

“Finishing The Task” or FTT

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Branding experts today don't like them, but every industry has its “inside” list of initials. One of those for those of us who are passionate about seeing people groups reached, is “Finishing The Task” or FTT.

This was more popular in the 1990s and before. For some, it is still used as a call to the church to reach beyond its “walls” to a world in need of the truth of the gospel. I understand the vision and passion behind the idea.

But, to many in the world, it doesn't communicate what is intended. The intention is to “rally the troops” (a phrase that has its own issues). But to someone who sees western imperialism or remembers the negative sides of colonialism, it sounds like we are going back to the Raj in India in the 1940s—for example.

In the late 1990s, Ralph Winter stopped using that kind of language. I don't know, but I would guess that he heard how this was perceived from

brothers and sisters from around the world. I'm sure there were other things he was thinking about—he always was considering and reconsidering the way he thought about issues and wondering if there was a better way to talk about or illustrate the “task.”

In part, the word “task” is some of the problem. It makes it sound like you can put together a list of steps and “finish” something...like your to-do list. No matter the vocabulary we use, it is a danger to the mobilization movement to try and “picture” the needs of the unreached. It can turn people into something on a list. While we promote lists of people groups—like JoshuaProject.net—we know the response to that kind of portrayal can range from making us callous to jumping on a plane to help without really preparing.

In some ways, the real danger is that it can make fulfilling our vision to see gospel movements to Jesus sound too simple to pull off. Actually, many of the things we have written about in *MF* can be wrongly taken that way. That is not our intention. And neither do we want to complicate things and put a burden on new believers by creating a version of “Christianity” that is not helpful or biblically necessary.

Perhaps the biggest danger to mobilization is that we think that we know how things will work before we get on the ground among the people we are seeking to love into the kingdom. That may be caused by the typical western process for getting a job or completing a task. The usual young person is told how to “make

it”—which involves getting certain things done, usually in a certain order. Get to the best school you can, which will get you the best job you can. When you get to the school, they tell you which classes to take in what order. Increasingly, in some institutions, you also get to do some actual work in the area to really learn. Hopefully, those internships show you that you might actually like this kind of work.

Of course, you can't do it the same way for cross-cultural adjustment and language learning. The “complete this list of tasks” approach will be altered by reality along the way. When that happens, people may feel guilty that they aren't seeing movements within a year or two. This has been the classic problem with workers going out from China. They expect that people will come to Jesus just as easy as they do back home.

Don't take me wrong. We need to track progress, highlight and visualize needs and mobilize people. We just need to be careful how we talk about it. As we have seen in the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist worlds, they are listening to us. Would we be embarrassed if they hear how we describe sharing Jesus with them as a task to be checked off our list(s)? 

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