

# I Am Changing The Face Of Global Mission

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## A Prophetic Impression

In November 2011, shortly after moving from Izmir, Turkey to Chiang Mai, Thailand, I experienced a moment of profound clarity. While driving, I sensed the Holy Spirit impress a phrase upon my heart with authority: *"I Am Changing the Face of Global Mission!"*

In the 14 years since, this phrase has been confirmed by scholars and practitioners alike, from both western and majority world backgrounds. While "global mission" is often viewed through the lens of history, God is wanting to bring shifts in how the Church – particularly in the Global South – perceives and engages in His Great Commission.

## Interpreting The Statement

While there may be many ways to interpret this statement, because of my ministry context of mission mobilization primarily among Global South churches, I understood and applied the statement to that particular context.

It's important to interpret the words *"the face of."* What does the Lord mean by that? I immediately sensed, back in 2011, the words referred to how mission looks at face value, or is perceived, by believers and the Church globally. The face of something is what it looks like to an onlooker. What does global mission look like to most in the body of Christ globally, particularly the Global South?

Let's unpack some of the areas of change the Lord may be referring to.

### 1. De-coupling Mission From Colonialism

First, a major area that seems to influence many other areas. God seems committed to seeing the perception and experience amongst the Global South Church of global mission being a western, colonialist, empire-dominated endeavor, drastically changed.

This requires an open acknowledgement by those of us from a western background of the mistakes and failures in the history of global mission related to the use of wealth, power and even military might to further the gospel around the world. Such an acknowledgement tells our Global South brothers and sisters we recognize and empathize with the history as they and their forefathers may have experienced it.

This in no way means every western missionary or society during the colonialist era made these mistakes. Yet, it does admit the mission system itself was inherently influenced by a colonialist culture prevalent among the western governments and their empire-

building ambitions, including an often-unconscious superiority complex.

A perception of global mission sending as being from those who possess wealth and power was unknowingly communicated to the rest of the world and still taints mission mobilization and sending in the Global South today.

How often have I been told *"global mission isn't for us, we're poor"* or *"mission is from those who have to those who don't have."* Both assessments betray a perspective influenced by history, not God's heart in global mission.

A deeply unfortunate legacy of the colonialism of Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia from the 1500's-1900's, for some in the Global South today, is that global mission equals the powerful to the powerless, the rich and wealthy to the poor, is focused on humanitarian efforts to "uplift" and is based in "civilizing" others. These false perceptions of global mission are hindering mobilization in many non-western, Global South churches today.

How will pastors and ministry leaders prioritize the Great Commission within their churches and denominations as God intends when deep down, they struggle with outlooks informed by global mission history connected to the painful era of colonialism? The perception of global mission needs a shift.

The historic mission movement from the West undoubtedly produced much fruit around the world for the Gospel. Yet, the models often used have been perceived as the only ongoing standard for doing mission. This has made it difficult for churches in the Global South to re-imagine global mission and mobilization from their own cultural contexts, free from the influence of the western, colonialist ties of mission history.

Mobilizing, sending, financing and other categories of global mission should not look as they have historically, or how western missions did them, but should be informed and imagined by the New Testament, along with Spirit-inspired models, not by historic, western models.

A return to a Scripture-informed understanding of global mission means remembering Jesus gave the initial Great Commission to poor, relatively uneducated, disciples who were living under the oppression of a foreign power and who obeyed it thereby turning "the world upside down" amid that same powerful empire.

They possessed no wealth and no state power. Yet, God used them to multiply churches and demonstrate the power of the Gospel among the unreached of the biblical era, like no other generation since. This was

done by a powerless people (humanly-speaking) within the context of a global superpower (the Roman Empire).

This is a model needed today. The Global South Church re-imagining and re-defining global mission within their national Churches. Completely separated from wealth, power and military might. Not trying to imitate western examples, while possessing little wealth and no state power, but instead following the examples of the early Church to reach near and distant culture unreached people groups.

## 2. Re-imagining Mission Funding

This one area of change being realized across the Global South Church would produce a ripple effect related to other areas too. For example, a change in what believers perceive about how those involved in global mission are funded. This is tainted by the historic western example of mission funding and the western wealth that backed it.

The biblical example, however, reveals that the early Church obeyed Jesus' Great Commission with little money. They certainly didn't use the traditional western support model of a church, family and friends financially supporting them. If you are from an economic context that allows for it, it works; but it is extremely limiting if you are not.

Instead, the early Church (and most mission endeavors until the dawn of the modern missionary movement in the 1790's), used various jobs, careers, occupations to financially sustain themselves, while doing the work of the Kingdom among unreached peoples.

The perceived financial stumbling block of finances in global mission could be overcome through this significant change the Lord appears to be emphasizing. I have personally seen the calling and desire to obey God across the global south Church, yet the perceived lack of finance keeps them from responding.

If the financial strategy in global mission was adjusted and a full commitment by church and mission leadership to mobilize the Global South Church toward being financed in mission in this way, we would see a dramatic increase in sending.

## 3. Activating The Whole Body (The 20% Scattered Vision)

That leads to another area the Holy Spirit seems to want to bring change. The false perception that only a few are meant to be involved in global mission. It is biblically and theologically accurate to say every believer is meant to be involved in the Great Commission in some way. Identifying and being activated in a particular Great Commission role.

One of these roles is those who go. Based on the early church model and where the Holy Spirit seems to be leading, it may be possible to assume God intends a much larger percentage of believers (maybe up to 20% of every local church) going to the unreached, relocating jobs and families, and incarnating the Gospel.

Most of these (maybe 15%) will not cross geopolitical borders but go to "near culture" unreached peoples within their own nations. They speak the same language and understand the general culture and customs, while still crossing ethnic lines.

While the other 5% will potentially go to "distant culture" unreached people groups. Crossing language borders as well as embracing cultural and customs differences.

What if leadership of every local church across the Global South developed mobilization goals within their fellowship, pursued over time, to scatter 20% of their members to both near and distant culture unreached peoples?

Not in the traditional "missionary" model way, but in the early church, Spirit-inspired "scattering" way. Multitudes deliberately going out, living among the unreached for long-term, with jobs and families, being salt and light and bringing to bear the Kingdom of God among them.

## Imagining A New Future

Let's acknowledge that most human beings don't like change. In fact, we readily resist it. Change means disruption. While God may be seeking to bring change to enable widespread mobilization, many (if not most) will not respond very well to it. Change happens a little bit at a time.

If we take the Lord's sentiment that "*I Am Changing the Face of Global Mission*" seriously and little by little adopt these three changes in outlook, perspective and practice, I am convinced we will see significant acceleration in mobilization toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Imagine a future where global mission is no longer seen as a Western-dominated, wealth-dependent activity for the elite few. Instead, it becomes a Spirit-inspired movement of the global body of Christ, free from unhealthy power differentials, operating in the power of the Spirit rather than the power of the purse. We would truly have a new day in global mission – just as the Lord has revealed He intends to do.

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