Disruptive Missiology Part 2

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Last issue (*MF* July-August 2007), I wrote about *Disruptive Missiology* a concept derived from the idea of *Disruptive Technology*. Even though I used illustrations from current technology (created by companies like Apple, Microsoft and Google), the idea of disruptive technology has been around a long time. Other examples include the shift from horses to tractors or cars, mechanical to digital watches, etc. Each of these displaced, to some degree, earlier technologies or industries.

In the business world, competition and survival are major factors driving change. Often, in the church or mission world, similar forces can be involved, as well as the motivation to do something helpful and good. Ministries can keep themselves alive with minor tweaks along the way, yet in the process, lose their way.

Just this week, a staff member mentioned to me the struggles he has seen going on in church after church he's visited recently. In the last two years, three of the churches that back my family's ministry here at the USCWM have had to reduce missionary support for various reasons.

These may be a symptom of the disruption within the church in the West, with which I and other missionaries must deal. But dealing with those issues will require a different approach than dealing with issues as the followers of Christ are established among the unreached. Do we take with us a model of church which—effective or not here in the West—will not be sustainable in new places?

One *MF* reader, replying to part one of my discussion of Disruptive Missiology, noted that missionaries usually are all for "contextualizing" or "adjusting" the way they do church when they go overseas. They may suggest that people sit on the floor; sing some songs written by the people, instead of *Amazing Grace*; or even meet on Fridays at noon in Muslim contexts. Is it enough just to tweak some patterns, or might the whole approach need a fresh look? We need two different things for two different situations:

1. **Here**, or wherever the church is already established, we need to look afresh at the Bible, and continually consider if what we are doing is biblical.

2. **There**, or wherever the church is not yet established, we need to let them look at the Bible and continually consider if what we are doing is biblical. They understand their culture as well as the people and relationships in ways that we outsiders will never fully grasp.

Of course, they need deep, prolonged exposure to God's Word, as we do. Increasingly I believe we have short-circuited that process by feeding them instead of teaching them to feed themselves.

So, **where the church exists**: We need to continually submit our lives and churches to the authority of the Scriptures. We may not change our theology often or at all, but we always need to examine how we live out our faith in our family, neighborhoods, communities, businesses, etc.

And, **where there is no church**: We must let the new developing fellowships determine what their patterns should be. Encourage them to look deeply into the Scriptures, not to the West or established historical patterns. Resist the temptation to tell them how you did it back home or even in a nearby city. Look at the Scriptures.

Naturally, that can make us uncomfortable for several reasons. It can make us feel like what we have been doing in church or mission work was wrong, useless, or even harmful. If we think that way, we will likely be slower to change our approach. Yet merely because we have all failed in some ways and we realize our models are not perfect, we must not let that put us on the defensive and keep us from thinking clearly about important issues.

All this feels disruptive. But, it is at that point that we can hope that enough change will take place so that we can see ourselves and His church grow and go into frontier areas to make God's Name known. Ultimately, success is up to God, and we all want to be on board with what He is doing. ⊕

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