



The Fruit of Perspectives in Local Churches

By **MATTHEW ELLISON**

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The Apostle Paul begins his epistles to the churches with warm greetings and inspiration, but it seems he reserved his most encouraging words for the Philippian church. With every remembrance of this church, Paul's prayers overflowed with thanksgiving and joyful petition. Why did the thought of this church evoke such joy and celebration in the heart of one of the greatest missionary saints of all time? Well, they were partners in the spread of the gospel: "Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (Phil 1:5, ESV).

People use the word "partnership" so frequently today that I fear it has lost its saliency, but we must understand that Paul's partnership with the church in Philippi was far more than a shallow pat on the back. This deep bond of fellowship results from God's people participating together, at immense cost to themselves, in the greatest movement in history; namely, the ingathering of worshipers from every

nation, tribe, and tongue for the everlasting fame of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

At Sixteen:Fifteen, every remembrance of the Perspectives family evokes joy within our hearts. Prayers of thanksgiving are offered up because of our nearly 20-year partnership in mobilizing God's people into his mission. Perspectives has helped create a movement of churches with divine discontent, with a clearly defined purpose and dauntless passion to see Jesus worshiped by all peoples in eternal delight.

Divine Discontent

Since founding Sixteen:Fifteen in 2004, we have coached hundreds of US churches to unleash their God-given potential to reach the nations. These churches are not content to do missions by proxy. Instead, they desire to actively engage the hearts, hands, minds, and imaginations of all their members. These churches moved from a reactive to a proactive approach to doing missions. They are communities for whom the thought of unreached peoples is simply unacceptable. One might say that these churches have divine discontent, a frustration with the missions status quo.

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When we begin coaching a church, we start with some diagnostic questions to help them understand their current missions reality. How did you arrive at a place where you recognized a need to rethink and retool your approach to missions? What forces, decisions, choices, and circumstances got you to this place?

In essence, we ask people why they saw a need to enlist the help of Sixteen:Fifteen. Countless times, I have heard, "Perspectives got us here." A church member, leader, or pastor experienced Perspectives. This inflection point filled them with longing to see the unreached reached. They desire to see their church become active participants in God's grand narrative. We come alongside them to help them discover, design, and deploy their church's unique

gifts in partnership with others to make Christ known among all nations.

Definitions

Two important questions churches need to consider is, "What is missions, and why does it matter?" This is especially critical today because numerous churches in the West have adopted a philosophy that says every good, altruistic, or evangelistic work is a missions work and that every follower of Christ is a missionary. But are these biblical concepts? Are they helpful? Do they lead to more missions work being accomplished or less? Calling everyone a missionary and every good work a missions work are likely well-intentioned notions. Still, they have unintended consequences. Such declarations obscure or minimize the priority of taking the gospel to all peoples, especially the unreached ones.

In March 2018, a Barna survey revealed that 51% of North American Christians did not recognize or know of the Great Commission. Here is the more alarming statistic: Of those 49% of Christians who recognized the Great Commission, only 37% could identify Matthew 28:18–20 from a list of five Scriptures. That means only 17% of Christians identified the Great Commission from multiple choice options. Houston, we have a problem.

Without a biblical definition of *missions* informing and shaping churches' missions decisions and actions, they may find that much of what they call "missions" is not missions work at all. Sixteen:Fifteen believes that a primary reason many churches struggle to do missions well is because they have thought about missions poorly.

Perspectives puts poor thinking about missions in its crosshairs, clearing the fog of confusion. Churches that engage Perspectives emerge with an understanding of missions, what it is, and what it isn't. This leads not to a mere redefinition of missions but to a rediscovery of the Bible. Jeff Lewis, long-time Perspectives instructor and Sixteen:Fifteen team member, wisely said, "May our missions definitions be driven not by our personal interests, prejudices, and preferences but by the passions and purpose of the God of all nations."¹

¹ Jeff Lewis, "Foreword," in *When Everything Is Missions*, ed. Matthew Ellison and Denny Spitters (Orlando, FL: Bottomline Media, 2017), 13.

So, not only are we beneficiaries of Perspectives but we return the favor by connecting churches to the course. We believe wholeheartedly that if churches do not have a firm grasp on the biblical basis for missions and if they do not have a passion for God's name and renown, they will find it difficult, if not impossible, to sustain an enduring commitment to reach the nations.

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Dauntless

If churches we coach have not experienced Perspectives, we, without fail, point them to the study program because we believe a big world missions vision begins with a big vision of God. When I teach the biblical section, I tell students that Perspectives is not a missions course; rather, it is a journey into the very heart of God. The aim of the course is for students to encounter him in such a profound and powerful way that the impact will be permanent and life-changing.

I've heard it said, "Knowing comes before doing, and it shapes and informs the doing." For a local church to be effective in the Great Commission, they must be gripped by the greatness of Christ. They must have a motivation that sustains enduring commitment. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:18-19). Perspectives helps churches understand that our mandate to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations" is based upon the authority and greatness of Christ.

A passion for God in worship must precede the offer of God in missions. This is precisely why we strongly encourage churches to incorporate the Perspectives Study Program as a part of their missions education strategy. Reaching the unreached is incredibly costly; thus, churches must be dauntless. Jeff Jackson, a pioneer church planter in Southeast Asia, said

something 30 years ago that I've never forgotten. "Matthew, it was a love for lost people that got me to the mission field, but it was a love for Jesus that kept me there." Perspectives kindles a deep love for Jesus in churches, without which they will merely dabble in missions, at best.

Delight Now

Several years ago, Sixteen:Fifteen was privileged to walk alongside church leaders at Calvary Murrieta in Murrieta, California, helping them to clarify their global mission, vision, and strategy. Because the leaders at Calvary experienced Perspectives, we stepped into a rapidly flowing missions current. One of their Great Commission convictions, no doubt influenced by Perspectives, was "Church-Wide Participation: Mobilizing everyone at Calvary Murrieta to embrace their unique role in the Great Commission."

They determined that they would provide multiple ways for congregants to engage the Great Commission, using something they call "vision handles." These handles are broad sets of opportunities that allow the whole church, regardless of age, income, or even missions experience, to grab onto the vision for themselves.

While visiting Calvary Murrieta not long ago, I decided to see if this value was just a platitude or something more. I talked to many people over a few days, across age groups, both staff and lay. Without exception, they all not only knew about Calvary's vision to engage two unreached people groups, but they had a supernatural delight born from their participation. A passion to see Jesus known and loved throughout the world permeated the church's atmosphere, from the janitors to the nursery volunteers.

J. Campbell White was the first secretary of the Layman's Missionary Movement who mobilized countless lay people to fund and resource the Student Volunteer Movement. He said it best: "Most men are not satisfied with the permanent output of their lives. Nothing can wholly satisfy the life of Christ within his followers except the adoption of Christ's purposes toward the world he came to redeem. Fame, pleasure, and riches are but husks and ashes in contrast with the boundless and abiding joy of working with God for

the fulfillment of his eternal plans. The men who are putting everything into Christ's undertaking are getting out of life its sweetest and most priceless rewards."²

By rallying everyone at Calvary Murrieta to actively and sacrificially engage in the Great Commission, church leaders simultaneously invited them to experience some of the best and highest delights available on this side of heaven and to anticipate even greater delight to come. The first part of their mission vision statement captures the heart of the Perspectives movement so well: "We see a vision so awe-inspiring where we witness God's fingerprints and not just our own efforts. We see [two] people groups being discipled, and in turn, discipling their neighbors. We see all of Calvary Murrieta being changed by anticipating these nations standing before the throne of God."³

Delight Later

"After this, I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Rev 7:9–10).

In this breathtaking passage, the Holy Spirit peels back the curtains of time and space, giving us a glimpse into the trajectory of all history. Here we see the Lamb of God receiving the reward of his suffering. What is his reward? Worship! Worship that is flowing from the redeemed from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.

This is the resolution of God's story. You could call it the consummation of his Church. It's worth noting in Acts 2 that the Church was inaugurated in a global context and, in Revelation 7, is consummated in a global context. When in heaven, bowing down before

the Lamb, alongside untold numbers of worshipers from all nations, there will be no doubt as to what God's ultimate mission was. We will know then, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that this mission was the greatest movement in history.

On that day, no child of God will think, "I regret that I was so passionate about missions," or "I invested too much time mobilizing God's people into his mission," or "I made too much of missions while on earth, I should have focused more of my attention and energy on other things." No, on that day, those who treated missions as unimportant or as an addendum stapled onto normal Christianity, who thought, "missions isn't my thing," will wonder how they marginalized one of the weightiest and most massive issues in the universe.

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To be sure, all of God's children will behold the glorious throne room scene described in Revelation 7. Yet I believe only those who joined the Father in the family business of making disciples of nations, tribes, and tongues will inherit the honor and delight of knowing that God mercifully worked in and through their lives to bring worshipers into his presence. Their heavenly crowns will be brightened with the acclamations that will redound to the Savior from people groups won to Christ, because they lived for the greatest cause.

God is using Perspectives to increase and elevate the joy and delight of people in churches the world over, both now and later. So, in closing, to our friends at Perspectives, I extend a heartfelt thank you. Because of our partnership in the gospel, churches are bearing much fruit among the nations, fruit that brings glory to our Father.

And to you reading this article, the next time you encounter a church passionately engaged in making disciples of all nations, ask them how that passion came to be. I have a strong hunch that if you pull on the thread of that passion and follow it to its source, you'll likely find Perspectives. 

² J. Campbell White, "The Layman's Missionary Movement," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981), 225.

³ Calvary Murrieta, "Global Missions." Accessed February 11, 2024. calvarymurrieta.com/missions