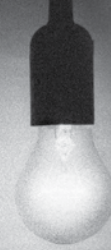


# NEXT STEPS IN YOUR CHURCH



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Without the “fires burning” on the home front, things go cold on the frontlines. The first time I wrote about this in *MF* was in the 1990s. Over the years, I’ve written about the need for a “champion” who takes on the cause and keeps it in front

of the church. I’ve also talked about prayer, mentoring, and the missions conference or what my home church calls a “festival.”<sup>1</sup>

A growing problem for the church to grapple with is that there are more and more people at church who have a deeper engagement with the world. One reason is the wealth of information available on the Internet—which can be alternatively helpful or false and overwhelming. Often it is very difficult to effectively interpret. Another reason for this growing interest is the increasing travel of many church members for their work—not to mention the huge numbers of people who go out for short terms.

But often, those globally engaged brothers and sisters don’t have an effective way to talk and learn more about the burdens they see. They come to church or attend a Sunday school class, but fail to see a connection between the teaching and day-to-day life in the world.

While I was speaking at a church

outside Houston, Texas a few weeks ago, I talked with a geologist from a large oil firm who was experiencing something different. Since he could work wherever he wanted, he had gained international experience by living in Nigeria for five years. Their kids had their worldview shaped by living in a very different culture. Their mom was able to reach out to all kinds of people—both from the country as well as global workers living there or passing through. And the company paid for it all! Now, as their kids go off to college, the parents are looking forward to where they might go next and the wife is as up for it as the husband!

As we talked, it was clear how much they enjoyed a particular class at their church that focused on global issues. It included not only Bible study but also concepts and books that allowed them to grapple more deeply with cultural understanding. They studied one that talked about shame and honor—subjects that the Bible has a LOT to say about, but we Westerners often miss.<sup>2</sup>

They studied another we have mentioned in this magazine: *When Helping Hurts* by Corbett and Fikkert. I suggested they consider, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* as a way of understanding the Gospels and statements of Jesus in a whole new light. Kenneth Bailey, the author of that book and a new one, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, spent his career teaching NT in the Middle East.

But what was so encouraging to me was what I heard in this calm

engineer’s voice. I heard a sense of engagement and excitement in church and its purpose. As we talked, he was able to discuss a much broader range of subjects than is often the case. I sensed the church was tapping into his experiences and he was committed to the church and to helping them share their missions values. As I talked with others and heard other global workers share, I was very encouraged by the level of interest.

I know there are others who were not really that interested—such is always the case. But I was greatly encouraged by the weekend to sense that the engagement would continue. There was not a sense of “well, missions week is over for another year.” It was more of a “how can we continue to grow and improve what we are doing?”

How is it going in your church? Perhaps there is something you have tried out that worked well—or failed! Are you excited about what your church is doing? Or are you frustrated? How are you engaged?

Why not grab one of those books I mentioned and discuss it with others? Then share what you learn by posting your thoughts about this article and see what others are saying:

[www.missionfrontiers.org](http://www.missionfrontiers.org) 

<sup>1</sup> While helpful to bring sharper focus, one-week events are problematic if that is the only time “the world” is really talked about.

<sup>2</sup> A friend and long-term field worker who is very engaged with key missiological and theological issues and how they intersect with his extensive and effective work, told me that the book *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* by David A. de Silva was one of his top ten books. It is on my reading pile!