God goes before us—we join God in what he is already doing. At a student mission conference I attended in Accra, Ghana, in December 2011, a Ghanaian speaker relayed the following story. At a conference celebrating

one hundred years of the presence of a certain church denomination, one of the representatives from the United States stated several times in his sermon that the missionaries "brought God to Africa." The next speaker, a representative of the church in Ghana, began his message, "Before I bring you my sermon, I want to offer a word of correction to our American brother. We know that missionaries did not bring God to Africa; God brought them. God was already here."

We need to remember that God goes before us, preparing hearts whether we're in Boston or Bolivia, Chicago or Calcutta, Los Angeles or Lagos. If God's heart is to pursue lost and hurting people and ask "Where are you?"(Genesis 3:9), and Jesus expresses that mission by stating he came "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10), then I need to ask myself, *Does my life reflect this? Am I reaching out, seeking, prayerfully pursuing lost people, caring for the hurting, loving the "least of these"?*

Keep in Mind: Billions Have No Opportunity

As we are going, we also need to keep in mind that there are literally billions of people in our world who have not yet had an opportunity to respond to the invitation of God to a personal relationship through Jesus. In other words, these folks have no family member, near neighbor, local church or Bible in their own language from which they can learn about Jesus. There might be no radio broadcast or printed material that describes God's love and the sacrifice of Jesus to pay for our sins and offer us forgiveness. They know nothing of Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit's power or living in daily fellowship with the God who created everything.

To drive this point home, the leadership team at one church decided to insert the global reality into their Sunday morning Communion service. In this particular church tradition, the servers passed out the bread and the congregation would hold it until the pastor spoke what was ultimately a rhetorical question: "Has everyone been served?" The question would be followed by the phrase, "Then take and eat: the body of Christ given for you." Then the servers would pass out the cup, representing the shed blood of Jesus, and the pastor repeated the question and stated, "Take and drink."

On this particular Sunday, the pastor and the outreach leadership coordinated the Communion together. When the bread had been distributed, the pastor asked, “Has everyone been served?” Rather than the usual silence, people in foreign attire stood up across the sanctuary. One by one they spoke: “I represent the Uygur people of western China, and we have not yet been served.” “I represent the Tubu people of northern Niger, and we have not yet been served.” “I represent the Karakalpak people of Kazakhstan, and we have not yet been served.” Others stood and identified people groups considered unreached or unengaged.[1]

The pastor paused and reflected, “As we take of this Communion bread today, let us remember that there are billions of people and thousands of people groups who do not yet know anything of Jesus’ sacrifice, resurrection and forgiveness that we celebrate today.” The process repeated with the cup, introducing people groups from all over the world. After this the pastor closed the service with these words: “Let us go into this week remembering and praying for the peoples of our world who will not know of the love and invitation of God unless someone crosses a culture, learns the language and lives with them as a messenger.”

Crossing Cultures

Many of the other chapters have offered ideas about reaching out locally, both to our neighbors and to the newly arrived international students, refugees or immigrants that God is bringing to us. This outreach in its many forms—meals and hospitality, legal aid and language aid, compassion care and verbal witness—has the potential to introduce many to the invitation of God through Jesus. Living on the go with a spirit of 24/7 availability can be a great bridge to help introduce people to the life we call discipleship.

But what about the rest of the world? We who live in the United States represent less than 6 percent of the world’s population, yet we are resource rich and often highly mobile. How can we venture into the world?

We start with prayer, collecting information, giving generously and advocating together for certain globally related causes; but at some point we need to venture out of our cultural and physical comfort zones in order to

learn about our world, understand the challenges and needs more firsthand and explore whether crosscultural ministry is God's design for us.

Much is written (positive and negative) about the short-term missions phenomenon, and I won't attempt to respond to all of the valid criticism here, but let me offer these few foundational statements:

- Go crosscultural locally first. Get involved across cultures in the city, at the university or with immigrants. There's much to learn without boarding a jet.
- Get trained. The world does not need well-meaning (but often condescending) short-term missionaries who come in to fix poverty or solve local problems with our technology—all in ten days or so. We don't need to keep repeating mistakes made in the past.
- Go to serve and learn. I strongly encourage anyone or any group going on a short-term mission trip to read Duane Elmer's *Cross-Cultural Servanthood* or David Livermore's *Serving with Eyes Wide Open*. As Christie reminds me when I travel crossculturally, "With two eyes, two ears and one mouth, try to observe and listen four times as much as you speak."
- Accept the complexities. The problems related to human need that we observe in other cultures often are a mix of poverty, historical injustice, human conflicts, gender assumptions, religious or cultural worldviews, and political power. We don't need to worry if we return home with unanswered questions and some confusion.
- Be wise about money. Investigate, learn and read books such as *Cross-Cultural Partnerships: Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission* by Mary Lederleitner or *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert.
- Go small. Learning dramatically increases when the visiting group is small enough to build some local relationships. Eat or stay with local people and listen to the stories of individuals. When a group of twenty-five, fifty or one hundred go, provide their own housing and food, and live together, they might be able to get a lot of work done

(especially building or physical labor projects), but their cultural learning will be dramatically reduced.

- Plan and make time to process after the trip. Following through with what we learn, deciding on action steps and integrating the experience into our own life of discipleship takes time. If we collect our bags at the airport and whisk immediately back to our North American lifestyles, we often will fail to process what occurred.
- Don't forget the experience. God lets us see circumstances and meet people in other cultures for a reason. It could be prayer, relationships, financial giving, advocacy or even long-term life change.

Having said all this, let me try some reverse psychology. Here are six reasons why I discourage people from getting out of their comfort zone and crossculturally into the world.

Six Reasons Not to Leave the Comfort Zone

Warning! An opportunity awaits that could turn our world upside down. It could challenge our ideas of what it means to follow Christ. It could blow away our beliefs about what brings true joy. We could end up doing things we never thought possible and encountering situations where we're forced to rely on God's strength, not our own.

Group leaders will warn us that when we come back, we'll never be the same. And they're right.

So if you want to be comfortable where you are, if you don't want to be challenged too much, if you don't want your values or lifestyle questioned, don't even think about going on a short-term mission trip. Because if you do, these disturbing effects are almost certain to afflict you.

If you're looking for excuses not to go, consider these.

1. It will explode our view of God. A Ugandan Christian leader who hosted a short-term mission team from our church told me, "We need to meet each other because without our crosscultural fellowship, we both stay fixed in our own cultural views of God. When we meet and interact and

share our lives, we discover that God is greater than either of our cultures. He is not a tribal god or an ethnic god or a national God. He is the transcendent God of the universe!"

We're all instinctively ethnocentric (the belief that the world revolves around our country or culture). As a result, we're prone to worship a God who looks like us, speaks our language and appreciates the worship styles that we appreciate. When we leave our country or culture, we confront people whose God speaks another language. Their services might be two or three times longer and louder than we are accustomed to. People dress differently and have different colored skin.

Crosscultural travel and relationships exploded my view of God. Visiting Christians in China enlarged my sense of God's awesomeness as I realized that he speaks every language. Serving in megacities increased my amazement that he knows every one of the over seven billion inhabitants on earth by name. Crosscultural worship services made me marvel that he really is Lord of the nations. Hearing testimonies of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and secularist converts gave me a fresh view of the universal application of the good news of Jesus Christ.

If we desire a God who fits tidily into our own cultural boxes, we'd better stay away from crosscultural mission trips. Ministry across cultures will transform our view of God!

2. It will change the way we view our possessions. We know intellectually that many parts of the world are much poorer economically than where we live, but staying at home keeps such knowledge at an intellectual level and at an emotional distance. When we go to serve in a poor barrio, inner city, orphanage or refugee camp, we confront this knowledge experientially. We may encounter feelings of guilt about how much we have back home and how little others have.

In my community, I've seen a bumper sticker that reads, "When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping." It reflects the addiction to consumerism that plagues our culture. An experience in a crosscultural service project confronts us directly with the challenge of 1 John 3:17: "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?"

We all want to avoid that sense of condemnation. We prefer to avoid wrestling with the dramatic economic inequities that exist in our world. The

best solution? Stay away from situations where we face these needs firsthand. That way we're not responsible. Right?

On the positive side, confronting our materialism helps us realize what really matters. One team of young couples went to serve in a church in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. They saw incredibly poor Christians rejoicing and singing at the top of their lungs, with a depth of joy that challenged the visitors' faith. They were forced to wrestle with questions like, Is our faith simply a nice "topping" on our materialistic lifestyle? They saw that although they possessed much more, their faith was nowhere near as deep as these poverty-stricken Haitians' faith.

One couple returned, moved to a smaller apartment, sold some stuff and taught their couples' Sunday school class on the theme "Living More Simply That Others May Simply Live." They stopped subscribing to cable TV and used the money saved (about $30 or $40 per month) to support a child through World Vision. Their direct encounter with poor brothers and sisters forced them to reevaluate their faith and their lifestyle.

3. It will confront our perspective on hardship. Most of us already think that life is tough. An obstinate boss, an over-priced house, monthly car payments and too many credit card bills present us with enough significant challenges.

Often in Christian small groups, some conversation focuses on what we perceive as hardships. A mission trip to the poorer parts of the world or fellowship with brothers and sisters who have suffered under totalitarian regimes changes our perceptions.

One couple went on a winter service project, worked with a poor congregation and stayed in the unheated apartment of a pastor in a very poor Eastern European country. They listened as the pastor recounted his experiences during the communist era of being followed, harassed and later detained by the communist government on multiple occasions. He challenged the couple's perspective on joy as he remembered the Bible study he started in the "reeducation camp" and the efforts he made to reach out to secret police.

When the couple returned home, they decided together that they should try to stop complaining. They posted the phrase "No more whining" on their bulletin board in the kitchen. Upon returning to their small group, they had difficulty readjusting because they wondered at the level of the sharing.

They totally upturned the spirit in the group one night when they said, “Sorry, we don’t have much to share tonight; after what we’ve experienced, we realize we have nothing to complain about.”

4. It will challenge our cultural ethnocentricity. There’s nothing wrong with being patriotic, but we American Christians often face great difficulty because we evaluate everything by our own standards and cultural norms. We struggle when we enter a country where another government makes the rules. We evaluate according to our own perspectives; we even conclude that people in British Commonwealth countries drive on the “wrong” side of the road.

An experience across cultures forces us to confront our tendency to compare everything to what we consider normal—from religious freedom to standards of living to types of food. It challenges our worldview.

One short-term mission group testified how their experience in Bangladesh had transformed their lives. They were most challenged by a woman who had given up her US citizenship to be able to serve there long term. Her example, plus their service in this poverty-stricken, Muslim country, forced them to ask if their faith and values were truly Christian or just cultural. Several of the team members reported a new understanding of being “citizens of heaven” first and foremost.

5. It will force us to think about heaven. Serving on a short-term, crosscultural mission trip foreshadows the multicultural, multiethnic church in Revelation 7:9—which pictures people from every nation, tribe, people and language worshiping Jesus in heaven. Crosscultural worship helps us experience the reality of Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there is neither “Jew nor Gentile.” It enlarges our understanding of the creative diversity of God.

Worshiping with Koreans has challenged my fervor in prayer. Singing with Haitians has enabled me to experience true anticipation of heaven. Listening to testimonies from new believers in Nepal has helped me understand the awesome grace of God’s forgiveness. Being with these believers intensifies my anticipation of heavenly worship.

The incredible growth of the church in Latin America, Africa and Asia over the last century means that heaven will be predominantly nonwhite and non-Western. If we’re not ready to experience a taste of heavenly worship, we need to avoid crosscultural service.

6. It will stretch our faith. Going out to serve crossculturally puts us into a "must-trust" environment where we realize that we're out of control. Whether we consider our concerns for finances, safety, health or communication, we find our prayers intensified because we cannot resolve these issues without God's deliverance.

At my home church, Grace Chapel in Lexington, Massachusetts, over eighty youth and adults participate in short-term missions every summer. When asked about their personal growth, a vast majority of participants will say things like, "The trip to Moldova taught me to pray," or "I trusted God for the money I needed, and God miraculously provided," or "We relied on God for safety as we served in the Amazon region of Venezuela, and God took care of us every step of the way." They testify that their faith was stretched. Unpredictable situations, being out of control, having to eat unfamiliar things and being asked to minister in areas where they did not feel confident forced them to depend on God instead of themselves.

Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission over one hundred years ago, said, "Unless there is an element of risk in our exploits for God, there is no need for faith."[2] Crosscultural service provides plenty of risk. If we don't want to stretch our faith, we'd best avoid an overseas opportunity to serve.

Conclusion

Warning! An opportunity awaits that could turn our world, our faith, our view of God and our perspective on the future upside down.

Do we really want this? It can be too uncomfortable. It might be too challenging. Some say it's too fanatical. It can challenge our ideas of what it means to follow Christ.

But then again, maybe a crosscultural service opportunity is just the kind of challenge we've been looking for to jump-start our growth. Maybe putting yourself into an overseas ministry setting can get you out of a rut. A short-term mission is about transformation of our views of God and our understanding of the body of Christ. It's about evaluating our lifestyles and deepening our faith.

“As you are going . . .” Jesus said. Maybe we should say yes.

EPILOGUE

Witnessing to All the Senses

If Christians wish us to believe in their redeemer, why don't they look a little more redeemed?

Friedrich Nietzsche

Our desire to fulfill the Great Commission mandate to make disciples and the Great Compassion call to care for those in need grow out of our passion to know Christ. The realities of people in need of God's redemption stir our zeal for outreach and ministry. As we contemplate engagement and influence in our world, we'll come to the question, If we are God's people with hearts on fire for Christ and his kingdom, how do we witness to the world?

I'd like to expand our concept of God's call to be his witnesses. I want to challenge us to consider the fact that God's Word calls Christians to be witnesses who live and proclaim the love of God in Christ to *all the human senses*. This is what I call "sensory evangelism." Witnessing to the senses follows the old WWJD question—"What would Jesus do?"—with questions such as

- How would Jesus *sound*?
- How does Jesus *taste*?
- What does Jesus *look like* to those outside the faith?
- What is Jesus' *touch* in the world?
- How would Jesus *smell*?

God calls us to be his witnesses to the reality of Jesus Christ in our lives as it affects each of the five senses.

To the Sense of Hearing

Let's start with the sense that most of us associate with "witnessing"—hearing. Romans 10:17 tells us, "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ."

We *proclaim*. Ajith Fernando, when preaching at my church from 2 Corinthians 5, urged our members to *persuade* people with all the vigor and enthusiasm of advertisers. We want to present Christ in words that challenge people to respond. Indeed, this is what we evangelicals are best at. We preach. We broadcast. We establish ministries that send out DVDs, broadcast on YouTube or live stream our worship services. We use the media.

When someone repeats the quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, "at all times preach the gospel; if necessary, use words," we react. "Wait a minute," we say, "words are important. The gospel must be proclaimed. People must hear and understand so that they can believe."

This is why we get training on how to evangelize, how to answer tough questions, how to start evangelistic conversations, how to start an evangelistic Bible study—so that people can hear the good news. It's why there are opportunities to point friends to evangelistic speakers, Easter services, Christmas pageants, tweets and blogs and so on. When people hear, they might respond.

Proclaiming the gospel to the sense of hearing leads churches to give financially or with personnel to crosscultural ministry, investing in things like

- church planting in France so that people can be evangelized or re-evangelized
- preacher training ministries in India so that more preachers can preach
- radio ministry in the Arabic language so that unreached people in the Middle East might respond to the good news
- Bible translation in Chad so that people can hear the Word of God in their own mother tongue

We believe that the gospel must be presented so that people can hear. Now, this never gives us the license to be rude. We need to make sure that our witness is expressed to the world in love, so our words don't become just a "resounding gong or a clanging symbol" (1 Corinthians 13:1). We speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

But there's more than just the audible witness. This is where most of us need some challenge with respect to how we see ourselves as God's witnesses in the world.

Matthew 5:13-15 takes us to the second and third of the senses: taste and sight. After detailing both the spiritual and relational qualities of the follower of Christ (Matthew 5:3-12), Jesus uses two analogies to describe the working out of these qualities in the world.

To the Sense of Taste

Jesus says that his followers, in their witness to the world, appeal to the sense of taste: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot" (Matthew 5:13).

Jesus says that the disciple is salt. Bible commentators believe that this analogy communicates two or three thoughts. Some observe that in Jesus' culture, salt was a preservative; therefore, God's people serve to restrain evil and preserve good in the world. Others point to the fact that salt was used as an expression of purity: its glistening clarity made it attractive as an offering that was presented in worship. Christians, they say, are supposed to be purifiers in a tainted and stained world.

Both of these applications carry powerful challenges—to preserve from evil and to purify—but the primary use of salt to which Jesus refers is as a *flavor enhancer*. Christians are supposed to add flavor to the dullness of life. In a world filled with monotony and boredom, the Christian community should live life in such a way that it becomes tasty, livable and desirable again. Filled with the Holy Spirit and living out the character of Christ, we ought to add zest and vigor. Eugene Peterson captures this sense in *The Message* when he interprets Matthew 5:13: "You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth."

Somehow along the way we went the opposite direction and started advertising Christian faith as a way to become dull—"We don't do this, we don't do that." This is why young people often see Christian faith as something to be put off until later: "Let me live my exciting life now, and then—when I get old and dull like you—I'll trust Christ too." Oliver Wendell Holmes supposedly stated, "I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers."

In contrast to dullness, we're supposed to be the flavor enhancers of the world. Through joyful lives built on a foundation of hope, we live to improve the quality of the lives of those around us.

But what do "salty" people look like?

- They look for ways to add value to their workplaces—maybe by bringing in donuts and coffee on a dreary Monday morning.
- They look for ways to help someone else out of the loneliness of life —by visiting a nursing home or dropping over to see a lonely neighbor.
- They influence their communities with zest for Christ by assisting in things like PTA, community associations or local service.
- They're not afraid of going into an environment of tastelessness because Jesus in them is the salt. They add flavor, and they serve as moral disinfectants in society.

Salty Christians seek to add flavor to the world beyond their immediate reach by investing in others to improve their quality of life in the name of Christ—through things such as

- giving generously to victims of natural disasters or getting involved directly in relief efforts
- helping people economically through training programs and micro-enterprise development—helping the poor break out of the cycle of poverty
- building houses through groups such as Habitat for Humanity

- standing against the abuse of immigrants or factory workers or child laborers
- donating clothes or food to ministries for the homeless
- inviting lonely people over for a meal
- hosting a neighborhood block party

One question I try to ask myself every day is this: Jesus calls me to be salt in society—so how can I add zest and flavor and quality to the lives of the people I touch today?

To the Sense of Sight

Next in the Matthew 5 passage, Jesus says that we, as his witnesses, appeal to the sense of sight: "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

In this second analogy, Jesus compares the disciple to light. Light brightens. Light guides. Light warns us from danger. To serve as Jesus' light means we have a role in dispelling the darkness. Into a world dark with sin, we come as lights—not hidden or covered for our own private use, but shining brightly, publicly, like a city on a hill.

Listen again to how Eugene Peterson expresses this in *The Message*: "God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. . . . Shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven."

Something important to note about both of these metaphors: in this Matthew 5 passage, Jesus does not say, "You are the salt of the church" or "You are the light of the fellowship." We are called to be salt of the earth and light of the world. When Rebecca Manley Pippert wrote the book *Out*

of the Saltshaker and into the World, she understood that if we stay in the church we'll never fulfill our role as salt and light *in the world*.

This is why I get very nervous about our program-oriented, busy North American churches where we offer 101 options for growth, most or all of which appeal to those who are already Christians. If all our time is spent with our Christian peers, something is drastically wrong. We go to church each week to renew our saltiness and clean up our light—so that Jesus can send us back out into the world refreshed and strengthened. As his witnesses, Jesus calls us to go out to be flavor enhancers and darkness dispellers in the world. God lights our lamp and we go!

Being light means that we let people see our faith. We don't hide it or exercise our faith only within the family of God. Instead we speak up, act out and go public with our faith. Being light is being, in the words of Oswald Chambers, "conspicuously Christian." There is no room for privatized faith!

Our light, Jesus says, is manifested by good deeds, kind actions and demonstrated love. We don't do good deeds to be recognized or applauded; Jesus condemns that later in this passage (Matthew 6:1-18). Instead, we go about our lives of service and compassion and mercy ministries, and people will notice!

What do darkness dispellers look like?

- In the workplace, they tell clean jokes to overtake the off-color ones.
- In the neighborhood or in the college dormitory, they host drug-free, immorality-free parties to show that you don't have to sin to have fun.
- They look for the darkest places and they move in—like the staff of Youth With a Mission that moved into the prostitution district of Amsterdam, Holland, to plant a church between a house of prostitution and a church of Satan.[1]

Do you want your light for Christ to have the maximum effect? Find a dark place and penetrate that darkness.

To the Sense of Touch

To investigate the fourth sense to which our witness in the world appeals, consider again the focus of chapter two, Matthew 25:31-46. There's no need to repeat it here, but take a moment to reread it.

Without stretching the text too much, I'd like to suggest that Jesus is affirming here that as his witnesses, we appeal to the sense of touch and the human need for touch. We are called to bring the touch of God's love to a broken world. We become the hands of Christ's mercy to a hurting world and to hurting people.

In this passage, Jesus paints a picture of the judgment day when the saved (the sheep) are separated from the unsaved (the goats). These verses make me very uncomfortable—because the sheep are *not* selected because they believed the right things or went to all of the appropriate Christian activities. The sheep are affirmed because of the way their lives touched the needy around them:

- They fed the hungry and gave drink to the thirsty.
- They invited in the stranger and they clothed the naked.
- They cared for the sick and they visited the prisoner.

Jesus emphasizes his main point twice: *By touching and serving these needy ones*, he says, *you were touching me* (Matthew 25:40, 45).

Touch witness can take many shapes:

- A Christian who works in the finance district of Boston takes one lunch break every week to cross a few blocks and serve meals at a soup kitchen for the homeless.
- A woman who rides public transportation buys gift certificates from local restaurants so that she has something to give to those who beg.
- A dentist dedicates one month a year to offering free services at a mission location in East Africa, and his ministry there opens many witnessing opportunities in his practice back home.
- A couple goes through their clothes twice a year and gives what hasn't been worn to ministries that "clothe the naked."

- A businessman starts a weekly outreach at a local juvenile detention center.

Like Jesus' earthly ministry, our ministry, our witness to the world, must involve touch. And not just the touching of the beautiful people or the people who will thank us or the people who will help get us somewhere. Jesus' touch means touching the *helpless, the unclean, the social outcast and the poor*. Is there any setting where we are giving without reciprocation?

To the Sense of Smell

The final sense is the one that might most surprise you. As Christ's witnesses, we go into the world to appeal to people's sense of smell.

> But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal process in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? (2 Corinthians 2:14-16, NIV 1984)

Paul tells the Corinthians that they are the fragrance, the aroma, the sweet scent of Christ. He uses a vivid analogy that the Corinthians understood immediately, but we need some explanation.

According to New Testament scholar William Barclay, Paul is describing a special parade called a "triumph" that was a custom of the Roman army. A victorious general who had led an on-field conflict, killed at least five thousand of the enemy and extended the territory of Rome would be honored with a victory march through the city of Rome to the capitol building. The march would go like this:

- State officials started the march, followed by the trumpeters.
- Then followed those carrying the spoils of war.

- Others would carry symbols of the conquest: models of citadels or ships that had been captured or destroyed.
- Then came a white bull to be sacrificed later.
- Then captive princes, generals and other leaders were led through the city. They were chained together and headed for jail or, in most cases, execution.
- Officers would follow, and then the priests carrying censors filled with burning incense.
- The victorious general came next in his glorious chariot.
- The parade concluded with the soldiers marching and shouting, "We have triumphed."[2]

In his analogy, Paul says that we are the *aroma* of Christ. The risen Lord Jesus Christ is the victor, and we go into the world as part of his triumph parade, singing the words of the hymn,

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son;
Endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won.[3]

As Christ's soldiers, we are led through the world in triumphal procession because our Lord has won the victory over death. The fragrance is the fragrance of victory, but the passage also says it is the fragrance of death. What does that mean?

Consider that parade. If you were a returning soldier or a Roman citizen, the smell of the incense from the censors would mean victory. But for the captives who smelled the same incense, it was the fragrance of death because it reminded them of their own imminent execution.

To the world, we are the fragrance of Christ. Our Christlike behavior, our attitudes, our work habits, our relationships, our service to others lingers in the air like a beautiful perfume or cologne. Did you ever enter a room several hours after someone wearing a strong perfume has left? It lingers. It creates a memory long after the person is gone.

But our fragrance is not always well received. To some we are the "fragrance of death" because Christlike behavior makes them feel judged—even if we say nothing! After we reveal our loyalty to Jesus Christ, some

people will apologize for their swearing or curses or anything else that they consider “unchristian.” And they’ll do this without our saying a word. Why? The presence of Christ in us carries with it both victory and condemnation. Light illuminates darkness and reveals that which was hidden. Salt stings as it heals. A touch can bring pain—even if it’s part of the healing process.

This idea of being Christ’s fragrance is especially significant if you are seeking to be a witness to people you’ve worked with for years or family members who’ve heard the message many times. In these situations, I begin by breathing the prayer, “Lord Jesus, guide my words and my behavior today so that something about my life leaves the fragrance of Christ. Help me to smell like Jesus today.”

What might the fragrance of Christ look like?

- Doing something anonymously in service to others—like raking a neighbor’s leaves or washing their car when they’re not home.
- Practicing “random acts of kindness” to servers, flight attendants, desk clerks, service station people and others who often serve without recognition.
- Guiding coworkers or peers in ethical and moral decisions—even without a biblical explanation.
- For one church, being the fragrance of Christ means utilizing the number of MIT graduates in their church family to serve the local high school—to the point that the church now coordinates the tutoring program in math and science at the school. They hold a concert to raise money for the town, and they believe one of their primary purposes is serving their host community.[4]

Being the fragrance of Christ in the world means action toward others that leaves the scent of Christ’s love lingering for others to ponder.

Complete Sensory Evangelism

We are Christ's witnesses. He sent the Holy Spirit to empower us to be so, and we are to have a whole-life witness: to all of the senses, hearing, taste, sight, touch and smell. Our challenge is to grow to be a complete witness:

- To people's hearing: am I prepared to give a loving and well-thought audible explanation of the hope that I have in Christ?
- To people's taste: am I a "salty" Christian, a flavor enhancer who improves the quality of life of those around me?
- To people's sight: am I a light-of-the-world person who dispels the darkness? Am I conspicuously Christian? Do people see my good works and get pointed to Jesus?
- To people's touch: am I the touch of Christ to needy people around me?
- To people's sense of smell: is there a fragrance of the love and life of Jesus Christ in my life that lingers—inviting people to think about eternal realities?

Let's always be asking,

- How will I sound today?
- How will I add flavor today?
- How will I look today?
- Who can I touch today?
- How can I leave the aroma of Christ today?

As Christ's witnesses and followers, we are his voice, his hands, his feet. Let's live out the Great Commission, Great Compassion lifestyle and become expressions of God's good news to the world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It goes without saying that many influences affect the writing of a book and the author who writes it. I am indebted to a variety of people and ministries who helped trigger the ideas for this book.

The example of York Moore and his emphasis on justice and justification by faith in Christ exemplifies the balance of word and deed that I've tried to express. Stephan and Belinda Bauman and the team at World Relief were living this long before I wrote anything. Others too numerous to cite painted the pictures of the Great Commission, Great Compassion ideal lived—but worthy of special mention are Todd and Leslie Engelsen of Peer Servants, Jeff and Judy Heath serving the people of Chad, and Femi and Affy Adeleye, serving through World Vision and ongoing ministry to people with HIV/AIDS.

I am deeply grateful for colleagues and former professors Timothy Tennant and Peter Kuzmic. They are both deep thinkers, diligent theologians and active practitioners. Tim taught me to read the Great Commission statements of Jesus together. Peter pointed out that the Great Compassion of Matthew 25 is part of the "teaching them to obey all things I have commanded you" of the Great Commission.

Finally, I am grateful to my editor, Al Hsu, and his team at InterVarsity Press. Their shaping, editing and suggesting have served to make my random thoughts readable.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Almost any of the books cited throughout this text would be worth reading as part of ongoing growth. I'd especially recommend the following:

Bradley, Anne, and Art Lindsley, eds. *For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

Carroll R., M. Daniel. *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2013.

Corbett, Steve, and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013.

Fernando, Ajith. *Sharing the Truth in Love: How to Relate to People of Other Faiths*. Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2001.

Soerens, Matthew, and Jenny Hwang Yang. *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion and Truth in the Immigration Debate*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Stearns, Richard. *The Hole in Our Gospel*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009.

Appendix

ONE HUNDRED IDEAS FOR GREAT COMMISSION, GREAT COMPASSION OUTREACH

Outreach, according to the concentric-circle mandate of Acts 1:8, takes us to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. Consider one hundred ideas of what this outreach might mean in daily life.[1]

Reaching out to your "Jerusalem" (the people right around you, often from a similar socioeconomic or cultural/ethnic background).

1. Choose one or two neighbors or coworkers who don't know Jesus and pray for them by name every day.
2. Do a prayer walk through the neighborhood, praying that every family and person will come to know Christ.
3. Get involved as a "fragrance of Christ" person in community activities (PTA, neighborhood associations, etc.).
4. Offer practical service (car washing, lawn mowing, etc.) to a family in need near you.
5. Do a prayer walk at your workplace: arrive early and pray over each desk, cubicle, office or work area for people to come to know Christ.
6. Go to the local police department and find out how you can become a prayer supporter for them.
7. Take an evangelism course to learn how to share your faith.

8. Have an “open house” simply to get to know your neighbors (hand deliver the invitations so that you make face-to-face contact).
9. Volunteer at a day care center to read to the children.
10. Invite your neighbors or coworkers to start a book club together to discuss popular books in hopes of using these as a bridge to the gospel.
11. Hold a garage sale and give the proceeds to a worthwhile local ministry.
12. Volunteer to be a chaperone for public school events like field trips, dances or the prom.
13. Start a “resale” shop that collects used clothes, furniture and appliances and recycles them to local ministries or sells them to benefit these ministries.
14. Join or develop a ministry to the hearing impaired, handicapped or other physically challenged people.
15. Establish a guest room in your house to entertain visitors or to help people needing lodging during job transitions.
16. Start a weekly prayer meeting with other Christians at your place of work.
17. Read a book on evangelism.
18. Use holidays to sponsor parties that allow you to get to know your neighbors.
19. Create a survey of questions designed to help you understand the spiritual perspectives of your neighbors; offer a barbecue to thank them for participating.
20. Take a neighbor out to lunch simply to get to know them.
21. Host a “Great People of the Last 2,000 Years” party and invite people to watch the JESUS film.
22. Start an investigative Bible study at work or in your neighborhood —four weeks of asking, “Who is Jesus?” by looking into the Gospel

of John.

23. Invite your friends, neighbors or coworkers to join you in some "Samaria" or "ends of the earth" outreaches (below); sometimes people get spiritually interested by getting involved in service.
24. Leave a piece of evangelistic literature for a waiter or waitress—along with a generous tip!
25. Invite a friend to go to the movies with you, and then over coffee afterward try to understand your friend's outlook on life by discussing the movie.

Reaching out to your "Judea" (people in your same culture, but in the larger region).

26. If you're involved three or more nights of the week at church or in Christian groups, downsize this activity in favor of getting involved in the community—join a club, take a course, join a team.
27. Organize a Christmas toy drive to collect toys for underprivileged children in your area.
28. Take a course at a local university in philosophy, world religions or some other subject that could provoke evangelistic conversations.
29. Volunteer to assist with a regional conference designed to help area churches become more effective in outreach.
30. Start a file of newspaper articles on a local community concern that you want to make a special focus of prayer or involvement.
31. Get training and then volunteer as a counselor for a Billy Graham Evangelistic Association outreach or other evangelistic event in your area.
32. Run for office on a school committee or other regionally significant community leadership.
33. Get involved in regional outreaches where you partner with other churches to affect the community.

34. Write or call political leaders in the county government regarding issues that you're concerned about.
35. Call a radio talk show in an effort to offer some Christian influence in their conversations on local issues of concern.
36. Get involved in (or start) a local food pantry for underprivileged families.
37. Volunteer at a local crisis pregnancy center or hotline.
38. Organize an evangelistic dinner in your area for people of your profession; have a Christian from your profession speak.
39. Write a letter to encourage local political leaders and offer your prayer support.
40. Get involved once or twice per month visiting the lonely at local long-term care facilities or nursing homes.
41. Voluntarily clean the public restrooms in your community.
42. Become a helper in a ministry to the alcohol or chemically addicted.
43. Volunteer to get involved in projects designed to spruce up the community—plant flowers, rake leaves, paint, etc.
44. Buy some food vouchers at a local restaurant to give to homeless people who approach you for money.
45. Get a list of area school principals and start a regular prayer routine for these key leaders.
46. Collect loose coins over the course of the month and then donate the total to local Christian ministries.
47. Get involved in the prevention of spouse or child abuse in your community.
48. Support the evangelistically oriented programs on local Christian radio stations.
49. Do a clothing drive in your area, collecting clothes that will be delivered to a city ministry to the homeless.

50. Memorize Luke 19:10 and create a list of the potential lost people you'd like to reach in your area.

    Reaching out to your "Samaria" (outreach that is crosscultural, but near to home; geographically close, but culturally distant).

51. Visit a foreign food restaurant and try to engage the owners in conversation about their country of origin, their culture and their faith.

52. Become a host family for an international student ministry at a local university.

53. Volunteer to serve one day a month at a shelter for the homeless.

54. Buy products whose proceeds will benefit local social need relief.

55. Become a teacher in an English language learner program (ELL).

56. Come alongside Prison Fellowship or another such ministry and collect Christmas presents for the children of inmates.

57. Join hands with an urban ministry as a volunteer tutor for students working toward a GED (graduate equivalency degree).

58. Visit a church that worships in a different language to get a sense of the international nature of the body of Christ.

59. Start a pen pal ministry with prisoners at a local correctional facility.

60. Go to the local school department to find out the languages spoken in your school system.

61. Invite a first-generation American coworker to your home for a meal.

62. Become a "big brother" or "big sister" to a child with only one parent.

63. Get involved in weekly or monthly prison outreach ministry or on-sight Bible study.

64. Visit and become familiar with local ministries that do work that is "crosscultural" to you (ministry with gangs, with HIV/AIDS

patients, etc.).

65. Do a prayer walk in crosscultural urban areas.
66. Visit leaders at a Muslim mosque, Hindu temple or Buddhist temple in an effort to understand what other religions believe and teach; invite them to come visit your church.
67. Read Matthew 25 and try to identify one project per month that you can do for the types of people Jesus lists.
68. Attend a local cultural or ethnically distinct event in an effort to understand the cultures around your area.
69. Memorize 1 John 3:16-18.
70. Attend a class or seminar offering training in cultural understanding.
71. Develop your own "welcome wagon" ministry to newly arrived immigrants in your community, helping them with shopping, driving or daily routines.
72. Prayerfully hang out in the area of the supermarket specializing in ethnic food and ask God to help you meet people.
73. Invite some people from other cultures into a discussion on the question, "What do you think a Christian is?"
74. Raise money and take a group of underprivileged kids to a sporting event.
75. Dive in with an urban friend and live in the inner city for a weekend.

Reaching out to your "ends of the earth" (international outreach).

76. Pray for the country on the label of your clothes.
77. Get a copy of *Operation World* to serve as your reference book for praying for the nations of the world.
78. Get an up-to-date map of the world and post it prominently to provoke prayer.
79. Listen to the BBC or other world news report and pray through the countries mentioned.

80. Buy a book or take a class designed to help you understand other world religions.
81. Start praying daily for one “adopted” country (other than your own).
82. Pray for a week for the Muslim countries in North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and especially the world’s largest Muslim country, Indonesia.
83. Fast and set aside the money saved for ministry with the world’s starving people (see Isaiah 58:6-10).
84. Look into short-term (one to two weeks) mission opportunities in another part of the world.
85. Learn a foreign language (or at least some greetings or phrases in locally spoken languages).
86. Invite someone who works internationally to your home and learn about his or her work.
87. Memorize Acts 1:8.
88. Coordinate a fundraiser (a run or swim or other sponsored event) for ministries dedicated to serving the world’s poor or hungry.
89. Start praying daily for an influential world leader who you want to come to know Jesus Christ.
90. Pray for a week for the world’s largest Hindu countries, India and Nepal.
91. Evaluate your budget and try to find about $30 per month that you could set aside to adopt a child through World Vision, Compassion or some other Christian ministry to orphans.
92. Call a missionary or an international Christian worker you know simply to offer prayer and encouragement.
93. Pray for the Lord to “send out workers” (Matthew 9:36-38) to the peoples of the earth who have no knowledge of Jesus Christ.
94. Look ahead to your retirement and start asking, Is there someplace in the world that I could serve using my accumulated experience and

skills?

95. Memorize Matthew 28:18-20.
96. Get involved in evangelistic outreach at sporting events that involve international teams.
97. Pray for God’s Word to go forward in the world’s most populous nation, China, with over 1.3 billion people.
98. Organize a prayer meeting specifically dedicated to praying for five or six foreign countries (spice it up by asking people to bring international foods).
99. Pray for your children to be open to wherever God might call them in service around the world.
100. Look into a three- to six-month leave of absence from your work in which you could serve in another country.

NOTES

Introduction: Choices

1 Jerry White, *The Power of Commitment* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1984), 48.

2 Bruce Horovitz, "You Want It Your Way," *USA Today*, March 5-7, 2004, 1-2.

3 Though the web page from which I gleaned this quotation (www.starbucks.co.uk/menu/beverage-list/espresso-beverages) has disappeared, the allusion to 87,000 choices still appears when you google Starbucks/87,000 choices.

4 From Femi Adeleye's lectures given at a gathering of FOCUS-Kenya Associates in Mombasa, Kenya, March 2002.

5 Many of John Stott's books strike at this balance, which he articulated as the primary writer of the Lausanne Covenant (1974; www.lausanne.org). His book *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Harper Collins, 2011) has served to call the church to both proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

6 Read about R. York Moore's ministry at www.tellthestory.net or check out his book *Making All Things New: God's Dream for Global Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

Part One: Biblical Foundations

1 See Passion Conferences, www.268generation.com; Urbana Student Missions Conference, www.urbana.org.

2 Most notably, John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010) or *Don't Waste Your Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009); David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2010).

Chapter 1: How Should We Then Live?

1 Crossway Books republished the book *How Should We Then Live?* in 2005 on the fiftieth anniversary of L'Abri, the community in Switzerland that Francis and Edith Schaeffer started in an effort to reach out to postmodern, post-Western young people.

2 For example, six of the Ten Commandments address obeying God in human relationships.

3 The Gospel of Luke emphasizes Jesus' merciful treatment of and relationship with the outcasts or second-class citizens of the day, including Samaritans, the poor, women, Gentiles and the socially unacceptable like beggars, shepherds and tax collectors.

4 David Epstein, Calvary Baptist Church, New York City, December 24, 2014. These quotations are from my note taking that evening so I'm sure that I have paraphrased and abbreviated somewhat.

Chapter 2: Commission and Context: Living Out Jesus' Final Imperatives

1 The Greek word for power is *dynamis*, from which we get the words *dynamite, dynamic* and *dynamo*.

2 The Greek word for witnesses is *martyres*, from which we get *martyr*. To be a first-century witness to Jesus was life threatening.

Chapter 3: Five Great Commissions, One by One

1 Timothy Tennant, lecturing in Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary doctoral residency, in the course Historical and Biblical Perspectives on Missiology, June 25, 2002.

2 Scholars note that the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark end at Mark 16:8; many Bible translations include this as a notation. Mark 16:9-20 (or 16:9-10) seems to be a later addition to the chapter. An excellent discussion of all of the problems and options surrounding this passage can be found in Timothy C. Tennant, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 140-42. In spite of the textual problems, I have chosen to include the passage because the text is deemed reliable enough by scholars that they include it in our Bibles.

Chapter 4: The Great Commission: Three Takeaways

1 Bob Jacks, *Divine Appointments* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006).

2 Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (1935; repr., Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1992), July 12 (http://utmost.org/classic/the-spiritual-society-classic).

3 Unreached people might have Christian workers in their midst but they do not yet have a self-reproducing Christian community. Unengaged people have no Christians working in their midst.

4 Edith G. Cherry, "We Rest on Thee, Our Shield and Our Defender," 1895.

Chapter 5: The Great Compassion: Caring for the Disadvantaged

1 Peter Wehner, "Christians and the Loss of Cultural Influence," *Commentary*, November 11, 2014, www.commentarymagazine.com/2014/11/11/christians-and-the-loss-of-cultural-influence;

emphasis added.

2 Gregg Easterbrook, *The Progress Paradox* (New York: Random House, 2003).

3 When I made a passing reference to this passage in my book *Western Christians in Global Mission*, I received a lengthy email response from Dr. Chris Little of Columbia International University (personal correspondence, January 13, 2013). His concern was that I was misapplying the text by applying it in general to "brothers" in the sense of needy fellow humans. He and other scholars observe that the passage was most likely meant to be applied to first-century evangelists. To receive them, clothe them and so on was to receive Jesus and the gospel message (see Matthew 10:40-42: receiving a disciple equals receiving Jesus; a "cup of cold water" to these followers will be rewarded). With this explanation, the people deemed "sheep" at the last judgment are those who receive and care for the disciples and presumably receive their evangelistic message. The "goats" are those who do not.

InterVarsity Bible study specialist Lindsay Olesberg expanded the understanding of the text even further. She writes, "After doing lots of research and study I've come to the conclusion that Matthew 25 is meant to be an encouragement to Matthew's audience (Jewish refugees in Syria) as they embrace the Gentile mission. They are the least of these who are members of Jesus' family (25:40; 12:48-50). They are poor, in need of hospitality, and potentially imprisoned for their faith. Yet, they have been entrusted with proclaiming the good news throughout the world (24:14). This picture of the final judgment assures them that they will be received by (some) of the nations and that those who don't receive them will experience Jesus' condemnation" (personal correspondence, December 30, 2014).

While attempting to understand the original context and steer clear of possible works-judgment misuse of the text (see note 5 in this chapter), I have chosen to keep this passage as a platform to provoke our care for the neediest people of our world. The categories Jesus cites (hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick and prisoner) certainly fall into the overall biblical call for compassionate living exemplified by the life of Jesus and reinforced most notably in the writings of Amos, Micah, Luke and James.

4 Matthew 24:14 is actually a strong imperative for reaching unreached people groups and those who have never heard because the gospel has to be preached to all the *ethnē* before Jesus comes (or at least that's the way the passage is worded).

5 Does how we treat the poor affect issues of eternal security? Does a cold heart towards the homeless or the prisoners or strangers result in eternal punishment as the "goats" of Matthew 25? Those of us who take these words seriously can lose a lot of sleep about this. The short answer is twofold. First, we need to interpret this passage in light of many other passages (see Ephesians 2 for example) that affirm that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Our "works" will not save us. But second, the Bible is also clear that true faith manifests itself by the lives we lead—including the way we treat the poor. See the section on "True Religion" in chapter 6 and examine James 2. Good works do not save; only Jesus does that. But faith is Jesus yields a transformed life, which includes a heart of compassion to those in need.

6 George Bernard Shaw, *The Devil's Disciple* (1901), act 2.

7 Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 59.

8 Learn more about Compassion International and child sponsorship at www.compassion.com.

9 United Nations, "Water," Global Issues, 2012, www.un.org/en/globalissues/water.

10 See www.echonet.org.

Chapter 7: Choose: Committing to Kingdom Mission in Our Personal Choices

1 Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 52.

2 Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 28.

3 Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 105.

Chapter 8: Learn: Developing an Ongoing Posture of Learning and Discovery

1 The word *workers* in Matthew 9:37-38 is also translated *laborers*. Ephesians 2:10 refers to Christ-followers as God's "handiwork" (NIV) or "workmanship" (NKJV).

2 In 1 Corinthians 9:19, Paul even refers to himself as a slave to others so that he might win people to Jesus Christ.

3 Paul Borthwick, *Missions: God's Heart for the World*, LifeGuide Bible Studies (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

4 David M. Howard, *The Great Commission for Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 31.

5 John Stott, "The Bible in World Evangelization," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981), 9.

6 For more on the Alpha program, go to http://guest.alphausa.org. For an explanation of and resources for the GIG (Groups Investigating God) strategy, go to "How to Lead a GIG," InterVarsity Evangelism, http://evangelism.intervarsity.org/how/gigs/gig-guide.

7 My favorites are Duane Elmer's *Cross-Cultural Servanthood* and Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers's *Ministering Cross-Culturally.*

Chapter 9: Look: Opening Our Eyes and Responding to Needs and Opportunities

1 Philip Yancey, *Vanishing Grace: What Ever Happened to the Good News?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

2 "Philip Yancey: Be Pioneers of Grace in a Post-Christian America," interview by Amy Julia Becker, *Christianity Today*, November 14, 2014, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/november/church-organized-for-outsiders.html.

3 Ibid. Emphasis added.

4 In 2014, *Time* magazine gave "The Ebola Fighters" their Person of the Year award. In the article describing the battle against this deadly disease, the authors gave full acknowledgment to

missionary doctors and nurses who were visibly demonstrating the sacrificial love of Jesus. The gospel demonstrated can grab the world's attention. See David von Drehle with Aryn Baker, "The Ebola Fighters," *Time*, December 10, 2014.

Chapter 10: Pray: Remembering That We Have Access to the Throne Room of God Almighty

1 E. M. Bounds wrote eleven volumes on the subject of prayer, with the most noteworthy being *Power Through Prayer*. His challenging emphasis on the ministry of prayer is captured in the volume *The Best of E. M. Bounds on Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981).

2 Martin Luther, "On War Against the Turk," 1528; quoted in Paul Borthwick, "Praying for the Powers That Be," *Discipleship Journal* 150 (November/December 2005).

3 Tertullian, *Apology*, 30; quoted in William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 65.

4 Barclay, *Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 65.

5 Ibid., 66.

Chapter 11: Welcome and Celebrate: Looking for Ways to Welcome the Stranger

1 William H. Willimon, *Acts*, Interpretation Commentary (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1988), 96.

2 James P. Eckman, *Biblical Ethics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 76.

3 Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 270.

4 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 124.

5 Rick Wood, "Peoples on the Move: Can the Church Cope with Mobile Mission Fields?," *Mission Frontiers*, November 1, 2012, www.missionfrontiers.org /issue/article/from-the-editor.

6 Ibid.

7 Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 25.

8 Jerry Appleby, *Missions Have Come Home to America: The Church's Cross-Cultural Ministry to Ethnics* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1986).

9 Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus" appears on a plaque on the Statue of Liberty. She refers to the statue as the "Mother of Exiles" who invites in the tired, the poor, the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free," the "homeless, tempest-tossed." See "Statue of Liberty Inscription," NYC Insider Guide, www.nycinsiderguide.com/statue-of-liberty-inscription#.VWYz71Lzldw.

10 See “Refugee Resettlement,” http://worldrelief.org/refugee-resettlement.

11 See www.evangelicalimmigrationtable.com.

12 Matt Soerens, email message to the author, January 15, 2015. Used by permission.

13 Ibid.

14 The Evangelical Immigration Table’s film *The Stranger* highlights three immigrant families, all of whom are now believers. Two of the families, at least, weren’t Christian when they came to the United States, and local churches in their respective communities were a part, through reaching out with compassion, of their coming to faith. The film can be downloaded at www.thestrangerfilm.org.

15 “Values,” Global Friendship House, www.globalfriendshiphouse.org.

16 Bill Henson, email message to the author, January 5, 2015. Used by permission.

17 Tim Dearborn, “Conclusion: A Global Future for Local Churches,” in *The Local Church in a Global Era: Reflections for a New Century*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse, Tim Dearborn and Scott Paeth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 213.

Chapter 12: Simplify and Give: Making a Generous Lifestyle a Priority

1 Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 132.

2 Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*; quoted in *Discipleship Journal* 25 (1985): 33.

3 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 81-82.

4 Paul Borthwick, *Simplify: 106 Ways to Uncomplicate Your Life* (Colorado Springs: Authentic, 2007), 148.

5 Ibid., 148-50.

6 Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009).

Chapter 13: Stand Together: Finding Like-Minded People and Advocating for Others

1 The chapter title was inspired by the motto of World Relief, “Stand for the vulnerable.” The concept (which this chapter tries to reflect) builds on the idea that if we join together to fight issues including sex trafficking, abuse of women and child laborers, refugees, and the state of the world’s most vulnerable, we can find the strength and the resources to succeed in pushing back the forces of evil.

2 Concerning the self-esteem of the poor and oppressed, Bryant Myers writes, "When the poor accept their marred identity and their distorted sense of vocation as normative and immutable, their poverty is complete. . . . This is permanent unless the issue is addressed and the poor are helped to recover their identity as children of God, made in God's image," and their true vocation as productive stewards. Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 130-31.

3 Philemon 1:11 is actually a play on words because the name Onesimus in Greek means "useful."

4 Church tradition holds that Onesimus went on to become a bishop of the Colossian church.

5 Dorothy Boorse's booklet, *Loving the Least of These: Addressing a Changing Environment* (National Association of Evangelicals, 2011), is available at www.nae.net/loving-the-least-of-these.

6 See www.creationcare.org.

7 See the interview with Anny Donewald, "Hope for Women in Hell," by Rachel Marie Stone, *Christianity Today*, October 27, 2014, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/october/hope-for-women-in-hell.html. Anny's book is *Dancing for the Devil: One Woman's Dramatic and Divine Rescue from the Sex Industry* (New York: Howard Books, 2014).

8 Marcel Serubungu, The Justice Conference, Los Angeles, February 21-22, 2014.

9 Bryan Stevenson, The Justice Conference, Los Angeles, February 21-22, 2014.

10 Along this theme, check out Noel Castellanos, *Where the Cross Meets the Street: What Happens to the Neighborhood When God Is at the Center* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

11 Vance Havner, quoted in Gordon S. Jackson, *Quotes for the Journey, Wisdom for the Way* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2000), 47.

12 Mark Acuff, "Lost and Found: Making Evangelism a Priority," *Ockenga Connections*, Summer 2000, 1.

Chapter 14: Go: Serving Crossculturally and Leaving Our Comfort Zone

1 Unreached people might have Christian workers in their midst but they do not yet have a self-reproducing Christian community. Unengaged people have no Christians working in their midst. The Joshua Project (www.joshuaproject.net) offers a variety of ways to help connect with, learn about and pray for the unreached and unengaged people groups of the world.

2 "Quotes: Hudson Taylor," OMF International, https://omf.org/us/about/our-story/quotes.

Epilogue: Witnessing to All the Senses

Epigraph: Nietzsche quoted in Gordon S. Jackson, *Quotes for the Journey, Wisdom for the Way* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2000), 30.

1 This ministry is described in Floyd McClung, *Living on the Devil's Doorstep: The McClung Family Story* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988).

2 William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), pp. 182-85.

3 Edmond Budry, "Thine Be the Glory," 1884; trans. Richard Hoyle, 1923.

4 For a full story, see Lisa Wangsness, "An Arlington Evangelical Church Reaches Out," *The Boston Globe*, December 23, 3102, www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2012/12/23/highrock-evangelical-church-gives-town-arlington-unusual-christmas-gift-money-pay-social-worker/EjqRTJItlcSHCrVcq1SPzK/story.html.

Appendix: One Hundred Ideas for Great Commission, Great Compassion Outreach

1 Updated and revised from a list that originally appeared in my *How To Be a World-Class Christian: Becoming Part of God's Global Kingdom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

PRAISE FOR *GREAT COMMISSION, GREAT COMPASSION*

"*Great Commission, Great Compassion* is God's heartbeat, written by his passionate servant Paul Borthwick on the core of what the gospel really should be—the urgency, purpose, practice and proclamation of the Great Commission. It is a timely piece that redirects us to show love to our world—the needed ingredient and the lifestyle that will drive us to fulfilling the master's ultimate task. It reveals the best way to appropriate our all (intellect, mind, strength, soul, talents and gifts) into expanding God's kingdom here on earth. It has the capacity to correct and change our many misconceptions about our possessions, intellect and energy. The church must be reminded that the very first step in—and the last thing in fulfilling—the Lord's Great Commission in all its facets is to live out the gospel as it is: the Jesus style of doing, teaching in the best way ever. It is the unequivocal and sure way to enjoy true peace for everyone. Given the opportunity, I will make sure every young person, especially students, youths and youth mentors, and every discipler get a copy. It has the latent capacity and power to transform ungodly ambitions to God's missional agenda. I recommend this book for everyone who in practical terms is passionate and desires fulfilling the Great Commission with great compassion."

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"Rather than jumping on the latest fad, in this book, Paul shares the Christian essentials that he's been teaching—and living—for forty years! In that time he's learned how to say it in a way that's easy to read but difficult to ignore. His stories are so engaging that you don't even realize that he's messing with your mind! God has used Paul to shape more than my view of missions; he used Paul to shape my view of being a Christian."

Dave Swaim, pastor, Highrock Network of Churches, Greater Boston

"*Great Commission, Great Compassion* delivers a wonderful overview of both dimensions of the gospel. But it does even more. It tells us how to live our daily lives in this complex modern world in obedience to these callings. And it somehow manages to do all of that with great depth, yet at the same time keeps it so simple and practical that you cannot finish a chapter without feeling that you now know how to do something valuable—today! This is not just a good book for the church missions committee, this is a valuable read for every believer on the road to greater obedience to God and his ways."

Jane Overstreet, president and CEO, Development Associates International

"In our highly attention-seeking culture, many in the millennial generation like me run the risk of pursuing social justice so intensely that we fail to call attention to the God of justice. In *Great Commission, Great Compassion,* Paul Borthwick offers a compelling corrective to this tendency by reminding us of the inseparability of compassion and discipleship. God has wed the two together because this marriage is what our world needs most. I invite everyone to learn not only from Paul's words, but from his disciple-making, justice-seeking, kingdom-building example. The man and the message are one and the same!"

Dave Ripper, campus pastor and pastor of young adult ministries, Grace Chapel, Lexington, Massachusetts

"In simple terms, Borthwick makes the Great Commission practical, easy and accessible. He challenges us to see how our everyday choices can help us love the world. Grounded in biblical reflection, full of stories from his experiences around the globe, Borthwick shows the simple, doable and everyday ways we can live out Jesus' command to love his world."

Nikki Toyama-Szeto, VP and director, The IJM Institute for Biblical Justice, coauthor of *God of Justice*

"With hundreds of practical next steps, scores of insightful stories, dozens of profound insights and one strategic invitation, *Great Commission, Great Compassion* distills a week-long missions conference into a form that you can read, savor and apply anywhere and anytime."

Gregory L. Jao, vice president and director of campus engagement, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA

“*Great Commission, Great Compassion* is passionate, principled and extremely practical, and its invitation is hopeful. The possibility for genuine impact is available to all of us. Paul writes what he lives, drawing from a life journey that has taken him across the world. I commend it highly.”

Stephan Bauman, president and CEO, World Relief

“Poverty has a name! It’s nine-year-old Mario in the slums of El Salvador, fourteen-year-old Orrapan in rural Thailand, forty-six-year-old Tom who lives on the streets of Denver. Jesus loves each one of them more than we can possibly imagine and he has commanded us to reach out and demonstrate that love through tangible actions. *Great Commission, Great Compassion* reminds us that by touching and meeting the needs of the poor, we are in fact touching and serving Jesus.”

Santiago “Jimmy” Mellado, president and CEO, Compassion International

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Paul Borthwick (DMin, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary) is senior consultant for Development Associates International, a ministry dedicated to the equipping of leaders in the under-resourced world. With this ministry Paul and wife, Christie, travel internationally two or more months per year. Paul also serves as a part-time professor in the Global Christianity courses at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts.

Through his speaking, writing and resource ministry, Borthwick works to mobilize others to participate in world missions. Borthwick is an active speaker and teacher, having taught courses at Gordon College, Africa International University (Nairobi), Alliance Theological Seminary (Manila) and Lanka Bible College (Sri Lanka), as well as holding a guest faculty position at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Previously he served for more than twenty years on the staff of Grace Chapel in Lexington, Massachusetts, first as youth pastor and then as minister of missions.

Borthwick is the author of *Western Christians in Global Missions*, *How to Be a World-Class Christian*, *Six Dangerous Questions to Transform Your View of the World*, *A Mind for Missions* and other books and Bible studies.

Paul and Christie have been married since 1979 and they live in Lexington, Massachusetts.

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How to Be a World-Class Christian

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Missions

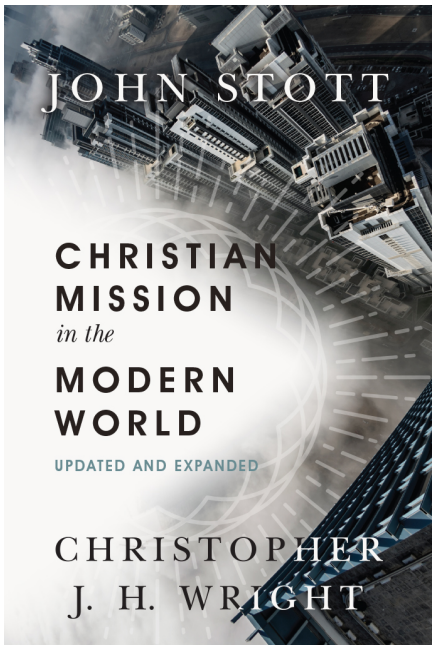
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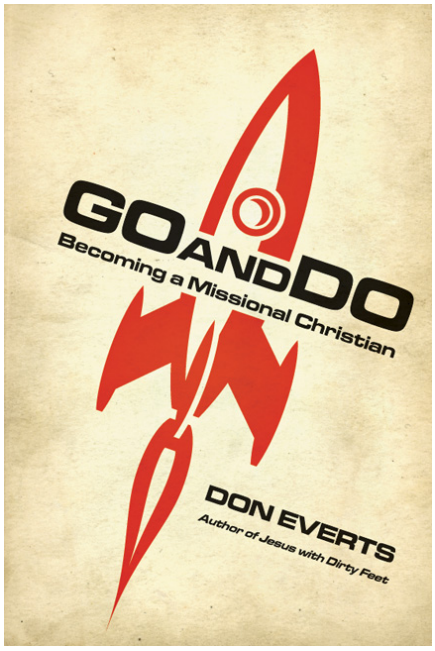
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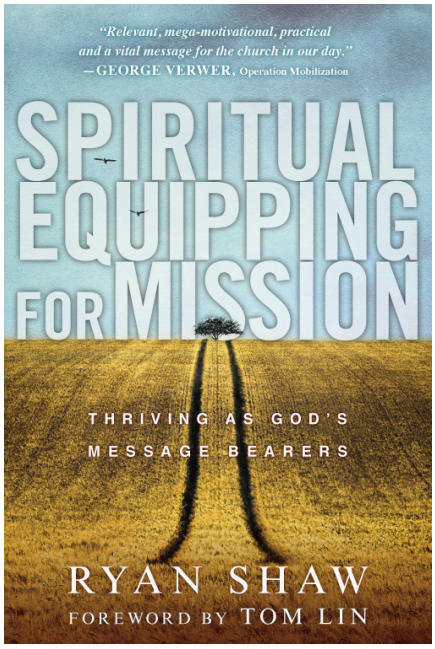
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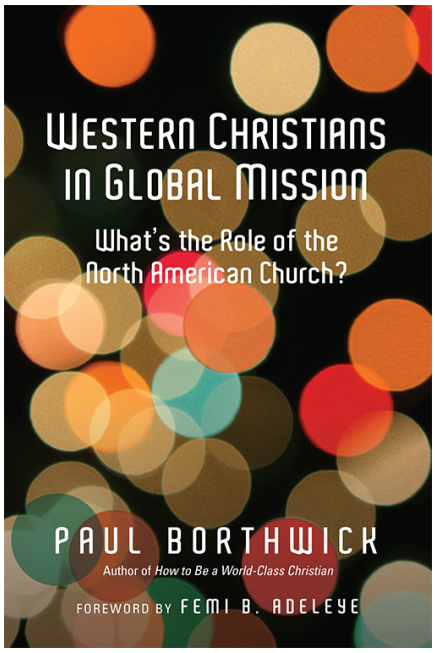
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