



## HOW TO KEEP THE UNREACHED PEOPLES...UNREACHED?

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I want to thank Rebecca Lewis for her marvelous work on the Sept.-Oct. 2019 issue of *MF* dealing with the “Death Industries.” She did a great job of research that will give fuel to evangelical efforts to rescue those perishing at the hands of these malevolent global forces.

This topic is very personal to me because I am one whose life has been deeply impacted by these “Death Industries.” Like many families around the world, alcohol and tobacco have done incalculable damage to my family and my wife’s family. My mother died prematurely from smoking and my twin brother and I have suffered with eyesight problems all our lives because my mother smoked while pregnant with us. My wife suffered verbal and physical abuse and neglect while growing up with a single, alcoholic mother.

The carnage wrought by the “Death Industries” needs to stop. We as followers of Jesus must do whatever we can to stop the suffering and death of millions of precious individuals as we work to bring the gospel to the lost, both locally and globally. Again, many thanks to Rebecca Lewis for her landmark work in this area.

### The Greatest Threat to the Mission of the Church

The most critical issue facing the mission of the Church today is the lack of clarity and understanding of what Jesus has asked us to do in Matt.

28:18-20, often referred to as the Great Commission. Answering the critical question of what is the central missionary task will determine what progress can be made.

According to George Barna’s research, (see pages 14–15 for a summary of his research) a whopping **51% of all church goers have never heard of the Great Commission and only 17% can correctly identify the passage and its meaning.** This is appalling! Even more troubling is that this ignorance is growing with each successive generation of believers. Only 10% of millennial believers have heard of the Great Commission.

This massive ignorance is crippling the mission of the Church. Every pastor should start teaching the Matt. 28, “Great Commission” passage, and not stop, until the majority of believers understand what Jesus has called us to do. **Our central identity as followers of Jesus is inextricably tied to what Jesus has asked us to do.** As Jesus followers, our true identity is as bearers of Christ’s mission to disciple all the peoples of the earth. Of course, there is a catch; this assumes that the pastors themselves understand what this passage means. Unfortunately, many do not, and that is what this issue of *MF* is all about.

This ignorance along with the continually shifting definitions of what “missions” means, have resulted in many church leaders

saying that, “Everything is missions and every believer is a missionary.” I am sure that these leaders mean well and are sincerely trying to get their congregants to take seriously the need to reach out to the lost in their midst, but a lack of clarity about the mission Jesus gave us is killing the Church’s ability to clearly focus its efforts and resources upon the critical task of fostering Kingdom Movements of discipleship and church planting within all peoples. When these leaders say that “everything is missions,” then any clear definition of the remaining missionary task becomes impossible, because everyone has their own definition centered upon that particular ministry they care about, not what Jesus has called us to do in Matt. 28. **If everything is missions, then nothing is missions.** If any destination will do, then any road and any vehicle will get you there.

In our lead article renowned author/pastor David Platt talks about what happens when pastors equate missions with their own local outreach or evangelism. “An emphasis on ‘your mission field’ can cause unhelpful tunnel vision such that you focus on the people/place right around you to the exclusion of people/places far beyond you. If we all just focus on ‘our mission field’ right around ‘our churches,’ then over 2 billion people will continue to be born, to live and to die without ever hearing the gospel. We need to see the world as our mission field.”

In order to put local ministry into its proper context we need to understand what that larger context is. In Matt. 28:18-20 Jesus calls **all** of us to go and make disciples. All of us have been called to obey the Great Commission and be disciple makers—teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded, including the command to make disciples. Multigenerational discipleship is inherent in the Great Commission. All of us are to live “on mission” with God to make disciples wherever God places us. **But that does not make us all missionaries.** In Acts 13 the Holy Spirit called out Paul and Barnabas in Antioch for the specific purpose of going cross-culturally to Gentiles. The Holy Spirit sent them, not to their own people or culture, but cross culturally to peoples that were not Jewish.

Likewise, today the Holy Spirit is calling people to leave their language and culture to become disciple-makers and church-planters in people groups near and far. As they go and the rest of us faithfully support them in their efforts, we are all faithfully fulfilling what Jesus has asked us to do to in Matt. 28. But if the majority of believers have no idea what Matt. 28:18–20 means, then they will have no idea that missionaries going out to foster movements in the unreached peoples should be fully supported with their prayers and finances. They can become involved in local needs and neglect God’s highest priority, that He would be worshipped and given glory by all peoples. If we have a proper understanding of what Matt. 28:18–20 means, then we can put what we do locally into its proper context and it will provide the motivation to do both local evangelism cross-cultural outreach to the unreached peoples.

David Platt provides some helpful clarity to the task Jesus gave us.

He [Jesus] has clearly commanded us not just to make disciples among as many people as possible, but to make disciples of all the nations, among all the peoples (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:47). This, after all, is the ultimate purpose of God in history: to save men and women from every nation, tribe, and tongue for His glory (Rev. 5; 7:9ff.). Therefore, every follower of Jesus and every leader in the church should live to see every nation reached with the gospel. **If we’re not focused on reaching those not yet reached, then we are either disregarding or disobeying the Great Commission.**

The best way to keep the unreached peoples unreached, is to keep calling all that the church does “mission,” and every believer a missionary and thereby keep people from understanding what the true missionary task is that Jesus has called us to obey.

## **We Need Your Ongoing Support as Vision Casters**

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