

Editorial Comment



What Is Our Mission?

Rick Wood, Editor, *Mission Frontiers*

In John 17:4, Jesus prayed to the Father, “I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.” Jesus knew what the Father had called Him to do. But do we know what the Father has called us to do? There seems to be a great deal of confusion in the Church about what is and what is not the mission that God has given to us. And if the leaders are confused, then how can the average church member possibly understand what God has called us to do? The more ominous question is whether the Church as a whole has adopted the wrong mission and as a result we have not fulfilled what God has intended.

In this issue we take a look back at our Evangelical and biblical heritage to better understand the mission that God has given to us, and answer the often-debated question, “Does God just want us to get people saved and bound for heaven, or does He care about our lives in this world as well?”

Based on the ministry strategies that have been employed over the last 100 years, it is fair to deduce that a major emphasis of our efforts in the Church has been to get as many people saved as possible and not to disciple new believers. We have held mass evangelism crusades in stadiums all over the world. Our churches gather the best speakers, musicians and programs, all designed to attract as many people as possible to the church so the pastors can present the gospel to the unsaved. All of these methods are centered upon “professional” leaders delivering the gospel message and not on equipping all believers to carry out the work of ministry.

Should the number of people who have prayed to receive Christ be our measure of success? Is this completing the work that God has given us to do? If we think so, then I believe we have adopted an extremely truncated view of what God wants from us. Being saved from our sins, while essential, is only the beginning. God wants us to grow in maturity to become obedient followers of Jesus who are able to make disciples. Jesus wants us to fulfill His command “to make disciples of all nations.”

THE SUNDAY MORNING SERMON IS ONLY A PART OF DISCIPLESHIP AND TO THE DEGREE THAT THE CHURCH RELIES ON IT ALONE TO DISCIPLE PEOPLE IS THE DEGREE TO WHICH WE WILL CONTINUE TO FAIL TO TRANSFORM OUR NATION AND THE WORLD.

We have paid a terrible price by focusing so much on just getting people saved and not enough on making them disciples who can and should change the world.

Robert Osburn makes the point in his article, *Feeding the Wolves*, on page 24, that as a church we have not put enough emphasis upon discipling people so that they become the seed that Jesus talked about falling onto good soil and producing a crop 100 times what was sown. Robert asks the question, “Is it any joy that so many sprang up “quickly” and then “withered” (Mt. 13:5) or were eventually “choked?”

The irony is that effective discipleship is the best way of getting as many people as possible saved over the long term. The church has largely bypassed the difficult work of disciple-making in favor of mass communication strategies. Discipleship starts out slow, but if done properly builds exponentially to encompass far

more people than the “quick and easy” mass strategies that may get people into the Kingdom quickly but do not adequately disciple them. Discipleship harnesses the enormous power of all believers to be disciple makers not just the professionals.

Wesley Showed Us the Way

The mission that Jesus gave His church was to make disciples, not just so His people would go to heaven when they died but so they would live before the world—lives that have been transformed

by God—bringing Him the greatest glory. The gospel is the power of God to bring transformation to individuals and to nations, but this transformation only takes place through effective discipleship.

The reality of this truth is seen in our first article on page 6, which describes John Wesley’s discipleship movement that transformed England in the 18th century. Wesley was not just after gathering people into churches who had “prayed the prayer,” but he sought to bring people to maturity in Christ whereby their lives would be changed. Transformed people transform nations, and that is what happened to England in Wesley’s day. People who came out of Wesley discipleship movement were called Methodists because of the specific methods that were used to make disciples who were obedient to Christ. Their mission was to transform lives and they

created the means to accomplish this. As reported in the sidebar on page 7, the Methodist movement died because they replaced the key elements that made their discipleship movement work. One tragic mistake was to stop requiring participation in the small group discipleship meetings in favor of Sunday

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services. The Sunday morning sermon is only a part of discipleship, and to the degree that the Church relies on it alone to disciple people is the degree to which we will continue to fail to transform our nation and the world. There is nothing wrong with gathering for worship and a sermon, but it cannot fulfill all of the training and discipleship needs of the Church. To only rely on a once-a-week sermon is to abandon our ultimate mission to make disciples.

The other mistake Methodists made was to move from a grass-roots approach to developing leadership where people in their discipleship groups could become itinerant preachers to insisting on professional, seminary-trained clergy. We make the same mistake today. Instead of just using professionally trained pastors and missionaries, we must begin to employ effective discipleship methods that can equip all believers to be disciple-makers. John Wesley showed us long ago that it is possible to do so and transform a nation in the process. We should learn from his example and develop the strategies to disciple the peoples of our generation. We have presented some of these strategies in recent issues of *MF*.

All we have to do is open our eyes and look around to see that the Church in the West is losing the battle against the forces of humanism, secularism, atheism, etc. We live in the midst of a culture in decline. There are too few followers of Jesus who have been adequately disciplined so that they can be the agents of transformation within our culture and around the world. Either we will disciple the people of our churches or the world will. Right now in the West the world is winning.

Another Example for Us to Follow

One agent of transformation was William Carey, who established the first protestant mission in India in 1793. He is a good example of what one committed disciple can accomplish in transforming a nation. The impact of

his work lasts to this day. He spent four decades not only spreading the gospel but transforming the culture of India as well. Scott Allen explains Carey's view of ministry in his article on page 15, "He looked outward across the land and asked himself, 'If Jesus were the Lord of India, what would it look like? What would be different?'" This question set his agenda and led to his involvement in a remarkable variety of activities aimed at glorifying God and advancing His kingdom." Carey followed in the footsteps of the Evangelical movement in England, where the mission of God was not just about getting people saved but it was about doing what was right in the sight of God. William Wilberforce is another product of the Evangelical awakening of the 18th century who worked tirelessly to transform the culture of England and bring glory to God in the process.

Can you see a pattern here? The Evangelicals of the 18th century believed that following Jesus meant not only getting people saved but also living out their faith in transforming the cultures around them. They saw the works of the devil and they went about destroying them. As they did, lives were changed, society was transformed and God was glorified. Their faith was not a once-a-week sermon experience but a 24-hour-a-day walk with Jesus that impacted everything they did, regardless of their occupation. They were full-time disciples of Jesus determined to bring glory to God in every aspect of their lives. We would do well today to follow their example. In so doing, we will bring glory to the Father by beginning to complete the work He has given us to do.

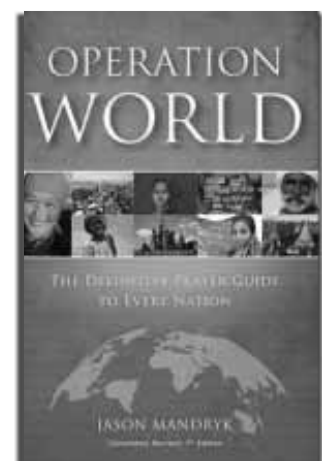
Pass On the Vision

We continue to make progress in gathering new financial partners to support the work of *Mission Frontiers*. We are asking for 1,500 of our readers to send in a gift of \$180 or \$15 a month to help support the work of *Mission Frontiers*. We currently have received gifts of various amounts equal to 238 of these gifts. We also appreciate larger and smaller donations which will also count towards reaching our goal of 1500 donors of \$180. These funds will enable us to send *MF* to Christian leaders all over the world.

Here is what one new supporter wrote recently, "Rick, just wanted to say thanks for all your work at *Mission Frontiers*. It has changed our lives and spurs us on to live as Christ calls us. We have been challenged by the articles and can't wait for the next issue to arrive. We will be sending in \$1,000 to encourage your efforts with *Mission Frontiers*. Blessings, Tim and Wendy from Kansas."

Would you like to join Tim and Wendy in supporting the work of *Mission Frontiers*? Just go to www.missionfrontiers.org/donate. You can also give by means of Paypal. f

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