



Good to Great in the Kingdom

Greg H. Parsons



A mission leader I know served on the field for 20 years. Then he was asked by his international director to become the U.S. director of his mission; his international director said he should take the role if “he wanted to make xyz mission the best one out there.” My friend said he wasn’t interested.

My friend doesn’t think that it’s “Kingdom thinking” to make one mission better than the others. He would have found it more Kingdom-oriented if he could help the mission to “be the best it can be” or “to find our Kingdom niche and fulfill it as well as we can.” But even that wasn’t what he really wanted to do.

You see, he wasn’t interested in building an organization – though that is often done “on the way” to a goal. He *was* interested in building “a passion and effectiveness for the Great Commission in the church around the world.” He ended up taking the role after much turmoil in his heart and mind, and it has worked out well as his colleagues have shaped the role around his gifting and calling.

As mission agencies and churches position themselves for the days ahead, many are discussing Jim Collins’ book, *Good to Great*, which offers several excellent ideas based on extensive research. The companion monograph for the “social sector” (by the same name) adds a helpful twist for not-for-profit organizations, for whom the bottom line is something other than profit.

Any good idea can run into problems if we don’t understand it, or apply it without thinking it through deeply. In *Good to Great*, Collins emphasizes the idea of identifying your organization’s distinctive contribution. That may have led some to focus their ministries on what *only* they can be best at – hinting at the idea of being distinctive just to be distinctive without taking into account what others are doing (for there are times when several structures may be overlapping in helpful ways). The core idea is to examine how a particular contribution is made for the common good and, in the case of non-profits in general, doing *good*

and doing it *well* – not merely to have a unique byline in our vision or mission statements.


Asking how any ministry’s work is unique is a helpful process, but if we are not thoughtful it can lead away from a Kingdom mentality. We must do our planning in the context of larger Kingdom efforts. Just as companies must have their competition in mind,

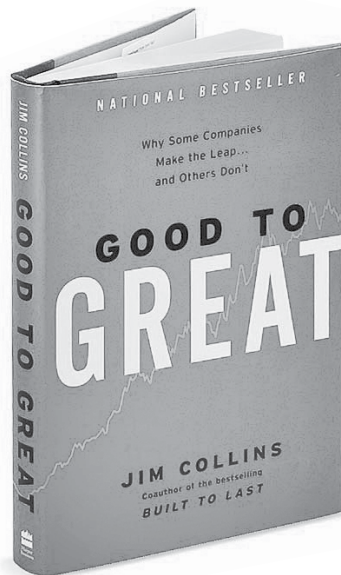
so we in the ministry sector must have our co-laborers within other mission or church structures in mind. Do we really know enough about what they are doing to know if we are overlapping or duplicating work?

It is even worse with churches, where it is really hard to be unique – since there are some ten

million similar groups around the world! While a similar dynamic may sometimes apply to mission structures, there has always been a unique role for pioneering agencies that work where others don’t. Yet we must be careful. It doesn’t take too much study of the history of pioneering agencies to find out how quickly they move to more established work, training ministry or leadership development instead of pressing on with more difficult pioneering work. While sometimes such a shift may be appropriate, we should keep a keen eye on and be sure that the church is actually being built as Jesus directed (Matthew 16:18).

We need to ask these kinds of questions in the context of the Kingdom. We should know what is happening and what is not. We should be open to see how we can serve others who are working nearby or in similar works to ours. We should be open to hand over work to others. We should do our best to discern and review the impact of our work wherever it can be effectively measured. And we need to think in terms of multiplication.

How can we advance God’s Kingdom today, pursuing what He has given us to do while also encouraging others in other structures He is blessing? 



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