

Lift Up Your Eyes and SEE...

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"Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." –Jn 4:35 (NIV)

"Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" –Matt 9:37,38

Jesus says, "Lift up your eyes and see..." or, as in the NIV, "Open your eyes and look..."

What does He want us to see? From these two passages, Jesus wants us to see three things.

1. The Harvest is Plentiful

The harvest field is the world. The world's population today is more than 7.6 billion (worldpopulationreview.com, June 2018).

About 2.4 billion are Christians, 2.6 billion may have heard of the gospel but 2.6 billion have never even heard of the name of Jesus in their own languages (Pew Research Center, extrapolation).

The 2.6 billion who have never even heard of the name of Jesus consists of more than 6,000 people groups with their own language and culture (<http://www.thetravelingteam.org/stats>). These 6,000 unreached people groups are separated from Christians because of language, culture, politics and physical barriers. To reach these people groups with the good news of Christ, we must go and live with them, learn their languages and cross the cultural barriers. Therefore, the greatest need in missions today is for cross-cultural missionaries.

2. The Field is Ripe for Harvest

In Jn 4:35, Jesus is emphasizing the urgency of evangelism. He says, "Now is the time for harvest." It is always easy to rationalize that the present is not the best moment for action. It may be easier tomorrow or the day after, or perhaps in the next generation. "No," said Jesus, "Don't say there are still four months. Now is the time. Go now and gather all the workers you can. The field is ripe for harvest. Tomorrow may be too late! The weather may have changed and the crops could be destroyed by a storm."

The evangelistic harvest is always urgent. The destiny of

men and of nations is being decided every moment. Every generation is crucial; every generation is strategic. We are not responsible for the past generation, and we cannot bear full responsibility for the next one. However, we are fully responsible for the present generation.

Jesus said, "The fields are ripe for harvest." This statement is truer of our time than ever before.

The Church in South America, Africa and Asia is growing at an exponential rate. As a result, the epicentre of Christianity has shifted to these continents (collectively called the Global South or the Majority World). The harvest is unprecedented in history.

Never has the soil of the human heart been better prepared. Never has the grain been thicker. Never have we had more efficient instruments in our hands to help us gather the harvest. Yet at a time when the harvest is the ripest in history, the Church has not been able to take advantage of the opportunities because of one serious drawback.

This leads us to the third thing that Jesus wants us to see.

3. The Workers are Few

Jesus says, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." (Mt. 9:37)

Ralph Winter and Bruce Koch estimated that there are more than 250,000 global evangelical missionaries ("Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge", in Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader, 4th edition, 2009). About 90 per cent are serving in existing churches, newly-founded churches and among people within cultures where the gospel has already penetrated. Only 10 per cent are serving among the unreached people groups in the world.

If the Church of Jesus Christ were to meet the challenge of reaching the 2.6 billion who have never even heard of the name of Jesus, two things must happen: (1) a great re-deployment of missionaries, and (2) an additional force of at least 100,000 cross-cultural missionaries.

In the light of these observations, what does Jesus want us to do?

Why do you accept invitations to teach internationally?

This is a question that I have encountered. The answer is not simple, part of the answer lies in the fact that I love to teach and learn with others in different contexts. Further, much of the answer has to do with the conviction that I have sensed a call to offer a warning with regards to some of the mistakes that the church in the West has made; and regrettably, continues to make.

Many reports about the church in the West are staggering, discouraging, overwhelming; and in many ways, condemning. It has been reported that while over 4,000 new churches will be established in North America this year, over 7,000 churches will close. Explanations for this are numerous; everything from changing demographics to secularism, to postmodernism, to the fact that the West has moved into a post-Christendom era. Neither the length of this article nor insight allows me to offer the definitive explanation for the present situation of the Western Church, but surely one needs to see that much of the answer lies at the doorstep of the church.

Ronald Clapp, in *A Peculiar People, The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society*, states:

"Western civilization has been so powerful economically, militarily, technologically and culturally that the church, in sponsoring it, has seemed close to the center not merely of a few men's and women's lives but of history itself." (p. 16)

He then continues to explain that the western world has essentially said to the church: "Thank-you for getting us to this point but we don't need you anymore." I would concur and would add that seemingly most of the West have not even acknowledged some of the significant contributions that the church has made in the development of western civilization.

Dallas Willard prophetically addressed the Western Church's role in creating the present state that we face; namely, the great omission. Willard wrote, in *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*, "For at least several decades the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian." (p. 4) The implications are clear: How can the church be healthy if the standards for being a follower of Jesus are so often ignored? One could even ask: If we are not growing as disciples then do we not forfeit the right to call ourselves followers?

Lesslie Newbigin, the British theologian, missiologist, missionary, former Bishop of Madras, India returned to England after decades of service in India. Newbigin was shocked and dismayed over the state of the Christian



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The Call to Be Missional

Church in the West. He subsequently asked a challenging, and haunting question; "Can the West be converted?"

He then proceeded to nurture an essential conversation on what it means to be the church, and, what does it mean to be a church that is involved in missions. The context, of course, will influence the conversation and conclusions, but the call to be missional is a universal mandate for the Christian church and everyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus.

This missional conversation, and the approach to missions that it should uphold, are guided by the premise that God is a sending

God: The Father sent the Son, and the Son sent His Spirit, and God's people are sent to share in the *Missio Dei* (The Mission of God).

Missional is a term that, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, has been in existence for approximately 100 years. To be missional is not just an event or some type of strategic plan, but rather, missional is an adjective that describes the way in which we are to be involved in missions. Therefore, to be missional is to have all our programs, projects, people, functions, activities, thoughts and efforts converge and focus on, and share in, the *Missio Dei* – The mission of God. The Apostle Paul said it this way: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God . . . and whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17).

To conclude, as others (Allan Hirsch, for example) have correctly pointed out, the church does not have a mission; but rather, the mission has a church. Therefore, the Global Church and every individual follower of Jesus must be missional as we see ourselves as "a sent people" who must faithfully and obediently respond to the invitation to share in the *Missio Dei* – The Mission of God.



Dr Robert (Bob) Shaughnessy, from Canada (with his wife Kathy, left) has taught two courses in missions and pastoral studies at DTC every January to February since 2016. He is an ordained pastor and an adjunct professor at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto.

Discipling Youth Cross-culturally

DTC alumni Sebastian and Jacqueline Gopal (2005-2006) serve as missionaries in Nepal. They have three sons: Jedidiah Jivon, Kiran and Josiah (right). We asked Sebastian to share with us over e-mail about his experiences in cross-cultural ministry.

Could you introduce us to the cross-cultural ministry in which you are involved?

My family and I have been in Nepal for the last 13 years. We are sent by the Methodist Church in Singapore. We are mainly involved in discipleship ministries and church planting ministries.

Jacqueline disciples youth in the context of the children ministries. Many of these youth are teachers leading the weekly children ministries in the churches. I am involved in discipling and training youth within our Methodist Churches in Nepal. We are currently discipling youth as young as 11 years old with the Basic Christian Living (5 Assurances) and the Living in Christ bible study series.

Some of our youth are discipling other youth. It is our prayer that we will see those being disciplined by these youth, discipling others.

How do you go about discipling and teaching youth in Nepal? What has been helpful to disciple and teach them, and what mistakes did you learn from?

I had to recall how I grew up in my faith as a youth. I relooked at my journey in detail and used the same processes as a guide in my discipleship. The mistake is also taking what I think are best practices in Singapore and implementing things without consideration to the cultural implications. One has to be sensitive to the culture that he is working in. He also has to be very clear what are biblical truth and principles and what are "church cultural" practices. We should not bring in "church cultural" practices, but we are to bring in biblical truth and principles into our lives.

What have been some turning points in your understanding of cross-cultural ministry?

I strongly believe that God placed us in a cross-cultural context to help us to understand him deeper. The main turning point for me was when I went through my Basic Christian Faith and Foundations (i.e. 5 Assurances) with the Nepali context in mind. Initially, I approached it with the intention of explaining the scripture (Basic Christian Living) to the Nepali but in doing so, the culture helped me to know Christ and my faith in a deeper level.

In the Assurance of Salvation lesson, we are asked: "Who gives Eternal Life?". Many of our immediate answers to this question would be "Jesus". But when we see 1 John 5:11-12, it is clearly stated that God has given us eternal life.



Then the argument would be Jesus is God or Father God gives us eternal life through his Son.

So who is our God? Is our God only Father or Son? Our God is the Triune God. Therefore Father God has given us eternal life by giving us the right to be his children (John 1:12); Jesus gives us eternal life like a spring of water (John 4); the Holy Spirit is the seal of our salvation (Ephesians 1:13).

Thus this simple question in the lesson caused me to think about how to teach this truth to the Nepali in a way they could understand better.

In Nepal, all official documents from the government MUST have three important things. Firstly, the document must have the right letterhead with the government crest on it. Secondly, the document must be signed by an officer in red ink. Third, there must also be a blue seal (chop) on the signature.

Our salvation is likewise. The Father (like the letterhead), the Son (who signed with his red signature by his blood) and the Holy Spirit (a seal of our salvation) all have a part in our salvation. In addition, we have three witnesses to our salvation. The Triune God is involved in our salvation, not just one personhood of God.

What challenges do you face in the cross-cultural ministry?

The main challenge is that Nepal is still considered a Creative Access Nation (CAN). As such, one is to be alert and careful to bring across the gospel to another person. Many had taken it for granted that this is a free country. The authorities are coming on harder in recent years upon those who are aggressive in their ways of sharing one's faith. Pray for us as the community of believers in Nepal prepares herself for a more challenging future where persecution or social pressures are on an increase.

How can DTC alumni/ partners pray for you and your family?

Pray for us as we transit back to our home country in about a year's time.

1. Pray

First and most important of all, Jesus wants us to PRAY! He said, "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:38).

Commenting on Matthew 9:37, 38, missiologist Dr. Paul Hiebert said, "If the size of the task discourages you by its scope and perplexity, THEN you are in a position to understand why Jesus went on to say, "Lift up your eyes ... and pray to the Father ... in other words, "lift up your eyes – even higher!"

Founder of China Inland Mission (now OMF International) J. Hudson Taylor said: "We are asked to do an impossible task, but we work with Him who can do the impossible."

Many of us cannot reach the mission fields on our feet, but we can reach them on our knees.

2. Give

Missions is a very expensive enterprise. But every cent invested in saving the lost is worth it because the souls of men and women are more valuable than the whole world. Jesus asked, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36)

The work of God is hindered today because of a serious lack of financial support. God has blessed us with much material blessings. He expects us to use them to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to other nations. Unless we increase our giving and direct it to missions, we will never be able to fulfil the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

"For God so loved the world that He gave ..." God gave

His only Son. He gave Heaven's best. What have you given? Have you given yourself? Have you given your children? Have you given your prayers? Have you given your money? Have you given anything?

3. Go

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus says, "GO and make disciples of all nations." This command is not just for the apostles but for the whole Church. It is for you and for me.

We "go" because we are under authority. We go to "all nations" because they are under authority also.

The renowned evangelical leader Dr. John Stott made this comment: "In the final analysis, we engage in missions today not because we want to or because we choose to or because we like to, but because we have been told to. The Church is under orders. The Risen Christ has commanded us to 'go', to 'preach', to 'make disciples' and that is enough for us."

The harvest fields are crying for more workers. They cry until their pillows are wet with tears. But no help came.

Unless the Church of Jesus Christ, unless you and I, respond to God's call, the Great Commission will never be fulfilled.

God had only one Son and He made Him a missionary. Can we do less?



Wan Chee Wan
Dean

A time to cry out to God

The DTC community met for a time of lament on a Wednesday afternoon this quarter.

It was a departure from our usual chapel time when a guest speaker would give a message or the community would pray for the needs of DTC and for one another.

Dr Eileen Poh, who is teaching the first-year students the Psalms this quarter, led us in the lament. She said: "Most people are familiar with the

psalms of praise and thanksgiving, but the most common type of psalm is the lament."

She introduced the features of a psalm of lament by using Psalm 54 (e.g. address to God, complaint, confession of trust, call for vengeance, vow and praise) and then we read Psalm 13 responsively.

We also sang hymns and meditated on the song "How Long" by Stuart Townend. We then observed a few

minutes of silence for each person to bring his or her lament to God for losses suffered that were still causing pain.

Each of us also prayed for brothers and sisters in different parts of the world who were suffering persecution for the sake of Christ, based on prayer points from the Barnabus Fund prayer guide.

We ended by confessing our trust in the LORD and singing the hymn, Great is Thy Faithfulness.

New website

DTC has launched a new website at www.dtc.org.sg It comes with a new design and updated information for potential applicants. For example, it outlines the admission process and includes a breakdown of the costs that a student could expect to incur. It also displays more prominently the buttons to download the course information and the letter of enquiry. Check it out and give us your feedback.

Giving to DTC

Donors may issue a cheque made out to Discipleship Training Centre Ltd. and mail it to **33A Chancery Lane, Singapore 309554**; or transfer the funds to DTC's account number **024-901049-4** with DBS Singapore by ATM, Internet banking or telegraphic transfer.

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