OUR MISSION IS FOUND IN GOD'S MISSION. SO WHAT?

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The Triune God is the instigator of mission and, through the sacrifice of the Son and the empowering presence of the Spirit, he is also the one who guarantees the success of mission. However, true to his relational nature the Triune God invites us to participate in mission with him. *Our participation in God's work is a gift from Him.*

> *"Those who have come to know the life of God through the missionary activity of the Son are themselves given the privilege of becoming 'co-missionaries' with God."*

It is important to stress that we are invited to join in mission. Our motivation should spring out of our relationship with God and our desire to serve him, not because we are propelled by a burden of guilt. Frost and Hirsch catch this nicely:

> *"Many well-intentioned church leaders have simplistically presented the words of Jesus "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" as some remote order barked by a stern sergeant-major. If Jesus said it, we should do it! But Bosch points out that missionary service that is motivated by blind obedience to an impersonal order from Jesus is built on a flimsy foundation. If our commitment to mission is only based on Jesus' "order" in Matthew 28, it makes mission an obligation for us rather than an act of love and grace. It's not unlike a woman who complains that her husband never brings her flowers. When the guilty husband rushes out and buys her a bouquet and presents it to her, she is still dissatisfied, because it wasn't that she wanted flowers in particular. What she wanted was for him to be motivated by his devotion for her so as to buy a gift. When we engage in mission only because we feel guilty that we haven't pleased Jesus and his order in the so-called Great Commission, we satisfy neither Jesus, nor our own sense of calling. Rather, says Bosch, mission emerges from a deep, rich relationship with Jesus. The woman whose husband never brings her flowers doesn't want flowers. She wants him and his devotion."*

Because mission is God's activity, it is inappropriate to suggest that God needs us to accomplish his purposes. He takes pleasure in us serving him and working with him. But we must never suggest that God is somehow weak and constrained, unable to reach the nations without our help.

God's mission is greater than anything we can imagine, plan for or achieve. But he invites us to participate. Because its scope is so far beyond us and our only capacity is in him, we can only participate well if we are in constant relationship with him.

Equally, it is inappropriate for us to define the ultimate goals of mission. This is not to say that we cannot set goals for individual projects, or for those activities over which we have some semblance of control. Appropriate goal setting and measurement of results is a necessary tool for our learning as well as a requirement of many of the partners we work with. However, we must never lose sight

of the fact that, first and foremost, our responsibility is to be obedient to the call of God on our lives. With Paul and Apollos we can plant and water, but it is God who produces the fruit (1 Cor. 3:6).

> *"Following Jesus is about obedience, not success. Ultimately, transforming people and society is something only God can do. All we can do is discern what God is doing and obediently join in".*
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> *"Obedience is not a formula, nor is it a means to an end, usually assumed to be success. Perhaps it's a more Western ideal, even an American lesson, to put numbers and goals to ministry and heap attention only on those who accomplish thisâ€"all others need not apply.*
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> *If I start defining success in ministry, then I start defining how God should and/or will work in a situation. I am taking away from His mystery, His sovereignty, and His will; in fact, I am wresting power away from Him when I draw that box or map of how this should play out".*

Or as another writer puts it:

> *In the end, this is the most hopeful thing that any of us can say about spiritual transformation: I cannot transform myself, or anyone else for that matter. What I can do is create the conditions in which spiritual transformation can take place, by ...developing and maintaining a rhythm of spiritual practices that keep me open and available to God.*

When we invite people to be involved in God's mission, be that in print, on the web or face to face, we call them to discipleship. We must be very careful to keep the correct balance between human and divine action in mission.

This is part of a paper on missio Dei, which I delivered at a mission conference. One day it might get published.Â

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