



# PERSPECTIVES

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Ralph Winter has significantly shaped the priorities and practice of many mission agencies and even more local churches around the world. One of the well-known avenues of influence for Winter's ideas has been the *Perspectives* course.

## **Everyone is Called: Advanced Missiology Informing Strategic Obedience**

What is often overlooked about Ralph Winter's invention of the *Perspectives* course is the audience that he was aiming for. Winter was determined to make advanced missiology available and meaningful to university students and lay people. By the time he first experimented with the course, he had already re-shaped field approaches to education for ordained pastors with what came to be known as Theological Education by Extension (TEE). Once the initial content of the *Perspectives* course had taken shape, Winter insisted that it be refined and simplified in order to multiply as an extension course. He did this in order to influence life purpose, not of ordained clergy, but of university students and lay people.

It may seem incredible to us now, but during the sixties and seventies, missions was commonly presented as an all-or-nothing issue for evangelicals. The mission decision seemed simple: Either God was calling me to a high calling of being a missionary overseas, or God was calling me merely to support missionaries by giving and praying. The *Perspectives* course introduced the amazing notion that God was calling *every* Christian to live with the same level of commitment, fulfilling diverse but nonetheless critically significant roles in pursuit of one great global purpose.

Winter made advanced missiology not only available, but even necessary, if one was

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going to live faithfully and strategically for God's purposes. He often used this audacious statement to enlist students: "Every major decision you make will be faulty until you see the whole world as God sees it." It had become traditional to honor missionaries for their uncommon dedication. Winter introduced the idea that it was every bit as important to be strategically aware and historically informed as it was to have a high level of personal commitment.



## **God's Story is Our Mandate: Our Task as a Crucial Part of History**

Another significant contribution of Winter was to frame the mission mandate as a long, unfolding story of God working with His people to fulfill His purposes on earth. For years before the course was first developed, Ralph Winter had been teaching the history of the advance of the Christian movement at Fuller's School of World Mission (SWM). The four sections of the course (Biblical, Historical, Cultural and Strategic) were drawn from four of the five core courses of Fuller's SWM. His approach to integrating the ongoing story of mission advance was to blend insights from social sciences with the powerful theological idea that God was steadily at work to advance His mission even when His people were disobedient. The biblical portion of the course traced the story from Abraham to the present day. The sense of being in a larger drama, filled with precedents and pressing toward a culmination, has brought a sense of destiny, clarity and urgency to our task in the present hour. ☽

