

# Where are We Headed?

If we know the goal we're more likely to hit it.

—Greg H. Parsons

Experienced field coaches who work with mission teams in tough places believe that one of the biggest reasons—often unstated—for missionary attrition is that the missionaries aren't actually getting anywhere. They aren't getting anything done.

Is it because of our model in the United States?

A young missionary woman and her husband were just about to leave for the field to work with an organization focused on church planting among unreached peoples. At a church mission conference she remarked, "I don't know about this church planting, I just want to go out there and be like Jesus."

We certainly need more people being like Jesus on the mission field! Younger missionaries these days bring a dimension of this some of us veterans need. We need missionaries who deeply desire to be like Christ in every aspect of their lives. We need believers—missionaries or not—who live out those beliefs everyday.

But we also need to know where we are headed.

I've been studying the words of Jesus related to what He would do—I've called it the *I will* statements. I'm not finished with my study yet, but so far, two things stick out.

One is in Matthew 4:19 where Jesus tells the first disciples, "Follow Me, and I will turn you into fishers of men."<sup>1</sup>



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That is what that missionary woman was trying to say. She wants to love people into the Kingdom. But I wonder if she will feel she is not getting anywhere without understanding the second instance when Jesus says He will do something, in Matthew 16:18. There He says, "...upon this rock, I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."<sup>2</sup> Many translations use "overpower" instead of "prevail." The word *katischuo* has the

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root meaning "to be strong, powerful, to gain the ascendancy."<sup>3</sup> The idea of overpower has remained in modern Greek. Yet, it makes more sense—since gates are defensive weapons—for gates to prevail (or not) than for gates to overpower (or not).

In any case, Jesus tells us that He *will* build His church. It is important to remember that the church didn't exist yet. The word for church in only used three times in the gospels; here, and twice in Matt. 18. The next time it shows up is not until Acts 5:11. Jesus doesn't give much detail about this new structure or meeting, but He does say that it will be His. He doesn't say He will build *the* church, but He will build *His* church.

Jesus presents a clear picture here of where He is going. The phrase following adds to His focus. The idea that the gates of Hell will not prevail against the church strengthens our church planting focus. The gates of Hades are keeping people from the light and truth that is found only in

Christ. As Jesus builds His church, Hell's gates will not be strong enough to withstand it!

Jesus doesn't say He will take over governments. He doesn't say everyone will follow Him. He doesn't tell us we'll just walk in and all this will happen. He simply says, "I will build My church."

Are we listening? Is that the focus and passion of our lives and our churches?

I've seen a number of evangelical church mission statements. They usually hold high the teaching/preaching of the word. They talk about worship and fellowship and prayer. Some add a statement about outreach including evangelism and/or missions. All of these are wonderful and necessary.

How many talk about church planting? How many churches think of multiplying their impact for the Lord by starting another church *in their area*? Do their missionaries focus on this? So many churches getting involved in missions are looking for short-term results when church planting in a new culture takes time—because the gates haven't been broken into yet.

Perhaps it wouldn't take as much time if we were living it, praying it, and sending our people out to see the church built; in other words, modeling it. If the mission field church is modeled after what we have here, we may be in big trouble in terms of seeing that church grow and truly impact its community for the Lord.

Perhaps that young missionary woman can't imagine how to plant the church because she has never seen it done!

1. NET Bible Translation, [www.netbible.com](http://www.netbible.com)

2. Author's translation.

3. Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich 1957, pg. 425