

# Unfinished

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## Fresh lessons for gospel bearers

Equipping for ministry in increasingly secularized cultures

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Spring 2015, Issue 59

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**Cover photo:**  
Young woman in Berlin, Germany. See articles from missionaries serving in France, Spain, and Germany on pages 8-15, and opportunities for service on pages 15 and 32.

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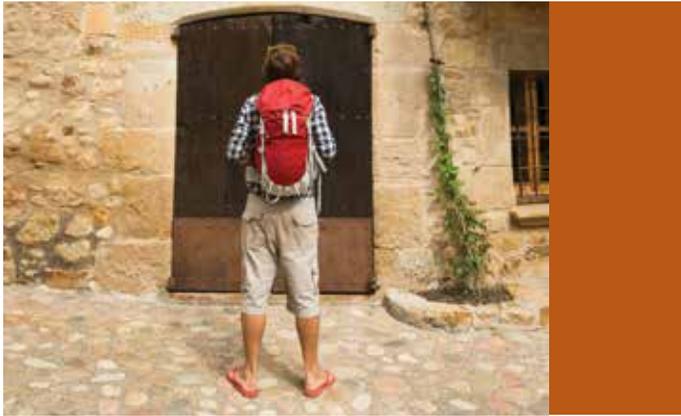
"It's been 13 years since God in His sovereignty brought the Global Outreach Workshop and The Mission Society into our congregation. The seed planted in that one weekend is still bearing kingdom fruit in Grace Church these years later. It will change your church and your life!"

**Jorge Acevedo, Lead Pastor  
Grace Church, Cape Coral, FL**



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—John 19b-22, NRSV



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### **The Mission Society hires new vice president for mission advancement**

On March 1, 2015, Clark Pickett assumed the role of vice president for mission advancement for The Mission Society. Pickett was hired upon the retirement of Dennis Brown, who had served in the role since 2003.

Before joining The Mission Society, Pickett served as a United Methodist pastor in the Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church. He is a gifted speaker, specializing in men's and couples' retreats and revivals. Pickett also has a strong background in sales management and communications.

"The Mission Society is blessed to have Clark Pickett advance our mission to bring more to Christ," said Max Wilkins, president and CEO of The Mission Society. "His dynamic experience will bring even more support to missionaries and outreach programs than ever before."

"I'm delighted to be a part of this ministry's mission and passion to reach the least-reached, and to be a part of inviting others to join Jesus in His mission through The Mission Society," said Pickett.

Clark resides with his wife, Diane, in Flowery Branch, Georgia. They have two grown children.

Prior to his coming to The Mission Society in 2003, outgoing Vice President Dennis E. Brown served as chairman, president and CEO, vice president, executive director and board member for major for-profit and non-profit organizations and corporations.

"The Mission Society is indebted to Dennis," says Presi-

dent Wilkins. "Because of his passion for connecting people to God's mission, this organization has advanced far beyond where it was when he came to us. It is untelling how many more are involved in missions today because of Denny. We will miss him."

"The thing that is absolutely apparent about Denny Brown is his contagious love for Jesus and his great respect for The Mission Society community and for any who use their lives to share Jesus," says Mission Society board chairperson Helen Rhea Stumbo. "He has been an exemplary and effective ambassador for this ministry, and we are so grateful."

Welcome, Clark. And Denny, thank you for your friendship and the lasting mark you have made on The Mission Society, on our lives, and the lives of so many. We will surely miss you.

### **Missionary kid Micah needs our prayers**

Please join us in praying for the healing of nine-year-old Micah, son of missionaries to China, who has been diagnosed with cancer. Pray for courage, comfort, and strength as he faces procedures and long days. Pray for the family and for doctors to have great insight and wisdom. Thank you for standing with us in prayer for Micah, believing for his complete and miraculous healing. "O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me." —Ps. 30:2, NRSV



From left to right: Clark and Diane Pickett; Dennis E. Brown; staff members wear wristbands as signs of prayer for Micah; the Rev. Dr. Ira Gallaway; regional consultants (front row, left to right): Kirk Sims, Europe; Dr. Cameron Gongwer, North America; Mary Kay Jackson, Africa; Jim Ramsay, vice president for mission ministries and acting regional coordinator for East Asia. Those in the back row are unidentified for security reasons. Not shown: Becky Stephen, senior director of field ministries

## A Mission Society founder Dr. Ira Gallaway passes away

A Mission Society founder and long-time board member, The Rev. Dr. Ira Gallaway, passed away on March 16, 2015.

Born in Glen Cove, Texas, Gallaway had a career in the Army Air Corps and served in North Africa in World War II. He earned a degree in international law from the University of Texas at Austin, graduating with honors. He married Sally Baxter in July 1941.

He worked in Washington, D.C., assisting a US representative, and returned to Texas, where he was elected county judge in Coleman in 1951. After working for several years in the oil business, he answered a call to ministry. He earned a master of divinity degree from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University and was ordained in The United Methodist Church. Gallaway served five churches over the course of his career.

In addition, he served as a district superintendent and as the general secretary of The United Methodist Board of Evangelism. Gallaway and his wife also served with Four Corners Ministry among Native American populations in Colorado. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Asbury Theological Seminary, and served on its board for a number of years.

His memorial service was held on March 22 at Asbury Theological Seminary's Estes Chapel in Wilmore, Kentucky. "Ira was a soldier and a warrior," said the Rev. Dr. Maxie Dunnam, who spoke. "To follow Christ is to, at least in part, be who Ira was."

Gallaway selected as the theme for his funeral service and as

the epitaph on the gravestone he now shares with his wife, Sally, the simple phrase, "Thank you, Lord." We thank you, Lord, for the courageous and faithful witness of Dr. Ira Gallaway.

## Regional consultants met; discerned goal to shape future Mission Society ministries

In February, The Mission Society's regional consultants (missionaries who assume additional responsibilities for their area teams) from Asia, East Asia, Europe, Africa, Latin America, and North America met in Germany. "The event was designed to form a new field leadership team and to spark Spirit-inspired, creative thinking about the future of Mission Society ministries," says Becky Stephen, senior director of field ministries, who organized the gathering. As the seven attendees studied Acts, prayed, shared their visions for their regions, and discussed critical organizational issues, they sensed the Lord's focusing them on one key goal for the organization's development and long-term fruitfulness: mentoring the next generation of missionaries. Plans are already underway to pilot a mentoring program for new missionaries, offer mentoring training to experienced missionaries, and to integrate mentoring into existing relationships, affinity groups, planning cycles, and programs.

# GOSPEL ON THE MOVE

*Even in places of dimming Christian  
witness, God's work is also dawning*



Throughout Western Europe and elsewhere—including now in the United States—the gospel seems increasingly forced out, untolerated. Missionary Laurie Drum (*page 12*) tells of churches and cathedrals in her neighborhood in Spain that are now functioning as museums, or as a casino, or a realtor's office. Slim crowds gather in Europe's churches, and America's churches are significantly less populated these days, too. The Barna Group (see the recent release, *Churchless*) and other researchers have been tracking the decline. While the Church in the West is not dying, says LifeWay Research President Ed Stetzer, it is a Church in transition. Post-Christian trends are gathering steam in America. The gospel can seem to be going into exile.

In this issue of *Unfinished*, we take on the intriguing work of equipping to be missional in our own nation. As we do, we recognize that the change in America's spiritual climate can feel to

some like encroaching doom. But the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not at peril. Church historian Andrew Walls observes that at each point in Christian history, just as Christian witness seems to be fading in one part of the world, the gospel shows up vibrantly elsewhere, as has recently happened in the global South and East.\* And remarkably, today, even in post-Christian Europe, where the gospel advance has seemed to come to a standstill, sociologists of religion are talking about a future re-sacrilisation (a return to religious meanings to the public sectors. See *page 11*.)

As we consider post-Christian and secular trends in our own nation, we can know that Jesus is at work in hearts all around us, and He invites us to join Him in His mission. —*editor*

\*See "Historian Ahead of His Time," by Tim Stafford, *Christianity Today*, February 8, 2007.

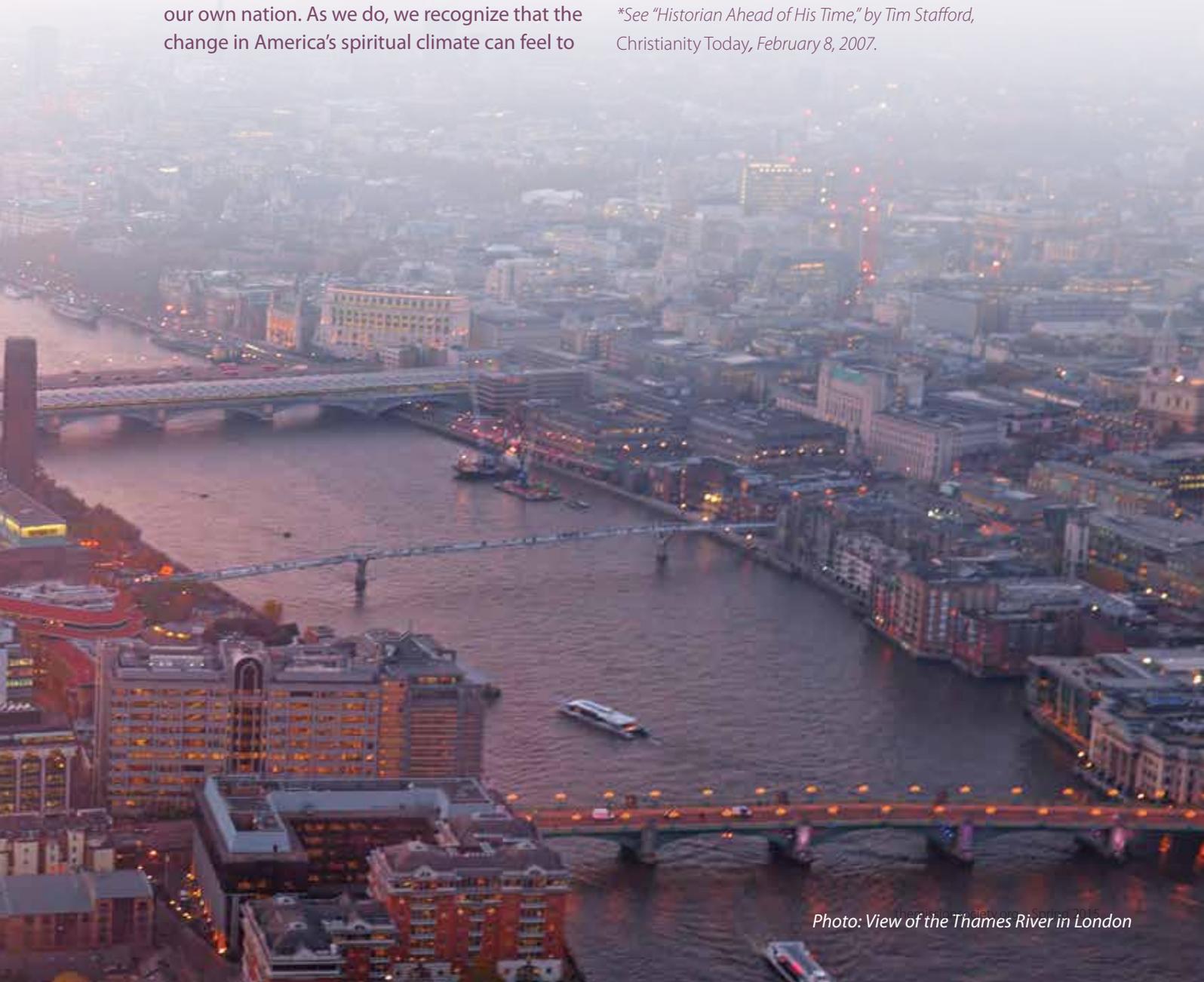


Photo: View of the Thames River in London



## Back to the future

The key to making disciples in our changing landscape may lie in returning to the roots of our faith, and the approach of our earliest “faith-makers.”



Timothy was an outsider to the church, until Paul discipled him. As we consider our nation’s churchless, we might take note of Paul’s discipleship practices, which helped transform an entire continent. (Shown left: Digital rendering of painting of Paul and Timothy.)

Quite frequently these days I have conversations with believers who lament the decline of the Christian culture in the United States. Many tell me we are rapidly entering a “post-Christian” age. This concern is supported by demographer George Barna who contends that, by his definition, 37% of American adults are post-Christian. He notes that 57% of Americans don’t read the Bible, and less than 66% attend church even once in any given year.\* And these statistics are worsening annually.

Yet, despite these post-Christian trends, the United States is not really becoming “post-spiritual.” The same research from Barna Group indicates that more than 80% of adults regularly pray, and almost 90% agree that faith issues matter deeply.\* Interestingly, the

post-Christian West is in many ways similar to the pre-Christian West: deeply spiritual, but pluralistic and largely pagan. Some see this reality as a cause for concern. But, the way I see it, it is also possible to view the wanderings of our increasingly post-Christian US as an amazing opportunity to reengage the culture in mission and discipleship.

### First century’s spiritual chaos

As I’ve been thinking about the possibilities for discipleship our present climate offers, I started reflecting on the Apostle Paul’s encounters in the tiny town of Lystra. Located in what is western Turkey today, Lystra was a pagan Roman town. In fact, it had no record of ever having a synagogue. It did have shrines to Zeus and several other pagan gods.

When Paul and Barnabas first arrived in Lystra, upon healing a man of lameness, they were assumed to be gods, and the people of Lystra tried to worship them. However, as they attempted to preach publicly about Jesus, the crowds turned on them, and tried to beat Paul to death! Not a very auspicious beginning to Paul’s ministry in Europe.

Despite his failures in Lystra, Paul returned to the town a few years later. In this visit he took a different approach. He was introduced to a teenager—a young man named Timothy. Born of a Jewish mother and a Greek father, Timothy was a half-breed, a “mamzer” as was termed by the Jewish religious leaders of that time. As such, Timothy was not allowed to worship or identify with the Jewish community. He was an

outsider, largely cut off from the Jewish establishment of that area, and adrift in the spiritual chaos of Lystra.

### Paul's discipleship approach

Paul, however, engaged Timothy at a personal level. He invited Timothy to follow him. He circumcised Timothy (an act that was unnecessary for a Christian, but was hugely significant to Timothy in signaling Paul's willingness to include him in the family of God). He helped Timothy recognize the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit had produced within him. He helped Timothy identify his calling, and then helped him to grow in faith and to practice that calling. He developed Timothy into one of the great leaders of the early church.

In short, Paul made a disciple of Timothy. And Paul would repeat the discipleship pattern he followed with Timothy with other young men, over and over again, as he moved through Europe! In making disciples, God used Paul to transform a continent.

Several features of Paul's discipleship approach stand out:

- 1. Personal relationship.** Although Paul continued to preach publicly in Europe, he spent increasing amounts of ministry time on personal discipleship development.
- 2. Commitment.** Timothy was called on to engage in a life walk, not just to make a faith decision.
- 3. Missional ministry.** Discipleship is tied to missions. Paul's life was the perfect example of this. He and

Timothy engaged in the missional ministry together.

- 4. Instruction of the Holy Spirit.** Part of discipleship was helping Timothy identify what the Holy Spirit was doing in his life.
- 5. Perseverance.** The discipleship process was ongoing, spanning the rest of Paul's life.

### My hope for America

The collapse of Christendom is both forcing and enabling the Church to think about ministry in a post-Christian context. Thankfully, the Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And His call to "make disciples" is as important and relevant today as it was in the days of Paul. As the landscape of America begins more and more to resemble the days of pre-Christian pagan Europe, the keys to making disciples may lie in returning to the roots of our faith, and the approach of our earliest "faith-makers."

I have been blessed to observe Mission Society cross-cultural witnesses coming alongside music students in Roi Et, Thailand; working with shoeshine men in Huancaayo, Peru; relating to "rag pickers" in Hyderabad, India; using biblical storytelling among

the women in Yemen; helping refugees in Clarkston, Georgia; sharing conversation with Muslims in Atlanta coffee shops; praying in huts in villages in Ghana, and sharing stories among nomadic tribesmen in Kenya. In each case, disciples are being made in new and fresh ways. The methods may change,

## America's unchurched

According to a 2014 Barna Group study, 156 million US residents are not engaged with a Christian church. "If all those unchurched people were a separate nation, it would be the 8th most populous country in the world, trailing only China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the remaining churching public of the United States (159 million)."

—From "10 Facts About America's Churchless," from the Barna Group, December 10, 2014.

but the basics are the same: personal relationship, time, encouragement, a call for decision, shared ministry, and a call to live into the plans the Lord has for each life. People and nations are being transformed as a result.

These stories represent my hope for America as well. As you read the stories throughout this issue of *Unfinished*, think about the variety of ways God is using His people to make a difference in our nation today. I hope you will bear in mind that our call remains the same: "Make disciples." And as counter-intuitive as it may be, the seeming move away from our Christian moorings offers us some amazing opportunities to carry out that calling. ✚

*\*From "15 Measurements of Whether Americans are Post-Christian," by Jeremy Weber, posted 4/15/13, Christianity Today, Gleanings (online)*

**The Rev. Max Wilkins is president and CEO of The Mission Society.**



# Getting to the barricaded heart

*Missionaries to post-Christian Europe tell  
how to let the light of Jesus shine into  
wounded and shut-down lives*

Philip Yancey tells of the human heart's hunger for a loving God. "Writers of the Bible lived in the 'Holy Land,' where bushes burst into flame, where rocks and volcanoes gushed sacred metaphors and the stars bespoke God's grandeur," he writes. "No longer. The supernatural world has seemingly gone into hiding, leaving us alone with the visible. The thirst for God, though, for contact with the unseen, the hunger for love from a cosmic Parent who can somehow fashion meaning from the scrambled world, defiantly persists."\*

So we look around us in our nation, where roughly four in 10 of the US population is said to be "post-Christian," and where hearts daily shut themselves off to faith. And yet the hunger to know a loving "cosmic Parent" persists. How do we display the splendor of God in a way that others can see—that will make a difference?

For insight, we went to some of our missionaries in Europe. Here, where Christianity once flourished, believers often live in isolation, surrounded by people with hearts resistant to a gospel story that is thought to be outdated.

In the following, some of our missionaries in France, Spain, and Germany tell of the spiritual climate surrounding them and how they are learning to let the light of Jesus shine in a way that can be seen.

*\*From Reaching for the Invisible God, by Philip Yancey, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000, page 28.*



## Go to where the people are

*“If the French are not going to show up at church, the Church needs to go out to them,” say this couple, who have been following their own advice as they minister among the business and arts communities in a village in France.*

France began its “post-Christian” journey in earnest with the French Revolution in 1789. Not only did the French declare the king dead, but because of all the atrocities committed in the name of God by the Church and the monarchy, they also declared God dead as well. I saw this attitude towards God and the Church firsthand when I was playing with a street band I belong to. We were changing locations at a market, and we walked by a Bible stand. In front of the stand, there was a sign that said, “I am the Way.” The sax player in front of me said to some others, “Yeah, the way to corruption, greed, abuse of power

and death,” to which all broke out in a hearty laugh.

A French pastor told us that it is a waste of time to invite a French person to church.

*“We go to them by taking the time to build relationships with friends and neighbors, listening to where they are coming from, and meeting them at the point of their needs with the love of God. It is a slow process, but it is the best way to reach the French in this post-Christian era.”*

To them it is a sign of weakness. Only the weak who need a crutch attend a mass or church service. The idea of needing

a savior makes no sense to them. They view the idea that Jesus died on the cross for our sins as ridiculous. A missionary serving in France for many years suggested that forgiveness of sins is not the best way to approach the French with the gospel. However, there is a lot of hopelessness and despair in France right now, so he believes the best approach is to share the hope that is in the gospel.

So, if the French are not going to show up at church, the Church needs to go out to them. We do this by taking the time to build relationships with friends and neighbors, listening to where they are coming from, and meeting them at the point of their needs with the love of God. It is a slow process, but it is the best way to reach the French in this post-Christian era.

In our area in France, the Catholic Church came along and mixed with the existing Celtic/Druid religion, so that the



## Think on this:

What would it mean for you or your small group to “go to where the people are”?

faith of the Catholic Church is hardly recognizable now. There is a very dark spiritual climate here that needs to be broken by the intercessory prayers of believing Christians. It is a daunting task, but, because God keeps sending people to France and Western Europe, it is obvious that He cares and refuses to give up on this region. †

*This couple serves in France as business operators. In addition, the wife—an artist—meets regularly with other artists in the community, and the husband plays with a band comprised entirely of atheists. Embodying the tireless love of God, this couple has become valued members of their community. Today, they also partner with a French pastor to plant a church. They wish not to be named, so as not to jeopardize friendships.*

# The hope for Europe

*Adapted from Lausanne Global Analysis, March 2015, Volume 4/ Issue 2, “Europe’s crisis, God’s opportunity”*

Today, most Europeans hope not for the return of the Lord Jesus but for the return of economic growth. All will be well if we can see a return to a nice, steady growth in GDP.

But only Christ can truly satisfy the hopes and aspirations of Europe’s peoples. For the first time in a generation, Europeans are questioning the hope and security that this world offers. It is the moment for churches to regain their confidence in the gospel as the hope for Europe. (And sociologists of religion have observed the resilience of religious belief in many

**"Sociologists of religion have observed the resilience of religious belief in many places around Europe."**

places around Europe. Some are even talking about a future re-sacralisation [a return to religious meanings to the public sectors] of Europe.)

Missionary and churchman Lesslie Newbigin was once interviewed on the radio and was asked the question: “Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the church?” Newbigin responded: “I am neither an optimist or a pessimist. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.”

Europe faces a multi-dimensional crisis with huge implications for European states and for Christian mission. Yet the Christian message of hope is the same one that has sustained generations of Europeans through all the crises of history: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.



## Understand their story

*“Spain has a long and tumultuous religious history, writes Laurie Drum (see opposite page). “Being in loving community together is the only way to meet people at the heart level and begin to heal the wounds of centuries of religious war and strife.”*

Walking along the streets of Antequera, Spain, a tourist might easily believe that this is a very religious place. With more than 30 Catholic church buildings and cathedrals, there seems to be a constant reminder that Catholicism reigns here. But the eyes deceive you. These church buildings are not actually functioning as churches. Several are now only museums for foreign visitors and are only open a couple of hours each week. One has been sold and turned in to a bar. Another is now a realtor’s office. Another has been turned in to a casino. Some are closed completely, only to be used for specific ceremonies when requested and paid for—weddings or funerals or an occasional christening. Only three of these church buildings are in use today, and their congregational numbers are slim.

- Today, Spain has 8095 municipalities (cities, towns, villages), and in 7540 of those there is no Protestant Church presence.
- Only 1% of the population in Spain is Protestant. Muslims account for 2.5% of the population. Muslim immigration grew 1000% over the past decade, mostly from Morocco and the Middle East.
- An estimated 70.5% of Spaniards self-identify as Catholic (down from 99% just a decade ago). However, of those who identify themselves as Catholic,

# Many ruled them

*Missionary Laurie Drum recounts Spain's tumultuous religious history*

The Celts lived in Spain in the 6th century BC, and were later toppled by the Roman Empire. Rome remained in control, and Spain was inhabited by both Jews and early Christians until it began to collapse with the rise of the Visigoth Kingdom in the 5th century AD. The Visigoth king eventually converted to Catholicism and the peninsula was once again in Rome's good graces. But not for long. The Moors moved across the land and took the peninsula in 711, and Muslims ruled the peninsula for more than seven centuries. Remnant peoples who practiced

Christianity adopted Arab customs and traditions while remaining true to their faith and became known as the Mozarabe people. In 1492, King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile began a reconquest for Christianity, which later gave birth to the Spanish Inquisition. Spain's thirst for exploration and trade spread Christianity, namely Catholicism, to the New World, but at a great cost.

Many years later, Spain would endure a brutal civil war and 40 years of dictatorship under Franco. He used Catholicism as power over the people. He demanded that all submit to Catholicism and declared a rebirth of the days of the

Reconquest and Inquisition, which resulted in a distaste by many for religion in general. At the fall of the dictatorship and the birth of democracy in the late 1970s, Spain began to also see the slow death of any religion or belief.

## Think on this:

Are you in relationship with non-believers now? If so, what are you learning about their stories that helps you better pray for them—and lead them into deeper discussions about Jesus?

47% of those admit to never having attended mass—ever. Only 25% say that they go to mass at least once per month, with most admitting to only attending once per year (during Holy Week).

Today, Spain is considered post-Christian and is one of the many European countries that is losing its roots and history of religious belief. “No one wants the Church. Why would we want that? It just brings oppression and war. This whole country is built on religious wars. I don't want anything to do with that,” says Carmen.\* According to Mari Teresa,\* “Mafia Lords...I don't want my money or my name associated with the Church. They just take our money and run the politics of our country. I'm not going anywhere near that.”

Our work here is delicate. We must be a new voice and a new light in a place that views religion through lenses of war and oppression. The institutional Church has a

stain on it. It doesn't matter what name is on the outside or how you try to package it, no one is buying in.

Our work is slow and relational. The culture of Spain is relational. Our Spanish friends love to be in groups around a table at a café. As a result, much of our work is

*“Our work here is delicate. We must be a new voice and a new light in a place that views religion through lenses of war and oppression.”*

meeting one-on-one or in small groups, in a café or on someone's patio. What seems to work here is natural, everyday conversations that lead to deeper discussions about Jesus. But we have to meet where people are comfortable, where life feels real and natural, and where the idea of institutional

Church is nowhere to be found. For many of these people, the civil war and dictatorship and the wounds of the institutional Church are deep and raw and too painful to deal with. So for many of our people, “church” happens at the kitchen table, or on the patio, or walking in the park—being in loving community together is the only way to meet people at the heart level and begin to heal the wounds of centuries of religious war and strife. †

*After serving in Peru for five years, Laurie and Billy Drum now live in Spain where they serve the immigrant population while working alongside the local Spanish church. The Drums—both certified teachers, trainers, coaches, and counselors—also serve other cross-cultural witnesses through member-care and leadership development.*



\*Pseudonyms



## Know that hearts long for Jesus

*In post-Christian Germany “it is now seen as strange to go to church,” says missionary and scholar, Kirk Sims. Without the social pressures to attend, many church-goers show up for one reason: “because they find themselves longing to encounter Jesus.”*

I have spent about a decade on the mission field, about half of which has been in Africa and the other half in Europe. For that reason, it rang true for me when Church historian Andrew Walls diagnosed the global Church’s new situation as being both “a post-Christian West and a post-Western Christianity.”

With its Church growing at an annual rate of over five percent over the last century, Africa has been emerging as one of the major regions where we are seeing vastly Christianized areas. Living in

Ghana, I witnessed firsthand a confident Church expanding and inculturating the gospel with imagery, songs, dances, and theologies that resonate deeply in the cultural realities of sub-Saharan Africa. I also observed something else. In what can be both a positive and a negative, in places where the majority of people are Christian, people begin sensing social pressure to be demonstratively Christian. Going to church, for example, becomes an expectation. With so many Christians, we are now seeing a “marketplace” of churches in many parts of Africa.

Although it looks different in Africa, this “marketplace” of churches among a Christianized people reminds me of my formational years and my initial ministry as a pastor in the “Bible Belt.” Perhaps you live in or grew up in a context where you either have or had a lot of external pres-

ures to be overtly Christian. Maybe you know it would be shameful in your neighborhood to cut your grass on a Sunday. Or maybe you might feel scorn if you were “caught” in a restaurant on a Sunday afternoon not wearing your Sunday best. Could an insurance agent, a lawyer, or a shop owner move to town and not be a member of at least some church and get any business? In a church context, the cultural mores dictate that people should both be part of a church and actually go to church. Churches then compete for members from among the Christian populous.

Within a Christianized context, it can become very easy to spend a lot of energy appealing to issues that are secondary to being a Jesus-centered faith community. I have honestly heard people talk about the color of the carpet in the sanctuary, and the extent of the sports program as

# Ministry opportunities

## Think on this:

What would happen to our US churches if the social pressures to be in church were suddenly gone?



Here are just two of several ministry opportunities in Europe. For more, see page 31.

### Germany

Come as an au pair or English teacher to reach Germans and immigrants with the gospel as part of an international Church community.

### Spain

Join a multicultural team to grow house churches in a region of Spain which has few Jesus followers. Disciple and train others to share their faith through small group Bible studies and relationships. (Visit page 31 for more ministry opportunities in Spain.)

determining factors in their choice to join a church.

However, by living in Europe, I have been immersed in a context where church attendance has been in steep decline for a few generations. Recently, I attended an evangelism conference where people genuinely desired to look for new ways of reaching people. At the event, I had a conversation with two women, both in their late 50s or early 60s, who told me that they were the youngest members of their congregations. Although many vestiges like cathedrals, Christian holidays, and shops closing on Sunday remain, by and large, much of Europe is indeed part of the new post-Christian West. Gone are the cultural pressures to be in church. In fact, it is now seen as strange to go to church.

In the part of Europe in which I live, worship attendance is around two or three

percent on a given Sunday. I have been experiencing firsthand what it is like to live without the external social pressures to be in church, or to even be a person of faith at all. My family has been working with migrants in Hamburg, and our international congregation is very much situated in a post-Christian reality. Without the external forces encouraging people to be in church, we are finding that those who are part of our faith community are with us because of essentially internal motivating factors. Their coworkers or classmates are often surprised to learn that their friends had

*"Within a Christianized context, it can become very easy to spend a lot of energy appealing to issues that are secondary to being a Jesus-centered faith community."*

actually been in church on Sunday. I think it is safe to say that people are not part of our congregation because of the color of the carpet in the sanctuary. People are part of our church because they find themselves longing to encounter Jesus by being part of a worshiping and missional community of faith.

The reality of the Church in the United States is far from what it is in Europe. Still given what is happening within the Church

in the US, it may be helpful for American believers to learn from the situation in the European Church. In America, why are people part of our congregations? Are we still appealing to approaches whereby being Christian is a given? Do we present the essence of church as being a Jesus-centered faith community, or is it a spiritualized social club? What would happen to our churches if the social pressures to be in church were suddenly gone? Would the gospel be so lodged in us that we would have a natural desire to still be part of a congregation? †

*Building on their ministry in West Africa and Europe, Kirk and Nicole are working with international and migrant ministries in Germany. Nicole pastors an international congregation in Hamburg, while Kirk serves as the regional consultant for The Mission Society in Europe and is engaged in ministry and research amongst West Africans. Kirk and Nicole are both ordained United Methodist ministers, and they desire to know and share God's heart for the nations.*



T



# he miscommunication

*Exploring why the gospel can be unappealing*

Young unchurched Americans are open, writes researcher Ed Stetzer. In fact, according to a Life-way Research project a few years ago with 20- to 29-year old Americans, “63% of young adults said they would attend church if it presented truth to them in an understandable way.”

Is our telling of the gospel unclear, inaccurate? Does it become unappealing? Sharing the gospel with our neighbors requires we first know what it is—and isn't. In the following, Frank Decker—who oversees the training of our missionaries—clarifies what the gospel is and some pitfalls in our gospel sharing.

\*From “The Spiritual Openness of the Younger Unchurched: What’s the status of the Church and how we might share the gospel in this time?” by Ed Stetzer, *Christianity Today* online, a blog by Ed Stetzer, December 29, 2014

## When the gospel is unattractive

Even if the gospel we share is biblical, it is not attractive to others unless the work of Jesus is evident in our lives. Otherwise, the message becomes merely theoretical—a danger in our age of information. In fact, I am convinced that the less we actually experience the living Jesus, the more apt we are to depend on intricate theologies in order to explain His apparent absence as a reality in our lives.

—Frank Decker

One day in Atlanta I was involved in a lunch meeting with a few mission leaders from other countries. During the informal discussion one well-known African leader shared about his ministry's ambitious plans to reach Muslims in the northern half of that continent by employing a rather traditional strategy of evangelistic outreach which would focus on extracting converts out of Islam. ("Extracted" converts would be those who, in order to profess faith in Jesus as Lord, are pulled out of their cultural moorings.) This African leader's plan was then challenged by another leader who had over three decades of experience ministering among Muslims in Asia. "That method has been ineffective for 1,400 years. What makes you think it will work now?" Then, the Asian ministry leader followed up his question as he looked his African brother in the eye and asked, "What is the gospel?"

### Misunderstanding the gospel message

Non-believers all over the world can misunderstand the gospel. Adherents of other religions, for example, might think that Jesus merely came to start a religion called Christianity, rather than to usher in the kingdom of God. Consequently, they might think the gospel is a teaching that requires them to join a new religion, which, for many, will jeopardize the relationship with their family—or even their own lives.

Here, at home, our non-believer friends might think the gospel is a list of do's and don'ts. And even those of us who grew up in the church may not realize what the gospel is and isn't. If we are going to respond to opportunities around us to present the gospel, it's important to understand what the gospel is.

### Seeking the gospel's essence

The altar call, the sinner's prayer, church buildings, the distinction between clergy and laity, and the current role of the professional pastor are five of more than 60 "post-biblical traditions" cited in Viola and Barna's *Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* (see opposite page). These things are not necessarily bad; they simply are not the gospel. They have helped people live out the gospel in certain cultural contexts which may or may not be helpful in other contexts.

Ever since I entered full-time ministry almost 35 years ago I've been seeking to understand and be able to explain the essence of the gospel message. In the process, I began to notice passages of Scripture that give a summary of the gospel, and began making a list of these "nutshell gospels." I Cor. 15:1-8 and I Peter 2:21-24 are two examples from different New Testament authors.

C.H. Dodd's research<sup>1</sup> of the content of New Testament apostolic preaching forms the basis of my conclusion that a solid, biblical understanding of the gospel message may be summed up in these simple points:

- In the fullness of time, God sent Jesus the Messiah as the Scriptures foretold.
- By His example and teachings, Jesus showed us how to live.
- He died in shame on a cross, bearing our sins.
- He rose again from the dead.
- He is now Lord, which He demonstrates by His Spirit today.
- God's kingdom will be consummated when He returns.
- Therefore repent, believe in Jesus, and live in this age as a member of God's kingdom.

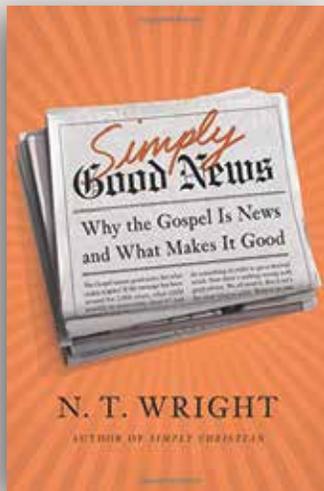
### Hungering for the gospel truth

E. Stanley Jones relates the story of a high-caste Hindu man in India who

(continued on page 20)

# Paradigm Shifters

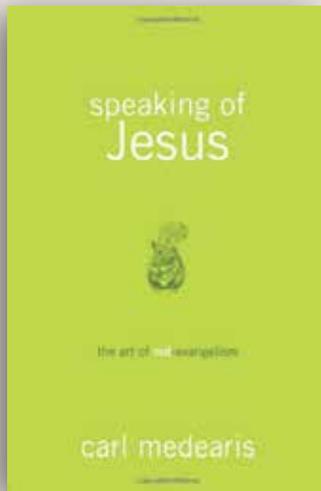
Reexamine the gospel, evangelism, and church



## Simply Good News: Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good

by N.T. Wright

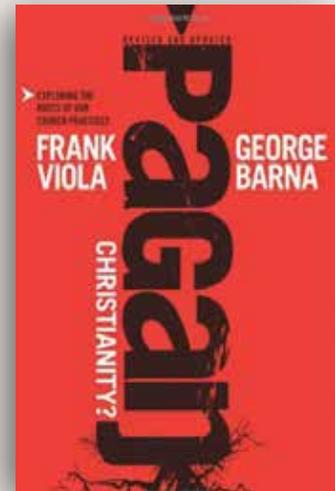
Noted Bible scholar N.T. Wright shows us how Christians today have lost sight of what the “good news” of the gospel really is. In *Simply Good News*, he takes us back in time to reveal how the people of the first-century—the gospel’s original audience—would have received Jesus’ message. He offers a clear and thoughtful analysis of the good news, and applies it to our lives today, revealing its power to transform us.



## Speaking of Jesus; The Art of Not-Evangelism

by Carl Medearis

In *Speaking of Jesus*, Carl Medearis draws on his experience of international reconciliation between Muslims and Christians to remind us of the heart of the matter: Jesus. Here he gives us tools, stories, and the foundation we need to move beyond “us” and “them” and simply talk about the One who changes it all.



## Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices

by Frank Viola and George Barna

Have you ever wondered why we Christians do what we do for church every Sunday morning? Why do we “dress up” for church? Why do we have pews, steeples, choirs, and seminaries? This volume reveals that most of what Christians do in present-day churches is rooted in pagan culture and rituals developed long after the death of the apostles. Coauthors Frank Viola and George Barna support their thesis with compelling historical evidence in the first-ever book to document the full story of modern Christian church practices.

N.T. Wright on:

## Why the good news is astonishing

*The gospel is not only that God reaches to us individually, offering us forgiveness of our sins. God's purposes are more expansive than even that. Says New Testament scholar N.T. Wright, "God's plan to put the world right has finally been launched."*

So how might we in turn summarize the good news—both the good news announced by Jesus and the good news that his first followers announced when they talked about him later on? The good news is that *the one true God has now taken charge of the world, in and through Jesus and his death and resurrection.* The ancient hopes have indeed been fulfilled, but in a way nobody imagined. God's plan to put the world right has finally been launched. He has grasped the world in a new way to sort it out and fill it with his glory and justice, as he always promised. But he has done so in a way beyond the wildest dreams of prophecy. The ancient sickness that had crippled the whole world, and humans with it, has

been cured at last, so that new life can rise up in its place. Life has come to life and is pouring out like a mighty river into the world, in the form of a new power, the power of love. The good news was, and is, that all this *has* happened in and through Jesus; that one day it *will* happen, completely and utterly, to all creation; *and that we humans, every single one of us, whoever we are, can be caught up in that transformation here and now.* This is the Christian gospel. Do not allow yourself to be fobbed off with anything less."

—*Excerpted from Simply Good News: Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good, by N.T. Wright, HarperOne, page 55.*

(continued from page 18)

said to a Christian, "I don't like the Christ of your creeds and the Christ of your churches." Jones' Christian friend responded by quietly asking the man how he would like "the Christ of the Indian Road." Jones continues the story: "The Brahman thought a moment, mentally picturing the Christ of the Indian Road... seated by the wayside with the crowds about Him, healing blind men who felt their way to him, putting His hands upon the heads of poor, unclean lepers who fell at His feet, announcing the good tidings of the kingdom to stricken folks, staggering up a lone hill with a broken heart and dying upon a wayside cross ... but rising triumphantly and walking on that road again." The Brahman suddenly turned to his friend and said, "I could love and follow the Christ of the Indian Road."<sup>2</sup>

As this illustration presents, people from all cultures and religious traditions

are hungering for Jesus—not a brand of religion. Yet research shows that Jesus' followers fail to demonstrate actions and attitudes consistent with Him. In fact, a 2013 Barna Group study showed "that most self-identified Christians in the US are characterized by having the attitudes and actions researchers identified as pharisaical." This produces dire consequences. "Millennials are often leaving church due in large part to hypocrisy they experience," says Barna Group President David Kinnaman. (See "Christians: More Like Jesus or Pharisees?", April 30, 2013, *The Barna Group*.)

### The gospel

Simply getting one's name on the church rolls or not working on Sunday are not the essence of the gospel message. Repentance from sin, faith in Christ, and seeking to follow His example are at the heart of the gospel. If people who are

looking in from the outside see us emphasizing various non-essential aspects of our life in Christ—even if it is done in the name of preserving the faith—we may actually be hindering them from seeing Jesus. †

<sup>1</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (Harper and Row, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> E.S. Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road* (Abingdon, 1925), 27–28.

**Frank Decker**, *The Mission Society's vice president for training and development, is a former missionary to Ghana, West Africa. He is an elder in the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.*

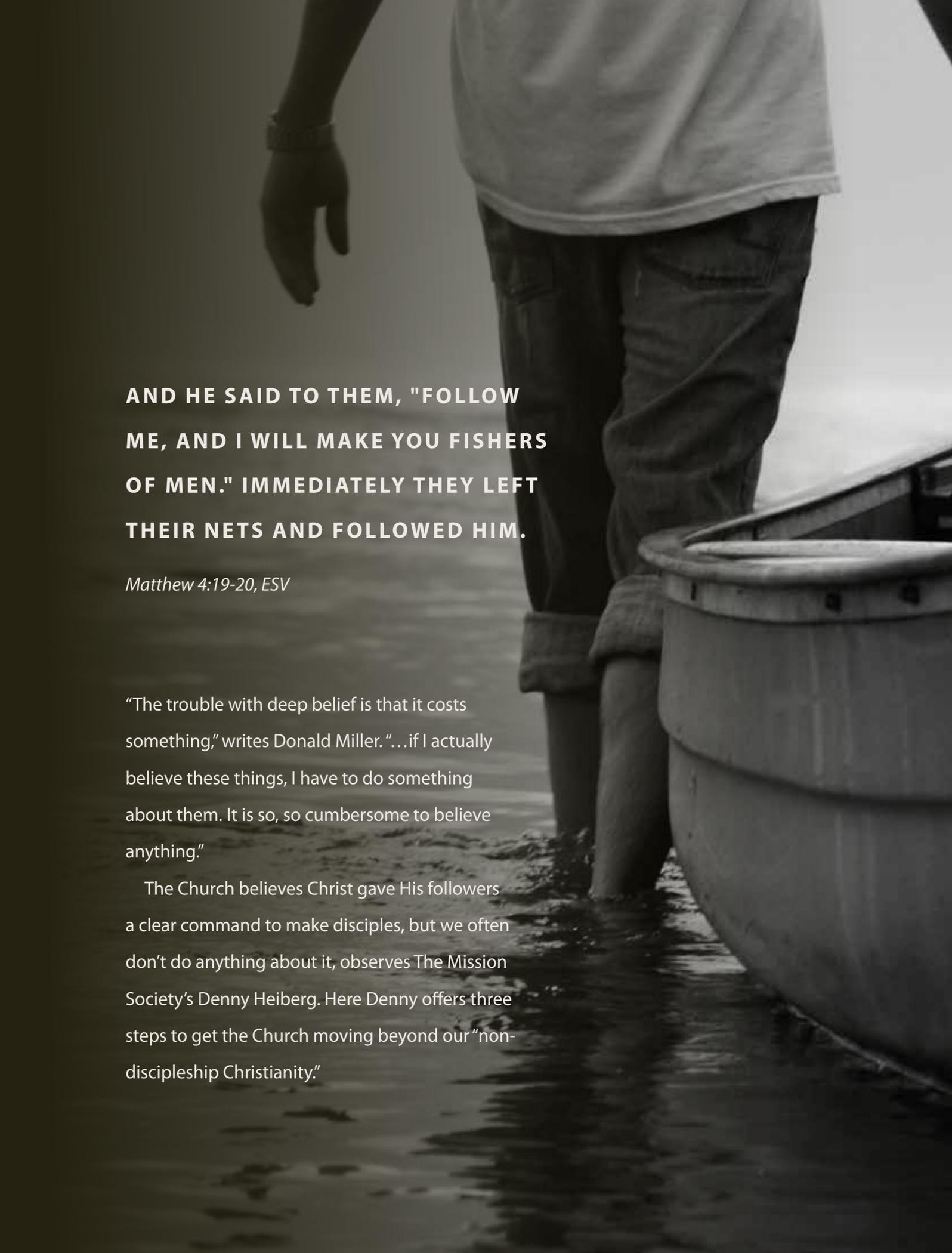


# BE BOLD IN YOUR GIVING.



Play a part in reaching the nations with the gospel.

- Train one (1) indigenous Christian leader to reach unreached people within his or her own country \$500
- Fund one (1) Global Outreach Weekend at a US church, mobilizing it for global mission \$1,250
- Train one (1) US missionary to multiply his or her ministry through strategic cross-cultural partnerships \$3,750



**AND HE SAID TO THEM, "FOLLOW ME, AND I WILL MAKE YOU FISHERS OF MEN." IMMEDIATELY THEY LEFT THEIR NETS AND FOLLOWED HIM.**

*Matthew 4:19-20, ESV*

"The trouble with deep belief is that it costs something," writes Donald Miller. "...if I actually believe these things, I have to do something about them. It is so, so cumbersome to believe anything."

The Church believes Christ gave His followers a clear command to make disciples, but we often don't do anything about it, observes The Mission Society's Denny Heiberg. Here Denny offers three steps to get the Church moving beyond our "non-discipleship Christianity."



**THE COST OF  
DEEPLY  
BELIEVING**



“The cost of nominal Christianity will be great for those who are lost in this world—for people in our communities, for people in our cities, for people groups around the world who will go on without the gospel because we’re content not to make disciples of all the nations.”

–David Platt

In my current role with The Mission Society I have the sacred privilege of helping people around the globe comprehend and engage in the number-one priority God has explicitly authorized His followers to accomplish: making disciples of Jesus who make other disciples. I am humbled that He would allow me, along with my wife, to invest in the precious lives of those serving locally and cross-culturally as we all seek to finish the task Jesus gave to us.

### **The unfortunate reality**

However, throughout my years as a local pastor and most recently serving with The Mission Society, I have encountered a significant number of stumbling blocks when it comes to the Church living out her purpose. I have discovered that church leaders and missionaries are not following the clear command of Jesus to make disciples of all peoples. As many have reflected on this reality in recent years, they have concluded, “the Great Commission has unfortunately become the Great Omission!” In other words, discipleship has become optional in the global Church.

### **The Great Omission**

What is the Great Omission? It refers to the reality that God’s people are not making disciples and teaching new converts to obey all that Jesus has commanded of us. But how could this happen when Jesus made it so clear in some of his last words spoken on the earth? (Matthew 28:18-20)

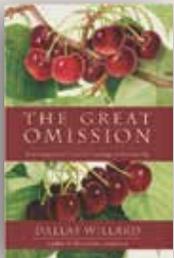
The barriers listed below are a composite of responses I’ve received from national Christians in 15 countries I have visited during these last three years. Sadly, very few of these believers are intentionally engaged in making disciples. As you read these responses, ask yourself if you and the people in your faith community could identify with these symptoms.

### **Why we are not making disciples**

- Most church people are confused as to who or what a disciple is and therefore, don’t have a clear understanding as to how to make a disciple.
- Most of us have never experienced a discipling relationship with someone who has invested his or her life of faith into us for the purpose of our spiritual maturity.
- We have come to believe that making disciples is the sole responsibility of Christian “professionals” or experts such as pastors, missionaries, Bible and seminary professors, etc.
- Many of us feel inadequate because we don’t know enough about the Bible to lead someone into a growing relationship with Jesus.
- Making disciples appears to take too much of a personal investment and sacrifice of time, commitment, and emotional energy.
- So many of us have been taught that winning someone to Christ and having him or her pray the “sinner’s prayer” is the end goal. After all, what could be more important than where one would spend his eternity?
- We, the Church, are focusing on making converts and church members instead of making disciples; offering exciting and attractive worship services instead of forming small groups of people who are growing in authentic and accountable communities of faith; church growth instead of kingdom growth; increasing people’s church activities instead of developing them as disciples; pastors preparing for their Sunday messages at the expense of preparing their people to make disciples; and discipleship as a program of the church instead of discipleship as the primary purpose and priority of the church.

# The Starter Collection

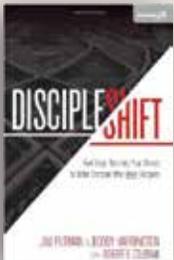
Denny Heiberg recommends some must-haves to help you dive into discipleship.



## **The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship**, by Dallas Willard

Willard's books have influenced generations of disciple makers, and this book is a must-read for anyone who takes Jesus' mandate seriously.

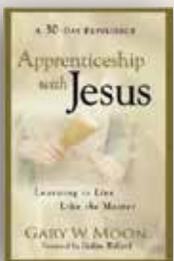
**Biggest takeaway:** "So the greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as 'Christians' will become disciples—students, apprentices, practitioners—of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from Him how to live the life of the kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence."



## **Discipleshift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples**, by Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington with Robert Coleman

Putman and Harrington have years of firsthand experience of leading churches whose mission is clearly making disciples. Robert Coleman has dedicated his life to making disciple-makers. This book is essential for those who want to realign the values of their church so that discipleship is at the core.

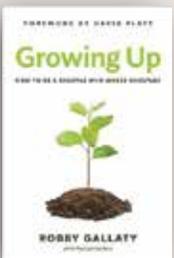
**Biggest takeaway:** The five shifts that every church must make to develop more and better disciples.



## **Apprenticeship with Jesus: Learning to Live Like the Master**, by Gary Moon

This is a unique resource on launching a personal encounter of following Jesus as His disciple. Moon offers a 30-day journey in which you actively practice being with Jesus.

**Biggest takeaway:** Thirty days of engaging spiritual instruction, reflections and apprentice activities.



## **Growing Up: How to Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples**, by Robby Gallaty

Discipled by David Platt, Robby is the lead pastor of Brainerd Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tenn. The church's mission and DNA is to "Deliver, Disciple, and Deploy." This resource is a practical roadmap for any church to follow in transitioning to become a discipling church.

**Biggest takeaway:** Chapter 3: The D-Group: A Blueprint.

## Other Top Picks:

### **Choose the Life: Exploring a Faith that Embraces Discipleship**

*By Bill Hull*

### **Discipleship is the Core Mission of the Church: Helping People Trust and Follow Jesus**

*By Bobby Harrington*

### **Disciplism: Reimagining Evangelism Through the Lens of Discipleship**

*Alan Hirsch (eBook, free download)*

### **Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship**

*By Michael Wilkins*

### **Living in Christ's Presence: Final Words on Heaven and the Kingdom of God**

*By Dallas Willard*

### **The Cost of Discipleship**

*By Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

### **The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ**

*By Bill Hull*



**Thank you!** You are part of growing discipleship ministries around the world. And because of you, missionaries are being trained in discipleship before they deploy to their places of service.

(continued from page 24)

The Church crisis of neglecting discipleship is not just affecting our nation; I have discovered that this crisis is a reality throughout the global Church. And while there are certainly a number of shining examples of the Great Commission being obeyed, they seem to be more of the exception than the rule.

### Changing directions

So how do we effectively and intentionally turn Christ's Church from living in deliberate disobedience towards fulfilling its purpose to extend God's kingdom globally? Jesus once told those who were following Him, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46) As I have wrestled with this question I have encountered three proven biblical approaches to initiate returning the Church to experience the transforming impact—one person at a time—that we read about in Acts and the New Testament letters.

#### 1. Start with an honest look in the mirror.

Ask yourself, "Am I living my life of faith in such a way that others see I am seeking to follow Jesus? (1 Corinthians 11:1) Are the fruits of the Spirit evident in my life? (Galatians 5:22-23) Am I giving priority to abiding in God's Word on a daily or regular basis? (John 8:31) Do I love other believers in a similar manner as Jesus loved me? (John 13:34-35) Am I producing much fruit in my life and therefore demonstrating I am indeed a disciple of Jesus? (John 15:8)"

#### 2. Reflect upon The Great Commandment.

Jesus summarizes the entire Hebrew Scriptures with the commands to love God with our whole being and to love others. (Matthew 22:36-40) Jesus also told His disciples that the proof of our love for Him is to obey His commandments and follow Him. (John 14:15; Luke 9:23) Ask yourself, "Am I proving my love for God and others by investing my life of faith into the lives of those who will be able to pass the gospel on to

others? (2 Timothy 2:2)"

#### 3. Make Jesus' last words your first priority:

Take time to read slowly the five passages that summarize the last words Jesus spoke to His disciples before returning to His Father. (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8) Ask yourself, "What is God saying to me in these passages? How am I giving priority in my life to these commands of Jesus to be a witness who intentionally makes disciples of Him with the people He has sent into my life?"

As you answer these questions with transparency, honesty and a heart to obey, God will reveal to you how you can become a catalyst in your sphere of influence where many will become disciples who extend God's kingdom globally and for His glory. As Dallas Willard said just three months before his death, "We are coming into a time when many churches and Christians who are in leadership positions will be able to say it's all about discipleship and transformation into Christlikeness." †

<sup>1</sup> Willard, Dallas; Ortberg, John. *Living in Christ's Presence: Final Words on Heaven and the Kingdom of God* (p. 10)

*Denny Heiberg and his wife, Cindy, train pastors, missionaries, and church leaders through The Mission Society's International Mission Mobilization and Discipleship Consultations. The Heibergs are also deeply engaged in pre-deployment training for Mission Society missionaries and their local church leaders. Prior to his work with The Mission Society, Denny served for 22 years in the pastorate in The United Methodist Church.*



# Crazy love

The unimaginable joy of discipleship

*Face it. We can shy away from discipling because we were not disciplined ourselves. Many of us don't even know what it looks like. Here, some of our newest missionaries tell how they were disciplined and how they are discipling others.*

## Discipleship opportunities burst into our everyday lives.

When we think about when God has been most clearly at work in and through us, the times in our lives in which discipleship played a key role come quickly to mind. These include times of our being disciplined and discipling others.

What is discipleship? In our experiences, and as was defined during a Mission Society training, discipleship involves followers of Jesus experiencing transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit and enabling others to do the same.

The lifestyle of discipleship directs all aspects of our lives for His glory and purpose in the world. As individuals and as the family of God, we never “graduate” from being disciples. Jesus is constantly forming us and using us as agents of change in the world. By grace, we have the privilege of working with King Jesus to bring about His kingdom of redemption and reconciliation on earth as in heaven.

I (Mark) have great memories of discipleship while in college, especially with the student ministry organizations of Cru and Bridges International. It seemed that my days were fueled by regular times of being disciplined and discipling new believers (including a few roommates). Time in discipleship was a time of encouragement when things were rough. It was a time of searching and finding foundational truths of the faith, and a time of coaching others to naturally share the good news of our Lord Jesus with friends.

While serving Christ in Mexico a few years ago, I (Kenzi) had the opportunity to disciple five young girls. It was a time for them to ask questions, seek prayer, and be encouraged by someone they trusted. Through this experience, I learned how much God truly desires to have a personal relationship with us all. Currently, I am being disciplined by someone I trust and admire in the faith. Our time together is a blessing. It encourages me and provides accountability in my prayer life.

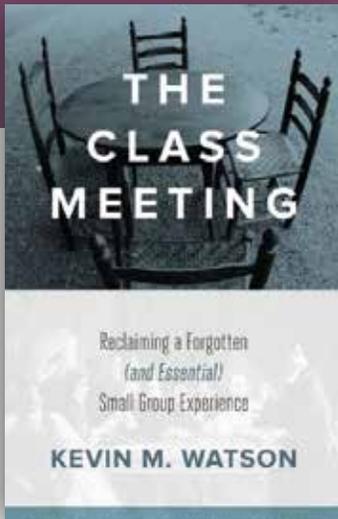
God has amazed me (Mark), by showing how much He is at work. During my short 18 months at my last job, great

relationships with coworkers from Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian backgrounds were formed through a small group study. Our true friendship allowed me to better listen to and learn from their perspectives and to respond to their questions about who Jesus is and how we can be a part of what He is doing. All this happened by following Jesus and praying that the Holy Spirit would work through our time together.

The opportunities for discipleship are all around us. We have been sent into the world, both near and far, to make disciples. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will continually lead and transform you, and use you in your daily life to draw others closer to Him and to each other. †



*Mark and Kenzi Fogleman both felt a call to Africa at a young age. Mark grew up in Kenya, where his parents served as missionary doctors for 10 years. He later studied civil engineering knowing he wanted to help provide clean and sustainable water to African communities. Kenzi grew up in Oklahoma. For a year, she worked in Mexico alongside her parents as they served for five years among orphaned children. Kenzi studied sociology, always with a heart for the orphaned children in Africa. After marrying in 2012 and taking a vision trip to Kenya in January 2014, Mark and Kenzi both discerned that God was directing them and their daughter, Emma, to live and serve in Northern Kenya. Their plan is to deploy to Kenya in the fall of 2015.*



## For your church: Disciple like John Wesley

Do you wish you knew how to form effective discipleship groups in your church? We recommend: *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience*, by Kevin Watson.

Author Kevin Watson writes, "Because most small groups are built around curricular study resources, people rarely get down to the real substance of what small groups are all about: transformation, or becoming like Christ. Most Christians know much more than they are practicing or applying to their lives. Class meetings were essential for the first Methodists, and they are essential today, because they helped people grow in faith in Christ and learn how to follow Jesus with their lives."

Watson's book unfolds a vision and a practical strategy for developing small groups. After eight weeks, the book is laid aside and the class meeting is born.

Multiple copy discounts are available through Seedbed at [Seedbed.com](http://Seedbed.com).

## From the Foglemans:

## Discipleship's key ingredients And how to get started

By Mark and Kenzi Fogleman

Discipleship looks different from one relationship to the next. It can simply be having coffee with someone and investing in his or her life for the glory of God. Whether it is a structured time of going through specific material, or simply hanging out when time allows, a few key ingredients we feel should be a part of it are: constant prayer, a listening ear (to God and each other), an authentic loving heart, and room for the Spirit to move.

For those looking to be discipled, think of a mature servant of Jesus in your life who you respect and enjoy being around.

Pray for him or her and your relationship, and take a step of faith as you ask your friend to spiritually invest in you.

For those who are not yet discipling someone, keep your eyes open to see how Jesus is working in the lives of your friends. Pray for them. Be real with them, and encourage them in Christ. Don't be afraid of not having all the answers. And as is true in all relationships, know that there will be joy and pain, but trust God. You are a light in the world's darkness.



## She let me into her life. It changed mine.

My friend and fellow Mission Society missionary Sarah\* has been the truest picture of discipleship in my life. I first met her when I was 17. She was a leader on our church's high school mission trip to the Middle East, a trip that would change the direction of both of our lives.

Soon after we returned, some friends and I decided that we wanted Sarah to be our discipleship group leader for our senior year of high school. When we asked her, at first she said *no*, because at the same time God was prompting my friends and me to ask Sarah to disciple us, He was calling Sarah to go to the Middle East and serve full-time. The next year of her life was going to be full of huge, hard decisions. But we begged and begged and begged her. And she said *yes*.

In the year that followed, Sarah let us enter into her life. We went over to her house every Wednesday. While we drank coffee, made dinner, and did the dishes together, we talked about the hard things in our lives and what God was teaching us.

Sarah, along with another amazing woman, named Libby,\* led us in how to hear from God. They poured truth into us and walked with us as we prepared to graduate high school and take our next steps. But the most impactful part of that year was being in Sarah's life as she was hearing from God and taking steps towards a life of full-time kingdom work in the Middle East.

Sarah disciplined me, not by going through a lesson plan or a discipleship book, but by being a part of my life and allowing me to be a part of hers as we both went on journeys of discovering our identities in Christ.

Last year, I found myself sitting on Sarah's couch with her cat in the Middle East telling her about the confusing season

of life I was in. We talked and prayed, and she gave me wise advice. And then she took me to her workplace, and I met her students and friends. We sat in the home of a refugee family and drank tea as she spoke with them in their language. Once again, she let me into her life, and I saw its fullness.

I saw how Sarah walked in joy and grace. And I craved that. Whether she was aware of it or not, she was leading me closer to the heart of the Father and closer to my own identity and purpose.

The other day I was hiking in the hills with a Muslim friend. She's 17 years old, a senior in high school. She has so many questions about Jesus, the Bible, and how to hear from God. We climbed up to the top of a hill and sat watching

the sunset. She asked me if we could watch the sunset once a week and talk about God and pray together. I said, "Of course!" I am so excited to invite this girl into my life the same way that Sarah invited (and continues to invite) me into hers.

Discipleship shouldn't be complicated. Jesus led His 12 disciples by inviting them to walk with Him on His journey to the cross. They laughed together and walked together. They did the dishes, and drank coffee, and watched the sunset. I pray that my life will echo the life of Christ. I walk in the grace and love of Jesus Christ, and so it is my most beautiful responsibility to invite people to walk with me. ✝

*Elizabeth graduated from Georgia State University in 2013 with a degree in English. She now serves as a Mission Society missionary in the Balkans, where she teaches English and ballet and assists in student ministry. Her favorite things about the country where she serves are the mountains and the macchiatos.*

*"Whether she was aware of it or not, she was leading me closer to the heart of the Father and closer to my own identity and purpose."*

\*Pseudonyms



## They are on their way!

### Unnamed missionary – Balkans

(November 2014)

This missionary is partnering with a local church and an indigenous ministry in the northern Balkans to reach into that community for Christ.

### Unnamed missionary – India

(January 2015)

This missionary works with a local ministry to bring hope to poor and marginalized women in India. She also serves in women’s and children’s ministries.

### Joey & Kerry Davidson – Liberia

(February 2015)

Joey and Kerry have been called to serve in marketplace ministry with the people of Liberia. Their vision is to transform lives by running a successful company that provides training and employment opportunities within the tourism and hospitality industries. Until they can enter Liberia, they are serving in South Africa, gaining skills for their future ministry.

### GreenLight Interns

#### Alysabeth Vititoe – South Africa

(February – July, 2015)

#### Lenora Cooper – Nicaragua

(February – April, 2015)



Left to right: Frank Decker, Steve Wilson

### Mission Society staffers take on new roles

In January, the Rev. Frank Decker and Steve Wilson transitioned into new roles with The Mission Society. Decker, who has held several other leadership roles, has now assumed the role of vice president for training and development. He initiated The Mission Society’s training department in 1994, when he and his wife, Vicki, returned to the States after two terms of missionary service in Ghana. He is excited now about returning to training as his primary responsibility, which also includes the spiritual

development of The Mission Society’s ministering community.

Wilson previously served as a missionary to Mexico for three years and in several key staff roles in The Mission Society’s field ministry department. He now serves as senior director of international mobilization to multiply mission-minded and mission-sending churches internationally to engage the least-reached in their neighborhoods and in the nations.

### Missionaries in difficult posts gather from across a continent

“Christianity is having a much more difficult time advancing in areas where there are people who think they are above or beyond it, such as in the Western, post-Christian world,” observed missions journalist, the late-David Mays. Europe can be a hard place for Chris-

tian witnesses. In early March, Mission Society missionaries serving in Europe gathered together in Spain. Europe’s regional consultant, Kirk Sims, tells of the much-needed time, “The time away was very fruitful in building community amongst our missionaries across the continent. Beyond talking about the situation of engaging in mission in highly secularized contexts, it was a time of refreshment through mutual sharing and prayer.”



From left to right: Kirk and Nicole Sims (Germany), unnamed couple, Miki Chastain (Estonia), Laurie and Billy Drum (Spain)

# Ministry opportunities

*Do you sense God calling you to serve in Western Europe? We seek to grow teams and add specific skill sets in several of our current places of ministry. (See left and also page 15). For more information, write to [mobilization@themissionsociety.org](mailto:mobilization@themissionsociety.org) or visit <http://tinyurl.com/nqc-wbzk> to complete an interest form. We are happy to help you discern ways in which you can join Jesus in His mission.*



## France

Reach people in a region of France where ancient pagan traditions are alive and well and the traditional church is ridiculed. Work alongside a couple who are actively sharing their faith as businesspeople in the local community.



## Spain

Learn Moroccan language and culture, living, working, and praying among the 100,000 Moroccans living in Spain.

Offer vocational training through a church-related NGO purposing to offer hope to unemployed, depressed, and desperate 20-somethings in Andalusia, Spain. (Young people make up more than half of Andalusia's population.)

A photograph of a young woman with blonde hair and blue eyes, wearing a red jacket, smiling warmly and hugging a young child with dark skin and short hair. The child is also smiling and holding a small, clear, faceted object. They are surrounded by other people, some wearing colorful clothing.

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# Living missionally in a post-Christian context

We can inhabit our new culture by pining away after our yesteryears, or by seizing the chance to live our faith in fresh ways



We might think our goal should be to “reinststate Christian culture,” even to legislate it. But should that be our aim? How do we respond to our changing context? Jim Ramsay offers some ideas for a way of living that have the potential for changing not only individuals, but entire cultures.

Some years ago while my family was still serving in Kazakhstan, a friend from the US who was on staff at a college asked me an existential question. The college had a rich tradition in the Christian faith, but like many such institutions, it had increasingly left that heritage in recent decades. The college administrators were in the process of implementing policies that my friend believed were in direct opposition to some fundamentals of the faith. He had been one of a handful of people on campus fighting against the policy, trying to maintain the Christian character of the institution. The question he asked me was, “Rather than fight to try to make this a Christian institution, should I instead learn what it means to live out my faith missionally in a non-Christian

institution?” How he answered that question would have major implications for how he would engage the context of his life and work.

As the United States increasingly shows “post-Christian” trends, those

“Rather than fight to try to make this a Christian institution, should I instead learn what it means to live out my faith missionally in a non-Christian institution?”

of us who put our faith in Christ are faced with a similar question. Should we be wringing our hands and despair over what we perceive to be a slide

into apostasy? Are we to engage in the so-called culture wars? Or should we be digging into what it means to live out our faith missionally in the context of a non-Christian culture? I wish the answer were simple enough to give in a brief article. It is not, but I offer here some ideas that might help believers as we wrestle with issues and consider our response to our changing context.

## Understanding our culture

The first issue is the whole concept of a Christian culture. There is a common assumption that American culture is or, at least, once was a “Christian culture” and reflected a “biblical worldview.” With this assumption in place, US believers today might understand their goal to be reinstating “Christian culture.”

"It is said that when Chinese Christians experience a wave of local persecution, instead of praying against those who persecute them, or even praying for a safer setting, they pray for God's strength to be witness in the midst of the challenges. This is what it looks like to live missionally in an unchristian context."

But let me suggest that ours is and was not a "Christian culture," per se. Christianity has certainly influenced American culture. And many American values can trace back to, and are consistent with, the faith of the Bible. But that is quite different than saying it is a "Christian culture."

This understanding is critical for missionaries. If US missionaries believe their home culture to be Christian, the line between Christian faith and American culture can become indistinguishable. Missionaries can end up injecting into a host culture elements of American culture that have little or nothing to do with Christian faith. We see this sometimes in other cultures when, through missionary efforts, churches are planted that are more reflective of American culture than they are of what the gospel looks like when reflected through the host culture.

With that in mind, the Church should be a prophetic voice, challenging aspects of culture inconsistent with the gospel rather than being co-opted by these cultural patterns. Regardless of how much a culture has historically been influenced by the faith, issues of justice, human dignity, human need, and morality should always be of great concern for the Church, since these are clearly great concerns in the Bible. At the same time, the Church also should be creative in reflecting the gospel in ways that make sense to the local culture. In other words, the Church should affirm what is in alignment with the biblical revelation and challenge that which conflicts. This is true in any culture setting. It is what we teach our mis-

sionaries to do and what all of us should do continually in our home cultures.

### **Transforming culture**

A second issue is the assumption that the best (or only) way to impact culture is through litigation or getting "our man or woman" into public office. Certainly believers need to be salt and light and to advocate for truth in the public square. Yet, as my friend wondered, is trying to legislate Christian culture institutionally the most effective, especially when the culture is increasingly showing post-Christian trends? Sometimes strenuous efforts to this end serve only to depict Christians as angry people who protest, write harsh letters, and excoriate people in on-line forums.

Interestingly, the book of Acts gives us a picture of what it looks like when people live missionally in a very unchristian—even hostile—environment. For example, when Peter and John were punished by the authorities, they simply prayed for boldness rather than organizing a protest or writing angry letters to the editor of the Palestine Post. What is noteworthy is that this missional life was very attractive to common people who flocked to the growing faith community. Even intense persecution could not stop the growth of the Church.

Today, we see practices of first-century missionaries being lived out among Christian communities. It is said that when Chinese Christians experience a wave of local persecution, instead of praying against those who persecute them, or even praying for a safer setting, they pray for God's strength to be witness in the midst of the challenges. This

is what it looks like to live missionally in an unchristian context.

When we send missionaries to other countries, they enter as guests at the discretion of the host country's immigration laws. They don't usually expect to find a governmental system that is overly sympathetic to the Christian faith. But the missionaries and the local believers they work with live out lives of faith in that context in ways that attract others to the love of God. In our culture, that same posture might be more attractive than simply expressing frustration (often loudly) when our government seems not to be supportive of our faith.

### **Living missionally**

Obviously, there are no simple answers as to how we should live as followers of Jesus in 21st century America. On the one hand, we don't want to become passive individualists who give no thought to unjust structures or policies. But on the other hand, we should question the effectiveness and witness of maintaining a hostile posture toward our culture, lifting up a model of a former "Christian culture" and striving to regain it, especially given that perhaps it was not as Christian as we thought! Living missionally, living in communities that exemplify love for one another and love for others, advocating for those in the margins, being bold, but humble and loving in the face of diversity—those practices are truly subversive and have the potential of transforming not only individuals, but entire cultures. †

*Jim Ramsay is The Mission Society's vice president for mission ministries.*



## What's a good church to do?

With cultural values in the US shifting away from Christianity, 'churches and church leaders have but one charge.'



In 2009, Chapin UMC in Chapin, South Carolina (shown), invited The Mission Society to lead it through our "GO Process for Local Churches." Today, the people of Chapin UMC have a dream and a prayer that they will have 3,000 of their own involved in mission, challenging each to "be the one." So when we were looking for a church to provide a guest article on the theme of communicating Christ in today's waning Christian culture, we knew exactly where to go.  
—**Stan Self**, *The Mission Society's senior director of church ministry*

**By Christopher DiVietro**, minister of assimilation, Chapin United Methodist Church

"Aren't you worried about all of these foreigners moving to America and changing the culture? When I was younger everybody went to church, but Christianity just isn't as popular as it used to be."

The woman on the phone was well-intentioned, and I thanked her for her honesty. She had worshipped at our church while in town visiting her son for Christmas, and we had quite a lengthy discussion when I called to follow up with her. Concerned the Church in America was no longer the center of society, she wanted to know what I thought the church should do.

"I'm not worried," I told my friend. "I

don't see pluralism and diversity in our country as problems to overcome but opportunities to embrace. That there are more people in America who don't know Jesus means we have more opportunities to proclaim the gospel."

I sensed no racism or bigotry in my new friend's attitude, only an earnest desire to see the gospel of Jesus Christ exalted and His Church persevere as steadfastly as ever. In her mind the influx of diversity and shifting of cultural values away from Christianity meant impending doom for the Church in America.

### Should we be worried?

Research suggests the trends this woman astutely observed are reflected even more prominently in shifting generational demographics. Studies conducted

for Thom Ranier's book *Millennials* estimated 65 percent of the Builder generation [born before 1946] were evangelical Christians; 35 percent of the Boomer generation [born between 1946 and 1964] are evangelical Christians; 24 percent of the GenX generation [born between 1965 and 1979] are evangelical Christians; and 15 percent of the Millennial generation [born between 1980 and 2000] are evangelical Christians. In fact, a recent Pew Forum study found one-fifth of the US public—and one-third of adults under 30—are religiously unaffiliated. Employing social demographics alone and assuming these statistics remain consistent, one sees America becoming an increasingly secular nation.

As if these statistics were not depressing enough, our turn down the

rabbit hole does not end there. Where a regular attender was worshipping four times a month, now they may attend twice; where a regular attender was worshipping twice a month, now they may attend once a month or once every other month.

These facts being reality, we return to my friend's question: Aren't you worried?

And my answer remains the same: No, not at all.

### Time to reorient

When I read the book of Acts, I see a Church that was persecuted, oppressed, and forced to exist on the margins of society. While the Church may have achieved cultural

majority, centrality, and superiority in recent centuries, what makes American Christians so presumptuous as to think we deserve a dominant place of mainstream institutional influence in America?

When we, as evangelicals, are disheartened over the state of the Church in America, what are we bemoaning? Do we mourn the loss of orthodox gospel preaching? Or do we mourn the loss of our privileged place in society? Do we long to exist as churches that make disciples for the transformation of the world? Or do we long to exist as churches that make life comfortable for those who already follow Jesus? Are we weeping over our neighbors who do not know Jesus? Or are we weeping over last week's giving and attendance?

Brothers and sisters, what shall we do? I propose what is needed is an entirely different orientation towards our culture.

The Church is not an outpost of heaven that it may serve as a gathering

place for those who know Jesus. The Church is an outpost of heaven that it may serve as a herald of the gospel in a culture that grows increasingly hostile to Jesus. Church is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. A gathering of individual believers who have responded to the testimony of scripture and are gathered together to cherish their freedom in Christ, the Church must further

*"The church is an outpost of heaven that it may serve as a herald of the gospel. ... Jesus did not write a book but left behind a community to communicate the gospel of the kingdom."*

be defined in terms of its call to bear the gospel to the world. Jesus did not write a book but left behind a community to communicate the gospel of the kingdom.

### How to effect change

Jesus said in John 20:21, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending

you." As Jesus was sent to earth to dwell among His creation, so we as His people are sent to dwell among those who do not know Jesus—and dwell among them we must!

In equipping the Church to witness to the kingdom and proclaim the gospel, we as undershepherds have but one charge: To prepare our people for the work of ministry! (See Ephesians 4: 11-16, 1 Peter 2: 9-10; 2 Timothy 2:2.) There is no building campaign, no children's program, no evangelism training, and no committee that can replace our work to invest in our people and release them for ministry.

Remember: Vision inspires change. Processes facilitate change. And habits sustain change. Cast vision for your people; develop processes to move your people towards God's mission, and prepare your people to cultivate new rhythms of gospel intentionality in their everyday lives.

Two books that have been immensely helpful to me in this journey are *Tan-*

## Equip your congregation

*Prepare your people to be gospel bearers to the world*

At Chapin United Methodist Church, Chapin, South Carolina, small groups grow. Why? Probably for several reasons. First, leaders develop new leaders. They intentionally mentor another who will lead his or her own group. Second, after several seasons, small groups multiply. (Groups of 14 are encouraged to multiply into two groups of seven.) Third, discipleship is not taught as acquiring knowledge, but as experiencing life transformation. "By emphasizing maturity-as-obedience, we have seen our group members engage in acts of service and enter into discipling relationships with more frequency," writes Chris DiVietro. Through these small groups, church people are being equipped to bear the gospel to the world.

*gible Kingdom and And: The Gathered and Scattered Church, both by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay. †*

**Christopher DiVietro** lives in Chapin, South Carolina with his wife Elizabeth, daughter Aletheia, and yellow lab Samson. They are expecting a son—Judah—in June. The minister of assimilation at Chapin United Methodist Church, Chris is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in organizational leadership from Johnson University.





# Discipled by the nations

Our changing spiritual climate can open us to voices we may never have heard.



*“My Kenyan friends have taught me so many things about hospitality and togetherness,” writes Richard Coleman about his Kenyan friends in the US. Shown here are Sonji Pass and Sonia Crawley, Mission Society missionaries who serve in Kenya.*

In his article, “Living missionally in a post-Christian context” (page 32), Jim Ramsay writes, “[T]he Church should be a prophetic voice, challenging aspects of culture inconsistent with the gospel, rather than being co-opted by [counter-Christian] cultural patterns.” When we read such statements, my guess is that most of us immediately think of the “Church” as being the body of believers born and raised in America. But what if the prophetic voice we need to hear is from the larger body of Christ? What if we need our brothers and sisters from other nations to challenge aspects of our American culture that are inconsistent with the gospel?

The most recent statistics show that the Church is growing fastest in the Global South and East and among diaspora peoples from these areas. Given this, and the increasing number of “unchurched” in the West, maybe we, as the Church in America, need to open ourselves to being discipled by our non-Western brothers and sisters. In order to do this, we would need to lay aside our xenophobia and, with humility, posture

ourselves as learners. Only then can we truly hear the prophetic critique of our culture.

## We’ve lost it

I can say that I’ve become a better person for having learned from my friends who immigrated to the US. My Kenyan friends, for instance, have taught me so many things about hospitality and to-

*“I can say that I’ve become a better person for having learned from my friends who immigrated to the US.”*

getherness. Their model of community, in contrast to our individualistic and efficiency-oriented culture, has exposed our deficiency in the lost art of caring for each other.

When my wife and I had our first child, we were blessed tremendously with gifts from our American family and friends. However, it was our Kenyan friend who went above and

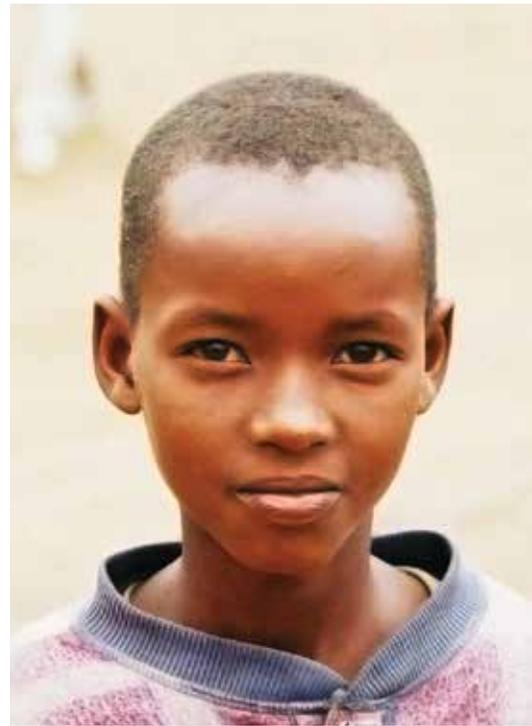
beyond. She came over to our house and cooked njahi (a type of black bean), uji (porridge), and other meals. She also brought groceries and made multiple weekly visits for almost a month. Why? Because in her Kikuyu culture, women shouldn’t do any work until they fully recover from having a baby. How many women in America have no such support? What would it look like if believers in our country took the same level of care for the people around them?

Our non-Western friends have a lot to teach us. Will we listen? Imagine us sitting at the feet of Hutu and Tutsi believers, learning how to reconcile our deep ethnic tensions in America. Envision our Indian brothers and sisters critiquing our missionary-sending structures and helping us to develop a holistic strategy. Consider how much insight we could gain from a Chinese believer about the spontaneous multiplication of churches.

## We need it

The American Church has much we can learn from its brothers and sisters of other nations, if we will be willing. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you,’” writes the Apostle Paul. “On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.” (1 Cor. 12: 21-22, ESV) †

*Richard Coleman is The Mission Society’s senior director of mobilization and candidacy.*



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