

10 Ways to Build Your World Vision

A MIND FOR MISSIONS

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CHAIN REFERENCE
Bible
THOMPSON

RED LETTER
EDITION

June 18, 1977
Dear Robert and Beth,
Glad to hear that you're
adjusting to life in Singapore.
We're praying daily.

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Introduction

When Jesus invited His first disciples to follow Him (Matthew 4:19), He asked them to make a commitment. Today the Lord Jesus Christ issues the same invitation to each of us, but—as with that first invitation—He asks us to make a commitment.

Jerry White, General Director of The Navigators, explains the nature of the commitment Christ asks us to make:

We make the commitment and leave the results to God. In a sense, it's like signing a blank check and allowing God to fill in the amount. It can be a frightening adventure. But God will never demand more from us than we have to give.¹

After we make the basic decision to follow Jesus Christ and give Him that "blank check," we still face many choices in our daily discipleship. One of the most basic choices is where we will focus our attention, whether we will focus on ourselves or on the world around us. Expressed another way, we face a choice to be *worldly Christians* or *world Christians*.

A worldly Christian is one who accepts the basic message of salvation, but whose lifestyle, priorities, and concerns are molded by self-centered preoccupation. The selfish spirit of

our age leads the worldly Christian to look to God and the Bible primarily for personal fulfillment. The worldly Christian looks to Scripture for personal blessing; prays mostly for immediate, personal needs; and sees the Christian faith as a way to "get God on his or her side."

The worldly Christian's desire for self-fulfillment or personal satisfaction makes his or her perspective very narrow. As such, he or she may oppose a worldwide perspective, and can actually oppose the worldwide commission of the gospel. Even nonbelievers recognize such narrow thinking as being harmful to worldwide objectives. The late Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung spoke to the problem of the self-centered person in his vision: "Whenever the mind becomes rigid, it is very dangerous."²

The worldly Christian *is* rigid in his or her thinking. The mind is closed to certain aspects of God's revealed will, and attention turns inward. Missions expert J. Herbert Kane summarized the worldly Christian's problem this way:

Everybody prides himself in having an open mind, but few actually achieve it. Man's capacity for self-deception is enormous. We think we have an open mind while in fact we are victims of our own prejudices and predilections. We have long ago decided that there are certain things we will not do. We wouldn't dare say it to God, but in our minds we have decided, "Anything but Christian service," or "Anywhere but the foreign field."³

As Christians, we face the choice: Will we turn inward and focus on the new life we have in Christ only as it benefits us? Or will we look beyond ourselves, opening ourselves completely to God and His purposes for us?

As Jerry White stated, giving God the "blank check" of

our lives can be a frightening adventure because He may work in ways that we are not used to. Like the Apostle Peter in Acts 10, we may find God at work in ways that are beyond our normal (and sometimes self-centered) ways of thinking. Yet if we open ourselves to God and overcome our selfishness, we can embark on the great adventure of becoming *world Christians*.

A world Christian breaks the mold of a self-centered way of thinking. A world Christian understands that Jesus calls us to deny ourselves (Luke 9:23) so that we might respond to a world of greater need beyond ourselves. As David Bryant says, "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."⁴

Becoming a world Christian or a worldly Christian is a choice we all face. Realistically, choosing the self-centered, worldly route will cost us greatly in our discipleship (if indeed we can even consider ourselves disciples when our eyes are narrowly focused on ourselves to the exclusion of others!). A self-centered focus will lead us away from understanding God's greatness. On the other hand, choosing a world focus will expand our vision, open our minds and hearts, and help us understand the greatness of our God in a way we have never before experienced.

NO REAL OPTION

Actually, the choice to become a world Christian is not really a

Some things in life are optional and some are not.

Wearing shoes is optional. But eating is not.

Driving a car is optional. But once you choose the option, driving on the right-hand side of the road (here in America) is not.

Becoming a Christian is optional. But once you decide to ask Jesus Christ to take control of your life, involvement in world missions is no longer optional.

I'm not saying that these things are impossible.

You can choose to go without eating, but if you do you must take the consequences. You must be willing to exist at a low energy level, to invite infection and disease, and if you persist, to die.

You can choose to drive on the left but you will pay fines and cause accidents.⁵

To focus our attention outward, to grow as world Christians, is really not an option at all. Looking to the needs, concerns, and opportunities of our world in the same way that our Lord would is a basic part of identifying ourselves with Him. If we choose to live with no outward focus, we will suffer. Peter Wagner identifies three realms where our spiritual growth will be hampered if we choose to be worldly Christians:

You can reject missions even if you are a Christian. But the consequences are clear:

1. You will find yourself sitting on the bench while you could be in there playing the game . . . missions are on the cutting edge of excitement in the Christian life. Being left out means a dull existence as a child of God. It is less than God's best for you.

2. You will lose authenticity as a Christian. You say that Jesus is your Lord, but yet you will be failing

to obey Him at a crucial point. Another word for that is hypocrisy.

3. You will be poorly prepared for that judgment day when what we have done here on earth will be tested by fire and only the gold, silver, and precious stones will survive (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).⁶

HOW DOES ONE BECOME A WORLD CHRISTIAN?

In order to become world Christians, we must learn to combat the overwhelming spirit of selfishness that we see through the media, through popular opinion, and even through aberrant doctrines that are being taught in Christian churches. The most basic way to do this is to start seeing the world as God sees it. We must believe that "the origin of missions is *ultimately* 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.'"⁷

This truth transformed the Apostle Paul, Francis Xavier, Hudson Taylor, Bob Pierce, and Billy Graham. This truth can transform us, too. When we start to see the world with Christ's love and compassion (in the words of Bob Pierce, to have our hearts "broken with the things that break the heart of God"), our perspective enlarges. Like David, we will say, "I will run the way of Thy commandments, for Thou will enlarge my heart" (Psalm 119:32, NASB).

Seeking God's perspective on the world can quickly overwhelm us, however, if we are not focusing our attention on Him. Only He can love *the world*; we do not have that capacity. This need to focus first on God is why the leaders of

with God, not the world around him, nor even the need of world evangelism. He is absorbed first in God and for that reason he becomes absorbed with humanity. The World Christian takes up the case of world missions because he understands that to be God's cause. Because 'God so loved the world,' the World Christian absorbed in God is committed to His program of world redemption."⁸

I am so far from this ideal, you may think. I want to see the world from God's perspective, and I want to be so absorbed in God that I am likewise absorbed in His purposes, but I am not there yet. Take heart! None of us has arrived. None of us are fully world Christians, but we can choose to grow in that direction.

If we desire to become world Christians, we need to choose to start formulating a world view that is honoring to God and consistent with His worldwide purposes:

Anthropologists . . . explain that at our cores is a basic view of reality—a worldview. That worldview determines who we are, what we will value, and how we behave.

If our worldview is unChristian, or less-than-biblical, it will inevitably surface in values and actions that contradict the heart of the biblical worldview. . . .

But if my actions stem from a biblical worldview, then it becomes a matter of *faithful obedience*. I can allow a fad to slip away, but not something that goes as deep as obedience. I have decided to follow Jesus with my whole life, and I understand where He's going. It's no longer a matter of choosing a career or lifestyle—it's a matter of faithfulness.⁹

The choice to grow, therefore, is basic to our starting the process of developing biblical world visions. To be faithful in

that which we learn is also basic, but there is more.

If we are going to go forward as world Christians and be stretched by an expanding view of God's world, we must make two more choices.

First, we must determine to get our eyes off ourselves. Like the Apostle Paul, we must say, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20), and "If we live, we live to the Lord" (Romans 14:8). Our lives are not our own. We have been "bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20), and our goal is to grow as disciples—those who choose to be identified with the Lord Jesus Christ.

In practical terms, this may mean overcoming our fear of others and sharing the gospel with peers or coworkers. It may mean revising our sleeping, eating, or spending habits. Whatever it means to each of us, it is a conscious statement to ourselves that we are going to allow Jesus to be our *Lord*.

Second, we must build for growth. All of us realize that we are far from our goal of being world Christians, both in terms of personal worship of our great God and in terms of our obedience to His calling into the world around us. But we can grow!

Building world vision in ourselves and others means that we grow toward God's goal that every people and tongue and nation would worship Him (Revelation 7:9-10) by starting right where we are. In the process of building a world vision, we may become discouraged when we see how far we have yet to go, but we can also turn around and be encouraged by how far we have come.

Developing a world vision does not mean that we forget about the people around us. It does not mean that we become preoccupied with the people "over there" (a phenomenon Eugene Peterson calls "Afghanistanitis," the belief that the real needs are all beyond us), nor does it mean we pack our belongings and head to the airport while praying for

God to direct us to the "right" plane to take overseas. We must not neglect the need and mandate to be witnesses right where we are. As our worldwide compassion for the lost builds, we must demonstrate this compassion to friends, relatives, and neighbors—people God has put in our lives right now. Reaching out to those who are near us will remind us of the millions around the world who have no opportunity to hear of Christ and will challenge us to pray and act.

LET'S START BUILDING!

The challenge of becoming world Christians lies before us. Knowing that we displease the Lord when we choose a worldly Christian attitude and lifestyle, may we choose instead the countercultural option of the world Christian.

Becoming world Christians is a lifelong process, but there are certain building blocks that will help us in our growth. This book suggests ten building blocks through which a world Christian vision can be enhanced and enlarged.

Building a world vision, however, is still a challenge. It requires discipline, hard work, and the willingness to fight against our own self-centeredness. "Admiral Mahon of the American Navy during the War of Independence is said to have insisted on a dictum when teaching his officers: 'Gentlemen, whenever you set out to accomplish anything, make up your mind at the outset about your ultimate objective. Once you have decided on it, take care never to lose sight of it.'"¹⁰ Let us not lose sight of our goal of becoming world Christians!

2. Quoted in Orville Schell, *In the People's Republic* (New York: Random House, 1977), page 49.
3. J. Herbert Kane, *Life and Work on the Mission Field* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), page 8.
4. David Bryant, *In the Gap* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1979), page 73.
5. Peter Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1983), page 5.
6. Wagner, page 6.
7. William Owen Carver, "The Missionary Idea in the Bible," *Classics in Christian Missions* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1979), page 32.
8. *What Does It Mean to Be a World Christian?* (Coral Gables, Florida: WORLD-TEAM, 1978), page 7.
9. Sam Wilson and Gordon Aeschliman, *The Hidden Half* (Monrovia, California: MARC, n.d.), page 97.
10. Quoted in John White, *Excellence in Leadership* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986), page 73.

NOTES:

1. Jerry White, *The Power of Commitment* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Nav-Press, 1984), page 48.