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needs inch toward resolution, the perseverance and compassion of Christ-followers bring glory to God and create the space for people to encounter him without pretense. Without expectation of first hearing the good news, unmerited service turns up grace-filled encounters.

CALLED TO GOOD NEWS

Just as political ambassadors represent their country's interests and policies as the personal designates of their own heads of state, so we are God's representatives who carry his kingdom message: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Stunning. The King entrusted his message of grace and salvation to us, his royal subjects.

In a bold and seemingly reckless decree, Jesus empowered believers to deliver his message. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," Jesus told his disciples after his resurrection. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:18-19). This mandate of evangelism, now known as the Great Commission, remains a central tenet in the faith of every Christ-follower. In every tribe and tongue we tell the message that Jesus Christ is alive, and through his sacrificial death we can stand before God the Father without sin, shame, or fear. Central to our calling is proclamation.

On this earthly journey we will be called on to bear witness to our heavenly home and the King of kings. But has our voice gone silent? Many believers have expressed concern that the church has forgotten her call to evangelism. Ed Stetzer notes that "in relating God's mission, the message increasingly includes the hurting but less frequently includes the global lost. . . . It is ironic, though, that as many missional Christians have sought to 'embody' the gospel, they have chosen to forsake one member of Christ's body: the mouth." It is a grave error to neglect this part of the body.

Whether because of a lack of urgency or an aversion to potentially risky conversation, we shy away from the verbal expression of the gospel. Andy Crouch suggests that

meeting the physical needs of the poor wins attention and affirmation from a watching world. Naming the spiritual poverty of a world enthralled to false gods provokes defensiveness and derision from those who do not even believe there is a god. Disaster relief and economic development seem like achievable goals that bring people together; religious claims to know the one true God seem like divisive mysteries that drive people apart. . . . In short, working for justice is cool. Proclaiming the gospel is not.

Yet when we bring the life-giving words of the gospel message, we speak into the need of the lost soul. Do we lack Paul's boldness, who declared, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (Romans 1:16)? The good news of Jesus Christ heralds the arrival of a new, all-encompassing kingdom. Yet our obsession with not offending people with the gospel insults the very nature of the message. The Spirit prompts but our tongues remain silent. How many of us cower behind the facade of good deeds when good words beg to be spoken?

Physical needs do indeed exist in the world today. But as pastor and author John Rackley writes,

Christian mission should not mistake itself for a humanitarian relief agency. This is a disconcerting thought. Many Christians and churches act as if the gospel is solely about what we can do to respond to the words of Jesus in Luke 4:16-23 ("The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free." Luke 4:18).

The tendency to prioritize freedom for the prisoner and sight for the blind overlooks Jesus' calling to preach the good news.

When we favor serving the physically poor over the spiritually poor, we diminish the call to restored relationship with God. Reconciliation with

God emerges from the choice to follow and worship God. But “how, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14). We are vocal ambassadors of this message, not merely demonstrators.

Social responsibility does indeed call the church to awareness of physical needs. Yet when church missions and the Peace Corps become indistinguishable, the legitimacy of our approach is called into question. As the church’s salvific message becomes marginalized, we cease fulfilling the biblical mandate to spread the good news. Do community initiatives without the gospel truly demonstrate God’s love? Does a focus on ensuring today’s lunch and tonight’s bed overlook the message of eternal hope in Jesus Christ?

Recognizing the theological commitments of our denominational traditions may offer insight into why we lean toward one end of the continuum or the other. More progressive traditions have tended to focus on social justice, while conservatives have emphasized intellectual orthodoxy. Author and Cru staff Randy Newnan notes that in the early to mid-1900s, the expression of the gospel in more liberal congregations turned toward food and clothing distribution, prison outreach, and other expressions of mercy, while the more fundamentalist congregations dedicated themselves to leading people to a saving faith in God through Jesus Christ.

While God calls all believers to tell the gospel message, he has specially anointed some believers to be evangelists of his story (Ephesians 4:11-12). Undaunted and impassioned, they lead people to Christ through inspired preaching and teaching. While ministry models vary widely among evangelists, they remain committed to the clear and effective communication of God’s sacrificial offer of eternal life.

Over the years God sparked revolutionary spiritual revivals through his evangelists. From Jonathan Edwards’s preaching and William Carey’s missionary work of the 1700s to the present-day ministries of Luis Palau, evangelists have shared the gospel message in large city stadiums and

modest church sanctuaries. As a young teen, my husband was one of the countless souls who knelt in front of their televisions while Rev. Billy Graham, a thousand miles away, led him to faith in Christ. It was Aimee Semple McPherson in the early 1900s who actually opened the way for modern-day televangelists. She founded the Foursquare Church and was one of the first to use media to share the gospel. Although her life was a controversial one, few would argue against her visionary use of radio for kingdom purposes.

If the spiritual needs of others tug on your heart or the hearts of your church leaders, there are numerous options for you to explore. Church planting remains a high priority for many established churches. This may be accomplished through a traditional daughter church, where a pastor-evangelist and a handful of families from the parent church establish a new location. A rising number of church plants, however, use a multisite strategy. Video technology links campuses together on Sunday mornings and other meeting times, though typically each site has its own campus pastor to build relationships and lead the community in that particular location. Some multisite church plants are in the next town while others are a continent away.

Church planting among unreached people groups remains a priority in the mainline denominational efforts of Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. Smaller independent agencies, such as Frontier Fellowship, also prioritize their outreach toward the seven thousand ethnic groups who have not yet heard the gospel message. In remote and less accessible regions, some Christ-followers carry the gospel through business-as-mission (BAM) entrepreneurship. Language schools, coffee shops, stove factories, and textile operations show the love of Christ through distinctive practices. Integrity, fair trade, and human-rights practices open doors for conversation about faith and the good news of Jesus Christ.

In locations hostile to God's Word, media ministries offer one of the best opportunities to share the gospel. Internet and radio outreach, for example, allow Afghan Christian Media to proclaim the gospel in Afghanistan and

Pakistan. Founder Hussain Andaryas's knowledge of the local Dari language and culture enable him to connect with people from the security of US soil. Another viable option is to partner with native-born evangelists. Agencies such as Advancing Native Missions and Living Bread connect Western churches with indigenous pastors and missionaries working among the global poor. Familiarity and comfort with life in marginalized communities allows the living expenses of indigenous church planters to be less than what would be needed to host a Western missionary.

Some people with the gift of evangelism have a heart for a specific age group. The ministries of Cru, InterVarsity, and Young Life focus on students in high school and college. Staff members raise their own financial and prayer support. Other agencies devote efforts to sharing the gospel with younger children. Child Evangelism Fellowship, for example, developed the Good News Club as a way to evangelize and disciple elementary-age children after school. They equip and encourage volunteers to create and maintain clubs in local schools. Other organizations, such as Alpha, aim to create a safe environment for adult seekers to explore the big questions of life and faith.

Not-yet-believers include those who have never heard the name of Jesus as well as hardhearted people who have not heeded his call. Whether the unreached man of the Amaruwa tribe in Columbia or the work-consumed businesswoman in New York City, each soul is precious to God. We are obedient when we share the gospel. In the renewal of the church, development and justice cannot come at the expense of the good news.

FINDING OUR PLACE

Can we be both community volunteers and kingdom laborers? Yes. The reality of it lies in the condition of the heart. When we sense a prompting to serve in a way that glorifies God and loves others, we would be disobedient not to explore it further. But there is no stretchy kingdom garment that fits every scenario. Communities need God's healing presence in all areas. Injustice burdens the weak and the vulnerable. Souls wander

in spiritual darkness. Nature cries out. The complexity of physical and spiritual needs requires a multifaceted response to advance the kingdom message.

The discord created by valuing one end of the continuum over the other weakens the witness of all believers. Ministry happens throughout the continuum. Yet personal opinions and unspoken biases influence too many discussions in this conversation. When our definition of a kingdom laborer is shaped by the Scriptures, we will find common goals even among the most diverse forms of kingdom work. We will be able to move forward together.

The greatest challenge in finding our place in this continuum emerges from the division between sacred and secular. Church leaders tend to place higher value on all things sacred, often without realizing it. For example, the tablecloth used for the communion table rarely doubles as a table covering for the church picnic of hot dogs and hamburgers. The occupational choice to become a pastor or missionary is revered and celebrated in the Sunday morning worship service, but when did we last celebrate a college student's choice to be an engineer? Sacred is spiritual and eternal while secular is physical and temporal. In our desire to live holy lives, we want to invest time and effort in activities we perceive as sacred and eternal.

But the sacred-secular division has done great harm to the cause of the church. The distinction draws us into ranking activities and ministries as we value the sacred callings—serving the church and Christian organizations—more than callings into society, business, and government. The propensity toward the sacred suggests that God calls the worthiest people into Christian service. One ministry leader told me it was acceptable for the church to lead an after-school club focused on sharing the gospel, but mentoring children or providing backpack snacks is not suitable work for the church. The resulting chasm hinders efforts to reach a hurting and broken world in a holistic way. This approach undervalues the work of Christ-followers in sectors of society outside the church.

Some believers choose secular agencies intentionally to engage people beyond Christian circles. The broader scope of relationships facilitates awareness of problems throughout the community. Furthermore, collaboration in non-Christian settings actually increases the potential for conversations with unbelievers. We simply encounter more people who do not know Christ there. No matter where we serve, our actions reflect God's presence. Regardless of the circumstances, when we demonstrate love, joy, peace, patience—along with the rest of the fruit of the Spirit—we become his presence in the world (Galatians 5:22-23). A piping-hot pot roast donated to a soup kitchen adds flavor to the lives of the poor. “Feed my sheep,” Jesus told Peter (John 21:17). We cannot miss the literal meaning in this statement, nor Peter's humble desire to glorify God with the rest of his life.

How then do we best communicate the gospel? The answer is as complex as the intricate gears in a pocket watch. People, place, and situation are moving parts. Together they form challenges unique in each setting. An effective outreach in Guatemala City may not translate to success in Mumbai. The needs within two communities may lie at opposite ends of the good news–good deeds continuum. Responding to either end can both honor and advance the gospel. Our personal passion for social justice—or for telling the gospel message—cannot be the determining factor for the needs of a community. I may be an evangelist at heart, but the story of Jesus would be like static noise to the mother watching her child starve. Conversation within the community, along with prayer and the Lord's leading, will reveal the best course of action.

When we look to the One who was himself the good news, we find an array of responses from one end of the continuum to the other. To the woman bleeding, he brought physical healing. To the demoniac at Gerasene, he brought spiritual cleansing. To the hillside crowd, he brought dinner. To the tax collector Zacchaeus, he brought restoration with God and the community of faith. To the Pharisees, Jesus brought debate. His articulate words and flawless logic confounded the religious leaders until

they altogether ceased approaching him. Jesus tailored his actions to each person and situation he encountered.

Following Jesus' example, context must shape our approach to serving the people who walk among us. Although we lack his divine insight into hidden wounds and motives, we serve under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. His work within their souls and our increased sensitivity to his promptings open avenues for conversations of faith. We then have the responsibility to articulate the hope we have in Jesus Christ and to invite others into fellowship with him.

I sat beside a young woman whose failed suicide attempt thankfully ended with her in a hospital bed. She talked about the dark, raw edges of her childhood. We cried together. I listened. Her voice was tenuous and soft. As gentle as a summer breeze, the Spirit whispered into my soul. Following his leading, I shared about Jesus and his message of peace and hope. Days and weeks later she and I continued the conversation about faith. Today this young woman walks with the Lord and radiates his light to people around her.

In the church lobby on another day I sat beside a young woman struggling in an abusive relationship. Winter wind rattled the back doors. Fragile from difficulties with family, job loss, and a criminal record, she quivered amid the uncertainties of the future. A tear escaped her attempts at control. In the tenderness of the moment, we talked about her physical safety. We drank hot tea. Prompted by the Spirit's tender insight, I told her we had some donated coats available if she wanted one. A nod and widened eyes affirmed her acceptance of the offer. While she waited in the lobby, I went to my office and emptied the pockets of my coat. It was the perfect size for her and it wouldn't be missed among the half-dozen other coats hanging in my hall closet at home. My young friend did indeed need Jesus, but that conversation would come at a later date. The situation shapes our approach.

Saturating the community with the gospel means we effectively connect physical, emotional, and spiritual poverty with the gospel. When the

connection is tenuous, benevolence and evangelism at best become a distraction to one another, at worst they become a competition. We must share this responsibility of living and speaking the kingdom language of love and salvation. The job is far too massive for any one model. We cannot travel this road alone. Kingdom growth depends on people who plant the seed of the gospel, those who water the seed, and those who harvest the ripened plants.

With remarkable creativity Christ-followers take on these roles. Believers are at work every day in all sectors of society and throughout the world. In humility we recognize the diversity of kingdom work including both physical and spiritual needs. The support we express for one another's callings becomes an additional testimony of faith to people who do not yet know Jesus. Hand in hand we serve the world for the sake of the gospel.

We recognize good deeds as more than a means to open opportunities to share the gospel. Their ultimate end remains the same as the evangelists' message: restoration of relationship between people and God. Paul Borthwick reflects on our call to both the Great Commission and great compassion, "To stay balanced, I focus on the fact that God sees people as both loved and lost." When the church views good news and good deeds as integrated, we resist the temptation to rank them. The Lord's call on our congregations will place us at various points along this continuum. He directs us in different ways to address the different physical and spiritual needs around us.

Our churches' missional engagement can effectively emerge anywhere along the continuum. Richard Stearns reminds us that life is about the people we meet: "When we become involved in people's lives, work to build relationships, walk with them through their sorrows and their joys, live with generosity toward others, love and care for them unconditionally, stand up for the defenseless, and pay particular attention to the poorest and most vulnerable, we are showing Christ's love to those around us, not just talking about it." With attentiveness to the needs around us and to the

prompting of the Holy Spirit, we become evangelists within our acts of charity *and* compassionate servants who give voice to our hope in Christ.

In his comprehensive summary, David Bosch defined evangelism as that dimension and activity of the church's mission which, by word and deed and in the light of particular conditions and in particular context, offers every person and community, everywhere, a valid opportunity to be directly challenged to a radical reorientation of their lives, a reorientation which involves such things as deliverance from slavery to the world and its powers; embracing Christ as Savior and Lord; becoming a living member of his community, the church; being enlisted into his service of reconciliation, peace, and justice on earth; and being committed to God's purpose of placing all things under the rule of Christ.

Our demonstration of God's love comes in word and deed. The Lord may call your church to serve the physically and spiritually lost people in a local school or in an unreached region. Through the work of discernment, the voice of the Spirit will prevail over the influence of personal preferences and strong personalities.

Whether your congregation's calling is to the unserved or the unreached, God can work through your church family to accomplish his mission. The call is quite simple: make disciples of all nations. To do so we share the good news with neighbors near and far. The gospel message, however, does not allow us to step over injustices on our way to the next unevangelized territory. Nor does it allow us to disappear behind acts of kindness when words of salvation beckon to be spoken.

QUESTIONS

1. Which one of the following scenarios best describes your place on the good news–good deeds continuum? Choose the one that most closely represents the direction of your calling. From your perspective, what makes your choice the best option?

- ❑ With heightened awareness of the poverty in his community, Andrew encourages his church to invest more resources in the physical needs of people. He is passionate about supporting emergency food or housing assistance needs that arise due to natural disasters or other crises. Andrew supports his church's work alongside agencies focused on longer-term needs, such as home rehab or literacy education, as well. He intentionally chooses non-faith-based organizations to reach people reluctant to seek support from Christians.
 - ❑ Bonita seeks to serve with organizations whose primary objective is to meet the physical needs of people. The organizations may or may not have a Christian affiliation but willingly permit faith-based conversations with people receiving services.
 - ❑ Chan Ho desires to partner with faith-based organizations who approach needs holistically. Along with meeting physical needs, he expects their resource offerings to include spiritual direction and faith-based encouragement. Chan Ho also wants their vision statement to include Christian tenets of faith.
 - ❑ Daniella only serves with organizations who are intentional about sharing the gospel message while providing for people's physical needs. She wants her church to partner with ministries who maintain a heart for prayer and evangelism as core values.
 - ❑ Burdened by the large numbers of people who do not know Jesus, Enrique partners with ministries whose primary objective is to evangelize. They invest minimal resources in meeting the physical needs of people. He works closely with his church leadership to equip members to share the gospel and to work with organizations with similar goals.
2. Rank the scenarios regarding the direction of God's call for your church's role in missional engagement. Which ones most represent

the majority of your church's mission partnerships? Give examples to support your ranking.

- 3.** How would you improve your church's ability to fulfill its calling in the good news–good deeds continuum?
- 4.** What are some consequences of the sacred-secular divide in your missions settings? What changes, if any, would you recommend to further the gospel message?

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