

# 360° missions

## The strategy of the Spirit

PART 3 OF A 3-PART SERIES

BY RANDY HURST

Strategy is critical to any mission. But the most important issue is — who defines it? The strategy of our mission is determined by the Holy Spirit.

God intends for us to utilize all He has given us to accomplish His purposes on earth for His glory. He uses our time, our resources — and our minds. As missionary-educator Dr. Del Tarr has said on several occasions, “God is not limited to using human intelligence — but He rarely uses *less*.”

The greatest cause on earth deserves our best capabilities and efforts. But these are still not enough. We cannot establish Christ’s church on earth through even our best natural abilities. Our Lord himself builds it.<sup>1</sup> He gave us the Great Commission and the promise of the Spirit’s empowerment to accomplish the task.

He also defines the strategy.

### *The Spirit’s guidance of the apostle Paul*

The apostle Paul certainly had a brilliant intellect, both naturally and through rigorous training. His mental and natural abilities seem unequalled among New Testament church leadership. But the Scriptures clearly reveal the limitations of even Paul’s strategic planning.

Luke records in Acts that while Paul was on his second missionary journey with his companions: “They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia<sup>2</sup>; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them.”<sup>3</sup>

At first appearance, it seems puzzling that Paul, sent to proclaim the gospel, would be prevented by the Spirit from taking that message into Asia and

Bithynia, where it had not yet been preached. The primary objective of his mission had been determined by God, and Paul obviously had a plan.

But the Spirit had a different — and better — time and method. In the process, He also initiated a significant means of provision for Paul’s future ministry.

Immediately after being stopped by the Spirit from preaching in Asia and Bithynia, Paul received a vision now known as the “Macedonian Call.”

Paul’s first stop in Macedonia was Philippi. Years later, in his epistle to the Philippians, Paul says, “You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.”<sup>4</sup>

A special relationship developed between the Philippians and Paul, and Philippi appears to have been Paul’s only supporting church in the succeeding years. In that portion of his missionary journey, he established churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth. But if Paul had followed his own plan, he would have been in Asia and Bithynia during that time.

What about the unreached in Asia? The Spirit had another strategy. Acts records a fascinating incident that can easily be passed over, which describes how the Spirit’s leading fulfilled the missionary passion of Paul’s heart even more effectively than Paul’s plan would have.

After his missionary journey in Macedonia and Achaia, Paul came to Ephesus. Luke records:

“He entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”<sup>5</sup>

Had Paul followed his own inclination and planning, he would have traveled throughout Asia proclaiming the gospel in one town at a time. Instead, the Spirit placed him in Ephesus at the school of Tyrannus. For two years people came to him. The message multiplied through those he disciplined, so that “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord.”

The Holy Spirit had a time — and a method — that was much more effective than Paul’s plan. The Spirit also led Paul to accomplish other works that the apostle did not anticipate and supplied future needs for which he had not even prayed!

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## The Strategy of the Spirit

### *A Spirit-birthered missionary Fellowship*

*Our Fellowship's founders were truly Pentecostal. They believed both Jesus' command to reach the whole world and His promise that they would receive the Holy Spirit's power to do it.*

The Holy Spirit led our founders to form the Assemblies of God during the Pentecostal revival early in the last century. Most of the reasons they gave for forming the Fellowship related to reaching the world with the gospel.

During the early General Councils, the missionary character and priority of the Fellowship was clearly defined. World evangelization was stated as "the chief concern of the church." Even in the resolution concerning tithes, the Council resolved that after the local ministry was supported, any surplus funds should be spent for "the spread of the gospel throughout the world."

In the General Council minutes our founders stated that they saw a "great need of cooperation, fellowship and unity, according to the Scriptures," especially in "home and foreign mission work." Although Pentecostal believers had attempted to cooperate in missions efforts in various parts of the country, they said, "Seemingly God has a more scriptural basis and method and a broader field and a greater work than has been accomplished."

The following resolution passed: "Whereas, in the providence of God there have sprung up spontaneously in this Movement throughout the country, Pentecostal centers, and ... monies for missionary purposes are being sent to these centers and distributed upon the missionary field, therefore be it resolved, that the presbytery be instructed to seek to bring about a more perfect cooperation among these centers, in the matter of distribution of missionary funds, and the sending out of missionaries, with a view to greater efficiency."

Some in the Pentecostal movement were not inclined toward formal church organization. Many had been asked to leave their denominations after experiencing and testifying about their Holy Spirit baptism. Consequently, they were wary of forming another church organization. So why did they organize? One of the primary reasons was they realized they could not accomplish apart what they could together — especially concerning reaching the world with the gospel. And they had a compelling conviction that the Holy Spirit was leading them.

Later in that meeting, the following dramatic declaration was made: "We commit ourselves and the Movement to Him for the greatest evangelism that the world has ever seen. We pledge our hearty cooperation, prayers and help to this end."

The boldness of our forefathers' response to our Lord's command is astounding. How could such a small group of Christians even consider

attempting to preach the gospel in *all* the world? Because they were truly Pentecostal. They believed both Jesus' command to reach the whole world and His promise that they would receive the Holy Spirit's power to do it.<sup>6</sup>

God has called people to raise up missions societies and agencies that focus on certain parts of the world. He called Hudson Taylor to establish China Inland Mission<sup>7</sup> in 1865, which made a significant impact on a great portion of China. God called Peter Cameron Scott to found Africa Inland Mission in 1895. Its missionaries still labor throughout Africa.

Unlike even many church bodies, whose missions focused on certain parts of the world, our early leaders were compelled by the Spirit to obey our Lord's command to "go into *all* the world and preach the gospel."<sup>8</sup>

Our founders did not focus on one part of the world. We are not a missions society or agency. We are a fellowship of churches, raised up by the Spirit and committed as a body to fulfilling our Lord's Great Commission together — everywhere in the world that our missionaries are called by the Spirit to serve.

Our Lord calls individual believers into His harvest field.

When Jesus taught about how His future banquet would be gathered, He told of servants who were sent into the highways and hedges to compel His guests to come in, so that His house would be filled.<sup>9</sup> But when He wants laborers for His vineyard, the Lord goes personally to the marketplace to hire them.<sup>10</sup>

A primary role of our Fellowship in the area of missions is to recognize the divine call of the Spirit in a person's life and help facilitate the mission to which that person is called. The Spirit calls people. We send them.

It is the privilege and responsibility of the World Missions Executive Committee to interview new missionary candidates twice each year. We share sacred moments as we sit across the table from these people and hear a wonderful progression of testimonies of how God has called them. Each is on divine appointment with people in our world who are lost. Each is a living testimony that God still calls messengers individually to proclaim the good news of Jesus in "the regions beyond."<sup>11</sup>

To say "yes" to the Spirit's call often means surrendering personal dreams and ambitions on the altar of commitment. It can mean facing loneliness and even peril. What compels a person to leave the comforts and security of home, family and friends to serve Christ in another land? The call.

In recent years, some people have come to us expressing a call to a country that is closed to missionaries. Natural circumstances prohibit their entering the country to minister. Yet soon after they answer the call of the Spirit, political situations change and, miraculously, visas are granted. The Spirit knows what we can't possibly know and calls people even before the door is open.

The Spirit defines the strategy of our mission — one life at a time.

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## The Strategy of the Spirit

### *The Spirit's strategy today*

*The Holy Spirit  
knows where  
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Even the most accurate analysis of world statistics has its limits. We tend to see countries as places on a map. We study tribes and language groups and place them in categories of least to most need. But God sees individual people — and His love reaches out to every lost soul.

When God looks at the world, He does not see political boundaries on a map. He sees people — lost people. Jesus revealed the priority of heaven in the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son. Whether they are wandering lost or willfully lost, the heart of the Father extends to each. Heaven rejoices more over one lost sinner who repents than over 99 who are already safe.<sup>12</sup> The apostle Peter said that the Lord wants no one to perish, but all to come to repentance.<sup>13</sup>

All spiritually lost people deserve an adequate witness of the saving work of Jesus Christ. Whether people are unreached because of language, geographic isolation or political circumstances — or even if they walk in the shadows of Christian cathedrals — they are included within the scope of the Great Commission. In Prague, Czech Republic, Christian statues line the famous Charles Bridge, where thousands of people walk each day. But a local survey of people's religious beliefs found Prague to be more than 93 percent atheist.

In recent years, much attention has been focused on what has become known as the 10/40 Window. The 10/40 Window is not a missions agency. It is an area defined by an imaginary rectangle that extends between 10 degrees and 40 degrees north of the equator, stretching from West Africa to East Asia. The 10/40 Window concept has been an effective awareness tool to challenge Christians to pray and send missionaries to the most populous region of the world and among the most unreached.

For decades, the strategic organization of our mission divided the world into four regions. In the last eight years, in response to the leading of the Spirit, two of those regions were divided again because of the growth in the number of missionaries serving there and to provide greater focus for outreach.

Some have asked why the Assemblies of God does not redeploy missionaries from parts of the world where there is great church growth and a high percentage of Christians — such as Africa and Latin America — to the 10/40 Window. We do not ask missionaries to leave the countries and people of their calling to meet a need somewhere else. But in the past 15 years, 74 percent of the numerical growth of appointed Assemblies of God missionaries in the world has been in the two regions that cover the 10/40 Window. They were not deployed there in response to demographic studies or population statistics, but because the Holy Spirit called each personally to this spiritually needy region. The Holy Spirit knows where missionaries

are needed — and specifically *whom* to send.

The mandated scope of our Fellowship's mission encompasses the entire world — 360 degrees. A fellowship of churches is not a missions agency or society. Our missionary leadership has remained committed to our founders' commitment to evangelize the whole world.

Increasingly, the most significant factor in reaching the unreached is the missions efforts of our fraternal fellowships worldwide. The many decades of faithful labor by missionaries who established indigenous churches have resulted in strong national churches. These fellowships not only support themselves but also are sending and supporting their own missionaries, both to unreached people groups within their borders and internationally to other countries. The U.S. Assemblies of God has 2,660 missionaries overseas. Our fraternal fellowships abroad now have 5,406 missionaries serving throughout the world — more than twice that of the U.S. church. And that does not include the numbers of their missionaries working among unreached people groups within their own countries.

Our Fellowship continues on the missionary course set by our founders. They sought to obey God's Word by venturing into *all* the world, as the Great Commission of our Lord specified. Our founders organized as a "cooperative fellowship." That cooperation is with each other and with the Holy Spirit — the master strategist of God's mission to redeem a lost world.

God bears the burden of the entire lost world. He shares a portion of that burden with each person He calls in a sovereign plan directed by the Holy Spirit. Looking back on our history, we can marvel at the Spirit's strategy and personal guidance as He strategically orchestrates our Lord's mission through the lives of people. As Jesus taught in Matthew 20, in the urgency of the 11th-hour harvest, the Lord of the harvest is going repeatedly to the marketplace to personally recruit servants for His vineyard before He returns to gather His bride from the four corners of the earth. **tpe**



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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16:18; <sup>2</sup> The term "Asia" used here is not the vast continent we know today. It was a province in the Middle East, which can be seen on a map in most study Bibles. <sup>3</sup> Acts 16:6-7; <sup>4</sup> Philippians 4:15-16; <sup>5</sup> Acts 19:8-10; <sup>6</sup> Acts 1:8; <sup>7</sup> In 1964 it was renamed Overseas Missionary Fellowship. <sup>8</sup> Mark 16:15, NKJV; <sup>9</sup> Luke 14:16-24; <sup>10</sup> Matthew 20:1-16; <sup>11</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:16; <sup>12</sup> Luke 15; <sup>13</sup> 2 Peter 3:9

All Scriptures are from NASB unless otherwise noted.

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