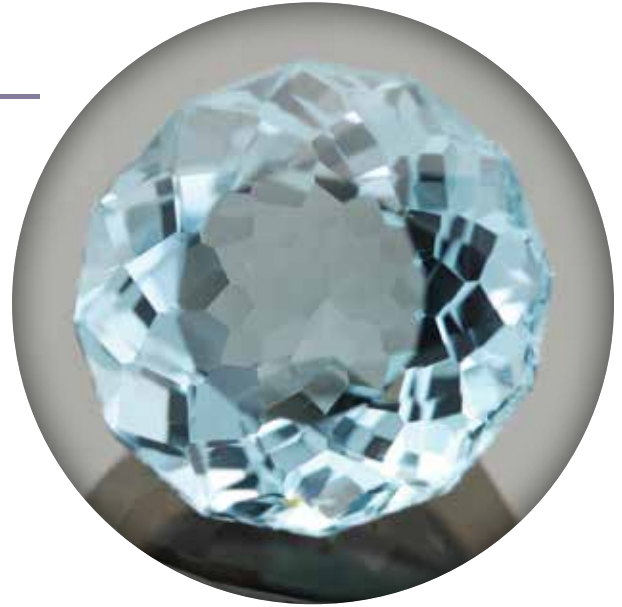


Mission Mobilizers— A Multifaceted Role in God’s Global Purpose

By **RYAN SHAW**

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What comes to mind when you think of a mission mobilizer? This role is generally understood through a one-dimensional lens (primarily an organizational recruiter), instead of a multifaceted role in God’s global purposes. It is common to understand being a mobilizer for a short season of ministry, while rare to find mobilizers remaining faithful decade after decade. A major reason is the lack of comprehensive understanding of a mobilizer. Calling the global Church to grow in her core identity as a multiplying, reproducing, missionary community requires multitudes of mobilizers being identified, trained, and empowered.

A Misunderstood Role

Mission mobilizers are a misunderstood role in Christian ministry. We understand a pastor, mission pastor, worship leader, children’s ministry leader, prayer leader, etc. But a mission mobilizer—who is that and what do they do? Ministry in a local church is generally understood as are those directly involved in global evangelism, yet the person bridging this gap is minimized. This appears to be beginning to shift as the Spirit emphasizes mobilization, raising *voices* (Isa. 40:3) preparing the way of the Lord. These are growing in confidence, though still misunderstood.

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Mission mobilizers are in every local church, denomination, and parachurch ministry, often not knowing they have this role. God has sovereignly placed them within His people already. They are pastors, teachers, evangelists, while others are lay leaders and lay people within a community of believers, each one emphasizing God’s redemptive storyline and how every believer can be involved. Many are leaders within denominational structures or church networks, marked by the Lord as His voice to mobilize and equip within these ministry structures.

God Is Raising Isaiah 40 “Voices”

Over 2,500 years ago, the Spirit spoke a prophecy through Isaiah directly applying to the body of Christ today. Isaiah 40:3–5 declares, *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

This did not happen during John's ministry. John's voice was a key partial fulfillment, yet not the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. His was the first fruits of millions of voices God intends to use.

Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill be brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Isaiah reveals a foundational call of the people of God—voices in every generation calling God's people to their core identity: *preparing the way of the Lord.*

John the Baptist embodied this calling, preceding the coming of Jesus in the first century. John's forerunner ministry laid groundwork so Jesus' purpose could be accomplished. John proclaims in John 1:23, *I am 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness; make straight the way of the Lord.'* With simplicity, courage, and humility, John became a voice of God in his generation, preparing for Jesus' first coming. Yet John's ministry was not the culmination of the Isaiah 40 prophecy. Verse 5 reveals, *The glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.* This did not happen during John's ministry. John's voice was a key partial fulfillment, yet not the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. His was the first fruits of millions of voices God intends to use. The Holy Spirit is searching for similar voices today to *prepare the way of the Lord.*

The fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy will not be complete until this Isaiah 40 generation comes to maturity, corporately mobilizing the global Church for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The Holy Spirit is searching for voices in local ministries, small groups, campus ministry fellowships, Bible schools, and more. May we, like John the Baptist, discern our calling as *the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord,* responding in faith and courage.

Types Of Mobilizers

Mission mobilization is a large, complex, multifaceted entity, with many types of leaders. We have generally lacked awareness of how many are in the category of "mission mobilizer." It is necessary to identify the wide variety of mobilizer roles. Not all are the same. Some focus on particular functions while other mobilizer types are involved in other areas altogether. Each is necessary, functioning at a high level, to see the global Church become all God intends in mobilization.

In Ephesians 4:11, Paul reveals five core leadership functions Jesus established to equip local ministries. This passage is in context to empowering the global Church to accomplish its calling. These particular gifts are roles serving the global Church. This verse gives a glimpse into the organization and administrative structure of the early Church.¹ There were three types of leader functions in the early Church: some whose authority was recognized across the whole church (apostles); some who travelled across many ministries (prophets, evangelists, teachers); and those focused on one local ministry in one place (local church pastors).

According to Paul (4:12), each of the five leadership functions' ultimate purpose is to equip churches and ministries to grow into mature disciples, discipling ethnic people groups themselves. Thus, we can say the five leadership offices each have an aspect of a mission mobilizer. They can be understood as five different types of mobilizers. It is possible to view God's big-picture redemptive storyline through the lens of God, Jesus, and Paul as mobilizers. We can go a step further and understand the same about these five leadership functions in Ephesians 4:11. Ministry leadership (when correctly focused on what the Bible and redemptive history are focused on) is for the distinct purpose of equipping God's communities of believers to be mobilized—educated, inspired, and activated in the Great Commission.

The global Church has fallen into a dangerous practice never intended in Scripture—leaders doing

¹ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Leicester: IVP, 1989), 166.

all the work of ministry themselves. Many believers in local ministries are bored, unable to express the gifts God has given, because those in public ministry have often misunderstood their function, crossing into the purview of each believer in the local churches.

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According to John Stott, this leads to one of three models of a local church. The first is the traditional, pyramid model where the pastor is at the point of the pyramid, while members are within the pyramid in levels of inferiority. This model is foreign to the New Testament. Scripture describes pastors in a shepherding role with every member contributing to the ministry using their gifts. Another model is a bus. The pastor is driving the bus while the congregation are the passengers, nodding off as they drive to their destination. Different from either of these is the correct biblical model of a local ministry made up of members each possessing a particular function or role.² We see this in Ephesians 5:19–21 where each member is instructed to bring a psalm, hymn, or spiritual song to the meeting.

Let's consider these five Ephesians 4:11 mobilizer leaders in the body of Christ, defining what they do, who they serve and how they function.

² *ibid*, 167.

Pastor-Mobilizer

This type of mobilizer is a pastor or ministry leader overseeing a church or ministry group. This could be a local church, campus ministry fellowship or Bible study leader. The Latin word for “pastor” is *shepherd*. God is seeking to raise shepherd mobilizers seeing their primary function in church leadership as mobilizing the flock to be God’s true missionary community, both locally (near cultures) and globally (distant cultures). They mobilize using the platform of their ministry function. This goes beyond recruiting laborers to the macro view of mission mobilization—guiding their ministry together on the journey of being mobilized and equipped. Through their leadership, they encourage growth and understanding in mission across the whole group. Without pastors deliberately functioning in this way, it will be difficult to see those under their leadership engaged in their roles in the Great Commission effectively. Well-known contemporary and historical Pastor-Mobilizers include John Piper, David Platt, Francis Chan, A. T. Pierson (1837–1911), Andrew Murray (1828–1917) and A. J. Gordon (1836–1895).

Apostle-Mobilizer

This leader is usually appointed to oversee a denomination, church network, campus ministry organization, or an area or district of such a ministry structure (overseeing multiple local ministries). They keep the big-picture purpose of their ministry structure’s function in the mission movement at the forefront. As the Greek word *apostle* refers to a “sent one,” they see themselves as dynamically involved in educating, inspiring, and activating their whole ministry structure in cross-cultural ministry (both within near cultures and distant cultures). God has placed them within a leadership context to equip the local ministries under their leadership to flourish as individual Great Commission ministries. Providing mobilization tools, courses, and resources to the local ministries under their direction, they work to see local ministries educated, inspired, and activated in Great Commission understanding. They see to it that pastors and leadership teams of local ministries are trained to mobilize and equip their ministries. It

is rare today to find this type of apostle-mobilizer, yet God is calling many along these lines. Historic examples include Nicolaus Von Zinzendorf (1700–1760), Samuel J. Mills (1783–1818), Charles Simeon (1759–1836), William Carey (1761–1834), A. B. Simpson (1843–1919), John R. Mott (1865–1955) while contemporary examples include Reuben Ezemadu (Nigeria), Daniel Bianchi (Argentina), Luis Bush (Argentina) and Rick Warren (USA).

Prophet-Mobilizer

This is a leader to whom God reveals specific guidance about particular strategies and insights in mobilization. They speak with authority as ones hearing from God related to pathways forward. Their main task is equipping others to grasp insights related to the plans, purposes, and ways of God in mission. They fellowship deeply with the heart of Jesus, discerning His ways and communicate these with clarity to the churches. They help churches, often bogged down with tunnel vision, to remain focused on the will of God: who they are as Great Commission ministries. It is easy for local ministries to get sidetracked, losing their identity as God's missionary community. Examples of Prophet-Mobilizers include Raymond Lull (1232–1316), Ralph Winter (1924–2009), Donald McGavran (1897–1990), Roland Allen (1868–1947), Loren Cunningham (USA), and Thuo Mburu (Kenya).

Evangelist-Mobilizer

Many scholars understand an evangelist as the person gifted to do the work of evangelism. Let's keep in mind the core thought in our Ephesians 4:12 passage—leaders equipping the saints to do the work of ministry. Evangelist-mobilizers, then, equip churches in local and cross-cultural evangelism and mission. They have been specifically trained by God to effectively evangelize and in turn train churches and disciples in outreach. They equip members to be “scattered” to multiply new churches. The evangelist-mobilizer is intensely practical, revealing the “how” of reaping a harvest among a targeted people group, either locally (near culture) or globally (distant culture). Historical evangelist-mobilizers have included John Nevius (1829–1893),

David Livingstone (1813–1873), Robert P. Wilder (1863–1938) and Jonathon Goforth (1859–1936), while in contemporary circles George Verwer (UK), David Garrison (USA), David Watson (USA), and David Lim (Philippines) fall into this category.

Teacher-Mobilizer

This may be a local leader within one local church or who travels to teach a grouping of churches in a geographic area. Their role is opening the Word of God, revealing the will and plan of God from Scripture. They root believers in discipleship, declaring and applying the whole message of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Teacher-mobilizers practically reveal the multifaceted roles for every believer within the mission movement. Teacher-mobilizers anchor the churches in the overall theme of Scripture—the mobilizer God aligning His global Church with His redemptive purposes in the earth. They connect the dots for believers to see their lives as directly part of God's story in the earth. This is a crucial role as teachers reveal the redemptive purpose of God in and through salvation history, applying it to our Great Commission context today. Examples include Hudson Taylor (1832–1905), Ajith Fernando (Sri Lanka), Paul Borthwick (USA), Max Chismon (New Zealand), Steve Hawthorne (USA), and Christopher J. H. Wright (USA).

For further articles and podcast episodes on core topics directly related to mission mobilization as well as mobilization tools for mobilizers, please visit <https://www.globalmimi.net/>.

*Author's Note—This article has been adapted from the author's book, *Rethinking Global Mobilization: Calling the Church to Her Core Identity*. The book lays foundations of a biblical missiology of mobilization while providing a practical framework to equip the global Church in mobilization. The publisher, IGNITE Media, has given permission for portions of the book to be used in this article. Find the book at [RethinkingMobilization.com](https://www.RethinkingMobilization.com) or search for it on Amazon. 