

Diagnose Your Church's Health Is the Church Driven by a Great Commission Focus?

By Chuck Lawless

This article is the fourth in a series dealing with questions to ask when consulting with a church. Previous questions were “Is the church’s teaching based on the Bible?” and “Is the church a praying church?” This month’s question, “Is the church driven by a Great Commission focus?” forces the church to look at its global commitment.

Five times in the New Testament, Jesus expressed some form of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-49, John 20:21, Acts 1:8).¹ It is Matthew’s account, however, that perhaps best describes our goal in fulfilling the commission: making disciples around the world who obediently follow Christ’s teachings.

And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, “All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. (Matt. 28:18-20)

A brief look at all of the texts reveals several basic truths about the Great Commission:

- Christ is the authority who demands our obedience to the commission (Matt. 28:18, John 20:21).
- He is not only the One who commissions us, but He is also the focus of our message; that is, the *gospel* is our message (Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-47).
- Preaching, teaching, and baptizing are strategies employed to fulfill the commission (Matt. 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47).
- The message we proclaim is *for the world* (Matt. 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:27, Acts 1:8).
- Christ promises us His power *and* His presence as we strive to fulfill the commission (Matt. 28:20, Luke 24:49, John 20:22, Acts 1:8). We never do the Great Commission alone.

Clearly, preaching the gospel and making disciples of all people groups around the world mattered to Jesus—and so these tasks must concern churches today. Regrettably, many churches have become so inwardly focused that church is more about protecting the status quo than about reaching out beyond themselves. As a consultant, you will want to help the church evaluate their global focus and then re-direct their attention to the world as needed. These steps may help you to do so.

1. *Ask the pastor to describe his personal passion for global missions.* Where the pastor is not committed to reaching the world, the church is unlikely to be more concerned about this task. I will sometimes ask the pastor if he has led or participated in an international missions trip within the last five years. If not—and there are seemingly no obvious limitations to doing so—I wonder how strong is his commitment to the Great Commission.

2. *Check the church's budget for a line committed to missions.* Here, your analysis should move in two directions. First, find out how much money the church intentionally sends to support missions. Then, interview church members to determine whether they *realize* that the church supports missions through offerings. Giving dollars is important, but churches are hardly globally minded if individual members lack a heartfelt desire to reach the world.
3. *Determine if the church has sent a missions team to any place in the world in the last two years.* One of the best ways to increase a church's passion for the Great Commission is to send members on a mission trip. When they return and report what they experienced, other members often find it hard to remain unconcerned about the world. To put it simply, missions fervor is infectious.
4. *Ask about the last time that a "real live missionary" spoke to the church.* The face of missions is most often the missionary, and the fuel of missions is frequently the stories that the missionary shares. If church members cannot remember the last time a missionary spoke to the church, their global focus is probably weak.
5. *Determine if the church is intentionally and consistently praying for God to call laborers from their congregation (Luke 10:2).* An inward focus says, "God, give us laborers to grow our church," but an outward focus says, "God, send us out to the fields to grow your church." The church that is willing to commit their young people and children to God's missionary service reflects a Great Commission focus.
6. *More specifically, evaluate the church's missions programs for children and youth.* Does the church prioritize teaching the next generation about missions? When the children of the church think about their heroes, will missionaries be among them? If not, church leaders need to evaluate their missions education programs.
7. *See if the church is participating in a local church plant.* Quite often, the church that is Great Commission minded willingly and enthusiastically supports new churches in their general geographic location. That is, they are more concerned about reaching people than about protecting their turf. The Great Commission demands making disciples where we live as well as around the world.

Finally, consultant, be aware that you will not likely be concerned about a church's Great Commission focus unless *your* heart burns to make disciples around the world. Maybe evaluating ourselves is the first step in helping a local church to do the same kind of evaluation.

¹ Many scholars do not view Mark 16:9-20 as part of the original text. Regardless of your view, the Great Commission passage clearly reflects other passages in the gospels.