

Being the Church Here, Near, and Far:

"We gather because of His love for us, we scatter because of our love for Him" (Barry Young)

Theme Scripture: Eph 4:4-6

Being the Church - Far



Let's begin 1st by describing

A. What's happening globally with the Church?

Before we can know how to be the **Church - Far** in this 21st century, where and how to plug into what God is doing, we need to grasp what's happening, what God is doing with His Church globally; we need to understand, as the sons of Issachar did, the *"times they lived in and what needed to be done"* [1 Chron 12:32]

During the past 26 years Christianity has experienced some of its most phenomenal growth and expansion historically. **However**, it should be noted that this expansive growth that has taken place has largely happened outside of Western countries normally associated with Christianity, countries where Christianity historically flourished and made its greatest impact during the last 2,000 years.

The result is that Christians in the West, whose numbers have dominated the Church for the last 1,000 years, no longer make up the largest demographics in the Christian faith. The focus of Christianity moved to the African Continent, Latin America, and Asia around 1987 and has been growing at phenomenal rates ever since. There's no indication that this trend will not continue well into 21st century.

(a) Take for example South Korea: In 1900, Korea had no Protestant Church and it was said to be "impossible to penetrate." Today, six new churches open every day in South Korea, and it is home to nine of the world's largest mega-churches, some with more than 800,000 members. Today South Korea is 30%

Christian with 7,000 churches in Seoul alone. Millions of Buddhists have come to Christ.

In 1982 there were only 321 South Korean Protestant missionaries. By 1992 that number had jumped to 2,576. On May 25, 1995, the South Korean Church dedicated 105,000 young people for at least two years of mission service. Another 3,000 South Korean missionaries are now being trained to go into China.

(b) Look at Latin America: Latin America has over 400 million people, more than 50 million have become evangelical Christians. By the end of this decade, a majority of the people in Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador will be evangelical believers. Chile, Costa Rica, and Bolivia are about 40% Bible-believing evangelicals. Already Mexico's population is more than 35% evangelical. Across Latin America some 34,000 believers are added to the Church each day.

(c) Puerto Rico now has the highest number of evangelicals per square mile of any country in the world. Of the country's 3.5 million people, one million are evangelicals. They have 7,000 churches, 10,000 pastors, nine Christian TV stations, 13 Christian radio stations, 130 Christian schools and 350 Christian community service organizations. More than 1,000 Puerto Rican young people are now training to go as missionaries to Muslims.

(d) One hundred years ago there were no evangelicals Christians in Brazil. In 1980 there were about 12 million Protestants. By 2010, that number jumped to more than 22.2 million, with more than 80,000 churches and 150 Christian radio and TV stations. Estimates run as high as 50.7% of the population will be born again believers by 2020. At least five new evangelical churches open every week in Rio de Janeiro. Over 5,000 new churches are planted each year across Brazil. [The stats above are adapted from data by David B. Barrett and Todd M Johnson of the [Global Evangelization Movement](#) web site.]

(e) Today Indonesia, a Muslim country, is home to more Christians than all 20 countries in the Middle East-North Africa region combined. In Nepal, which had no Christians in 1960 there are now half-million believers. The church in Vietnam has seen a 600% increase in believers.

(f) In Africa, at the start of the 20th century Christianity was virtually nonexistent, now it's the faith of the majority – about 50,000 new believers are baptized every week across Africa. Over 25,000 new believers per day join the Church. In a single summer in Mombasa, Kenya 56,000 Muslims came to faith in

Jesus Christ. As of 2010 63% of the population in all of Africa were now believers. Nigeria now has twice as many Protestants as Germany, the birthplace of the Protestant Reformation.

(g) And what about the phenomenal growth of Christianity in China during the last 60 years. According to China Aid, a Texas-based human rights group, the number of Christians in China has increased 100-fold since 1949. Current estimates range from 80 million to 130 million active members. Even estimating 80 million Christians in China, a conservative figure, still has them outnumbering the membership of the Communist Party, which at last check, in June 2010, was 78 million, according to the ChinaDaily.com

(h) In contrast to what's happening in Africa, China, Southeast Asia, and Latin America look what's been happening at the same time across Europe & America:

- In 1970 European Christians made up about 40% of the worldwide Church, by 2030 it will be down to 20%. While Europe is where Christianity flourished during the last 2,000 years today Western Europe is very secular and Christianity is in decline.

- More than 200,000 villages, towns and cities in Europe do not have a gospel witness.

- In 22 of Europe's 36 countries, less than 1% are born-again Christians.

- Take for example the Czech Republic, once a bastion of Christian faith, where heroes of the faith like John Hus - burned at the stake for his bold preaching - are immortalized in bronze statues that circle the capital city of Prague; today 60% of the Czech population claims to be atheists.

- Europe is a tragic paradox — an empty appearance of Christian symbolism that masks the reality of spiritual darkness.

- The question before us is will America follow Europe's pattern? Though America has not succumbed to secularization in quite the same way as Europe yet America's intellectual elite are secularized and overwhelmingly anti-Christian in their stances on morality, justice, virtues, and values.

Current legislative decisions and laws enacted by our government endorsing sexual relativism together with the Mainstream media and Hollywood pushing a redefinition of marriage as the "new normal" coupled with a new hostility towards any Christian who dares to stand up and voice opposition towards this

agenda of sexual relativism makes it look as if American will not escape this turn from faith in God and is becoming more secularized and hedonistic in its moral base.

So this is the State of the Church worldwide and what God is doing. What does it mean for Missions and how we play a role in carrying out God's Great Commission in the 21st century?

B. Christianity's Center of Gravity Shifting - And Missions Is Changing:

The first thing we must do is recognize that there has been a shift in the “center of gravity in Christianity” from the West to Latin America, parts of Asia, and Africa. This has been underway for some time but is now unmistakable; 61% of the worldwide Christian population now is African, Asian, or Latin American (the Pew Forum, an independent research group)

This shift in the center of gravity within Christianity is nothing small or inconsequential. The last time the Church saw such a seismic shift was when the Church, barely 100 years old, shifted from a Middle Eastern influence – Jewish – to a Western dominated one. That shift remained in effect for 2,000 years.

Soon an African, or Asian, or Latin American perspective rather than a Western one will dominate the Church. Even the Roman Catholic Church this year elected its first Latin American Pope. What this shift will mean in how the church is run, how it goes about planting churches, its values, or doing evangelism is not certain as of yet.

The second thing we must do is acknowledge that emerging with this “center of gravity” shift is a coming shift in missions too – who does it and how it will be done.

Nations like India, China, Brazil, South Korea, and Argentina all are now sending out missionaries at increasing numbers to nations that for the last 500 hundred years were the premier missions sending nations. Countries like the England, Germany, France, and the USA - once the proud bastions of Christianity now see an increasing number of missionaries coming to them from traditionally viewed mission fields.

In England currently there are 1,500 missionaries from countries England used to send missionaries to. The Mizo people from India, recipients of 19th century missionary endeavors from Welsh Presbyterians, have returned the favor sending missionaries back to Wales to reconvert it. But England isn't alone in this new reality.

Today there are 32,400 missionaries from foreign lands operating in American. Bishop Murphy of the **Anglican Mission in America (AMIA)**, said *"We [America] have become the mission field. In a bold reversal of the missionary actions of the last 500 years, the churches in Africa and Asia have undertaken a labor of love and courage to renew and revitalize the Anglican faith in America."*

Considering this shift of the center of gravity in Christianity and the changes in missions taking place are we simply to withdraw from doing missions? No!

America still has a definitive role to play but our role must take into consideration what God is doing, how God is using others, identifying what's not being done that we Americans could do if we chose to and then having the contentment and faith to do it.

Americans, so used to being at the helm of missions, providing leadership and largely carrying the burden of the Great Commission might find that as things shift we are asked more and more to take the "second chair".

International missions and evangelism committees once chaired by Americans may in the future be lead by an African, an Asian, or Latin American. America may find itself in the unfamiliar seat of serving others visions, of leading from behind, of working from the auxiliary position. Still critical positions and roles to play, but no longer the coach, simply one of the vital players on the team.

Why is this important? 2 reasons:

- 1. Because the Church Here and Near affects the Church Far!**
- 2. It's important because it's my belief that unless we change our paradigms about how we do missions we could find ourselves regulated to the seat of irrelevancy.**

It wasn't that long ago that England was the leader of world missions, sending out thousands of missionaries around the world to carry out the Great Commission. Before them it was the Germans and before them the Swiss. Where are they now?

Changing our paradigms doesn't mean we stop doing traditional missions - sending out our own Western missionaries - **but that we open our minds to new innovative ways of doing the Great Commission, of being the Church Far.**

We need to find new wineskins to put new wine in! That's the challenge for us in America. **Not to withdraw from missions nor to keep the status quo but to reinvent** our approaches taking into account the changing circumstances and landscape of missions.

If you will bear with me and permit me a few moments of digression I'd like to share something I've been wrestling with as I have prepared to speak with you at this Conference. I feel this is important to mention to awaken us in a prophetic sense to what might be around the corner for us as the Church Here and its effect on how we are being the Church Far.

Anyone who knows me knows I don't use the term "prophetic" flippantly. However, I will make this disclaimer – though what I'm about to share I believe sincerely and deeply, I could be wrong; just because I say it doesn't mean it's correct. **So I could be wrong, but what if I'm right? What does it mean for us being the Church Here, Near, and especially Far.**

Looking down the road a decade or two I predict America will see a declining missionary force.

3 contributing factors that will produce a declining missionary force:

a. Decline of interest in Missions as America becomes more of a mission field itself. Recent research indicates that there has been a continuous decrease in giving to missions over the past decade. Previous generations gave sacrificially for missions to be done, even during the Great Depression Americans gave over 3% of their income to missions and charity. Over 70 years that amount remained at 3%. However, the last decade has seen a sharp decline to approx. 1% on average given by Christians for missions (according to the Joshua Project). **With the costs of everything**

going up but giving going down how long before that reality permanently changes what missions is carried out and how many are sent?

b. The forces of humanism have captured the heart of American culture and are now defining American society in a manner void of a God-centered worldview. God is seen as irrelevant to whatever discussion we are having. The Boomer generation will go down in the annals of history as the generation that lead America away from God and into hedonism.

Since Woodstock - which became synonymous with free love and the sexual revolution and the Age of Aquarius - which became synonymous with enlightenment apart from God - became fashionable in the 60's we have seen:

- Prayer knocked out of school.
- The removal of religious symbols like the Ten Commandments stripped off of every city or public building.
- Christmas hijacked as a secular goodwill holiday with nothing doing with Jesus and His virgin birth.
- Easter hijacked as a candy holiday with nothing mentioned about the Resurrection of Jesus.
- Abortion on demand as a woman's choice— the destruction of the sanctity of life.
- Cheapening of human sexuality - rather than held until after marriage, sex now is seen as a part of the dating ritual.
- The rise of homosexuality even among pro athletes.
- The endorsing of same sex marriages as equal to heterosexual marriage, some in the Body of Christ misguided as they are thinking they are in step with God's revelation by endorsing same sex marriage or homosexual behaviors as normative and acceptable before God are doing more harm to the cause of Christ than Satan. They are sacrificing God's virtue and creation on the altars of convenience and compromise.

- On the horizon are the following hedonistic compromises – euthanasia, transgender endorsements, and a form of pedophilia which was acceptable in Greek culture and later in Roman culture

c. **The upsurge of “local churches doing missions”** – church, small and large doing their own thing rather than supporting long term missionaries or the missions work they’re carrying on; short term missions trips carried out by members of the church or pastoral staff are competing with those giving their lives full time to the Great Commission. This shouldn’t be an issue, we should follow Jesus’s instructions of **“you should do this without neglecting that”**.

So how are we to be the Church – Far? How can we effect change that is meaningful in personal lives, local communities, and societies around the world? How do we reinvent how we as Westerners are doing missions?

Well, there’s no end to the innovative ways we can carry out the Great Commission. But in the time remaining I want to share with you how we in Crossroads are reinventing how we are doing missions, **how we as the Church Here are being the Church Far**.

One of the most dramatic changes has been that we shifted our emphasis from sending Westerners to carry out traditional missions work to raising up indigenous missionaries to carry out the work of missions, birthing within them a vision and then getting behind that vision. **We call this our Timothy Project**.

Crossroads is currently operating in 5 countries – India, South Africa, Pakistan, Uganda, and Myanmar. In each country, Crossroads missions programs and projects are carried out by indigenous missionaries, our “Timothy’s”.

Working with these young “Timothy’s” in a mentoring and discipling relationship Crossroads designs, develops, and executes innovative missions’ projects/programs to serve as catalysts for change within local communities, societies, and the Church at large.

Currently some of those missions initiatives include: *church planting endeavors in Myanmar, humanitarian aid & relief initiatives in Pakistan, micro-development projects in India, and Uganda, early childhood education programs in India, child relief aid programs in Uganda, micro-finance loans in Pakistan, discipleship*

training seminars in South Africa and India, and emerging young leader's leadership workshops in India and South Africa.

The goal within 10 years is the planting of a viable indigenous missions organization with capable mentored and disciple leadership at the helm, overseeing and executing a variety of mission endeavors that are effectively presenting the gospel while demonstrating the love and compassion of Christ to a lost world. **And Crossroads has proven it is possible:**

Another more personal way we can be the Church – Far is by investing in innovative mission programs and projects launching them and making them viable.

These programs and projects must be more than simply humanitarian efforts; evangelism must be at the heart of what we do. We should strive to be both the hands of God, showing compassion, and the voice of God telling the truth, showing the way to spiritual life and freedom.

Programs and projects like the Crossroads Asha Project, a kindergarten through grade 1 education program providing meals, clothing, and spiritual instruction to destitute children living in the slums of India. This program not only address poverty by giving these children an education and healthy meals but also provides a means for our staff to daily interact spiritually with the children and their parents.

Currently there are 40 children – all from Muslim and Hindu backgrounds - in our program. These are the fortunate ones; they have American Christians who sponsor them into the program. Sponsorships provide the food, clothing, and education these children receive.

Hundreds more children from the same slum are waiting for sponsorship and a chance for a new life.

You could change the life and destiny of a child living in squalor, both spiritually and physically; you can be instrumental in introducing a Muslim or Hindu parent to Christ. This happens through your sponsorship of a child into the Asha Project's Alpha Care Program.

Or you can effect meaningful change, being the Church – Far by rescuing families and children sold into a life of slavery in Pakistan.

The Crossroads Freedom Project is working to end human trafficking of women and children in Pakistan. **You can help rescue a child or woman from a life of abuse – physically and sexually.** Children rescued are placed into Christian families waiting to adopt them were they receive love and care. These children are enrolled in schools where they receive an education.

Families, usually widowed women and her children that are rescued are given micro-loans and help with setting up a micro-business where she can earn a living, provide for her children, and see to their education. Doing this ensures that this woman and her children do not fall prey again to human trafficking.

This Freedom Project is run by a pastor in Pakistan who serves as our Timothy. Throughout and after the ordeal of rescuing these children and women our faith in God and the gospel of Christ is shared.

So far Crossroad has rescued 40 children and 1 family made up of a widow and her 6 children.

Providing micro-loans to families rescued or to families suffering in extreme poverty is also a way we can be the Church – Far.

Providing the startup funds for micro-development projects like the Ox Project in Uganda where we are purchasing sets of oxen, yokes, and plows for rural Uganda women to farm with. **This is also a way we can be the Church – Far.** Currently Ugandan women plow their fields by hand – literally. Crop yields are always low because it takes 1 – 2 weeks to plow an acre of land by hand. One set of oxen will plow three times as much land in 2 days.

This project is being run by our Timothy in Uganda and he is tying evangelism and discipleship to the project to plant churches throughout rural Uganda.

A friend of mine, Bruce understands what being the Church – Far means for his personal life. Bruce is using his hobby of beekeeping to help create indigenous missions funding structures in Myanmar.

This December Bruce will accompany me to a rural village along the border of India and Myanmar to host a beekeeping Workshop.

In attendance will be 4-6 indigenous missionaries working in Myanmar doing church planting. Each missionary will be trained in the craft of beekeeping with the goal of establishing a source of funding for their church planting endeavors. Each missionary will return to Myanmar with equipment and 2 fully outfitted startup beehives. Every three months these missionaries will bring their “harvest” to a collection point and Crossroads will see that the raw product is turned into marketable honey products that are sold in local markets. The profits will be returned to these indigenous church planters for the funding of their missions work.

Acting as the Church – Far, Bruce not only is coming to do the training but also has taken on the responsibility for raising the funds needed for this project. He is raising a total of \$6,300.

Bruce accepted this challenge understanding he is not called to serve as a traditional missionary, but he can be the Church – Far; and in doing so he can participate in what God is doing in His Church globally, effecting meaningful change in the lives of people and how missions is done in the 21st century.

And finally one other innovative way for us to be the Church Far, to impact global missions, is to support indigenous missions like the Crossroads Timothy Project.

This program identifies and then develops young men from third world countries, called by God into missions. These “Timothy’s” enter into a unique relationship with Crossroads of discipleship and mentoring. Working together we plant an indigenous missions agency running a variety of mission programs and projects through which evangelism takes place, poverty of individuals is addressed, and local funding structures are erected to help fund traditional missionary activity within their country.

Closing:

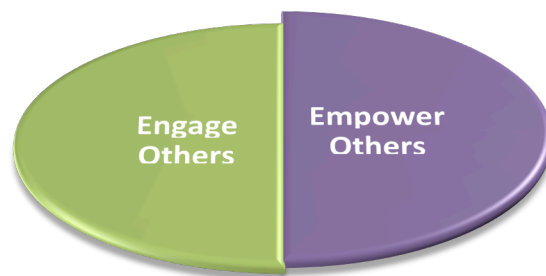
American has historically done missions by engaging others with the gospel - sending Western missionaries to foreign fields.

But the future of missions for Western nations is more supportive rather than hands on; more complementary than initiating; more investing in indigenous missionaries, and coming alongside those indigenous missionaries serving in

supportive roles through short term missions or 1 – 2 year missions assignments designed to augment the work of an indigenous missionary.

But the fact is Missions is changing; the question is will we make the changes?

The Great Commission has two equal parts – **engage and empower**. If you do one but not the other it's like eating an Oreo cookie without the center cream. It looks and feels like an Oreo, it's packing looks the same, it tastes similar to an Oreo but there's something lacking, something which makes it uniquely an Oreo Cookie – the white cream in the middle. It's the combination of the two ingredients that makes it uniquely an Oreo.



We've done a great job of **engaging others** by going – something we must continue to do. But now we need to add this other element – **empower others**. **This is how we can be the Church – Far having eternal impact that is life changing and transformative to the glory of God.**

Appendix

Missions In America: Engaging An Ever Changing Culture With A Never Changing Gospel

4 Trends in Christianity That Could Scare You, According to Ed Stetzer

2:00PM EDT 6/4/2014 [ED STEZER](#)



Despite what many think, the church in America is not dying (and no serious researcher thinks that). However, there are some challenges and changes to be considered.

When we consider missiology, part of the discipline includes considering how churches relate to their culture. Since we live in changing times, it's worth thinking through what current cultural changes mean for future church engagement of that culture.

Here are four trends that are already evident, but will become even more important in days to come:

1. The word "Christian" will become less used and more clear. There are three broad categories that make up the approximately 75 percent of Americans who refer to themselves as Christians. I wrote about this earlier in [The State of the Church In America: Hint: It's Not Dying](#), but it is worth keeping in our minds moving forward. The fact is that not everyone who uses the word "Christian" is using it the same way.

Cultural Christians, about 25 percent of the U.S. population, are simply those who, when asked, say they are a Christian rather than say they are an atheist or Jewish. They are "Christian" for no other reason than they are from America and don't consider themselves something else.

The second type is what I call a **congregational Christian**. They account for another close to 25 percent of the population. This person generally does not really have a deep commitment, but they will consider refer to themselves as Christians because they have some loose connection to a church—through a family member, maybe an infant baptism, or some holiday attendance.

Convictional Christians, also about 25 percent of the population, are those people who self-identify as Christian who orient their life around their faith in Christ. This includes a wide range of what Christian is—not just evangelicals, for example. It means someone says they are a Christian and it is meaningful to them.

So, what's the trend?

Well, first, the trend is that less people are calling themselves Christians and those who are will take it more seriously. In other words, cultural and congregational Christians, or the "squishy middle," is collapsing while convictional Christians are staying relatively steady.

In the future, the word Christian will mean more to those who would be considered convictional Christians. However, it will mean—and will be used—less to those who were nominal Christians in the first place. The word will be less used and more clear.

2. The nominals will increasingly become nones. Basically, type one (cultural) and two (congregational) are what we would generally call nominal Christians. Nominal comes from the Latin, meaning "name" or "name only." A

growing number of people are name only Christians. They claim "Christianity" for survey reasons, but rarely attend church or give any consistent consideration to their faith identification.

They're simply calling themselves Christians because that's who they consider themselves to be, not because of any life change or ongoing commitment. Those types of Christians, about half of the population now, will become a minority in a few decades.

We are now experiencing a collapse of nominalism.

It is fair to say we are now experiencing a collapse of nominalism. Many of these who have been labeling themselves as Christians are starting to feel free to be honest about their religious affiliation, or lack thereof. The "Nones," those who give say they have no religious preference, could potentially represent as many as half of the population in the next 20 to 30 years—[it's already over 30% among college students \(with a third of college students still being religious\)](#).

The nominal Christians in the squishy middle (cultural and congregational Christians) are becoming those who now answer "none of the above" on religious surveys. In other words, the "nominals are becoming the nones." As the Nones rise in their number, Christian influence on culture will begin to wane. The minority of Christians in a culture will begin to feel even more like a minority when more nominals become Nones. As people no longer claim to be Christians, Christianity will be further marginalized, which should change the way we think about engaging culture.

3. Christians will increasingly change cultural tactics. The next 20 years are going to be a challenge for convictional Christians and churches in many places. We will be engaging in cultural conversations often as the minority we truly are. Those who aggressively fight this as a culture war will find it hard to reach people. Instead of being seen as those who are seeking to engage and serve people in the culture, Christians will be seen as an enemy. That's not to say there are not important causes to engage—there are—but *how* we engage is almost as important as *that* we engage.

In biblical terms, we may experience what it means to be salt and light in the midst of an adversarial culture. As the Nones rise in their number, Christian influence on culture will begin to wane.

In response, we should look to two groups of people from the Bible, which I profiled in [Creating an Assessment Culture By Being of Berea and Issachar](#). We must hold the Word of God in high authority as the Berean Christians did in Acts 17:11. Christians must become seriously committed to Scripture and the Gospel in every aspect of our lives. We should also wisely discern the present culture and strategize how to best glorify God. "From the Issacharites, who understand the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32).

I desire for the church and Christians to be examining the Scriptures daily to know the Word of God and also to know the times, the context, and the Spirit's wisdom to address the culture with the Good News. As I see it, some Christians will go down fighting. Other Christians, will go on loving. But either way, convictional Christians will increasingly see they are not the moral majority and will advocate less for the legislation or traditional values and be more focused on protecting religious liberty. There are ways to stand for the good, advocate for cultural realities that engender human flourishing, and do so in a loving way. That's the future convictional Christians need.

4. More robust churches will result from the death of nominalism. The next 20 years are going to be a challenge for convictional Christians and churches in many places.

It is beginning to cost something to be a Christian in America—not as much as in many places in the world or in much of history, but more than it used to. And, as living for Christ costs more in our culture, it will mean more in our context.

Churches that are preaching the Gospel and are focusing on biblical truths are going to become more clearly distinct from the culture around them. The end result? Robust Christian communities are going to get stronger.

These gospel-preaching churches will have members who are more, not less, committed and these committed churches will have less nominal Christians in the years to come. Christianity will become more of a minority in culture, but more refined, more biblical, and more missional churches will be the result.

Where From Here?

The lasting effects of these shifts will force churches to make a critical decision. They will either become a cultural church that allows the societal trends to dictate their ever-changing beliefs. Or they will become a counter-cultural church that faithfully adheres to Scripture and proclaims the gospel in a carefully considered way. The latter church will offer real hope in the midst of an adversarial culture and is the only real future for the American church.

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