

God's Great "Co-mission"

Psalm 86:9 "All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your Name. For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God."

Giving and receiving money cross-culturally is common in the economics of our everyday, global world.

Brian Knell of Global Connections writes that "Christians today know more about the world than ever before. World issues are presented to us every day. ... All [of these things] connect Christians to the world. ...Business and tourist travelers provide a great opportunity ... to relate our everyday world to our faith."

Hello, I'm Barbara Shantz. (TWR's global development liaison) In this first video, we're going to talk about what we give, where we give but most importantly, why we give.

In both secular and Christian work, words like "sustainability" and "unhealthy dependency" describe concerns for long-term accountability that we dare not shy away from. Simply thrusting resources into a situation without thinking through how it will affect the future has been found to have damaging long-term effects for both the giver and receiver.

Those who give sometimes feel like their only value in cross-cultural ministry is writing checks. Those who receive sometimes feel like that abused (English) word "charity" – worn out and misunderstood. They're tired of asking for money but stuck in a system where they feel their only value is their written reports on what they've accomplished.

The topic of money seems to bring everyone to attention. When the topic of money is brought into cross-cultural conversations, the tensions increase and at some point, misunderstandings are sure to occur.

So – while this video series does not promise to give you four steps to fixing your money problems in cross-cultural ministry, we *do* promise to give you four points from which to begin discussing the most common bumps in the road that, once understood, should give you ideas on how to steer around dangerous potholes.

As we look at the Bible, we see that God’s purpose for humankind is that we would praise and honour Him. And, incredibly, He has included us in His mission for the Earth – every believer is urged to go out and bless others by making disciples.

As Christopher Wright details in his book *The Mission of God*, “The Bible presents to us a portrait of God that is unquestionably purposeful. The God who walks the paths of history through the pages of the Bible pins [God’s] mission statement to every signpost along the way. ... Christ crucified and risen is the key to all history, for he is the one who accomplished the mission of God for all creation.”

TWR’s President and CEO, Lauren Libby, sees one of those many signposts in Psalm 2:7/8: “The Lord said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession’.” Jesus is to inherit all ethnic groups of the earth, and as believers, we’re participants in God’s great work. God’s goal of reconciling believers from every nation is repeated throughout the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. He is looking forward to having diversity represented in his Kingdom, and we are invited to His ‘co-mission’!

This common thread of taking God’s message to the nations begins in Genesis 12:3 and continues in Matthew 28: 18-20 and right through to the last book of the Bible, where we see the results of our cross-cultural and cross-generational work – the vision and goals of Revelation 7.

God uses the Great Commission as the vehicle on our journey to become the Holy Temple of God described in Ephesians. At the end of the journey, we will experience what He promised in Revelation 7, where every tribe and people and language is gathered before God’s throne in that Holy Temple built by the Spirit.

The fact that God’s Great Co-Mission is a common thread of Scripture tells us two things:

- every believer is an equal participant.
- and that no one nation or generation will be able to complete the job on its own.

Ephesians 2:19-22 tells us: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

When we think of this long-term view, it reminds us that, by design, the plan seems to be that we learn to work together over generations. The fact that we can now work globally means that cross-cultural ministry can happen more quickly and that everyone can help reach the ends of the earth. As we see global population movement increase, the Gospel can truly be taken “from anywhere to everywhere.”

If we were to picture the Great Commission as a bicycle, the front wheel could be the local ministry as working to take the Gospel to local communities, then further out to surrounding nations and finally to the ends of the earth, as we see in Acts 1:6-8.

The back wheel can represent foreign assistance helping to push forward the local ministry, which sets the direction. Let the chain between the two wheels represent the process of connecting resources from the assisting rear wheel to the front wheel, where the ministry takes place.

The global church, therefore, is the cyclist and remains balanced as all the parts move forward, powered by the Holy Spirit and working toward a common and meaningful goal.

Once the new believers are reached, they too must be invited into the process. This is the discipling, or multiplication, process of the Gospel. The front wheel then replaces the back wheel and helps the new believers accomplish their God-given vision.

And what about the old back wheel? If it still has anything left in it, let the previous wheel be reconnected to another Great Commission front wheel, and continue the journey to the ends of the earth, to the end of the age.

But as we look around the world, this is not the normal picture of cross-cultural ministry we see. If a front wheel is always receiving resources and doesn't learn to find their own, they become dependent on that back wheel. In those cases, a front wheel cannot become part of the larger Great Commission, reaching the ends of the earth because they have to depend on the back wheel for their very existence.

What happens when, not if, the back wheel wears out? For surely no wheel is meant to work forever. We see no model in Scripture of a local ministry receiving from a foreign source permanently.

In other cases, we often see the back wheel try to steer the ministry by the bicycle *chain*. Of course, this doesn't work either. If you see that your local ministry is convinced that whoever has the money must also have all the best answers, have a look at James Chapter 2. James warns us about showing partiality to the rich because this is probably also where you'll see the rich feeling arrogant. In extreme cases, you can see a pattern of the rich and their money – not the Holy Spirit – determining the local ministry's vision; in other words, the deciding factor becomes money rather than prayer and reliance on God's provision.

Once there are believers in an unreached area, we can be assured that the Holy Spirit will also guide the local people with the ability to know the best way to reach their own culture. For the long-term good of the ministry, the front wheels must steer according to the vision of God for their work. The front and the back wheels must act together as equals in the journey, both receiving their respective instructions from God through the global church – the cyclist, in our analogy – and preparing for the long journey into the next generation rather than expecting quick wins or glory.

Now, here are some questions that have been helpful to others. Choose which might be helpful for you to prayerfully think through and discuss with others.

1. Is the front wheel of your ministry allowed to steer toward its God-given destination?
2. Is the front wheel being prepared for becoming a “back wheel”?
3. Is there an “exit strategy” for the back wheel of your ministry before it breaks down?

On the Faith Reliance web page, www.twr.org/faith-reliance, you can see a list of books, videos and articles pertinent to this first step we've taken together regarding Faith Reliance in ministry.

Any comments, questions or critiques are welcome at faith-reliance@twr.org

The next video in this series deals with the topic, “Generosity.” I look forward to seeing you there!