

LASTING IMPACT COMES IN THE SIMPLEST WAY



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I've heard a lot of people share their vision during my 30 years on staff at the USCWM. Naturally, they believe it is God's vision—and it sometimes is pitched as God's vision for the USCWM or for me!

Much of this comes from those with a good heart and often a solid track record

of ministry and prayer. And often it is reasonable and doable. But sometimes, I call it a "mobilization vision," meaning that all too often, it is either triumphalistic or it doesn't take into account the field realities. Calls to send thousands to China several years ago caused all kinds of problems—partly because you can't "sell" these visions without making a big deal of them. If you make a big deal of them, the Chinese officials will know about it—not to mention non-government terrorist groups, among others. Just yesterday I heard about a new vision to send 1 million workers there!

But the bigger problem is that it usually doesn't work. A real story might help, one that starts with a researcher on the brink of depression. George Barna had worked for years, gathering and analyzing massive amounts of data in order to understand what was happening at the "intersection of faith and culture."¹

What he discovered was that, despite all kinds of efforts, programs, and strategies, there was virtually no impact;

nothing was happening. Leaders and followers were very committed and wanted to make a difference, but the data showed that it wasn't working. Barna was discouraged, almost depressed. He writes:

"I couldn't figure out what the underlying obstacles were that kept us from seeing tangible, positive results.

It wasn't for lack of marketplace intelligence.

It wasn't for lack of funds.

It wasn't for lack of passion.

It wasn't for lack of plans and tactics."

Then one day he had a breakthrough. He "*realized that the key to spiritual health in America (if not the world), and a general about face in our culture, did not hinge on our facilitating some kind of grand, nationwide [I would add global] revolution that would hit with fury and force all at once. Instead, it was bound up in a return to the way Jesus did things—that is changing one life at a time.*"

We've talked a lot about this in *MF*, over the last year in particular. Barna's story caused me to better understand what I've been processing over the last few years and have come to believe: *our greatest investment is in others.*

What we do in discipleship or mentoring must flow out of our own on-going growth in faith and walk with God. I always tell people that it's a two-way street—just because I've been a believer for more than 50 years doesn't mean I can't learn from my son. As all parents know (or will soon learn), our children have much to teach us about ourselves and our

depravity! The same is true with our newest, youngest, twenty-something staff member.

What Barna goes on to say is that the real "value" came in "connecting people's beliefs and lifestyles with biblical principles to effect a better integration of scriptural values and practices in their lives."

My take-away from this observation relates to leadership. There is so much written on this, a dizzying array of books, ideas, breakthrough concepts, and key things to master if you are a leader . . . or want to be one.

The danger is that the strengths leaders have can often become THE important thing. At times, these are spiritual gifts, so it seems only right to maximize their use. But that must be done in conjunction with biblical truth. The diligence the Bible talks about with regard to leaders doesn't just mean we work hard. It means that we lead out of our relationship with God, His Word and an understanding of our times, just like the men of Issachar. (1 Chronicles 12:32)

None of this is groundbreaking; it is simply what Jesus did and taught. But reading what Barna has said and the data he presents helped me realize what I have been feeling: the best leadership with the greatest long-term impact happens when we invest personally in the lives of others like Jesus did and thereby empower them to lead others as well in true discipleship. 

1. All references are to Barna, George. 2011 *Futurecast: What Today's Trends Mean for Tomorrow's World*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, vii-xi.