

Global Partnership: Re-Vision the Macedonian Vision – A Voice from the Global South

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Living in the 21st century, we are clearly now in the era of globalization. While the formation of globalization helps the advancement of the Great Commission by providing many unconventional tools (such as Skype calls, Internet-based UUPG database like Joshua Project, etc.), globalization also signals several unique challenges for the global mission in this generation. Among these challenges, this article will focus on the challenge of *global partnership*. Coming from the background of the Global South (to be more specific, born and grew up in Asia, saved and called in America, and serving in Africa now), the author would like to discuss about the challenge of the global partnership based on the passage of the Macedonian Vision given in Acts 16.

The Example of the Macedonian Vision

In the passage given in Acts 16:1-10, God directed Apostle Paul by revealing the Macedonian Vision. Moreover, several important principles can be learned from this passage. First, while Apostle Paul wanted to focus on the area of Asia Minor, God led Paul to advance to Europe – a geographic breakthrough. In this passage, God stopped Apostle Paul not just once, but twice in his ministries. The first time was in verse 6; Paul and his team worked hard and traveled through certain area in Asia Minor called Phrygia and Galatia. However, they “[had] been *kept* by the Holy Spirit *from* preaching the word in the province of Asia” (v.6b). The second time happened

immediately in the next verse. Because Paul and his team wouldn't give up so easily, they moved on to other places of Asia Minor for ministries. "When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus *would not allow them to*" (v.7). Then Paul's team "passed by Mysia and went down to Troas" (v.8). And in verse 9, God revealed the vision of Macedonia to Paul. While Apostle Paul worked hard and wanted to focus on Asia Minor, God had a different plan and want to expand His Kingdom to the continent of Europe. Thus, God stopped Paul's ministries twice, and then changed Paul's plan totally.

The Bible tells us, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, either are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isa. 55:8-9). Because God gives us wisdom to think, there is nothing wrong for us to plan our ministries. But the key is that we need to be sensitive to *God's* will and guidance, rather than being stuck in *our* plans. In other words, there should be no contradictions between *praying* and *planning*.

However, as human beings, we should realize our own limitation in terms of knowledge and scope. And praying (i.e. seeking God's will) should always have higher priority than planning (i.e. pursuing our will). Are you working hard and encountering bottlenecks for your ministries now? Is it possible that God is trying to show you something bigger and better by expanding your scope and platform? Do you insist your own plans (i.e. my way or no way)? Or do you keep an attitude of open-minded and allow God to replace *His* plan for your plan?

Second, Apostle Paul developed fellow workers with ethnic diversity intentionally. As God had called Paul to focus on ministering to the Gentiles, it is important to notice that Paul not only shared the Gospel with the Gentiles, but also purposely developed leaders among the Gentiles. In the passage of Acts 16:1-10, we can see that Paul first took along Timothy with him, and Timothy

was a half-Jew and a half Greek. (v.1) Moreover, this passage is the well-known “we” passage, for the subject of this passage has been changed from “they” in verses 1-9 to “we” in verse 10. While the subject of “they” is referring to “Paul and his companions” (v.6), clearly the subject of “we” is referring to “Paul and his companions” *and* Luke – the author of Acts. So who was Luke? He was a gentile, a medical doctor (Col. 4:14), and an intellect who wrote both the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:1) and the book of Acts (Acts 1:1).

When we apply this principle for cross-cultural missions, one key challenge is to develop *national* workers. Coming from the background of the Global South, I deeply appreciate the love and efforts of churches and mission agencies of the Global North. However, I must admit that I have some mixed feelings about the efforts of the churches and mission agencies in the Global North. For example, the focus of Unreached and Unengaged People Groups (UUPG) is an honorable priority. In order to fulfill the Great Commission entrusted by our Lord, undoubtedly all Christians should pray, take real actions, and invest our time and efforts for this special privilege given by our God. But one of the key questions is *how*? Many times, when I was attending mission conferences or church planting seminars, I observed that most attendants were from the Global North, and only very few from the Global South.

If we agree that the challenge of the Global Mission is too big for any one church denomination or one mission agency to finish the task, then the reasonable solution is that the challenge of the Global Mission needs the participation of the Global Church. In other words, the Global Mission demands the global partnership, by including all of churches in the Global North *and* in the Global South. For example, in African countries where our mission Africa inland Mission is working, currently there are a total of 723 UUPGs (per *Luke's Leadings* dated on March

28, 2014). Following the good practice of sending missionaries two-by-two for each UUPG (cf. Luke 10:1), we will need to recruit, train and send *at least* 1446 missionaries for this need.

On the other hand, if we can have 400 of our current missionaries committed to multiply ourselves by equipping at least *three* of our African brothers and sisters (cf. 2 Tim.2:2), then we will have a total of 1600 missionaries (400 initiatives plus 1200 nationals). Serving in a Bible college and focusing on equipping our African brothers and sisters for cross-cultural missions, I agree that the equipping task itself is very challenging. However, I must humbly admit that once called by God for missions, our African brothers and sisters are far more effective and efficient than me in cross-cultural missions, especially in terms of cultural discernment and language learning. While serving UUPGs in the challenging areas is an honorable calling, should we view equipping national churches for UUPGs as an equally (if not higher) honorable calling as well?

The book of Ephesians is an important book related to the doctrine of Church. In Eph.4, the Bible says,

It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13).

Applied to the context of a local church, a pastor's role and first priority is *not* to be a superman or a lone ranger who will do all ministries by himself alone, but "*to prepare God's people for works of service*" (v.12). Now taking from the perspective of the Global Church, should we say that the churches and mission agencies in the Global North should take a leading role in *preparing* God's people in their counter partners in the Global South for works of service, such as cross-cultural missions?

Third, Apostle Paul's ministry was fruitful, especially in casting vision and mobilizing other believers, both Jews and Gentiles. In the passage of Acts 16:1-10, we can observe a dramatic changing point between verses 9 and 10. The Bible says,

During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' After Paul had seen the vision, *we* got ready *at once* to leave for Macedonia, *concluding* that God had called *us* to preach the gospel to them (vv.9-10).

In other words, after receiving the vision, Paul had successfully not only shared his vision with others, but also recruited them to join the noble task. For a leader, one of his top challenges is to help other people not only in understanding his vision, but also in *owning* the vision. Thus, the vision can be become a shared vision and owned by the team. And in this case, Paul was able to recruit Luke a Gentile, intellect and medical doctor to become his fellow team member. What a blessing for Paul and his ministries in several aspects! Can we imagine that we go to an African church or any other church for vision sharing, and in the end a medical doctor is willing to join our team for our ministries in CAN (Creative Access Nation)? Therefore, in our ministries we should not forget the importance of vision-casting and mission-mobilizing, both in our sending countries *and* in our host countries.

Conclusion

Based on the passage of Acts 16:1-10, we have found several important principles for cross-cultural missions. First, while Apostle Paul wanted to focus on the area of Asia Minor, God led Paul to advance to Europe – a geographic breakthrough. Thus, praying (seeking God's will) should always have higher priority than planning (pursuing our will). And prayer should be our number one strategy. Second, Apostle Paul developed fellow workers with ethnic diversity intentionally. Following this good practice, we should multiply ourselves, and view equipping our African

brothers and sisters in missions with a much higher priority. Third, Apostle Paul's ministry was fruitful, especially in casting vision and mobilizing other believers, both Jews and Gentiles. In addition to modeling in cross-cultural missions, the churches of the Global South should take a leading *and serving* role in equipping the churches of the Global South especially in the areas of vision-casting and team-mobilizing.

As we focus on the Gospel needs of UUPGs and send people to challenging areas to respond to such important needs, we should not forget the priority of equipping our brothers and sisters in the Global South for missions. The challenge of the Global Mission can be the beauty of the Global Mission as well. By developing Global Partnership, all churches both in the Global North and the Global South can join hands together, "*so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity*" in Christ (Eph. 4:12b-13a). Thus, for the churches and mission agencies in the Global North, are we ready to help and equip the counter parts in the Global South to be the new blood of the mission force for the Kingdom of God? My humble request is – Let the North equip the South. Together we send the best to the rest.

In Acts 20, the Bible tells us "remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: 'It is *more* blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35b). While the context of Acts 20:35 is talking about helping the poor, the same biblical principle can be applied in the areas of spiritual format, church growth and mission mobilization as well. One of the key indicators of a mature Christian is that they are willing to share their blessings with others, and they take a role as a giver, rather than as a taker. When a local church is willing to "give" by sharing the Gospel with others, it shows that this church has become more mature and responsible. Moreover, this church is ready to be "more blessed" by God, because as Christians, we are blessed to be a blessing (cf. Gen.12:3).

Do we really believe that the involvement of missions is a bigger and better blessing? Do we want to develop mature and responsible Africa churches for the fulfillment of the Great Commission? If yes, then why are we hesitant in passing the privilege to our beloved African brothers and sisters and equipping the churches of the Global South to fulfill God's purpose in the Great Commission? Let us remember that our Lord Jesus Himself says, "It is *more* blessed to give than to receive!"