



# Sending Down *Deep* Roots: Authentic Expressions of the Gospel

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**A**s we reflect in this issue of *Mission Frontiers* on how the gospel can take root in different cultures, recent events in Iraq give us ample opportunity to consider various methods of outreach.

Most of us have heard about the deaths of aid workers in Iraq who, it turned out, were from the International Mission Board (Southern Baptist Convention). Apparently the specific targets of radical terrorists, they were seeking locations for water purification when their car was attacked. Four died at the scene, one died later, and another survived.

The articles I've read said very little about what these particular workers were doing, nor did they mention training and skills they had. (Two who died had been serving internationally for 26 years.) Instead, the secular media have chosen to present a

picture of how "evangelicals" are bringing not only the gospel but also instability to Iraq and its emerging government.

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For example, in one article those interviewed gave plenty of fuel to the reporter's bias. The article portrays Iraqis who now go to church because they were given supplies and because they like the lively, Western-style worship.

One pastor states his vision for a church of 10,000 in Baghdad, mention is made of gospel tracts distributed with food and supplies, and it is noted that nine new churches in the city were started by \$100,000 gifts from American churches. It was clear that the reporter felt that the purse distributing the relief has strings attached.

We wrestle with the question: what are the best approaches for establishing a long-term church there? Could we be in such a rush to be sure that people hear a quick message—right now—that we inadvertently undermine the crucial, long-term, deep discipleship that is needed to see the gospel remain

long after we are gone? While urgency is biblical, mission history reminds us that while the gospel has been in this part of the world for a really long time, it has really not taken root deeply and widely. What should we learn from that? What can we learn from several other examples in recent history where Christians have rushed through open doors with Western methods—such as in Russia a few years ago?

One lesson to note is that some forms of evangelism—even if accompanied by social service—are not enough. Getting people to make decisions based on very little information rarely creates long-term followers of Christ. Many do come for the food or clothes or a relationship with an American and the possibility of a visa to the U.S. Some may truly repent and believe! But revealing studies (such as those conducted in the former USSR) demonstrate that when researchers return in a few years, these people won't still be in the churches. In many places in the Muslim and Hindu world, the church buildings won't be there, either.

Instead, we must do evangelism with a view to the establishing of the church that can carry on when we are not there. We need to see the transforming power of the gospel work its way throughout that people group and beyond to other groups.

That is hard work, the kind of work that these recently-martyred servants were pursuing. It takes time and experience. It takes figuring out—by and through the Spirit of God—how to nurture an "insider" movement, not something foreign.

We should honor and be thankful to those going into difficult places like Iraq. Yet let's also pray that any form of "rushing in" will not build long-term immunity to the gospel, and let's seek approaches that combine sensitivity with boldness. May we be urgent in our prayer, diligent in His work, and wise as serpents in our approach. 🌐



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