

HABIT THIRTEEN

Grasp the Bigger Picture

*“... was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world.”*

I Timothy 3:16

One of the greatest compliments a master craftsman can give is to invite a journeyman or apprentice to join him in producing a work of art. Growing children often want to “help.” Even adults are familiar with the joy of being asked to contribute to a project we value. God’s dream is to gather a large group of beloved persons with whom He may enjoy an eternal, meaningful love relationship. The amazing wonder is that He is inviting you and me, not just to be a part of that special group, but also to partner with Him in the grand enterprise of gathering it. It is a high calling and noble privilege to become God’s partner and contribute to His grand design. All human beings were created to love God and enjoy Him forever, but some are not yet aware of this. Those of us who already know Him, therefore, have the unique opportunity to contribute to something that means very much to God.

God is everywhere in the world. There is no place He is not already working. He is inviting people everywhere to participate in His grand, worldwide, soul-saving, church-building, family-extending project. This generation’s challenges and opportunities surpass those of previous centuries. Our physical bodies eventually slow down. However, if we expand our

horizons, our adventure of discovery, growth, and usefulness can continue well into our senior years.

The Frog in the Well

There is a Chinese and Korean parable called The Frog in the Well. The frog in the well thinks the universe is like the stone walls, darkness, and occasional splash of the bucket that make up his “world.” Each of us frogs may be excused for being born and raised in our own wells. On the other hand, we have ample opportunities to break out of those narrow confines through magazines, travels, books, or conversations. Becoming the best possible “frog” doesn’t necessarily mean you have to get out of your well physically, but there is no reason to remain there mentally.

Since God created the whole earth and all the frogs therein, we should be aware of what is going on outside our well. Given that Christian frogs in our well have good news all frogs ought to know, we have even more reason to be concerned about the frogs outside our well. Even if we do not all go to other wells, there are many ways we all can be involved in God’s great worldwide enterprise.

Every one of us was born and raised in a specific place on this earth that influences our worldview. To view the whole earth and God’s grand design from a wider perspective, consider the following facts.

A Demographic Perspective

To bring your “picture” of the world up to date, read excellent books like *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* edited by Ralph D. Winter. This marvelous reader contains 124 chapters of the best missiological writing available. It includes hundreds of years of missions experience and scholarship in its 782 pages. Some of the statistics cited below are from that book. Winter’s *Perspectives* has four sections: Theological, Historical, Cultural, and Strategic. Reading it will inform you about world evangelism, missions, related stories, and insights. You can read of life and death outside our well.

The human race can be viewed from many different perspectives. Look for a moment at all the people in the world

from the perspective of their distance from the nearest church. Why this perspective? For all their imperfections, churches remain the best tools for world evangelism. Jesus, wise strategist that He is, said He would build His church. Churches are the place where the gospel is preached, evangelism is taught, new believers are nurtured, workers are trained, and encouragement is given. Because of that, the distance between a person and the nearest active church is a big factor in determining the likelihood of someone becoming a Christian. The multiplication of churches in the world remains the best strategy for winning the world for Jesus.

Combining data in the *Status of Global Mission* report (mid-2005) with data in the January 2005 issue of *International Bulletin of Missions Research*, we may calculate that 10.7 percent of the population of the world is the

dedicated “Great Commission Christians.” They are the most powerful group of people in the church. This group includes those with a life-changing, genuine faith they are likely to share with others. Some inside the organized church are called “second-generation Christians.” These individuals call themselves Christians but have neither

made a personal decision nor have genuine faith themselves. They, too, need a conversion or a change of allegiance to become true believers. Called nominal Christians, they make up approximately 22.4 percent of the world’s population. Some Christian workers are especially gifted at working patiently with this unique type of unsaved people. Nevertheless, both dedicated and nominal Christians are already in the church. Combined, they make up approximately 33.1 percent of the population of the world.

People who live within geographical and cultural reach of a Christian church make up another approximately 32.2 percent of the population — almost one-third of the people in the world. In missiology, we refer to these people as “reached.” It does not mean every member of their society is already a Christian. Instead, it means there is a church within a reasonable distance that speaks their language and understands their culture. We consider that society reached with the assumption that many will be saved as a healthy church continues to do its job. There is plenty of work for

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dedicated Christians in the churches in these societies since the dedicated Christians are only 10.7 percent of the world's population. They are attempting to establish meaningful personal relationships and communicate with the 32.2 percent who live nearby, are culturally similar, and speak the same language. For every dedicated Christian in churches all over the world, there are three unbelievers within their cultural, linguistic, and geographic reach. The sobering surprise for many, however, is the next category.

About 34.7 percent of the people of the world live where there is no church within cultural, linguistic, and geographic distance. In other words, just over one-third of the world's population is unreached. They would have trouble finding culturally relative information about Jesus even if they were actively searching. They are called the "unreached." Because they are not visible, many of us don't realize they even exist. They are off our radar screens. Do we dare pretend they are not there? This is the spiritual demography of the world, even though many do not realize it. Seeing the world's population this way helps us become aware of what is going on outside our well.

Consider also the distribution of Christian missionaries in the world. Only 26 percent of the missionary force works among the unreached people groups of the world. Including both Western and non-Western missionaries, 74 percent of the missionary force serve among largely Christianized people (those who are reached). Clearly, there is a great imbalance in the distribution of Christian workers in the world. We not only need missionaries, we also need to distribute them more strategically.

The unevenness of missionary distribution is easily illustrated when you consider the Chinese and the Hindu people. Each has over one billion people. Together, they make up over one-third of the earth's population, yet only 4 percent of the mission force works among them. In the reached areas of the world, there are 185.6 missionaries per million people. Yet, there are only 2.73 missionaries per million people in Muslim areas. Many places do not have churches within cultural, linguistic, and geographical reach of the 34.7 percent unreached of the world. We must move this information onto our radar screens.

Raising Awareness Levels

As a young boy, I decided I would serve as a missionary. I still wonder how a six-year-old child could make such a significant