

# MISSION NEWS

## JOURNAL

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## Missions and Opportunity

by David Blackney

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Demographers have stated that the six billionth baby will be born this summer. Based on the statistics and probability factors they have assembled, they predict that the child will be a boy born somewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. These social scientists have before them an intriguing adventure and a daunting task in identifying this child. They must first determine the date and probable country and then the potential village. Then they will wait for the first boy to be born after their theoretical threshold passes to pronounce him the symbolic if not the actual 6,000,000,000th inhabitant of planet earth. As Christians, we have the much easier task of identifying those already around us who still need Christ.

But like the Macedonian vision helped the Apostle Paul determine his direction, it may help us who are living at the end of the 20th century, to put a face on the six billionth baby in order to hear the cry "Come over and help us." We recognize that we should not need to know the demographics of a "10/40 window" to move us to obedience today. However, the knowledge of global statistics could help jar us from our lethargy. At least, the whimsical endeavor to find this precise child does remind us of the reality that if we are to reach particular people with the claims of Christ, we must continually send others after them. And, the sending is, in reality, a much more daunting task than finding a symbolic child.

The encouraging news for us as Western Christians is that God has blessed us with many of the necessary resources for the sending and going. To whom much is given, much is required. We have the much. Will we find the will for the required? What would it take for us to do this? It will take the convergence of having the right people in the right places. This convergence is what we commonly call opportunity.

*Opportunity* is defined as a fit or convenient time; a *favorable* occasion or circumstance. Opportunities are defined in relationship to stated goals. An opportunity is favorable only as it is an avenue to advance the goal. It becomes fitting because it meets the objective. A study of its synonyms makes this clear. A *chance*, an *opening*, a *break*, and an *occasion* are all kinds of opportunities. They denote times and circumstances which are favorable to some purpose.

"When such a propitious moment comes in the normal course of events, we call it an *opportunity*; when it seems to come by accident or unexpectedly, we call it a *chance*. An *opening* is an opportunity that permits one to enter a field, launch an enterprise, embark on a career, etc. The informal *break* is quite similar, and stresses in addition the emergence of an opportunity in previously opposing circumstances. *Occasion* ...denoting a time suitable for some action, or requiring some action... differs from the





other synonyms in that it does not have the suggestion of good fortune which is implicit in them.”<sup>1</sup>

Doing missions effectively is all about how we use the ‘fortunate,’ or we would say *gracious* opportunities with which we are presented or that we, in obedience to God, make for ourselves (2 Tim. 4:2).

The Scriptures exhort us to the proper use of the *opportune* moment. On a personal level, we are reminded, “Today is the day of salvation.” (2 Cor. 6:2); “Today if you hear His voice harden not your hearts.” (Hebrews 3:8 - 4:7) *Time*, translated *opportunity* in Col. 4:5 is defined by Strong as “a definitely

limited portion of time with the added notion of suitability”; “the time when things are brought to crisis.”<sup>2</sup> Thus Paul’s missionary prayer request: “praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a *door [of opportunity]* for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ” (Col. 4:3). Paul comforted the Philippian church for their lack of giving by his acknowledgment that they “were concerned before, but [they] lacked *opportu-*

*nity*” (Phil 4:10). Their concern for missions was always there, however the opportunity to give was not.

Opportunities are indeed fleeting. Sometimes elusive. But most of the time they are lost because we are not able—we are not prepared to take advantage of them. We do not have the right people in the right places. These opportunities are lost because we are unwilling to do what it takes to seize them. Jesus said the harvest is now and it is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Notice he did not say the churches are few—or the churchgoers, or the programs, or the seminars, or the conferences are few. These are the many. No, He said the laborers, the pickers, are few. Most of us do not relish the role of the laborer. The harvest picker, like the house or field slave, is not the role to which we are attracted. In fact, we resist these servant images. We would rather be supervisors, managers, or directors, ‘senior’ pastors, anything but laborers. In missions, it is no different. It seems we’d rather be strategists, advisors, agency execs, mobilizers. But the harvest doesn’t need plantation owners or even taskmasters—the harvest needs pickers. Where will we get them? And like harvest pickers, is it true that just about anyone will do? These questions must be answered because effective mission work will only happen when the right people are in place when the opportunities arrive.

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Every analogy can break down, even biblical ones when pressed too far. The harvest laborer must not be like the unskilled migrant harvester. In fact, the Scripture is clear that he must be a leader in specific areas. He must know how to lead his home to properly model redeemed relationships to a lost culture. To lead in the church, to be able to solve the problems in the church and on the mission field, he must have a record of accomplishment in solving his family’s problems with biblical solutions. He must be a leader in properly handling the Word of God, able to convey its message accurately. He must have a sterling reputation before those outside the faith. But we must never forget that his task is still one of intense involvement. Like the picker, he goes to check *each* branch looking for fruit. Paul went “house to house” with the whole counsel of the Word of God (Acts 20:20).

To take advantage of the *breaks*, the *openings*, that come our way, our churches must again actively pray for, groom and then affirm those whom the Lord calls out from their midst to go to the harvest. As it is now we are not replacing retiring career missionaries with new career missionaries. We do not have the proper personnel in place. Most of those volunteering to go do not volunteer for the *opportune* places. But, if only twenty-five percent of evangelical churches would concentrate on drafting and sending *one of their own*, we would more than replace the missionaries that are retiring from the field. We could actually open new fields!

*One of our own.* Is that really possible?

We question, because we have followed agency and denominational patterns for so long that we tend to forget that even their missionaries came from some church, somewhere. The commission and its responsibility has been given to the church not the parachurch mission agency or denomination. The task of leadership in the church is to be the catalyst in enabling the people of God to do the work of God, not only here, but also abroad. In missions, if the elders don’t lead in identifying missionaries and forming partnerships, it usually will not be done. As pastors, we know this is a sobering responsibility. We also know by experience that we alone are not able to convince people to go. We have taken steps to challenge our people and educate them properly. Yet, most congregations have not had the experience of sending one of their fellow members to the mission field. Those of our membership who have answered the call to missions are usually endorsed by us but then we rely on the denomination to support them or their own fund raising efforts through other missions agencies rather than supporting them significantly ourselves. Most of us usually resign ourselves to supporting others that have been brought to our attention. And while this is commendable, without our



sending one, we are not keeping pace with the opportunity or the blessing that would be ours. At our best and with all of our efforts to personalize missions, we have minimal relationships with most of the missionaries we support. *One of our own.* We concede it would be exciting, perhaps the best of all the possible ways we currently do missions. Are there other steps we can take?

In observing those churches that have the joy of sending one of their own to the mission field, I have witnessed several factors surface repeatedly. These churches and church leaders demonstrate the following traits:

### **They pray and trust more specifically.**

We pray for missions and missionaries, so let us commit ourselves afresh to pray that the Lord of the Harvest would call one of ours to go. Let us ask Him to prepare the congregation to meet the challenge of their support when He answers our prayer. Some have been reluctant to pray this way in light of the struggle they have to support the existing pastor and/or staff they have. It is hard to think about supporting a missionary family when support seems to be wanting for local staff needs or building projects. We must trust that God can provide both needs. These are key issues: trusting and asking. We know intellectually He can provide, but often we do not trust Him or even ask for what seems beyond our abilities.

### **They develop discernment and lead their members to commit to God's best.**

Discernment is necessary to know which opportunities are fitting. Taking the steps to define missions biblically enables the church to decide which appeals are proper and which will tend to diminish their resources for better endeavors. We must learn to identify the better and best among the sea of the good. We must learn to recognize God's purposes and ways in doing missions. Discernment is needed because some missions "experts" are advising the churches to implement procedures and practices based on appeals of cost effectiveness. But these ill-conceived methods violate the Scriptural ways of fund raising and the principles of personal obedience in going and sending. Strong missions congregations take personal responsibility for the mandate and search for the best ways to fulfill their task.

### **They set priorities without losing flexibility.**

Priorities: because no one can do it all. How humbling missions is! All that we do is at best, incomplete! Churches blessed in their mission endeavors are not proud of their accomplishments. They don't brag of

budgets and fields, but are constantly asking God for more opportunities and ways to improve. This is where priorities with flexibility are crucial. God is gracious in allowing us to do those things we desire (2 Cor. 8:3-4, 11-12). We can decide where to place our investment for missions. We can strive for excellence. However, flexibility is needed because opportunities can be missed because they don't present themselves in the clothes of our priorities. The Bible was given to disclose to us God's plan. It was given so that we can line up with it. The Spirit of God is given to lead us in understanding truth and for guiding us in the service of the truth. We often get this backwards. Our prayer too often is "God go with us this day" or "God bless our plan." When God is actually saying follow my lead. God ordains opportunities that we may miss because they did not fit into our plans or agendas. Be assured God's plan will be established (Is. 46:10-11) but through someone else and we miss the blessing of being workers with God. Successful churches recognize the leadership of the Spirit in their midst, taking opportunities that often become bridges to their priority objectives later.

### **They focus on effective training more than traditional credentials.**

Business leaders often do not care what field it is in which a prospective employee's has earned his college degree. They know that the tenacity and basic disciplines that have allowed them to succeed in the academic arena can be shaped and developed for the job they want accomplished. Often there is little connection between the degree and the work. Our churches are beginning to recognize the same principles about doing missions. They recognize that the individuals in their midst who have learned how to do 'church' here, can, with some specialized training succeed in doing the same things across cultural barriers. They understand that knowing how to worship, how to interpret and proclaim the Word, how to give godly counsel,

*These churches don't try to re-invent the wheel, but scrutinize the kind of training needed... that can most readily help their missionaries prepare.*

and how to settle church disputes with redemptive church discipline are lessons not adequately taught in even the best of academic settings. These are better learned in the context and crucible of involvement with the local church. Some churches recognize their role in training, but then unfortunately adopt from traditional methods an academic model in training potential leaders. Pastoral mentoring and supervised service (discipling) is emphasized in successful churches. Then once it is apparent that a person is gifted and called of God, he gets any additional specialized Biblical and technical training he will need to make it on the mission field. These churches don't try to re-invent the wheel, but scrutinize the kind of training needed and take advantage of schools and training facilities that can most readily help their missionaries prepare. Some 'hoops' are not worth the time required to jump through them, others are essential. Strong missions churches can discriminate the difference, separating the chaff from the wheat thus enabling the timely departure of new missionaries to the field.

### **They decide what they want to do and get on with it.**

As mentioned earlier, God is gracious in allowing us to do what we want in picking the particular avenues we use to fulfill our responsibilities in missions. But churches with significant missions ministries don't err by thinking that having options in choosing approaches means that missions itself is an optional endeavor. The mandate to go to the ends of the earth is not optional. Planting a congregation in the next community is not the same as planting one in the 'ends of the earth.' God blesses obedience. Goals and strategy are important as long as they don't substitute for obedience. Successful churches are characterized not by their talking about missions but by their actual doing of missions. While they may conduct missions conferences which tell of their endeavors, the emphasis of their reporting is more spontaneous and regular throughout the year, a steady outgrowth of what they are doing. Missions is not something they emphasize once a year but rather an ongoing activity of the congregation. Partnerships between the congregation and their missionaries are actively sought and promoted. These congregations are as active in making opportunities as they are in taking opportunities. They understand that the reason behind the command to minister the word "in season and out of season" is that the time will come when sound doctrine will not be endured (2 Tim. 4:3). Opportunities existing today may be gone tomorrow. They emulate verse 5. They are sober minded—clear thinkers in all things; they endure hardship; they keep the work of evangelism central in their tasks; they finish well, they fulfill their ministry. Their members run their course knowing that just like the Apostle Paul, one day their time

will be up, their departure will be nigh. They live with the awareness that they only have a certain amount of time allotted to them in which to fight the good fight. They don't have time for trivialities. Sounds rather serious and sober! But I would be remiss not to mention that these congregations experience the greatest joy that comes from fruitful service. While some congregations have focused on creating and pursuing an atmosphere of fellowship and joy, we must recognize that these blessings come primarily as a result of being involved in doing significant ministry. Mission minded churches put service to God first, not the "felt needs" of the congregation. They reap the marvelous blessings of fellowship, harmony, and joy as the spin-off blessings of consecrated service.

*Mission minded churches put service to God first...*

### **They are convinced and do what it takes to implement their goal.**

Churches that send one of their own have learned that sending their own is one of the best ways to fulfill their missions responsibilities. They are convinced this is a more biblical methodology. They have decided sending one of their own is the best endeavor among the good—that sending one of their own is the needed priority. It assures them of the type of ministry that will be extended to the field. They see it as the crux, the pivotal or vital point of their obedience. Again, they don't re-invent the wheel. They join hands with others who can help. They partner with those churches and mission agencies that understand the role of the sending church and will not step between them and their missionary.

While the demographers may or may not find the actual six billionth child—we can, by God's enabling, send the adequately trained missionary that could reach him and his peers. We can determine to identify one of our own, adequately train him and his family, and get on with the task. As **The Master's Mission** founder Paul Teasdale has stated, "There is no point in praying for open doors when we don't have the personnel with the training to go through them." We at TMM are committed to partnering with churches in doing both. Together we can identify and train missionaries that will make the most of their God ordained opportunities!

1. *Standard College Dictionary*, Funk & Wagnalls, 1967, p. 947.
2. *Strong's Concordance*, kairios, #2540, synonym entry #5853.

# The Global Village of 100 People

- 57 are Asians



- 21 are Europeans



- 14 are North & South Americans



- 8 are Africans



- 70 of the 100 are non-white
- 70 of the 100 are unable to read
- 70 of the 100 are non-Christian
- 80 of the 100 live in sub-standard housing
- 1 of the 100 is college educated

• 50% of world's wealth is owned by 6 citizens of the United States of America

**“To whom much is given — much is required.”**

## **The Master's Mission serves local churches by:**

- Training Biblically qualified missionary families for a lifetime of service.
- Assisting the local church to follow a Biblical pattern of missions—emphasizing the role and responsibility of the elders with their missionaries.
- Equipping missionaries to be prepared biblically and technically to meet the demands of the mission field to which they are called.
- Assisting churches to develop a Biblical philosophy of missions by conducting seminars for missions committees and congregations on site at the local church.
- Providing the outgoing assistance to churches in getting their missionary to the field—accounting services, passports and visas, crating and shipping.
- Offering a broader base of counsel to churches in solving problems and meeting the challenges their missionary encounters on the field of service.

**To discuss or schedule a training event at your church call David Blackney at 1-800-419-8618.**



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# An Open Invitation



*The Master's Mission extends to you an invitation to visit our training base, so you can see first-hand how we are equipping missionaries for cross-cultural ministry. You're welcome to bring your family or come yourself for a few days to relax. While you're here we will introduce you to our training program and discuss mission opportunities that will encourage and excite you. The rest of the time is yours, to refresh yourself in one of the most beautiful settings God has created.*

To schedule your visit, please contact us at  
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