

# Building World Vision

## How can we begin to see the world as God sees it?

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by Paul Borthwick *Discipleship Journal* Issue #37 January/February 1987

All of us have faced life's most important decision: whether to trust Christ as Savior. But after that choice comes another that will profoundly affect our lives and the lives of potentially thousands of others. We may not even be aware that we are making the choice, yet our decision will affect our perspective on life, our choice of life partner and vocation, and our use of time, money, and all the resources God has given. The choice is this: Will we become world Christians or worldly Christians?

A worldly Christian is one who accepts the basic message of salvation, but whose lifestyle, priorities, and concerns are molded by the self-centered spirit of our age. This person looks to the Scriptures for personal blessings, prays mostly for immediate, personal needs, and sees Christian faith as a way to get God on his side.

A world Christian breaks the mold of a self-centered world. A world Christian is one who has chosen to start living with an attitude of self-denial so that he might respond to a world of greater need beyond himself.

Missions expert David Bryant writes,

World Christians are day-to-day disciples for whom Christ's global cause has become the integrating, overriding priority for all that He is for them. Like disciples should, they actively investigate all that their Master's Great Commission means. Then they act on what they learn. World Christians are Christians whose life directions have been solidly transformed by a world vision.<sup>1</sup>

But how can we become world Christians? How can we combat the spirit of selfishness that barrages us through the media, through popular opinion, and even through aberrant doctrines being taught in the church?

The most basic answer is to start seeing the world as God sees it. As Ruth Tucker writes in *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, "The origin of missions ultimately is to be found in the heart of God. No thought of God is true to His revelation of Himself that does not rest on the fact that He 'so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son' that by believing in Him 'the world should be saved through him.'"<sup>2</sup>

This is the truth that transformed Frances Xavier, William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Bob Pierce, and Dawson Trotman. They started to see the world with the love and compassion of Christ, and (in the words of Bob Pierce) their hearts were broken with the things that break the heart of God.

Most of us realize how painfully far we are from that ideal. But that is no excuse not to begin formulating a world view that is consistent with God's purpose for the world: that every people and tongue and nation worship Him (Rev. 7:9). All of us must start where we are. In the process of building, we may get discouraged with how far we have to go, but we can look around and be encouraged by how far we have come.

How can we build world vision? What input should we seek to make sure that we are developing God's "heart" for the world? Consider these ten building blocks as places to begin.

## **THE SCRIPTURES**

From Genesis to Revelation, from Creation to the end of human history, God's plan has been to have fellowship with man. God's redemptive work is evident from His initial response after the Fall (Gen. 3:9 ff.) to His covenants with Noah and Abraham; from His promises to people of faith to the work of the Cross. "God so loved *the world* that he gave his one and only Son" (Jn. 3:16): His love is worldwide; His love is active; His love is redemptive.

As we let the words of Scripture work in us by the power of the Holy Spirit, our view of God, our view of the world, and our view of ourselves begin to change. We see the eternal, omnipotent Creator as Lord of the Universe with His creation—mankind most notably—as the target of His love. We see ourselves as agents of that love to others. The commissions of Jesus (Mt. 28:18–20, Acts 1:8) become the launching pads from which we take off with a knowledge of a great God and His worldwide plan.

The Scriptures are the first building block of world vision because these words are God's words to change us. As William Carey, sometimes called the father of modern missions, read the Bible, "he became convinced that foreign missions were the central responsibility of the church."<sup>3</sup> Dawson Trotman, founder of The Navigators, developed his own world vision through reading the Bible, and then he shared his vision with others: "Daws' method of instilling world vision was to lay a foundation from the Bible, for he knew that a challenge with any lesser authority would soon evaporate and become a forgotten emotion."<sup>4</sup>

## **CURRENT EVENTS**

I was surprised one day to find a newspaper—what I considered a potential distraction—lying next to the Scriptures in the seminary prayer room. I learned later, however, that the paper was placed there by one of the school's leading prayer warriors, J. Christy Wilson, because he was committed to getting us to pray about the real needs around the world. "The Bible," he told me, "tells us what God wants to do in the world; the newspaper tells us where He needs to do it and where we need to be prayerfully involved."

Throughout the ages, God has mightily used current events to direct the Church. God worked through the Roman persecution of Christians, recorded in Acts 8, to direct the Church's mission efforts—believers were forced to scatter, beginning the fulfillment of the Acts 1:8 mandate to be witnesses to the ends of the earth.

When we listen to the news, read the paper, or thumb through news magazines, we must do so as Christians. We must not grow callous; instead we must try to realize that these stories deal with real crises, real needs, real people. And we cannot let our hearts grow hard with hate either: We must be those who pray for the Ayatollahs and Marcoses and Khaddafis of the world.

## **PRAYER**

Developing God's perspective of love and redemption from His Word and becoming informed about the needs of our world should combine to drive us to our knees in prayer. "God is calling us to stand in the gap (Ezk. 22:30), primarily as a people of prayer," writes David Bryant.<sup>5</sup> When Jesus saw the multitudes in need, He did not tell all of His disciples to go out and meet the needs; instead, He told them to call upon the Lord of the Harvest to send forth laborers (Mt. 9:36–38).

When we pray, two things happen. First, we remember who is in charge (lest we think presumptuously that we could effect change on our own), and we are changed. As we pray for the concerns on the Lord's heart, we become increasingly sensitized to hear His voice.

In addition, prayer changes other lives. When I was in college, I became burdened for Nepal and the People's Republic of China. As Jesus instructed in Mt. 9:36–38, I began to pray for the Lord to send forth laborers. Over the course of ten years of praying, I have been greatly encouraged to see three friends go to these countries as Christian "tentmakers"—missionaries who enter a country as professionals in order to minister to the people there. God does answer prayer.

How can you begin to pray for the world? Many missions organizations provide resources that help believers pray knowledgeably and systematically for the needs of specific areas. These tools can be excellent guides to effective prayer.

## READING

William Carey got his first vision for missions not from the Scriptures, but from reading secular literature. According to one biographer, Carey's interest in missions was sparked when he read *Captain Cook's Voyages*. God used the explorer's accounts to cause Carey to see the Scriptures in a new light.

In the same way, reading can build our missions zeal and world vision. *National Geographic*, news magazines, and publications from other countries can motivate us to pray and increase our knowledge. Christian publications provide a wide overview of missions past and present: *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* provides a readable history of missions, while the publications of the Evangelical Missions Information Service offer up-to-date information on developments and needs in missions around the world.

To make things manageable, I have adopted a phrase I heard from a missions leader: Know everything about somewhere and something about everywhere. Of course, there is no place I know *everything* about, but I have chosen various areas or peoples to study—Nepal, the People's Republic of China, the Kikuyu of Kenya, the resettled Hindustani in Surinam. "Something about everywhere" means that I know where countries are, where the Muslims, Hindus, and Chinese (the three largest unreached people groups) are located, and where the Church is growing in the world.

## FIRSTHAND EXPOSURE

Peter was a spiritual man, but he was still full of ethnic and racial prejudices when God sent him to Cornelius and other God-fearing Gentiles. When Peter finally understood the love of God in its breadth, he exclaimed, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from *every nation* who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34–35).

It was firsthand experience with the Gentiles that changed Peter's life and enlarged the mission of the church. Through this exposure, God worked to destroy stereotypes and break down racial barriers.

For us, building world vision requires a similar firsthand exposure to God at work in people of other cultures. Such exposure may come through a short trip to the mission field, or it may be as simple as a dinner at a foreign-food restaurant. Growing numbers of internationals in our country—both students and refugees—make opportunities to interact with people from other cultures increasingly

available. Those who live in or near major cities can gain cross-cultural exposure just by visiting strongly ethnic neighborhoods.

But beware! Firsthand experience in cross-cultural ministry will change your life. Your view of the Church will grow broader, and you may find yourself at odds with those who hold to a narrower, more racially-defined view. You will realize that God does not speak only one language nor is He worshiped in only one way. Becoming aware of the greater needs of others makes us see that many of our complaints (and even some of our priorities!) are petty by comparison.

## **FELLOWSHIP**

The writer of Hebrews instructs, "Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Heb. 3:13). Our world vision can only grow when we exhort one another to think beyond ourselves. We need that type of correction!

In the 1700s, the Moravians exhorted each other in this way, and they began one of the strongest movements of missions involvement of all time. In 1886, Dwight L. Moody met with 251 students at the Mount Hermon Conference. After a month of studying the Scriptures and exhorting one another concerning God's love for the world, one hundred of the students committed themselves to world missions service. The Student Volunteer Movement was born, and thousands of young people were sent overseas in the next thirty years.

Emphasizing world vision in our fellowships enables us to catch the vision together. Adopting missionaries, countries, projects, or "people groups" as special targets of prayer and support can change the life of a fellowship as eyes are focused outward rather than merely on individual or group concerns.

## **GIVING**

One of the great privileges we have as we build a vision for the world is to be involved financially. While giving money is not a substitute for personal involvement, it is one way that we who are rich (and even North America's poor are "rich" by world standards) can invest in the worldwide ministry of the gospel.

Jesus tells us that our hearts and our treasures are directly linked (Mt. 6:21). Therefore, if we want to develop a heart for world missions, we should redirect at least part of our earthly treasures that way. Giving to overseas ministries can also enhance our prayer lives because most of us are stimulated to pray more if we are financially committed as well.

Giving to build world vision should come in at least two forms. First, we can give financially. As we do this, however, we must see ourselves as good stewards of the money we give. We cannot respond to every need that we hear about or read about, nor should we be giving a dollar a month to twenty different ministries just to give ourselves a feeling of worldwide involvement. We need to read, pray, and do some research so that we (or our fellowship or church) develop a strategy of involvement with our financial gifts.

Giving should also include our time. Other building blocks (prayer, Bible study, firsthand involvement, etc.) all require time, and this is certainly part of giving. Some people give a week or two of their vacation time each year in missions service. Others volunteer to type, file, or do administrative work at missions' home offices. Still others are choosing early retirement so they can

give ten or more years in missions service. Whatever we choose, our missions vision grows as we give it our time.

## **MEETING MISSIONARIES**

When Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey, "they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). Perhaps it was this report that stirred John Mark's missionary interest; it definitely stimulated the early Church in its "world" vision, and it provided the foundation for others being sent out.

If we want to build world vision in ourselves and others, we must have regular contact with those who are involved in cross-cultural, worldwide ministries. Communication can take place through newsletters or personal visits to missionaries on furlough. We need this interaction so that we can pray more intelligently and so that God can work through them to challenge us to consider missions involvement.

One of the best parts of my job is meeting with all of our church missionaries when they are home on furlough. Some work with tribes; others work in cities. A few are in the midst of great spiritual revivals; others are persevering in the Muslim world, where there seems to be little fruit. After every encounter with our missionaries, I am encouraged to pray because I have faces to match my prayers, and I have specifics to pray for rather than general "bless the missionaries" prayers. I am also challenged to ask, "What about me? Is God directing my steps to a foreign field?" So far He has not, but my time with missionaries keeps my heart open.

## **LIFESTYLE CHOICES**

How we choose to live and what we set as our personal priorities will condition our ability to build a personal world vision. As we open our eyes to the situations and needs around the world, we will find ourselves challenged in a new way with the words of [1 Jn. 3:17](#): "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"

A few may be called to total renunciation of possessions. All of us are called to responsibility for all that we possess, and this can be even more challenging because it involves continual choices.

There is no absolute definition of a Christian lifestyle or a Christian income level, but we all can adapt our lifestyles in light of the needs of the rest of the world. This may mean changing our vocabulary—phrases like "I'm starving" or "I need this" take on a new meaning when we consider the desperate needs of others. Finances become a way to help others rather than just an extra bonus to spend on ourselves. Priorities begin to shift as we see our "brother in need" and start to respond.

When I was on a team working in Kenya, we were presented with a need. A woman from Chad needed \$300 to continue her schooling (\$300 would pay for her room, board, and tuition for one year!). We prayed together as a team and decided to use money from our team spending allowance to support this woman. It was a tremendous growth experience for us because we made a voluntary choice to limit our own spending so that our sister in need could benefit. Whether we realize it or not, all of us face similar decisions regarding how we will use our resources.

## **OTHER INPUT**

In Dt. 30:19–20 Moses sets before the people of Israel a choice: life versus death, blessings versus curses. He urges them to choose life by obeying God and holding fast to Him. We need to make the same choices every day—obedience, loving God, holding fast to Him.

If we are to stay close to God and to share His love, His heart for the world, we must be willing to go out of the way to keep the world on our minds and hearts. Building Block Ten for world vision—"other input"—refers to the casual yet purposeful choices we can make as we build our hearts to love the world as God does.

Even as we are commanded to keep God's laws always before us (Dt. 6:6–7 and Dt. 11:18–20), we can also choose to set the world always before us. A world map over the desk, a prayer calendar tucked in the Bible, or an occasional dinner at an international restaurant can help enlarge our vision. Some of my friends listen to missionary broadcasts over their shortwave radios in order to get a greater sense of how the gospel is going into all the world.

Waldron Scott, formerly of the World Evangelical Fellowship, traced the beginning of his world vision to his childhood. Due to a lung problem, he had to blow up balloons regularly, and on each balloon was printed a map of the world. My wife and I have surrounded ourselves with world maps—they adorn our coffee mugs, our desk blotter, a paperweight, a pencil sharpener, and even a beach ball! We need all the help we can get to keep our eyes on God's "big picture," the world.

## **THE FIRST STEP**

As we learn more and more about the world into which God calls us, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the enormity of the need and to give up, convinced that our small contribution is equivalent to only a drop of water in a mighty ocean. But we are not called to conquer all the world's problems—we are called to obey as God leads. The first step of obedience is to begin to build in ourselves and in others God's vision of the world. Using the suggested building blocks and responding to the Lord as He directs can take our eyes off of ourselves, increase our burden for the lost, stimulate our prayers, and give us a greater sense of where God wants to use us in His master plan.

Will we be worldly Christians—preoccupied with selfish needs and seeing our relationship to God only as it benefits us—or world Christians—building our vision so that we begin to develop God's heart for the world and to see it as He does? The choice is ours.

## **Notes**

1. David Bryant, *In the Gap* (Madison, WI: InterVarsity Missions, 1979), p. 73.
2. Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), p. 115.
3. William Owen Carey, "The Missionary Idea in the Bible," *Classics of Christian Missions* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), p. 32.
4. Robert D. Foster, *The Navigator* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1983), p. 192.
5. David Bryant, *Concerns of Prayer* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), p. 16.