

BY KEVIN HIGGINS

Kevin Higgins is General Director of Frontier Ventures (FV). He has a PhD from Fuller in Intercultural Studies with a focus on Translation Studies. He is married to Susan and is the grateful father of Rachel, Sarah and Emma and the proud grandfather of Henry.

The theme of this edition of *Mission Frontiers* is a topic dear to my heart. It is at the very heart of our purpose here at Frontier Ventures, and it is dear to the heart of Jesus: “The Changing Shape of People Group Strategy.”

I want to begin with a special mention. I am grateful for Len Bartlotti's clear discussion related to Rethinking People Groups. I have known Len for a long time. He has been on the ground among the unreached, and on the ground here in Pasadena. He knows whereof he speaks.

I will talk first about the three hearts: mine, ours, and Jesus'. Then I will talk about the two halves of this edition's theme: people groups and strategy.

Three Hearts

Since 1980, I have in various ways been personally learning about people groups and about strategies. I am still involved with movements at a ground level among unreached peoples, and among peoples now on their way to being “reached,” thanks be to God.

Susan and I have our own sweat equity in the whole effort, you might say. Therefore, this topic is dear to my heart.

It is dear because for us we know and love real *people*, so we don't approach this as an abstract about “peoples.”

But this is more than personal. This is close to the heart of Frontier Ventures, right at the heart of who we are, why we began, why we still exist, and why we are moving forward into the future.

For more than 40 years, raising awareness about unreached peoples has been at the center of who we are. The vocabulary we use has shifted, certainly, from hidden peoples to unreached peoples to frontier peoples. But inside of all that

is the same concern, to join in God's invitation as God fulfills the abiding purpose of blessing all the families of the earth.

Which brings me to the heart of Jesus.

While my readers will certainly be familiar with Jesus' heart for nations as expressed in say, Matthew 28 and the command to disciple all nations, I want to dig further back in Jesus' words for a moment.

Just today I was re-reading Luke 4. After Jesus speaks of fulfilling Isaiah 61 when He is in the synagogue, there is an initial surge of enthusiasm, as all the people present express their joy at those words.

They were, as the context shows us, joyful because they thought this was for them, and apparently, only for them.

So Jesus continues. He does not say “thank you.” Instead, He draws out other portions of the Old Testament. He could have selected many, many passages. The two He selects tell us a lot about His heart.

First, He refers to a widow. A woman. A non-Jewish woman.

Then He refers to a man, a leper, a non-Jewish man.

Two unclean people. Non-Jewish.

From the mass of Old Testament texts He could have selected, He picks these two at the launch of His work. This shows us His heart for the nations, and thus for the least reached.



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People Groups and Strategy

What is there to rethink? We have lists of people groups, don't we? And every edition of *Mission*

Frontiers records progress on movements among the unreached, right? Doesn't this suggest we know who the unreached are, and we know what to do to reach them?

Yes, and no to both questions! First: people groups.

In an age of globalization and migration, and in an era in which we continue to discover the nuances and complexity of how people, how peoples, see themselves, we are realizing that the more we learn, the less we know about people groups!

That does not mean that Joshua Project, for example, is wrong, or that the lists of unreached peoples there need to be reworked. But it does mean that as any pioneer cross-cultural team gets engaged and begins to love and learn about and with the people with whom God has put them into relationship, they will begin to see things that no list can show.

How does this people's language, religion, culture, location and current history shape how they see themselves? And how does that need to shape how we work among them, or to use another term, how does that affect strategy?

There is much to say about strategy and strategies. I am grateful for everything we are learning today, from the fruitfulness of many workers and organizations and about things that are working among the least reached. Discipleship, church-planting, cultural sensitivity, orality, new insights into Scripture translation and much more.

However, in an age of globalization and migration, and in an era in which we continue to discover the nuances and complexity of how people, how peoples, see themselves, we are realizing that the more we learn, the less we know, not only about people groups, but about the strategies for reaching those where we are yet to see movements emerge!

There is a lot to learn about why this or that strategy works in this or that people group, but seemingly not in another. Is it the people? The team? The strategy itself?

Back to the Heart

This brings me back to why this is all at the heart of who we are and why we exist. From our beginnings, there has been a focus in Frontier Ventures on not only unreached peoples, but on understanding and seeing the barriers, the reasons why some are reached, and others not, why in some cases an approach bears fruit, and elsewhere it does not.

I pray and trust that in some small way, this edition of *MF* will help to stimulate new questions, and ultimately fresh answers, so that least reached peoples may experience more and more of the fullness of life in Christ! 

