

# Editorial Comment



## God's Plan Is to Reach Families

Rick Wood, Editor, *Mission Frontiers*

As you read through this issue, prepare yourself for a paradigm shift in your thinking about what it means to do missions. Evangelicals from the West are so accustomed to thinking about reaching people with the gospel as distinct individuals—one at a time. Much of our theology and evangelistic practices are centered upon this individualistic approach apart from any connection people have with their family or community. Have we missed God's prime strategy for world evangelization with this exclusive focus on individuals?

Don't misunderstand me. Every individual must develop their relationship with Jesus Christ by faith in Him as his Savior and Lord. But that does not mean that he or she cannot be introduced to that relationship as part of a larger group such as a family.

Our hyper-individualistic, freedom-focused Western culture has dramatically impacted the methods that we have employed in reaching the unreached peoples. Most of our mission strategies over the last 200 years of the modern missionary movement have been focused on extracting individuals from their families and gathering these remnants of the surrounding society into churches. In the process these individuals lose much if not all access to presenting the gospel to their family and community. As the Church goes forth to enter the various unreached peoples for the first time, would not the gospel spread more easily and rapidly if the church came as a friend to families and the community as a whole rather than being seen as a destroyer of families—extracting its various members—taking them “captive” to a foreign community and system of beliefs?

As Alex Smith points out starting on page 14, this individualistic approach to world evangelization is not based in biblical or historical precedent. It is a more recent phenomenon for the church in the West—a by-product of our history with the Reformation. Smith provides numerous examples of how the standard practice before the Reformation was for whole families and peoples to turn to Christ *en masse*. He presents us with many practical suggestions for reaching families and not just individuals. He also debunks many of the myths and mistaken ideas regarding the effectiveness of reaching family groups versus a focus on just reaching individuals.

### Is Reaching Whole Families Really Possible?

The impact of one man's passion to reach his family can be seen on page 19. We present a story from Donald McGavran of one man named Ditt who persevered in reaching his whole family and created a people movement to Christ that impacted hundreds of thousands of people in India. In accord with common missionary practice, Ditt was urged not to go back to his family but to stay with the missionaries and they would give him a job. They were isolating him from his family and his community. How would his family ever hear the gospel this way? Instead, Ditt went against the mission methodology of his day and changed an entire people for Christ. Can that happen today?

With our focus on reaching just individuals we have overlooked one of the most effective ways to build God's kingdom by impacting whole families and peoples for Christ. Because of our own Western cultural background, the idea of whole families and peoples turning to Christ is

foreign to our thinking but not to God's. It was His plan all along.

T. and B. Lewis explain in their lead article starting on page 6 that the family is God's idea. He created it to accomplish His purposes for mankind—to spread His reign and rule to every family by using every family to fill the earth with His glory. God's design is for the family to do battle against Satan by bringing the knowledge of God to every family. Even the failure of the first family did not deter God from using other families to fill the earth with His glory. He used Noah and his family and he made a special promise to Abraham and his family that through Abraham and his seed all the families on earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). This promise to Abraham is ultimately fulfilled when every tribe, language, people and nation stands before God's throne in worship (Rev. 5:9, 7:9). This is no minor theme of Scripture, but the very heart of God's plan for humanity. It is also no surprise that Satan would be attacking the family so viciously—he knows that it is central to God's plan to defeat him.

The Lewises learned firsthand from their church-planting experiences that reaching family units was the most effective way to establish churches. They tried for years to gather the remnants of families into churches. They found repeatedly that these churches were inherently unstable and prone to break apart because there was mutual distrust among the members—they had no previous committed relationships. The Lewises discovered by “accident,” when someone invited them to share Christ with an entire family, that family units are the best means by which to build home fellowships. There is much greater trust and commitment within the family

than there is when you just gather some individual remnants of families together. The gospel also spreads more rapidly within the safety of the network of extended family relationships. You can read more about this in their article in the January-February 2009 issue of *MF* on page 16. Reaching whole families not only rests on a solid biblical foundation, but it is also the most effective strategy in many cultures.

### Rethinking Church Ministry to Families

How effective has the Church in the West been in equipping parents to disciple their kids and help them find God's calling on their lives? In his article starting on page 22, Rob Rienow points to recent statistics that show that we are increasingly losing each succeeding generation in the West to unbelief. Only 4% of the latest generation claims to be Bible-believing followers of Jesus.

Rienow identifies the root cause, "When it

comes to youth and children's ministry, we must acknowledge that the 'new experiment' has failed. The new experiment is age-segregated, church-building-based evangelism and discipleship of children. Parents drop them off. We split them up by age in different rooms in the building and 'disciple' them. In terms of Christian history, this is a brand-new idea. Slowly but surely, we abandoned the biblical model of family discipleship and delegated the spiritual training of our children to 'professionals' at church." One of the unintended consequences of this "new experiment" is, as Rienow describes, "parents were free to remain spiritually passive at home. After all, they were making sure that their son or daughter was involved in a 'great youth group.'"

The biblical focus should be on equipping parents to do the job of discipleship, not attempting to do the job for them. The church has taken over the proper role of the parents while abandoning the role of training parents and others to do the work

of the ministry. An unhealthy dependency has developed in the church. As the professionals have taken over more responsibility for discipling the young people, the parents have taken on less.

As Rienow points out, this is in stark contrast to the way it was in centuries past, when the parents were expected to disciple their children at home and there was strict accountability set up to make sure it got done. When was the last time your pastor or someone at church asked you how your family devotions were going? Has it ever happened? First, having family worship has not become a priority or an expectation from the church. Second, accountability has almost vanished from our churches. The renowned preacher Charles Spurgeon was so concerned about this trend, clear back in the 1800s that he said, "How can we hope to see the kingdom of our Lord advance when His own disciples do not teach His gospel to their own children?" (p. 23). Great question! How indeed? 🌐

## HISTORIC MERGER OF U.S. MISSION ASSOCIATIONS

CrossGlobal Link and The Mission Exchange are now one. With 159 years of combined history these two associations have joined forces to form Missio Nexus, one of the largest, most inclusive networks of Great Commission-oriented evangelicals in North America. With over 200 churches, mission organizations, training centers and educational institutions, the global impact of Missio Nexus extends to nearly every country in the world through the ministry of 35,000 missionaries serving with its affiliates.

Rebranding two associations with this much history requires a full-circle perspective that looks back and ahead all at the same time, blending timeless values with contemporary relevance. The board chose the name Missio Nexus because it captures a sense of appreciation for their rich history and a sense of anticipation for their preferred future.

*Missio*, the Latin word for mission, has been used in Great Commission literature over the years and affirms the importance of being on mission with God, standing on the shoulders of a great cloud of faithful witnesses proclaiming the unchanging message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. *Nexus* is a Latin word that has found a place in contemporary English and describes the coming together of two associations in this historic merger as well as a point of convergence where Great Commission influencers from North America can learn from each other and work together in servant partnership with the

global Church to make disciples of all nations.

The Missio Nexus board appointed Steve Moore, former President and CEO of The Mission Exchange, to serve as President of the new entity. Speaking about the merger, Moore said, "In coming together we embrace the unity promise of Psalm 133, 'For there the LORD bestows his blessing,' and the unity prayer of John 17, 'so that the world might believe.'"

In reflecting on the merger journey, Moore went on to say, "We never could have made it to this point without the commitment and partnership with Marvin Newell, Executive Director of CrossGlobal Link. I'm thrilled he has agreed to continue on with Missio Nexus as Senior Vice President."

In looking to the future Moore said, "The Great Commission is too big for any one organization to do it alone, and it's too important for us not to try to do it together. We invite you to join us on this journey as we explore the possibilities God is opening before us for shared learning, collaborative action and increased effectiveness through Missio Nexus."

**For more information, go to [www.MissioNexus.org](http://www.MissioNexus.org).**

