



a **VISION**
~ *of the*
possible

Pioneer Church Planting in Teams

daniel sinclair

Sinclair has sifted nearly 30 years experience in one of Christianity's foremost mission agencies working among unreached peoples to provide this valuable resource. The result is *A Vision of the Possible*, a message of hope, insight, and encouragement to all who long to see the completion of the Great Commission in this generation.

DR. DAVID GARRISON

missionary and author of *Church Planting Movements*

This book excites me. I am a pioneer missionary to the core. I long to see churches planted among the most difficult peoples on earth. For years many of us have been groping our way through the miasma of ingrained misconceptions about what it means to plant a church. Here is the best and most practical guide to church planting I have yet seen in print. May it become a stimulus to a new wave of good church starts among unreached peoples across the world!

PATRICK JOHNSTONE

author of *Operation World*

For years prospective church planters among the most resistant peoples, like Muslims, have had to rely largely on a vision that a church was possible. With this book Dan Sinclair has demonstrated through his own and his colleagues' experiences, blended with scripture, how this vision is not only possible but is a reality.

DR. DUDLEY WOODBERRY

Dean Emeritus and Professor of Islamic Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary

Dan Sinclair has the experience of a field church planter coupled with 11 years of being field director, where he tracked progress of nearly 160 field teams, made visits to field teams, and intervened when trouble arose. All of this gives him unique experiences and insight which is wonderfully put in this book of amazing breadth and depth. It is a must read for all those who aspire to plant churches among unreached peoples.

DICK SCOGGINS

co-author of *Church Multiplication Guide* and
mentor for church planting with various other organizations

Pulling upon 20 plus years of experience, *A Vision of the Possible* spells out what is practically needed for today's church planter and fills in the gaps what others books have left out. Dan's message is clear, funny, and easy to read, and he's vulnerable in the process. I highly recommend this book to anyone who thinks they may want to be on a team, or send a team to reveal the glory of God where it is not yet known!

BOB SJOGREN

president of UnveilGLORY and
author of *Unveiled At Last* and *Cat & Dog Theology*

In the midst of the overconfident generalizations of self-appointed “arm chair” theorists, Dan has “been there; done that” in the Muslim world. *A Vision of the Possible* is an exemplary guide from a veteran who has been a colleague and coach to literally hundreds of “on the ground” practitioners in 40 different countries! He writes reality as one who loves God with His mind as well as his heart!

GREG LIVINGSTONE

founder of Frontiers and author of *Planting Churches In Muslim Cities*

A Vision of the Possible is a future classic; the best book of its type that I have ever read. The style is balanced, entertaining, engaging, and practical. Very well done.

SCOTT BRESLIN

field church planter and co-author of *Understanding Dreams From God*

The beauty of this book is that it is rooted in the Word of God from start to finish. The author has beautifully blended in present-day insights from management, conflict resolution, language learning, and team building, all of which are empowered by a God-given vision to reap a maximum harvest for the Lord. It is so filled with practical wisdom on every phase of church-planting movements by team efforts that it should be a companion volume to the Bible for every Christian working among unreached peoples.

DR. DON MCCURRY

president of Ministries to Muslims, editor of *The Gospel and Islam*, and author of *Healing the Broken Family of Abraham: New Life for Muslims*

A Vision of the Possible not only fills a major hole in the need for information to mobilize more workers among unreached peoples, but also for what to do when they get there! The lessons that Dan has gathered in this book will be critical to our own mission of YWAM, and many other missions and churches, in our common journey on the Emmaus road.

STEVE COCHRANE

International Director of Frontier Missions/Neighbours, Youth With a Mission, India

The first thing I did after reading *A Vision of the Possible* was to give it to a young man preparing for ministry in Pakistan. The clarity, experience, and illustrations of the author help any aspiring “pioneer” understand the practicalities of the challenges ahead as well as the essential nature of serving in a team context. I believe every pioneer church planter—as well as trainers, strategists, or churches desiring to partner with such efforts—should read this book carefully and repeatedly.

PAUL BORTHWICK

speaker and author of *Youth and Missions, Leading the Way, How to Be a World-Class Christian*, and *A Mind for Missions*

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Introduction

“Planting churches among unreached peoples” doesn’t strike most people as a gripping topic. Even for Christians, while *missions* has a place in the overall scheme of things, it is just one of many priorities vying for the attention and resources of the church.

But let’s stop right here, take a deep breath, step back, and look at the big picture. What are we really talking about? Followers of Christ know that human history is not random, but rather is moving toward the riveting last chapter, which for most will be a *surprise ending*. “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). All of Scripture points to the reality that bringing the gospel of Christ to all nations is now *the* central drama on the human stage. What develops with Christ’s *apostolic envoys* as they work among *all peoples* is the great story—ignored by most—that will affect the destiny of all who live.

What stands between us and the end of history? Only one thing: reaping a harvest among the remaining people groups for whom the gospel has not yet taken root, through establishing healthy, indigenous churches. Therefore, what is the true significance of pioneer church planting? Of taking the gospel to the largest blocs of unreached peoples—Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists? This is the *main event*, the *holy grail*. Without overstating anything, there is no greater drama unfolding today on Planet Earth! Not only is it the greatest challenge to the church in fulfilling our Lord’s Great Commission, it remains the single most determining factor in the course and close of human history.

This book is born out of five core convictions. Firstly, in between His resurrection and His ascension, several times and in different ways Jesus made it clear that bringing His gospel to all peoples must be of paramount importance to all His followers until the task is done. Wherever His followers live or whatever the cost, nothing else is to be of higher priority. “Go and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19) is one statement of the Great Commission; being His witnesses “even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8) is another. Among approximately one third of the world’s population, this assignment remains so very unfinished. Unreached peoples must be the core focus in obeying our Savior’s great command.

Secondly, in the wide scope of church history, “church planting” is newly in vogue in the church today, so we might be fooled into thinking it’s a new concept. But in fact it is as old and as central as the Great Commission itself. It is exactly what all the apostolic teams of the New Testament did. They preached the gospel and then formed and matured *communities of faith*. How could Paul say, for example, that “from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum [about half the Mediterranean Basin] I have fully preach the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:19)? Only by dotting the landscape with new churches that would carry on the task of evangelism in their areas.

Thirdly, again following the New Testament example, we must pursue these aims in teams. These needn’t be big or elaborate teams. But, as we will see, apostolic works in the Bible were always joint efforts. By the way, those on the home front who are actively engaged as “senders” through prayer, financial, and other vital forms of support, are part of the broader team belonging to those precious field teams. This book is also for you, as you gain a clearer picture of what those with whom you are partnering are grappling with on a daily basis.

Fourthly, the harvest *will* come even in these very difficult fields. We must avoid the temptation to fall into an unbelief, sort of by default, that there will always be major swaths of humanity which the gospel is unable to penetrate, and therefore the people cannot be saved. We simply cannot believe that and the Bible at the same time. Some from “every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9) will definitely be a part of heaven’s eternal community. Hence this book’s title: *A Vision of the Possible*. While reaping a harvest among unreached people is humanly impossible, by our Lord’s leading and power it is not only possible but *certain*. This book attempts to unpack what is involved in working in teams to plant churches among the most resistant peoples on earth. Envisioning the steps will fire our faith and lead us to go after the seemingly impossible—for whatever fields might seem to us as *resistant* are in actuality *white unto harvest*.

Lastly, the Word of God is our primary teacher for how to do this. Nearly 2,000 years of experience and missiology is also an incredible aid to today’s teams, and some of that is included in these chapters. But throughout I have sought to firstly see what the Lord instructs us in the

Bible. It is amazing how much the Word deals with the questions cross-cultural workers are grappling with today.

Nearly all of today's unreached peoples are Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist (or other Chinese religions), or tribal/animist. By *pioneer* work we mean going, like Paul, to where Christ is not "already named" (Romans 15:20). Indeed, this book emphasizes the work of the gospel among those who are unresponsive, resistant, or even hostile. We speak of apostolic efforts among populations who for centuries have blocked Christ's saving message from gaining any meaningful foothold. This usually means special struggles and persecution for those who do believe, exceptional obstacles to gathering believers, and unique hardship and sacrifices for the workers who go in and labor, laying down their lives—figuratively and sometimes literally—in order that Christ might be formed in the new churches. Examples include the Fulbe of West Africa, the Yadava caste of India, the Khmer of Cambodia, and thousands of peoples in between. However, sometimes it is not so much that they are *resistant*, but that they have been sadly *neglected* by the body of Christ. In any case, the love of Christ compels us to go.

Some Nuts and Bolts

- Some names of people and other particulars have been changed for security reasons.
- The principles in this book apply to all pioneer church planting efforts, despite the fact that most of the examples given arise out of the Muslim context, as that is my main area of experience. It can be equally useful to believers laboring among Hindu, Buddhist, and animist peoples.
- In a number of instances I felt that using an acronym helped the text flow better. These are mostly CP (*church planting*), CPer (*church planter*), MBB (*Muslim-background believer*; likewise HBB for *Hindu-background believer*, and so on), and CPM (*church planting movement*).
- I have intentionally sought to keep the words *missions* or *missionary* to an absolute minimum. Properly understood, these words mean good things. However, in much of the world they are misunderstood and carry quite negative con-

notations among the people we are seeking to love. We do not wish to reinforce misconceptions of cultural or religious colonialism, coercing or inducing people to change *religions* as if we were in some global religious contest. Jesus calls out to all people to embrace forgiveness of sins in His name, to be changed *in the heart*, and to become His disciples. The outward forms this takes will vary widely across cultures.

I have drawn on the experiences of the last twenty-nine years. In this regard no one has been more important than my wife, as we have been on this wild ride together, being privileged to work among Muslims in the United States, in the Middle East, and from the international office of a large church planting agency, serving as field director. From the beginning, it's been a team effort with my wonderful wife and kids as we have learned together. Thank you for believing it was, and still is, worth it.

Many friends have invested hours of their personal time as the reading/editing team, in giving much-needed advice, in logistics, and just encouraging me to keep pressing on. These include Felicity McLure, Phil Parshall, Darrell Dorr, Dick Scoggins, and Celeste Allen. Others also helped significantly, but have asked not to be mentioned by name for the sake of ongoing ministry in sensitive locations. The Lord knows who they are. I pray that these all receive much blessing and encouragement, knowing how they have helped others. Thank you all!

Finally, words are not adequate for how grateful I feel toward the scores of colleagues on the field around the world, with whom it is my greatest privilege to be your *fellow worker*. Your dedication and giftedness humble me. These insights are your insights. The victories have been your victories. The harvest ahead is your harvest in the Lord. You are the pioneer church planters of this generation.

Dan Sinclair

1

Apostleship: The Great Neglected Subject

She came up to me immediately after I finished speaking about our life and ministry in the Middle East. “I just want to encourage you, Dan. Your family’s willingness to serve the Lord in this way is so special and is a real challenge to us here.” Others shared similarly affirming words. When I got home, I realized there was a sub-message in their kind words: “What drinking fountain did you drink from, ’cause I really don’t want to catch whatever you’ve got?!”

Let’s face it: Anyone who would leave family and friends; a good job; a home; one’s own country, culture, and language; and move to the other side of the world where everything is so different and scary and economically poorer—not to mention hostile to the message—must be a little nuts, right? Numerous other times I’ve been asked, “So you guys must really like it over there, right?” expecting to hear the affirmative. After all, the reasons for going must be the adventure, the stimulation from other cultures, foreign travel, and the like. Not!

If you’re a worker in a foreign country, laboring to bring Christ to an unreached people group, I’m sure you’ve experienced the same. The reason we seem to be such oddballs is that our calling is different. There’s only one reason to do what we’re doing: because Christ wants us to. Why? Because He loves all people, not just us. He wants everyone to have the opportunity to know Him—not just those who live in free, comfortable countries. And throughout the centuries He’s given the *apostolic call* to certain ones of His children. So they head out, regardless of the cost or whether or not it feels good to them or makes sense to

friends back home. It doesn't make us any better than anyone else, but it may make us stranger.

It was a chilly January 1 morning, in the early 1980s, when our family first arrived in our new home in Egypt. The evening before, sitting at the gate at New York's JFK felt like waiting to depart Planet Earth on a mission to Mars. I had recently made an exploratory trip and was fortunate to have already arranged a furnished apartment for us to move right into. We got there, and immediately jetlag hit us like a big brick. But what really got to me was the noise. Turns out our seventh floor flat was on the noisiest avenue in the city and possibly the entire continent of Africa! Egyptian drivers honk their horns all the time. The saying goes that if your horn is broken, park your car—as the horn is more important than the steering wheel. A friend later took a stopwatch and measured the longest duration between horn honks and once got as high as thirty seconds, at two in the morning! In the back of the flat, where our bedroom was, was the tram line. Anytime a tram went by, which was from 6 a.m. to 1 a.m., there came a series of bam-bam-bams . . . at one-second intervals.

My heart sank. There was no way I could live here! But there was also no way I could throw in the towel and return home, though I would've considered this option if it weren't for all the "Let's go out and reach the nations" talks I had just given at our sending church. The point is, pioneer envoys are not inherently tougher. They're just called.

We had been in the city a whole two weeks and were feeling almost settled. Another team family arrived and stayed with us in our apartment, but John and Cindy also wanted to spend a couple nights in a hotel, for the sake of registering their passports. I said, "I know just the place." So we took a taxi to the Venetian. But something wasn't right. Even though it was only 6:30 p.m., the door was locked. Finally, after knocking on the door awhile, a not-very-well-dressed young man answered the door. We had learned a handful of Arabic words prior to coming, so we worked to communicate our wishes for a room. It was all seeming a bit odd, but we just figured that hotels in Egypt must be different from what we were used to. The young man was looking more and more perplexed, but graciously tried to accommodate us. He showed us in, and sure enough there were some rooms with beds and accessories. But things seemed to

be missing. And there were no doors. When we struggled to express our concern over the lack of doors and privacy, he appeared very distressed. He didn't know what to do. Then it suddenly hit us: this wasn't a hotel; it was a furniture store! I can't remember feeling so stupid—either before or since. My friend John laughed so hard and so long that even his son pleaded with him to stop, and to get up off the ground.

Are pioneer church planters inherently more cross-culturally aware? Well, I hope that's not a requirement.

For years we have shied away from using the word *apostle* in relation to church planting work overseas. After all, people know that apostles were the “big shots” in the New Testament. To say, “God has called me to be an apostle,” sounds somewhere between gross arrogance and a delusional break from reality. This is an unfortunate confusion, because the ministry of apostles is at the very core of the Great Commission as well as the current work to bring the good news to those who have never heard.

Many years ago I took *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* at the U.S. Center for World Mission. Though it was an outstanding course, I cannot recall a single lesson on apostleship. I later completed a master's degree from seminary. There were no classes offered on apostleship. In fact, I do not recall a single lesson on the subject. Please understand: I do not mean this as a criticism. Given the silence on the subject, this isn't too surprising. But it is ironic in light of how the calling and work of the apostles is at the very core of the expansion of the gospel in the New Testament.¹ If this is true, then the calling, gifting, and nature of apostleship today is more vital to us than even concerns such as cultural anthropology, methodology, and missiology. What was true in the first century is just as true in the twenty-first century: without apostolic ministry the gospel does not break new ground. With regard to pioneer work, apostleship is everything. Indeed, it is why, in the Lord, the impossible is acutally possible.

I would encourage you to read through appendix 1, “Apostleship in the New Testament.” To summarize, in the New Testament we find mainly two categories of apostles: the Twelve and pioneer workers in general. The Twelve played a foundational and sacred role in the es-

tablishment of the church and had a unique authority from Christ. But the two categories are not fundamentally different. Perhaps the clearest mandate for the apostles is found in Acts 1:8, to be Jesus' witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." In fact, the command to the apostles to take this gospel "to the remotest part of the earth" were Jesus' last seven (or however many they were in Aramaic) words before his ascension! This was fulfilled in the book of Acts by both the Twelve and the "non-Twelve" apostles. The non-Twelve apostles included Paul (who seems to have been a sort of bridge between the two apostle types), Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Apollos, James, and others. The primary way in which *apostle* and *apostleship* are used in the New Testament when not referring to the Twelve is concerning the pioneer work of taking the gospel to unreached peoples, resulting in new communities of the body of Christ. Thus "church planting among unreached people groups" would be a fair description of the New Testament concept of apostolic ministry.

SOME APOSTLE FAQs (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)

1. Are there apostles today?

Yes. Apostles and apostolic ministry are just as needed and mandated today as in the first century. There is no biblical reason to suppose that the way the term was applied to Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Apollos, James, and others would not continue throughout the church age (and today). The term does not apply simply to all who are *sent out* from their churches (or else many more would have been called apostles in the New Testament), but to those with the special gift of apostleship. Indeed, since the ministries of Ephesians 4:11 exist to bring the church to full maturity, including its growth to all people groups, the role of apostle must still be alive and well!

2. Should pioneer church planters take on the title *apostle* for themselves?

I believe that those engaged with an unreached people group to evangelize and plant churches can unabashedly speak of *apostolic min-*

istry and of being on an *apostolic team*. But out of Christian humility and acknowledgement of the diversity of views concerning apostleship, one should be reluctant to stand up and say, “I am an apostle.” Also, while the various teams in the New Testament were no doubt engaged in “apostolic ministry,” the actual title *apostle* seems to have been applied somewhat sparingly, perhaps only to those whose calling, gifting, and fruitfulness in pioneer work had become confirmed over time. As 1 Corinthians 9:2 shows, not even Paul’s apostleship was universally recognized.

Having said that, I do believe that over time other leaders may come to recognize that a particular person has a clear gift of apostleship, and may legitimately refer to him as an apostle.

In his recent book, *Loving the Church, Blessing the Nations*, George Miley has five very helpful chapters on apostolic leaders. “The word apostle might trigger more concern in some than the word apostolic or even the compound apostolic-type. Notice the difference between saying, ‘He is an apostle,’ ‘He is an apostolic leader,’ or, ‘He is an apostolic-type leader.’ Similarly we can speak of apostolic ministry or even apostolic-type ministry. If we have hesitations about the role of the apostle today, using the adjective might give us more freedom to talk openly about this subject.”²

3. Can *apostleship* today refer to a positional or leadership role in a denomination?

While I respect those who might use the term in this way, I personally find no evidence of this kind of position in the New Testament. While the twelve apostles were given broad authority in the church by Christ, the focus of their apostleship was not some form of top-level ecclesiastical governing. I do not see support for believing that apostleship today pertains to a kind of positional authority in a local church or hierarchical governing in a church denomination.

4. Is it enough for a pioneer church planting team to possess a general mix of gifts?

In my observations over the past twenty-two years of working with pioneer church planting teams, if a team lacks apostolic gifts (that is,

no one on the team seems to have that *breakthrough* type of apostolic gifting), then they are rarely very effective.

5. What about those who are not apostles?

If you do not feel that you have the gift of apostleship, but you are on a pioneer church planting team, is all this apostleship stuff reason for discouragement or for questioning your calling? Certainly not. Many in the New Testament were called to be a part of apostolic teams but were never themselves called *apostles*. Most were called *fellow workers*; and only a handful were called *apostles*. Today, just as then, there are many, many indispensable roles for workers who will not be recognized as apostles themselves.

6. What are apostles like?

I do not believe there is a clear-cut profile—certainly not one you could easily defend simply from the New Testament data. But of those I've observed who seem to truly have the gifting, I can offer some tentative general traits (being very nondogmatic here!):

- a. God uses them in a variety of ministries. They are the kind who tend to make things happen. Oftentimes they are good at making something out of nothing, ministry-wise, successfully starting new works from scratch. Generally there is a history of evangelistic and discipleship fruitfulness.
- b. People readily catch their vision and feel led to join in.
- c. They have gifts of Bible teaching and leadership.
- d. They can be quirky and sometimes hard to get along with.
- e. They can have thick skins and hard heads. They tend (right or wrong) to not back down very easily—on anything!
- f. Areas of the flesh can include self-confidence, overassertiveness, and independence. When this is the case, you can see the Lord taking them through a process to grow in these areas toward greater fruit of the Spirit and total dependence on Christ.
- g. They want to have a good handle on everything in the ministry. This can seem like a tendency to *overcontrol*.
- h. “They have their own ideas of what they want to do.” (Miley:111)

- i. “They do not fit the mold. They color ‘outside the lines’.” (Miley:111)
- j. “They have a genuine hunger for a deeper relationship with God.” (Miley:111)
- k. “They are broad in their horizons and think beyond ‘our church.’” (Miley:111)
- l. “They thrive on doing things that are challenging and risky” (Miley:111)
- m. “They tend to become overextended in their commitments.” (Miley:111)
- n. They can be extroverted or introverted, glittery or non-showy. Apostolic gifting doesn’t just come with a particular personality type. Some examples: Apollos was winsome. Paul was driven and task-oriented. Barnabas—whose name means “son of encouragement”—was strongly pastoral.

More could be added to this list. And no doubt some needs to be subtracted from this bit of speculation.

THE NATURE OF APOSTLESHIP TODAY

Apostolically gifted pioneer workers are not supermen or superwomen. They have quirks, character flaws, and soft spots. They can be tall or short, smart or not so clever, impetuous or cautious. But they seem to have this in common: They are always on the lookout for key openings. When the normal ways of getting in seem blocked, they look for other ways to get to the people to show God’s love. When those unique opportunities happen, they jump on them.

I think of my friend Bruce, a Presbyterian minister, and his family, who had prayed for years for some way to bring the love of Christ to the Kurds of northern Iraq. In early 1990 they moved to a particular Middle Eastern city to study Arabic, and hoped that somehow an opening might present itself to bring the gospel to this people group that was so inaccessible. When Saddam’s tanks rolled into Kuwait City, no one knew that this would mean a way for the gospel to reach the Kurds. A couple weeks after the fighting stopped in April 1991, word went out that the

UN eagerly wanted NGO (nongovernmental organization) help among the Kurds above the thirty-sixth parallel. Within a week, Bruce and his family and their team were on their way to Iraq—not knowing where they would live, whether they would be safe or unsafe, or what would happen the next day. It was a sad day for our kids when their kids left, as they all had become good friends. Other workers soon followed, and they have seen a tremendous harvest for the Lord.

I likewise think of Joe and Cathi, who longed to bring Christ to the people of Albania who were so cut off from the good news because the Communist regime shut off virtually all avenues for the gospel. So Joe and Cathi moved to Kosovo, Yugoslavia, and for a few years learned the language and ministered to ethnic Albanians who lived there. When Communism suddenly and unexpectedly fell in Albania, they immediately went in. Within a week Joe was preaching Christ in the open air in Tirane, standing on a fallen statue of Stalin. A church sprung up at once.

Apostles are not exclusively expatriates. While God is moving people from various nations into the harvest among unreached peoples, He is at the same time raising up nationals, even to go to various cities in their own countries to evangelize and plant churches. I still remember how my heart was moved as I listened for four hours as Jamal, in Central Asia, told me of his conversion and remarkable calling by God. He had a dream in which he was protesting to God not to send him to join other wheat harvesters because he had to care for his family. God directed Jamal's eyes to a high mountain peak; at the pinnacle his infant son was rocking serenely in an cradle. Suddenly God gave a command and the cradle flipped upside down, coming around in a full revolution, finally returning to its former place at the mountain's pinnacle. After Jamal recovered from the horror of witnessing his most prized possession, his first son, meet his certain death by God's command, he looked more closely. There in the cradle was his son, smiling and calm as though nothing had happened. God finally said, "Do you see? I can take care of your family better than you can. You go into my harvest!" This brother has since planted several churches in and around his native city. He and

his family have relocated to a new city, having been formally sent out by the MBB church they planted!

In 1984 I sat on a hill overlooking a large swath of Cairo—four- to ten-story buildings as far as the eye could see, all of the same drab light-brown color. The horizon was hazy because of a big cement factory. The population just in this limited viewing area was probably around seven million souls (out of the nearly twenty million of the city). The thought burned through the haze: this is exactly what Paul described in Romans 15:18–21:

For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. *And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; but as it is written, "THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND"* (emphasis added).

In this passage Paul shares his heart and his calling, what drove him to do everything he did. It was his life's calling to go to cities where Christ was not yet known, to people groups in which the church had not yet taken root. One of the great privileges of pioneering ministry is that when you share the gospel with a neighbor, friend, or taxi driver, it is the first time they have ever heard—and sadly, may be the last. At that moment, you are truly Jesus' ambassador to them.

Recently my wife and I were visiting the church one of our daughters attends. The pastor was making a reference to *apostleship*, but he stumbled on his words and it came out *impossible-ship*. I thought, "Hold on. That's right. That's really what apostleship is." Apostleship is the work of creating something out of nothing. It is moving to a city and

people where virtually no one is following Christ, yet where God uses you to create a body of believers. It normally functions in a hostile environment, which makes things very difficult both for the church planters and for the new church. Humanly speaking, this is an impossible task. It really is a special anointing and gifting.

Why focus in a particular way on Hindus? Or Buddhists? Or Muslims? Though this might seem to some as aggressive or possibly a new form of colonialism, it actually comes from a heart of loving concern. Everyone needs Jesus. For far too long, Christians have failed to give Muslims, for example, an opportunity to understand the peaceable way of Jesus. It is also recognized that the Crusades set a negative historical image. We are grieved that Muslims were mistreated in the name of Christ. Since that time, many Muslim societies have distrusted so-called Christian societies, and vice versa. In addition, Muslims are often taught an incorrect view of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Therefore gospel workers feel they have a role to play in correcting any misunderstandings about the true nature of Jesus Christ. By becoming proficient in Islamic history and culture and the language of the people, they are better able to maximize their sensitivity and respect for Muslim peoples. In the West we comprehend so little about the typical Muslim's needs and worldview. Only by really caring for these people can we begin to understand. In addition, pioneer church planters have discovered that Muslims have much to teach us. They take the spiritual world quite seriously and generally are open to discuss religious issues. They have a very high respect for God and His power. They place a high value on community and loyalty. Hospitality is very important to them. These are some of the many qualities expatriate workers value in their Muslim friends, and they find that living among Muslims has enriched their lives. Finally, we wish to be for our friends those "People of the Book"³ spoken of in the Qur'an: "But if you are in doubt regarding what We have sent down to you, then ask those who read the Book before you. Assuredly the truth has come to you from your Lord; so be not among the doubters."⁴

The apostolic heart beats for pioneer church planting—to go where others aren't going or can't go, to engage a populace who have never

before heard our message with the great news of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ—without worry of interference from other ministries or of interfering with them. This is the yearning of the apostle. It is why Paul would turn his back on visiting Rome, the center of civilization at the time, with its emerging church and all the excitement, comfort, and prestige that could have meant for him. Instead he stayed on in cities without a vital church, usually in frustration and obscurity, pleading with resistant and hostile people to hear the gospel and building up those who responded.

This pioneering, suffering spirit has always characterized God's special *sent ones*. As C. T. Studd wrote:

Some wish to live within the sound
Of Church or Chapel bell;
I want to run a Rescue Shop
Within a yard of hell.⁵

A practical application, as alluded to above, is that apostles need “fellow workers” (or teammates) and that these workers, in turn, need apostles. Together they comprise viable apostolic teams. Several times I have observed team leaders who do not yet have a team. Even though they may exhibit signs of apostolic gifting, they can go for long periods without fruit because of not having fellow workers to help them.

I have likewise observed the reverse (and here is where I might get into trouble with some): good-sized church planting teams that do not seem to have anyone on the team with the gift of apostleship—not the team leader nor anyone else. It's perplexing, because these teams have mature and experienced people, but year after year nothing seems to happen. Could it just be that the soil is hard and it's not yet God's timing for a harvest? Of course this is sometimes the case. But I also believe that sometimes the reason is that there is no one on the team with a *breakthrough* gifting, that special anointing that creates something out of nothing for Christ's sake. When this is the case, it may be best for all either to find a new team leader with possible apostolic gifting or let the team break up and the workers join other teams where they can be more effective.

Paul's consciousness of being called as an apostle had a profound impact on his life and ministry. Nothing would ever again be the same. First of all, he knew that his gospel ministry was not his whim, idea, or chosen career path. Rather, it came from God's initiative. And therefore it came with God's authority. How often Paul reminded people in the churches he started of his apostleship—and of his awareness that God was communicating to them *through him!*

Secondly, Paul's awareness of calling eliminated any shrinking back from discharging his ministry with all faithfulness, whatever the cost. "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for *I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.* For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, *I have a stewardship entrusted to me*" (1 Corinthians 9:16–17; emphasis added). This "stewardship," of course, was his apostolic ministry. As Paul said in his emotional farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus, "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and *the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus*" (Acts 20:24; emphasis added). One team leader confided with me, "Paul's sense of apostolic call has had a profound effect on me and my ministry, Dan, forcing me to plead with Christ Jesus constantly to grant me His grace that I might be faithful until the end, not turning to the right or the left in my vocational and ministerial aspirations. I am a bond slave of Christ, called to die to my own will and live for His alone. In addition, when preaching to nonbelievers and exhorting obstinate church members, sometimes, but not often, I have had to plead with them not to sin or reject Christ because God was *at that moment* speaking directly to them through me. Of course, I had better be careful when to invoke my "authority," but such moments have always kept both me and my hearers very serious and careful that our words, spoken with love and humility and extreme self-examination, *at that moment* have eternal weightiness before God."

We're told that today there are still around two billion people who not only do not know the Lord but are also beyond the witness of any church in the midst of their own people and language. They have no news of Him; they have not heard. And they never will until pioneer gospel

ambassadors do whatever it takes to bring the gospel to them and plant churches, particularly among Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Taoists, and secular Communists, as well as many other kinds of unreached people groups. This is why we do what we do. This is our vision. This is our apostolic calling.