

New Strategies in Global Evangelism

Greg Swinney

When Jesus spoke with his disciples following the resurrection he sandwiched three words in the middle of his final challenge. They may seem daunting and overwhelming, and for some the three words sound like the theme song from *Mission Impossible*. We tend to quickly pass over the three words: "Of all nations."

Jesus' commission in Matthew 28:18-20 provides our marching orders and challenges us to a life of global evangelism: "Go and make disciples of all nations." Biblically speaking, global evangelism requires cultivating, planting, watering, and harvesting throughout the world (1 Corinthians 3:6).

We cultivate the hard soil of the heart and prepare it for the truth of the gospel. We plant and water with relational support and intellectual evidence for the gospel. Finally, someone enjoys the blessing of bringing in the harvest of that heart when a sinner makes the willing decision to follow Jesus. Each of us is called to do our part in the organic process of global evangelism.

Some people fear the word *evangelism*. Our minds float to visions of street corner preaching, door-to-door "cold calling," or sweltering nights in a mosquito-infested jungle. When it comes to our own circle of relationships we fear saying something that will offend a close friend and bring our long-term relationship to a painful end. You may feel like my friend Mike who said, "What if someone asks me a question I can't answer?"

Wineskins Have Expiration Dates

Jesus told a parable to his disciples that we should take to heart. He described new wine (the gospel) as constantly needing new wineskins (the methods we use). Wineskins expand as the fresh wine within them expands. As wineskins age, they become brittle, cracked, and no longer able to carry the new wine as they once did.

So it is with the methods we employ in personal and global evangelism. A strategy, method, or event that worked successfully 20 years ago may no longer be effective. New efforts in missions must be dreamed and developed. It's a temptation for us to get so connected with the wineskin (the method), that we forget about the ultimate importance of the wine. Fighting that temptation we must spend more energy envisioning new strategies—strategies that fit us, our culture, and, most importantly, reflect the wine they carry.

New Wineskins on the Foreign Field

National mission organizations are dreaming big dreams and deserve a pat on the back for their creativity and boldness. Doug Lucas of Team Expansion recently told me, "We are excited about our new efforts in the training of apostolic leaders in the areas of unreached people groups. Our 80-hour training program is gaining traction and we're excited about the future." Christian Missionary Fellowship International reports, "Our ministry among the urban poor in Nairobi continues to thrive. Ten schools have been established, eight churches planted, over 4,200 children are being sponsored, and over 1,000 people have been assisted with microloans" (see www.bigdent.org).

Harnessing Modern Technology

Today, with the World Wide Web, smart cell phones, text messages, Facebook, and tweeting we have more tools at our fingertips than any generation in human history. Good News Productions International is now expanding their NOMaD Project (equipping **N**ationals for **O**utreach using **M**edia and **D**iscipleship). GNPI provides the resources and training for nationals to produce quality media resources to reach their mission field. Great results are already being seen in Kenya and 15 additional nations are requesting the NOMaD

project in their region.

When the Going Gets Tough

What about the countries that are closed to missionaries or have restricted access? The world watch list (<http://www.opendoorsusa.org/persecuted-christians/world-watch-list>) names 50 countries where the worst Christian persecution exists. These nations either prohibit or openly restrict traditional missionary efforts. What about these countries? Does "of all nations" apply to them? Absolutely.

I have a friend in one of these countries. He is a businessman helping indigenous people improve their standard of living by raising chickens and growing coffee. The underground churches he is starting are slowly but faithfully taking root. Other mission efforts that develop the economy find people making jewelry out of recycled items. My wife wears an unusual necklace of tightly wound, colorful newspapers. It reminds me of those in areas who are hearing about Jesus through non-traditional means. As I sip my morning cup of coffee (grown in a Third World nation), I think of the sacrificial life and influence of my good friend with his new wineskin.

Glocalization at Home

Local ministries that have a global impact have caught on in the United States today and these efforts are sometimes referred to as *glocalization*. International student outreach is one such ministry and is close to my heart. The "of all nations" part of Jesus' command seemed impossible for me until I considered the staggering growth of the international student population on our university campuses. If current growth trends continue (and the world remains at peace) we will have over one million international students and visiting scholars in the USA by 2014. Over two-thirds of these students come from nations with restricted access. God is bringing the future leaders of the world to us. In many cases they are only minutes from our front door.

As I write this article I am in sunny southern California. Walking the campus of the University of Southern California opens my eyes to the field around us that is white unto harvest. USC enrolls more international students than any other university in the United States. Over 8,000 international students from 150 countries are here. Dropping by the university's international student office gave me the chance to meet their professional and kind staff. "Is there anything I can do for you?" I asked. A staff member replied, "We would love to have volunteers." Helping students with their English, invitations to share in the holidays (most international students cannot afford to go home for college breaks), and friendship are just a start. If we had 1,000 families in southern California who each "adopted" three international students into their family we would be reaching less than four percent of the global population that currently resides on the campuses of California.

Sharing God's love with students "of all nations" can be as close as a few minutes from your home. We have been invited into this international crossroads. What's stopping us? Long before the church had pulpits there were kitchen tables and dining rooms. People met in homes and broke bread together. Sharing a meal and God's love with people "of all nations" is commonplace in my home. Colombia, Nepal, India, Malaysia, South Korea, China, Japan, Indonesia are more than spots on the globe to me; they are the faces of those who sit across from me at my kitchen table.

You Can Be Involved

What is stopping you from sharing your faith in a gentle and gracious way with that friend at work or neighbor across the street? Do you live in a university or college town? Would you be willing to invite an international student to be part of your family for a year—or more? Sponsoring a child in a developing nation or sending financial support to a mission organization is now as simple as the click of a mouse button. Will you?

Max Lucado suggests in his recent book, *Out Live Your Life* (Thomas Nelson, 2010), "I wonder if God creates people . . . so he can prove his point, 'See, you can do something today that will outlive your life.' Who would

want to miss a chance to do that?"

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