

## **REDIRECTING MEMBERS OF SHORT-TERM MISSION TO UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS**

By  
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### **SHORTAGE OF MANPOWER TOWARDS THE UNREACHED**

One crucial and fascinating but often-overlooked aspect of taking the Gospel to the remaining Unreached People Groups of the world is how new missionaries choose their countries of service. In 1983, when we first read that there were only about 85,000 missionaries serving in the world, we were shocked. Still, we felt sure about one thing: We need more missionaries.<sup>[i]</sup> As Justin Long stated recently in *Momentum Magazine*, “Reaching the unreached is a challenging task, but our primary problem is not the cultural, economic, logistical or political barriers we face. It is more simple: we lack sufficient manpower.”<sup>[ii]</sup>

A few years later, when we discovered that 90 percent of all missionaries were serving in the already-reached parts of the world, we became deeply concerned.<sup>[iii]</sup> Not only do we need more missionaries, but we need more people in the places where no one ever volunteers to go or feels “called” to serve in. Since that time, we have had a great interest in observing how future missionaries choose their countries of service. Missionaries Serving Reached Peoples: 420,000. Missionaries Serving Unreached Peoples: 10,000

### **THE UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS**

Over the past 30 years, as the Frontier Mission Movement has focused on taking the Gospel to Unreached People Groups around the world, the situation has improved slightly. Nevertheless, the vast majority of missionaries (90%) still serve where the church is already established.<sup>[iv]</sup> If we consider *all* missionaries (as shown above), then actually 98 percent serve in reached areas and only 2 percent serve among the unreached. (See “Missionaries to the Unreached . . . A Very Small Slice”).

Dr. Ralph Winter and the U.S. Center for World Mission, along with many others, have called attention to the thousands of ethnic groups yet to have their own church. The Lausanne and AD 2000 and Beyond Movements, as well as Luis Bush’s development of the 10/40 Window concept, have impacted and influenced mission agencies, churches, and Christians worldwide to place heightened attention on the unreached peoples of the world.

The *Perspectives* course, which clearly paints the picture of the world situation, was created in part to give future missionaries (e.g., the Urbana mission conference long-term mission commitment card signers) information on the world situation so that they could make a well-informed decision regarding many aspects of their future mission service. Major topics addressed in the course include where in the world to serve and what approaches to use. Yet in

all these years, the simple idea of assigning new missionaries to the Unreached People Groups has somehow been overlooked.

With as few as 10,000 workers serving today among the thousands of Unreached People Groups of the world, however, the vast number of Unreached People Groups will remain unreached as new missionaries continue to join the throng of missionaries already serving in the reached areas of the world.<sup>[vi]</sup> The Church (Senders) and most missionaries (Goers) both seem to be echoing what Moses said to God in Exodus 4:13 “O Lord, please send someone else to do it.”

### THE “ZEAL FOR ME”

In previous mission eras, most candidates simply went to the country where they were assigned by their mission agency or denominational sending board.<sup>[vii]</sup> Today’s self-oriented individualism, however, has resulted in a Christianized form of Maslow’s hierarchy with the ultimate goal of “attaining my own personal spiritual fulfillment.”<sup>[viii]</sup> Perhaps this has blinded many people, causing them to focus more on the gifts and “calling” of the missionary instead of the command to take the Gospel to every tribe, tongue, and nation (*ethne* or peoples). Indeed, we fully endorse the scriptural teachings regarding wise stewardship of our spiritual gifts and talents, but *where* we use them also needs to be guided by the Scriptures, not just our personal preferences.

Trying to seek our own self-fulfillment, a spin-off of modern psychology, is contrary to the most basic concept that Jesus taught His disciples. “He knew that the only path to true fulfillment lay in denying self. The only way to find truly abundant life is to throw your life away for Jesus’ sake.”<sup>[ix]</sup> The vast majority of new missionaries today simply go where they want to serve and do what they want to do. They add to the masses—today still 90%—serving among already-reached peoples. “The biggest hindrance to the missionary task is self. Self that refuses to die. Self that refuses to sacrifice. Self that refuses to give. Self that refuses to go.”<sup>[x]</sup> We would add another hindrance: self that refuses to go where few, if any, missionaries are serving.

Almost completely lost today is any consideration of the point of view of the unreached peoples themselves who are still waiting for missionaries to bring the Gospel to them for the very first time. If a lost Libyan (who deep down longs to really know God) were on a church missions committee or mission agency leadership team, where would he or she vote to send a willing missionary candidate?

This “zeal for me,” which often results in new missionaries going where they want to, means that the current 6,000 to 10,000 Unreached People Groups will continue to remain unreached unless mission agencies change their policies, ask candidates to be willing to go anywhere, and work together with each team of willing candidates (and their sending churches) to research and select an Unreached People Group.<sup>[xi]</sup> No one knows better than mission agency leaders which specific Unreached People Groups no one ever volunteers for. These “unengaged” (with few, if any, missionaries) Unreached People Groups should be at the top of the list that agency leaders begin recommending to willing candidates.

## **WHY DO MOST NEW MISSIONARIES END UP SERVING IN WELL-EVANGELIZED COUNTRIES RATHER THAN UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS?**

During almost 20 years of mingling with pre-candidates (future missionaries), we have observed that most new missionaries select their fields of service based on an initial short-term trip. “Indeed, recruitment is a primary reason agencies began facilitating short-term missions. The Southern Baptist International Mission Board (SBIMB) appointed 885 new missionaries in 1998. Of those, 85 percent said God used short-term mission experiences to confirm their call.”<sup>[xi]</sup>

Many pre-candidates choose where to serve long-term by first going on one or a series of short-term trips to a country. They fall in love with the place and the people. We must work together to change this trend, however, because the primary result seems to be that most new missionaries continue to go where the majority of missionaries are already serving—that is, in the reached parts of the world.

One simple reason for this pattern is the reality that long-term field missionaries who serve in the already Christianized parts of the world are the primary hosts for the vast majority of short-term mission trips. Deeply influenced by their short-term experiences, most new missionaries often choose to go back to serve long-term in the same countries, or even as teammates with, the long-term missionaries that they met on their short-term trips. Nevertheless, this very fact means that new workers continue to throng to the already-reached areas where most missionaries are based. They end up joining in the work of those missionaries who are primarily working with Christians in churches that have already been established. This self-perpetuating pattern is a major factor in keeping the Unreached People Groups from being penetrated.

If a pre-candidate asks for advice from the missionary they got to know on their short-term trip, the field missionary likely will invite this new missionary to come and serve where the long-term missionary is already serving. Almost every missionary we have met over the past 25 years was understaffed and would rarely turn down the possibility of a fully-funded new worker to join in their ministry.

Most new missionaries feel “led” based on this kind of personal contact and information from missionaries they meet out on the field during short-term trips. For some pre-candidates, the field missionaries they met on short-term trips may be the only missionaries they know, and for some new missionary candidates, this kind of personal invitation from a long-term field missionary may be the very “sign” from God that they were praying for.

For some new, young missionaries, it may be very prestigious (and quite an honor) to have an older, senior field missionary recognize the young missionary candidate who may not yet have their own sense of confidence and direction. An offer from the older missionary to come and serve together may literally be too hard for the younger missionary to turn down. The result is that many new missionaries will accept such offers and thus, continue to go where churches are already established rather than to Unreached People Groups.

In the past, contact with long-term missionaries was likely minimal, perhaps during a furlough visit to the pre-candidate’s home church. The dusty missionary photo next to the world map in the church foyer really is a real person who springs to life every four or five years on the church stage. Maybe there was time for the pre-candidate to meet with that field missionary

during the following week over lunch. Maybe not. Either way, contact was minimal with little sense of relationship.

Due to the exploding short-term missions movement, the one-on-one relationship-building that many pre-candidates have with long-term field missionaries has greatly increased.<sup>[xiii]</sup> Now, pre-candidates can more easily get to know a long-term missionary out on the field during their short-term mission trip experience. In fact, some pre-candidates may meet the same missionary every year during multiple trips to the same place. In some cases today, the frequent short-terminer may actually visit a field missionary on the field more than that same long-term missionary visits the supporting church that the short-terminer calls home. The relationship is not only deeper but also more dynamic because it develops out on the field rather than inside the walls of the home church.

Now it is much easier for the aspiring mission candidate to literally visualize themselves living and working in the very same place as the field missionary they met on a short-term trip. Some new missionaries have already lived in their selected country of service for days, weeks, or even months via short-term trips to that place. The resulting impact on the young future missionaries is often an even stronger feeling of being “called” to work long-term in that well-evangelized country, possibly even with that missionary.

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This cycle must either be broken or at least greatly redirected. We must begin to explore both creative and very tangible ways to see the spinning-out-of-control short-term missions movement make a radical shift toward short-term mission trips to Unreached People Groups.<sup>[xiii]</sup> How else will we see a new wave of missionaries who feel “called” to go to these people groups?

This will not be easy, though. The first obvious major barrier to seeing short-term vision and pre-search trips to Unreached People Groups is the reality that so few long-term workers are already serving among Unreached People Groups. Thus, few are there to arrange short-term trips. Also, if we are talking about the Unengaged Unreached People Groups, then workers serving among them and information about them is scarce, and short-term trips there are almost unheard of. Thus, as it is today, and has been for many decades, there is almost no way for aspiring missionaries to feel “called” or “led” to an Unreached People Group in the normal pattern of going on a short-term trip there first.<sup>[xiv]</sup>

In one sense, it would almost be better for future missionaries not to talk with long-term field missionaries if one of the primary results is more new workers serving in the well-evangelized parts of the world. Ironically, however, many of the same long-term field missionaries who help organize short-term trips often (but not always) have the latest and best information on nearby Unengaged Unreached People Groups.

How wonderful it would be if the short-term mission movement took a major paradigm shift in purpose toward being used specifically (or could we hope and dream . . . even exclusively?) as a tool to get new workers into people groups that currently have few or no missionaries serving among them. Perhaps we need to further challenge, encourage, and train

field missionaries on how to organize and host vision and pre-search trips primarily to Unreached People Groups.

We do indeed highly recommend that new missionaries sit at the feet of and learn from experienced missionaries. Churches sending missionaries directly without leaning on the decades of wisdom, experience, and knowledge that both long-term field missionaries and their agencies have has been a mistake. Traditionally, new missionaries may serve their first and even second term under the wing of a senior field missionary. Those senior missionaries know well how to work strategically in that area, region, and country.

If we assume that passing the baton of knowledge and experience can only occur when younger and older missionaries actually work together (on location) in the same field, however, then we have raised yet another barrier to getting new missionaries into Unreached People Groups. The only way for new missionaries to actually reach Unengaged Unreached People Groups is to go beyond where other missionaries are already working.

We must find a better way to pass on this crucial knowledge and experience. Many agencies today use email, telephone, and visits by traveling regional supervisors to wherever new missionaries are working. The real root problem, however, is that many new missionaries actually prefer having a live person around all the time who can help them at a moment's notice. This is another strong factor enticing new missionaries to choose to serve in the already reached parts of the world.

Short-term mission trips, invitations to serve with missionaries working in evangelized areas, lack of vision trips to Unreached People Groups, and a pattern of serving directly under the constant personal supervision and guidance of veteran missionaries are all reasons why most new missionaries end up going to the "reached" parts of the world. Perhaps an even larger factor is the reality that it is often just much easier to serve in reached areas. That ease is a big attraction for many missionaries. The biggest factor, however, may well be something much less tangible, yet far more influential, than any factor we have presented thus far. It is called one's "calling."

## **The Awe of the Call**

There is a long-standing, hallowed tradition—primarily held, guarded, and promoted by missionaries—that one must be "called" to serve in a certain country and to a specific kind of mission work. Kevin Howard boldly challenges this by stating: "But Scripture doesn't teach this concept of a call for all believers, or even for most believers."<sup>[xv]</sup>

In fact, it seems that most "mission folk" are rather in awe of this mysterious call. If we step back for a moment, however, and realize that the flip-side of our "calling" to missions is millions of Christians who are sure they are "not called," then we may want to go back and re-examine this tradition in light of Scripture.

It is a sad irony that those most devoted to missions are often also the ones most perplexed by the fact that the vast majority of Christians think missions is irrelevant. Perhaps mission leaders, missionaries, and mobilizers have helped fuel this dichotomy between the "called" and the "not called" that is not found anywhere in Scripture. We have been trying for

decades to figure out how to get more pew-sitters (who could care less about what we love most) actively involved in missions either as Senders or Goers.

We (mission folk) are sure the Great Commission is a command for all believers, not just those of us who were “called” into full-time mission service. Indeed, with all our hearts we also believe this is true! But the very way we talk about our own “calling” may well be one of the prime factors fueling the masses of Christians who do not have missions anywhere on their “page,” much less their hearts.

Many mission leaders have tried for years to show that all Christians are commanded to be involved some way in missions either as Senders or Goers. There is no third option for sidelined benchwarmers (or pew-warmers). Everyone is in the game! Yet today, most data continue to reveal the fact that, worldwide, only about 10 percent of those who call themselves Christians are actively involved in world evangelization.<sup>[xvi]</sup> Those 10 percent, sometimes referred to as “Great Commission Christians,” would almost all fall into the popular new category called “Senders.” (And if we dare try to calculate what percentage the 10,000 missionaries to the Unreached People Groups represent out of all 2.1 billion Christians in the world, then we are only talking about 0.0005%). Seemingly lost today is simple obedience to the obvious command clearly found in the Scriptures: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15 NIV). Also overlooked is the great need found in the world situation today (still 10,000 Unreached People Groups with few missionaries serving among them).

Perhaps we need to develop a better way of talking about our “callings” with more emphasis on the Scriptures—such as God’s command for everyone to be involved in taking the Gospel to the whole world (Matthew 28:18–20)—and less talk about our own personal “callings.” Sharing how God is “guiding” us or how the Holy Spirit is “leading” may both be more biblically-based terms. They are certainly applicable in the daily lives of all believers.

Some may argue at this point, “Well that is just semantics; it does not really matter which words you use.” (Semantics, by the way, is the study of the meaning of words). The point here, however, is that the images and meanings conjured up by the word “calling” have tremendous ramifications on both new and old missionaries alike, as well as on non-missionaries. For many, the meaning of the word “calling” is very powerful, almost sacred.

Many people seem to have more of an “Awe of the Call” to mission service rather than an actual awe of God Himself. We wonder if perhaps individualism and the pursuit of a Christianized self-actualization may also at times be cloaked in the “call” with its often high-priority focus on *me*, *my* gifts, and *my* desires.

Maybe Christians cloak their choices in spiritual language—“God’s calling me”—to make themselves feel better about their choice or to keep people from questioning their choice. Why not just say: “The Bible tells believers to make disciples. Therefore, I want to go to Egypt,” or “Even though I have reservations about going to Egypt, I think they could benefit from my help as a follower of Christ”? What harm is there in approaching Christian service in that way? God is still glorified.<sup>[xvii]</sup>

Most likely, the “Awe of the Call” evolved over the centuries from two key biblical models: Isaiah’s “call” and Paul’s “call.” The following passages are perhaps those that many

have used over time in attempts to base the idea in Scripture, along with the long-held tradition of a “calling” to missions service.

### **Isaiah’s Call**

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8 NIV)

### **Paul’s Call**

Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:16–18 NIV).

It is rather easy to show that Isaiah’s “call” was to serve as a prophet in Israel, not as a missionary. Paul’s “call” is more likely the foundation that any missionary would love to use to scripturally substantiate their own personal “calling.” I know I would. I am unashamed to admit that after Jesus Himself, Paul is my hero! Some have questioned, however, whether there really is sufficient biblical evidence to confirm the idea of the traditional “call” to missions so popular in the jargon of missionaries.

Kevin Howard, referring to different passages than those above, wrote in *EMQ* in 2003:

As we think about a calling, let’s consider the first missionary journey in Acts 13:2. It says, “And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’” (NASV). The other passage that comes to mind regarding God’s call to missions is the Macedonian Call in Acts 16. Paul wanted to preach in Asia, but was forbidden by the Spirit, and a vision led him to Macedonia. Many Christians conclude that all believers must therefore have this kind of clear calling. But, can we make either of these experiences the standard for all other missionaries? If so, why? Nowhere does Scripture promise this sort of clarity when doing God’s will.<sup>[xviii]</sup>

I agree with Howard that there seems to be scant scriptural evidence to support the long-held tradition of a “calling” to missions service. Perhaps, though, we are actually arguing against this idea of a “calling” for a different reason than Howard.<sup>[xix]</sup>

Few argue with the concept that the Great Commission indeed applies to all believers, and teaching all believers to obey the Great Commission is actually part of that commission (“teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you,” Matthew 28:20 NIV). Perhaps if we let go of this tradition of requiring missionaries to have a “calling” we will actually see many more Senders and Goers raised up who are motivated to “send” and “go” simply by obeying the Great Commission.

Howard's article received a strong critique through a long letter to the editor of *EMQ* from a well-known missionary who was "shocked and deeply disturbed" that someone questioned the idea of the "call" to missions service.<sup>[xx]</sup> In this article, we are not really challenging the idea of the "call" so much as the way I think it is often misused. In fact, my own "call" more than twenty years ago is still foundational to what I am doing today.

The general "calling" or decision to serve in career missions work perhaps needs to be differentiated from the specific "calling" to a certain country or people group. Many mission folk tend to use the term "calling" to describe both, even if our "calling" to serve in career missions and our "calling" to serve in a specific country came many years apart from one another, as often is the case. Our focus here is on "calling" as we use that term in relation to place of service (country and people group).

Rather than fully entering into a theological debate as to whether or not the idea of a "calling" has substantial scriptural footing, we simply would like to think about how the traditional "call" to a specific country does not seem to be well-guided by the biblical emphasis to take the Gospel to those who have never heard. "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation" (Romans 15:20 NIV).

How do we explain God's calling only 10 percent of all missionaries to the Unreached People Groups? Are only two missionaries out of every 100 hearing the Holy Spirit call them to these 10,000 Unreached People Groups still waiting to hear the Gospel? Does not the Holy Spirit want to send missionaries to these Unreached Peoples? Is the problem the Holy Spirit, or perhaps is it the fact that we are not truly listening? Perhaps we are not able to really listen to God mainly because we already thought for sure God "called" us to go somewhere else based on being "led" through our short-term experience and contact with a missionary we met there in a well-evangelized country.

Do we perhaps mistakenly apply the concept and especially the timing of when we receive our personal "call" to serve in a certain country? If this is the case, then it is possible that mission agency leaders, who are best suited to steer people to Unreached People Groups, do not suggest specific people groups because these leaders also have the same "awe" and respect for the mysterious "call" of service to a certain country. In fact, these agency leaders likely hold very dearly their own personal "call" to the country they formerly served in and are not about to tell a new missionary, even someone willing to serve anywhere, which country or people group they should serve in. That would be tantamount to breaking the long-held tradition and perhaps even putting in jeopardy their own previous "calling" to the field they served in. However, it does not need to.

What we are suggesting is that the "calling" to a particular Unreached People Group (and country) can just as easily take place after the mission agency assigns the new missionary to a specific people and place. This is simply a timing change. Both old and new missionaries could still gather years later and share stories about their "calling" to serve in a certain country with a specific people group.

Would not almost all mission agency leaders be thrilled if a new generation of applicants began filling in their application forms as follows: Country of Calling: *Anywhere*. People Group: *Assign us*. If this actually began to happen, these leaders could not only maintain the integrity of their own previous "calling" but also help many new applicants discover their own "calling"



through the new process of being assigned to the peoples and places that few people ever write on those lines of their application forms. As it stands today, in general, most agencies simply want the missionary to go where the missionary feels “called” to go (and possibly just where the missionary wants to go).

Frontiers and Pioneers are two of my favorite mission agencies. They each grew out of the Frontier Mission Movement in direct response to the shift toward Unreached People Groups; in fact, these fine agencies send missionaries only to Unreached People Groups. If most sending agencies, including Frontiers and Pioneers, still follow the traditional “awe of the call” concept, then thousands of Unreached People Groups that these two agencies (and many others) would love to target will still remain unreached, and workers they recruit and send will continue to amass among certain “popular” Unreached People Groups.

The long-held tradition of having a “calling” to a specific country and people group before joining a mission agency may actually be thwarting many agencies’ original vision to get workers into as many Unreached People Groups as possible. It certainly seems to be thwarting Jesus’ original command to go to all peoples.

Why not look more at how the timing of the “calling” to a specific country and people group might come as a process in community between the sending church, the candidate, and the sending agency? Could it not occur closer to the actual time of departure to the field or even after arriving to the place of service one has been assigned? One biblical model that seems to support a post-arrival (or arrival at their post!) “calling” is the way that Paul and Barnabas were sent off by the Antioch church. In fact, these two new missionaries got most of their direction to various cities, countries, and peoples after they landed on the mission field!

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper (Acts 13:1–5 NIV).

The way Paul and Barnabas were sent off seems to provide biblical support to the idea of receiving one’s “calling” at the time of departure or even after arriving on the field. They had no short-term experiences. Their “calling” (or sending, if you look at it from the church’s point of view) involved no sense of specific countries or peoples. They were not limited by imagining God had told them years earlier to serve in a specific country. Their prime directive seemed to be that which applies to all believers—to take the Gospel to the whole world. “It really is God giving the vision for the world rather than just the specific country,” as the director of training at a mission agency once told me.

Therefore, we propose that new missionary candidates should wait, pray, and be willing to go anywhere. Then, they should receive their “call” from God closer to their departure time, just at Paul and Barnabas did, with confirmation of their “call” through specific guidance from God and the leading of the Holy Spirit while already on the field they are sent to.

The simple, two-part solution that we are suggesting is to encourage pre-candidates not to choose a country or people group, but be willing to serve anywhere while at the same time asking mission agencies to assign them to Unreached People Groups, especially those people groups that have the fewest missionaries.

## **Willing and Waiting**

How many stories do we know of missionaries who were on their way to one of the 141 already well-evangelized countries of the world that have 60 percent or more church members when they were redirected to an Unreached People Group.<sup>[xxi]</sup> I personally know of only one or two examples in 20 years of working with pre-candidates.

On the other hand, how many stories do we know of mission candidates who marched off to serve in countries where the church is well-established? Probably most of the missionaries we know serve there, since 90 percent (or more) of all missionaries are serving in the evangelized parts of the world. In Romans 15:20, Paul clearly emphasizes his desire not to work where other missionaries are already serving to ensure that he is taking the Gospel to those who have never heard. This should be our desire as well. For centuries since Paul penned this prototype “mission statement,” the Church has almost completely lost this desire to avoid “building on someone else’s foundation.” Sometimes, we actually seem to prefer the places with established foundations.

The simple idea we are suggesting begins with asking pre-candidates (as well as new mission agency applicants), during their long years of preparation, to wait and receive their “call” by submitting to the mission agency and their sending church with a willingness to be steered or guided especially to a country and an Unreached People Group that no one is volunteering for.

We feel that mission agencies and churches should ask those seriously considering long-term mission service not to decide where they want to go but rather to wait and be willing to be assigned to an overlooked country and people group. Actually, pre-candidates should be challenged with this concept early on, perhaps before or during their first short-term mission trip, because many decide where to go years before joining a mission agency and departing for their long-term place of service. Where to serve (meaning country and ethnic group) is perhaps the most crucial decision that missionaries, mission agencies, and sending churches make.

We believe the Spirit is calling. Yet new missionaries are often not in a position to listen because of what they already thought God told them regarding their country of service. The Bible certainly seems to support the idea of having a willing obedience to God without first having all the details spelled out. Surely flexibility, submission, willingness, and obedience are all qualities that every aspiring missionary should have. Encouraging new missionaries to have a willingness to serve anywhere is not asking them to do anything more than what God is asking them to do. Agencies and sending churches should then work together to assign these willing candidates to Unreached People Groups.

## Agencies Assigning

Most of us have experienced an uneasy feeling when individual members of a Christian group, committee, or team disagree on what should be done in a given situation. Impasse, deadlock, and delay are often the results. As the Holy Spirit is sought through prayer, however, the affirmation that indeed the Spirit is speaking, and not just people, can be found through agreement. The Holy Spirit can guide different people—sometimes with their own personal agendas—together in unity regarding an important decision.

The Bible teaches this simple, yet too rarely applied, principle for discernment in decision-making. When the Holy Spirit speaks, directs, and guides, confirmation can be discovered by the agreement of those in spiritual authority.

The situation in Antioch, described in Acts 13, shows that the church leaders (which many believe included Paul and Barnabas) all agreed on the decision to send out these two as missionaries. We can more clearly discern the Holy Spirit's work in *community* to affirm a decision than we can by ourselves. It is far easier to be misled when making a decision on our own. Deceiving ourselves goes back all the way to the Garden. All of us are naturally pretty good at it.

We see the same pattern in Acts 1:23–26 when a new apostle was appointed to replace Judas. They began with two choices, prayed, and then all agreed to select Matthias. Again in Acts 6:1–7, when the problem about distributing food to the widows arose, agreement among the leadership regarding what to do and who to have do it was confirmed by one thing: agreement. Actually, the 12 apostles agreed to delegate the decision to the much larger group (the disciples) who, amazingly (because it is not always easy to see large groups come to agreement), were able to agree upon seven men to fulfill this need.

We believe that these (and other) biblical models suggest that God's will can best be both sought and confirmed through a communal decision. Thus, regarding the country and people group placements of new missionaries, we suggest that the three-legged community of church, the applicant (new missionary), and the mission agency as the closest modern application of these biblical models. To achieve this, we need to literally (e.g. by email and phone) connect the new missionaries, their home or sending church leaders, and their mission agency leaders so that together they can pray, discuss, and discern which country and Unreached People Groups to send the new missionaries to.

Once all three parties agree on the same country and people group, then together they can all be much more assured that they are truly hearing from God. If two or three of the parties begin by choosing different countries and people groups, then they must go back to the prayer room until a unified decision is reached.

One caution with this approach is in order. If the mission agency, sending church, or missionary is not fully committed to sending and going only to Unreached People Groups, especially where few or no missionaries are serving, then this communal decision process may actually backfire, resulting in more new missionaries going to the well-evangelized parts of the world. If at least one or even two of the three parties have this conviction and commitment to go where other missionaries are not going, however, then the other parties can be moved by the Holy Spirit to eventually agree on one and the same direction.

Leadership teams at churches, mission agencies, and other types of ministries spend a significant amount of time meeting and discussing where to place, replace, assign, and reassign (or sometimes even release) staff members serving under their authority. Just because new missionaries are not working directly on location in those ministry “offices” does not mean that less time should be devoted to discussing these new candidates’ specific placement on the field. Should not the placement and role of their “field staff,” the home churches and mission agencies of the new missionaries, justify as much or even more time for discussion among those leaders? The same unity in decision making used daily among spiritual leaders can also be used in assigning new missionaries to the field.

This process may well be more biblical. In fact, it may actually offer even more assurance for the new missionary than the commonly-heard argument that one must have a sure “calling” to a country or they may later lose heart, give up, and come home when faced with difficulties. Seeing these three parties start with possibly three different choices, yet later end up agreeing on the same country and people group, can also provide assurance of the Holy Spirit’s guidance. It may provide even more confidence and joy, as it seemed to do for Paul and Barnabas. They did not seem to struggle with doubts about the decision that was made by the leaders in the Antioch church.

In the old paradigm, where placing missionaries in specific countries was the primary focus for most mission agencies, there were far fewer options than with today’s focus on reaching the remaining 10,000 Unreached People Groups. In previous mission eras many agencies specialized on one continent, a certain region or a specific religious bloc. The number of options was radically lower when discerning which country to assign the new missionary applicant to. For large denominational agencies who desired to have representation in every country of the world, there were less than 200 options. And for continental or regionally focused agencies, the number of country placement options often would have been well below 50. This is nothing compared to 10,000 options for placement!

Perhaps the sheer number of Unreached People Groups in the world today has made some agency and church leaders think “Why only God can choose where to assign you,” so they opt out of the tremendous opportunity God has given them to place new missionaries into overlooked people groups. Therefore, we are challenging mission agencies to turn the clock back and once again begin assigning willing long-term workers, this time not only to countries but specifically to Unreached People Groups.

1. Future missionaries should wait and pray that God would give them a heart willing to go any where.
2. Mission agencies and churches should assign these willing new missionaries to Unreached People Groups.

One of the major reasons for this approach is the fact that mission agency leaders know best where they really need workers (i.e., where no one ever signs up to go). These leaders have access to the latest data on the number of missionaries serving in creative access countries, something hard to get on the Internet or in books such as the excellent *Operation World* by Patrick Johnstone.<sup>[xxii]</sup>

If mission agency leaders would assign new candidates, not just to countries but also to specific Unreached People Groups, we believe we could speed the day of Christ’s return. Indeed,

we should hope and pray for the coming glorious days when so many new missionaries are spreading out to serve among the remaining 10,000 Unreached People Groups that assigning new missionaries eventually becomes a “10 . . . 9 . . . 8 . . . 7 . . .” countdown.

We hope and pray for the coming day when the Unreached People Group lists become so short that new missionaries might actually know the “limited” options of where their service is needed before filling out their application. “Bummer . . . so many workers have already flooded Libya . . . I guess the only choice left for me is Somalia,” might be recorded and saved on the audio portion of the online application as the candidate mutters to themselves just before their webcam interview with the agency director in the year 2025. Yet we never will reach that point if we continue to allow new missionaries to go wherever they want.

Our main point here is simply this: If mission agency leaders, many today who long to send more new missionaries into Unreached People Groups, are not willing to take measures to assign willing candidates to specific Unreached People Groups, then the majority of new missionaries will continue to go to well-evangelized countries and work with Christians and churches they got to know through previous short-term mission trips. According to Kevin Howard, the “calling” is perhaps the biggest barrier of all:

What frustrates me with the advice “go where God calls you” or “find where God is working and join him” is that it is given as sort of the panacea answer, the ultimate solution to all my questions and doubts. But this advice only begs the question. To tell me to go where God is calling me leaves unanswered the very question it proposes to answer—where do I go?<sup>[xxiii]</sup>

Longing, praying, strategizing, and even making new agencies focused exclusively on unreached peoples will not break this pattern unless seasoned field veterans, who know very well the places and peoples who are being overlooked, help to assign these young new missionaries. Relying solely on God to “call” new missionaries to the remaining 10,000 groups sounds spiritual and reliant on God. Perhaps agency leaders need to realize that God has appointed them to their position of leadership for “such a time as this.” Directing new missionaries should be the primary function of a mission agency director. Many young new missionaries may simply lack this broader global vision and will end up making their own private decision based on personal preferences. Likely, the majority will continue to go to the places where many missionaries are already serving.<sup>[xxiv]</sup>

### **TROUBLED BY “STRATEGIC” MISSIONS?**

Some will argue that this approach of assigning new missionaries to Unreached People Groups is simply a “strategic” approach and thus, void of the leading of the Holy Spirit or lacking God’s guidance. Perhaps the entire category labeled “strategic missions” always has been a misnomer. The word “strategy,” especially in the eyes of the fastest-growing segment of the church worldwide, the Charismatics, has likely always been a poor choice. It just does not sound spiritual enough and seems void of the Holy Spirit.

Many assume that the word “strategy” involves only human-made plans simply because we associate the word with the fields of business or the military, two things we are sure God has nothing to do with (which, of course, is not true. God has His hands into just about everything). The term was borrowed from the business and military worlds, so some may assume that a

“strategic” missions approach must be directed by humans and have little to do with the leading of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we should develop a different term such as “Spirit-Led Missions” or “God-Guided Missions” instead of the term “Strategic Missions.”

One only needs to look a little closer at what “mission strategy” is actually talking about to see that it speaks volumes regarding the leading of the Holy Spirit and the main thing on Jesus’ heart: His desire to have a relationship with the peoples who have the fewest opportunities to come to know Him, and how we can be led of and used by the Holy Spirit to accomplish Jesus’ mission.

C. Peter Wagner, one of the top missiologists advocating the Holy Spirit’s role in missions explains how the Holy Spirit is using “mission strategy” in the Frontier Missions Movement.<sup>[xxv]</sup> The Scriptures and the heart of God clearly reveal what the Holy Spirit wants to do—to bring the light and Person of Jesus to those who have not yet heard. This is what strategy is all about!

### **HYPER-STATISTIC APPROACH?**

Others may fear that statistics alone and a desire to be “strategic” will cause people to be assigned to serve among a specific Unreached People Group without a clear sense of God’s leading. For many, however, God uses statistics to reveal the presence or lack of presence of the Holy Spirit around the world. William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Ralph Winter, Luis Bush, Patrick Johnstone, and many other mission leaders who have helped awaken the church to places no one was working have all used statistics extensively.

I often enjoy using *Operation World* at the end of my daily quiet times. The statistics have never seemed dry or made by humans. Rather, they have always represented the voices of the masses calling out for people tell them about Jesus! Statistics, coupled with the Word of God, have been two of the main ways that the Holy Spirit has spoken to me with regards to where to serve and what to do there. If you have never done this before, open your Bible and a copy of *Operation World* together, lay them side by side, and read a little from each. Then, pray that the Holy Spirit would speak. Watch out! Your plans and even what you “thought” God had already told you to do might be turned upside-down by the Holy Spirit.

Statistics are just numbers, but they represent real souls and the reality we must face in the world today—the lack of the presence of the Holy Spirit among 10,000 Unreached People Groups. My heart has been breaking for more than twenty years at the thought of the millions of people who have no church, no missionaries, and no *Jesus*. The Holy Spirit used statistics to open my eyes to this reality. Statistics are not just numbers on paper or from a website on your screen. They represent the lost sheep that Jesus is trying to bring home, but so few willing shepherds are hearing the Master Shepherd’s voice.

## **PROMOTING, MOBILIZING, RECRUITING, AND ONE MORE THING: ASSIGNING NEW MISSIONARIES TO UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS**

During the birthing years of the Frontier Mission Movement, many missionary applicants began asking to be sent to Unreached People Groups. In response to the requests of those pre-candidates, new agencies focused exclusively on Unreached People Groups began to form. Today, many churches want to send missionaries to and support work in Unreached People Groups. All of this has caused workers to gradually begin trickling into Unreached People Groups around the world.

At Urbana 2006, we would guess that almost all of the hundreds of mission agencies on display somewhere mentioned what they were doing with Unreached People Groups, even if, in reality, they were not doing much. Today, a variety of projects, campaigns, and even specialized ministries have also sprung up. Nevertheless, through all of the promotion, mobilization, and even specific recruiting, there are still only 10,000 missionaries working with Unreached People Groups.

What we are suggesting is one more crucial step: the actual placement or assigning of new missionaries to Unreached People Groups, with a priority focus on the Unengaged Unreached People Groups. The well-established pattern of new missionaries going to where other missionaries are already serving is now also happening in some prominent Unreached People Groups while other Unreached People Groups are left barely touched. It is just a numerical coincidence that 10,000 workers are serving in Unreached People Groups today and that 10,000 Unreached People Groups remain unreached. Do not assume that this means there is one worker in each group! In fact, the reality is that in some of the groups there are 1,000 workers, while in other groups, there are just five, and in still others, there are not any workers.

### **Shorter Lists: A Step in the Right Direction**

I am very excited about a project where several agencies are cooperating together to focus on the Unreached People Groups that are being overlooked. The project leaders are developing a priority list of Unreached People Groups and collaborating between several mission agencies to get new missionaries into these overlooked groups while at the same time not duplicating or overlapping but rather combining their efforts. We are also thrilled to be involved with the Vision 2015 project to send 300 new Asian missionaries to 50 Unreached People Groups.

These and other similar projects are a major step in the right direction for two reasons. For one thing, the lists of people groups are shorter. For another thing, challenging new workers using these shorter lists may be just one step shy of assigning new missionaries to specific people groups. We recognize that the main way people choose countries or people groups is through personal contact. Would it not be better if that personal contact was from the director of a mission agency that wanted to send new missionaries to Unreached People Groups rather than a field missionary serving in a well-evangelized country?

We live in an age of information, but information alone is not the answer. Any pre-candidate in the world could pray daily over the lists of thousands of Unreached People Groups at the *Joshua Project* website and still never know where to go.<sup>[xxvii]</sup> The shorter lists being used by Vision 2015 and other similar projects may be less overwhelming simply because they are shorter, more focused, and thus, easier both for pre-candidates to choose from and for mission agency directors and church leaders to assign from.

We are now producing our own list of more than 70 Unengaged Unreached People Groups for a multi-country region. If a pre-candidate we come in contact with is already leaning heavily to one country in our region, then the number of people groups to choose from is even shorter. As we develop these priority people group lists, we hope to assign these new missionaries to a specific people group from the list, if they are willing.

We recognize that new missionaries still need personal contact as they discern where to serve. Our hope is that we can help to facilitate that kind of personal connection for these people groups. Though there will be few or no missionaries who may be able to set up short-term trips, we will work to make a way for pre-candidates to have some form of short-term trip as part of their process of discernment.

We also want to promote a stepping-stone or interim practice that new missionaries can use before the “waiting and assigning” process becomes commonplace (as we earnestly pray that it someday will). We recognize that it may be many years from now before the process we are suggesting actually is put into practice both by the majority of new missionaries and by several mission agencies. Because so few agencies today are willing to assign missionaries to specific countries and Unreached People Groups, we suggest that new missionaries ask to be assigned to (or choose on their own) a general region to serve in, move there, and then do field research to look specifically for the people groups that no missionaries are serving.

These new missionaries can then report their findings to both their sending churches and their mission agencies. Then, through what they discover together, they can discern which Unreached People Group to focus on. This interim procedure can help the new missionaries to obtain fresh information before discerning where to serve. Abraham simply left his country and trusted that God would show him the specific land to go to after he was already living in the new region (Genesis 12:1). Another biblical example is the way that Paul and Barnabas left their church and received guidance for the specific places to minister after arriving on the field (Acts 13 and beyond).

### **Still Willing to Be Assigned**

The convictions we have shared here are the result of a five-year process of discernment about where to serve, as well as almost 20 years of watching others go through the same process. As of this writing, my wife and I, as new missionaries ourselves, are still open to our agency and sending church to tell us which country and Unreached People Group to serve in. The long tradition of hearing from the Lord (having a “calling”) has been one of the major blocks in our experiences.

For years, we felt led to a T-1 country.<sup>[xxviii]</sup> Once we learned that another couple from our home church was on their way there, however, we were willing to go elsewhere. One day in



early 2004, my wife and I were sure that God told us to go to a T-2 country. This happened quite by accident as we were just “shooting the breeze” one night. There was no reason for us to discuss other countries since we were so certain of our “calling” to the T-1 country. But the uncanny way it came up, along with the peace and full agreement that we had, actually made us even more sure of our “calling” to the T-2 country. As a result, we prepared for more than a year. We went on a pre-search trip to the T-2 Country, did six months of intensive fundraising, and participated in four months of intensive training.

Just months before our departure to the T-2 country, two leaders in our agency had the courage to approach us and suggest that we not go to the T-2 country because it was one of the “popular” Unreached People Groups, with over 1,000 workers. It was awkward since we were almost ready to leave, but we were willing to follow the guidance of our spiritual leaders.<sup>[xxviii]</sup> We struggled because of our “calling,” but eventually, we grew convinced that the opportunity to go where almost no missionaries were serving was really what God had been “calling” us to do all along (Romans 15:20). We believe that this is what God is calling many new missionaries to do.

We understand why none of these leaders approached us earlier during our five years of searching and seeking where to go. If God had already told (“called”) us to go to a specific country, then what leader would feel free to suggest another? The system and current tradition (requiring a “calling”) prevented these leaders from telling us where to go since we were so sure that God had called us first to the T-1 country and then to the T-2 country.

God has used our journey to open our eyes to this concept: We think agencies and churches should tell willing applicants where to go, especially to the places where few people ever go. Maybe God has allowed us to go through this wilderness so that we can personally know and understand how so many pre-candidates feel who truly are willing to go anywhere during the discernment process. Some may give up and just go to the well-evangelized places where they went on short-term trips. That is our temptation too!

*It is simply too easy for most Christians to say they have never been “called” to missions, and for most missionaries to say they have been “called” to well-evangelized countries.*

## **MISSIONARIES TO THE UNREACHED . . . A VERY SMALL SLICE**

However you slice it, most researchers agree that just a handful of all missionaries are serving in Unreached People Groups.

### **Ninety Percent of All Missionaries Serving in the Well-evangelized World**

Those passionate about the unreached are simply asking Christians to bring resources to bear on the unreached. In spite of years of talk, over 90 percent of the world’s cross-cultural missionaries are still focused on areas that are largely evangelized; less than one percent are focused on places that call themselves non-Christian or anti-Christian. Some significant portion of these mission resources should be brought to those who have nothing.<sup>[xxix]</sup>

429,000 Missionaries from all branches of Christendom. (Only between 2 and 3% of those missionaries work among unreached peoples.) 140,000 Protestant Missionaries.<sup>[xxx]</sup>

### **Only 10,000 Missionaries among Unreached People Groups**

Only an estimated 10,000 of the global foreign mission force\* are working within the 10,000 unreached groups, while 41 times that number of foreign missionaries continue to work within people groups already reached. What an imbalance! Even if you include the foreign missionaries working with Christians within the entire major cultural blocs, reached and unreached . . . it is still a glaring fact that most foreign missionaries work within peoples which are predominantly Christian.

\*The global foreign mission force includes all kinds of Christians (Protestants, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, etc).<sup>[xxxii]</sup>

In 2000, 26 percent of 6.0 billion people were unevangelized = 1.6 billion [and only] 10,000 cross-cultural missionaries work among them.<sup>[xxxiii]</sup>

### **Missionaries of All Kinds in the World Today**

*World Christian Trends* estimates there are 420,000 missionaries worldwide (including Orthodox, Marginals and Roman Catholics).<sup>[xxxiiii]</sup>

The global totals show 201,928 [Protestant, Independent, and Anglican] missionaries sent and received. Of these 104,196 are serving within their own country and 58,357 within a near culture. There are 97,732 missionaries serving in a country other than their own.<sup>[xxxv]</sup>

### **The Short-Term Missions Explosion**

We believe the short-term missions movement is spinning out of control primarily in that it can sometimes be one of the greatest deterrents to long-term mission service. While it is true that almost every long-term missionary today has been on a short-term trip, a smaller and smaller percentage of short-termers ever decide to serve long-term. This is true both due to the massive numerical increase in short-termers and the slowing down of Western missionaries going out.

If it were true that the short-term missions explosion was producing long-term workers, then the sheer explosion of the past 15 years should have resulted in a corollary explosion of new workers rather than an overall decrease in the number of workers from Western countries. Notice these thoughts from prominent mission thinkers:

Timothy Erdel asks pointedly, “Is this the first major missionary movement carried out primarily for the personal benefit of the missionaries?”<sup>[xxxvi]</sup>

Frampton Fox also notes this trend: “Involvement in and spending on missions trips is seeing an unprecedented increase, while recruitment for full-time mission service is flat.”<sup>[xxxvii]</sup>

Don Parrot identifies the problem as:

Anti-long-term sentiment. Fifteen years ago a missions-minded church could identify the people from its congregation who were preparing for long-term service. Today, many of those same churches cannot name one such person. Of greater concern, they seem content with this disparity. Their priority on so many people in short-term trips seems to replace any need to prepare people for long-term service. Simply stated, the number of people being challenged to long-term cross-cultural ministry is declining every year.<sup>[xxxvii]</sup>

Lastly, Ryan Shaw notes that,

As we look with realistic eyes on today's student mission world, we find some things need an overhaul if we are going to be serious about pursuing this goal. First is the imbalanced focus on short-term ministry to the neglect of the importance of long-term....A generation is coming of age familiar with the long-term goal but only thinking about short-term options. Hence short-term trip participants are increasing dramatically while long-term workers dwindle....We believe in the importance of short-term ministry, but it must not be substituted for long-term ministry. Short term mission should be presented as a stepping stone for God's lifelong call to radical discipleship and wholehearted obedience, which includes long-term service. Unfortunately this is not the underlying philosophy of a majority of trips anymore. One discouraged campus leader said, "short-term trips highlight having a spiritual experience rather than producing prepared laborers for the harvest."<sup>[xxxviii]</sup>

## NOTES

[ii] Keith Green, "Why You Should Go to the Mission Field," *The Last Days Magazine*, 1982.

[iii] Justin Long, "Where Are We Going?" *Momentum Magazine*, July/August 2006, 7, <http://www.momentum-mag.org/>.

[iiii] Ralph D. Winter, "The Task Remaining: All Humanity in Missions Perspective," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981), 324. Figure 7 reveals the situation 25 years ago: 81,500 workers (or 91%) of the mission force serving in reached people groups and only 8,000 workers (or 9%) serving in unreached people groups.

[iv] Long, "Where Are We Going?" 7.

[v] Long, "Where Are We Going?" 7. See "Missionaries to the Unreached . . . A Very Small Slice."

[vi] A missionary "candidate" is a new missionary in the final stages of joining, training with, and being deployed by a mission agency. While our point here is that we are proposing a return to the old days of assigning candidates, we are suggesting this only if there is clear collaboration among mission agencies that are committed to the goal of seeing missionaries in all of the remaining 10,000 Unreached People Groups. Sadly, in previous eras, the denominational agencies' process of assigning missionaries was (at least in part) for the purpose of each denomination's desire to have their own missionaries and churches in each country of the world. One only needs to glance briefly at Patrick Johnstone's *Operation World* to see the resulting long lists of a variety of denominations in some countries and virtually no Christian presence whatsoever in others.

[vii] Stan Nussbaum, *American Cultural Baggage: How to Recognize and Deal with It* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 40. Nussbaum explains that "self-actualization" is a top American cultural value: "American culture has adopted the view of the psychologist Maslow, who taught that "self-actualization (fully becoming the person you could be) is the highest level of human development." It is my personal belief that we have Christianized this core American cultural value in the Church with an overt focus on *our* gifts and *our* desires rather than *God's* desires.

[viii] Thomas Hale, *On Being a Missionary* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995), 46. Hale explains further: "Why is no one psychologically suited to be a missionary? Because being a missionary means denying self, and that is contrary to that teaching of modern secular psychology, which says, 'Affirm self.' Secular psychologists preach self-fulfillment; Jesus preached self-denial. But Jesus was a better psychologist than them all."

[ix] Hale, 29.

- [xi] For one of the best brief, yet thorough, explanations on why different groups report different numbers of Unreached People Groups, see Joshua Project, “How Many People Groups Are There?” <http://www.joshuaproject.net/how-many-people-groups.php> (accessed August 29, 2008). We personally lean towards the higher numbers of 10,000, thus the reason for using that number herein versus the more popular 6,500 per the Joshua Project website.
- [xii] Scott and Sandi Tompkins, “The Short-term Explosion,” *Moody* 101, no. 2 (November/December 2000): 14.
- [xiii] Tompkins, 13–14. One statistic, published in 2000, states that, “The Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies estimates that in 1999, a half million North American Christians participated in cross-cultural, short-term missions outreaches, a number that has quadrupled in less than 10 years.”
- [xiiii] For more information about short-term and long-term mission, see “The Short-term Missions Explosion.”
- [xv] See <http://www.takeitglobal.org/?q=node/91>. Indeed, there are Joshua Project Research trips that are now called “Research Expeditions,” and other similar initiatives from some cutting-edge agencies committed to Unreached People Groups (e.g., Pioneers, Frontiers, and several others). These small efforts, however, are dwarfed by the massive number of trips in the Christianized world.
- [xvi] Kevin L. Howard, “A Call to Missions: Is There Such a Thing?” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (October 2003): 462–465. Included below is an important excerpt from Howard’s article to demonstrate how his emphasis is different than mine: “Most Christians have struggled in similar ways as I did to discover God’s specific calling for them. I want to explore the idea of a calling, and see if this is really the best way to talk or think about ministry. In 1980, Garry Friesen and J. Robin Maxson wrote *Decision Making and the Will of God* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Books, 1980). Friesen deals in detail with all of the passages that supposedly promote the specific will of God, and argues that there is no specific will of God for each believer. Rather, believers should make wise decisions based on what Scripture has revealed.
- [xvii] David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, “Status of Global Mission, AD 2006, In Context of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30, no. 1 (January 2006): 28. Since 2000, in many different public forums, several mission leaders have stated that only about 10% of the church worldwide is actively involved in missions. I have tried to find published data to substantiate this, but without success. The closest figure I know of that may somewhat substantiate this is the 695 million Great Commission Christians listed by David Barrett on the table cited above (out of 2.1 billion Christians of all kinds). But this would be over 33% of all who call themselves Christians. Yet, 10% seems to fit what I have observed in Asia, South America, Africa and North America in the churches in each continent the past 25 years of watching. Also, for a one-page summary with statistics that summarizes and further illustrates the term “Great Commission Christians,” see <http://www.thetravelingteam.org/?q=node/194>.
- [xviii] Kevin L. Howard, “Kevin Howard Responds,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (July 2004): 276–279. It may be far better for missionaries to drop the term “calling” and instead talk about how God has guided them, something clearly taught in Scripture and applicable to all believers in all situations. It is simply too easy for most Christians to say they have never been “called” to missions, and for most missionaries to say they have been “called” to well-evangelized countries.
- [xix] Howard, “A Call to Missions: Is There Such a Thing?” 462–465. See also Hale, *On Being a Missionary*, 16–29. I highly recommend this book to all new missionaries and deeply respect the author as a humble man of integrity. Chapter 2, entitled “The Call,” represents well the common views among most “mission folk” about the “call,” also known as the “call to missions” or the “missionary call”. The entire chapter about “The Call,” however, provides little scriptural basis to substantiate this mysterious call. All of us who have personally experienced a “call” to serve as a missionary need to openly search the Scriptures to see how we justify this. (Hale’s “call” was two days after accepting Christ and was both his mission calling and country calling wrapped together in one event). This is what I am challenging, even though I also believe that I have been “called” to missions. In the preface, Hale states, “I write in the belief that there is no higher or more glorious calling than that of being a missionary of Jesus Christ.” This sounds like the “Awe of the Call” that I have also had in the past.
- [xx] For more on the topic of “calling” in the Scriptures, see Howard, “A Call to Missions: Is There Such a Thing?”
- [xxi] Wesley Duewel, “No Clear Calling?” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (July 2004): 276–279. See also Howard, “Kevin Howard Responds,” 276–279. Duewel, in his letter to the editor, responds to Howard’s article, yet fails to give a scriptural basis for the “call.” It is possible that even more people may be released into missions service (not less, as Duewel fears) by moving toward emphasizing the scriptural command for all believers to obey the Great Commission. Also, emphasizing obedience to the Great Commission would allow for more open confrontation of those who say they are “called” to already-reached lands. If we drop our emphasis on the “calling,” then we can more directly challenge new missionaries regarding where they are going. As it is now, who can question what God told (“called”) any new missionary to do? Howard responds by challenging Duewel’s lack of scriptural references and use of experiences alone to argue his point. Howard says: “Hinting that my position opens the door to liberalism is unfair, especially when I’ve used Scripture to make my point, and you’ve used feelings and experience to support yours.”

My view challenges Christians to take another look at Scripture, probing whether or not it teaches what so many have labeled as a “calling.” Does Scripture warrant the commonly held ideology of a calling? No, Scripture doesn’t prescribe a calling—a clear and unalterable sense of God’s leading—as the norm for most believers.”

[xxii] David Barrett and Todd Johnson, “Global Diagram 34: Today’s Global Mission: The Status of World Evangelization in AD 2000,” *World Christian Trends* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001). This chart explains that 141 countries in the world have more than 60% Christian populations (and are more than 95% evangelized). To further make our point, we may have included the World B figures, the 59 countries that are half evangelized (50% evangelized countries with church members less than 60%). With these additions, the total together is 200 countries. These are the 200 countries that almost all missionaries work in.

[xxiii] Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster USA, 2001).

[xxiii] Kevin L. Howard, “A Call to Missions: Is There Such a Thing?” 462–465. I recognize that Howard is using the argument both in his article and the further thoughts in his response to the letter to the editor from Duetzel, possibly almost in an opposite way than I am using Howard’s quotes to make my points. The end result of Howard’s argument is a freedom to go anywhere. The end result I am searching for here is to see that the Scriptures really are urging us to see more missionaries go where no one goes. But Howard and I seem to agree on the central point, and that is, that the Scriptures do not teach a specific “calling.” I am using this argument in hopes that more will obey the clear command to make disciples everywhere (both as Senders and Goers). I am also using Howard’s arguments to release the misuse, or subjective personal use, of the term “calling” by so many who say that they are “called” to the reached nations.

[xxiv] The next step should be to conduct a simple (yet broad) survey of The Mission Exchange (formerly EFMA) and CrossGlobal Link (formerly IFMA) member mission agencies regarding three key numbers: (1) the number of new missionaries that chose their long-term country of service in relation to a previous short-term trip to that country; (2) the number of applicants willing to go anywhere, desiring the agency to place them; and (3) the number of new missionaries being assigned by agencies to Unreached People Groups. The results of such a survey may be a much-needed eye-opener for mission agency directors.

[xxv] C. Peter Wagner, “On the Cutting Edge of Mission Strategy,” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 531–540.

[xxvi] See <http://www.joshuaproject.net/>.

[xxvii] I will use artificial names for security purposes.

[xxviii] We believe that only the people who trust God enough to submit to spiritual authorities (whom they can see) can also be trusted to truly submit to God (whom none of us can see). In other words, if you cannot submit to human authorities, how can you submit to God? Submitting to leaders is another clear biblical command, and it is essential to applying the concept that candidates would willingly submit and go where they are assigned by agency and church leaders. We believe that emphasizing submission to authority can be conveyed to (and embraced by) Gen X’ers and the next generation because they long to do what the Bible says. This is why we argue for a return of agency placements rather than subjectively leaving the choice to the missionary. Having a “calling” to a specific country is just not that clear scripturally as a principle.

[xxix] Justin Long, “‘Unreached’ is Not a Fad” *Momentum Magazine*, September/October 2005, 7, <http://www.momentum-mag.org/>.

[xxx] Mobilization Division, USCWM, “Approximate 2002 AD Global Missions Statistics,” <http://www.uscwm.org/>.

[xxxi] Ralph Winter and Bruce Koch, “Looking at the Task Graphically,” *Mission Frontiers*, June 2000.

[xxxii] Justin Long, “Where Are We Going?” 7.

[xxxiii] Justin Long, “What Will it Take” *Momentum Magazine*, September/October 2006, 27, <http://www.momentum-mag.org/>.

[xxxiv] Johnstone, *Operation World*. See appendix 4, “The World’s Missionary Force.”

[xxxv] Timothy Paul Erdel, review of *Between Past and Future*, by Jonathan J. Bonk, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (April 2004): 250.

[xxxvi] Frampton F. Fox, “Screw-tape on Summer Missions” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (October 2003): 483.

[xxxvii] Don Parrott, “Managing the Short-term Missions Explosion,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (July 2004): 357.

[xxxviii] Ryan Shaw, “From Trips to Careers” *Momentum Magazine*, November/December 2005, 24, <http://www.momentum-mag.org/>.