
What Is the Job That Needs to Be Done?

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empty tomb exists to help mobilize church people to love a hurting world in Jesus' name. We do this because we recognize Jesus as Lord, and Jesus says that is what we should do: Love God and love neighbor (Mark 12:29-31).

Jesus also tells us to be smart as well as kind: in fact, gentle as doves and wise as serpents (Matt. 10:16).

So when we talk about helping to mobilize Christians to care about their neighbors, we need to look at the task from every angle. That way, we can be sure that we're not missing something.

Some of the mobilizing works are reflected in this newsletter. Christians reaching out to deliver food or furniture, repair homes, sort and share clothes, provide assistance with bills and medicines, and support all these activities, are all part of that effort to help the church do what the church is called to do.

Mission Match, supported by designated donations through the Discipleship Tree, and the research try to encourage Christians on a broader national basis.

The State of Church Giving through 2012, 24th edition, continues the research effort. Published in October 2014, the subtitle asks a question: *What Are Christian Seminaries and Intellectuals Thinking — Or Are They?*

The first five chapters look at church giving and membership numbers. Four of these chapters look at the period 1968-2012. One chapter considers data for 1921-2012.

:In all five chapters, a pattern is clear: Church member giving as a percent of income has been shrinking. Also church membership represents a smaller and smaller percent of U.S. population.

Of course, it seems reasonable to ask why this might be happening.

In chapter 8, the book offers five realities that, apparently, church leaders and thinkers in seminaries and elsewhere have not recognized. Briefly, these are: 1. The potential of church members to fund a positive agenda for affluence. 2. Pastors are preaching to congregations filled not with the poor, but rather the "rich." 3. Money is a spiritual power. 4. Bigness has produced an illusion of powerlessness. 5. Seminaries and intellectuals need to lead.

Of course, the book expands on these ideas.

For example, in the section on point 4, Bigness and the illusion of powerlessness, there is a discussion of "anecdotal" Christianity and "at-scale" Christianity . Here are a few key points from those pages that help explain Figure 24 (shown on Page 2).

Christians receive so much information that they are aware of how big the world is. This bigness can cause an "illusion of powerlessness." Rather than believing in the promises of the Bible, it's tempting for Christians to leave the big problems to someone else and focus on what they can do as individuals.

Since Christians are focusing on themselves as individuals, mission agencies communicate with them as individuals. The agencies do not offer a big picture on a scale with the need and the real potential for Christians to impact that need, but instead limit their communication to telling stories — anecdotes — to show why individual Christians should support a specific need.

The book notes, "All this activity results in the current level of mission activity . What is going on is good. The problem is that it is woefully inadequate, in light of both the potential and the needs ...

"What would look different if the bigness of the world's problems was coupled with an understanding of the potential that Christians have if they mobilize massive resources seven decades into this age of affluence?

“A key factor would be a change in focus. Individual Christians would understand that the question is not ‘What am I doing?’ or ‘What is my congregation doing?’ Rather, the question becomes, ‘What is the job that needs to be done?’

...

“The difference in flavor would be changed from perceiving Christian discipleship as being similar to going to college to discover your gifts, to more like signing up to win World War II, whether through frontline battles or, at home, planting victory gardens and working long shifts at the war plant, to keep supplies going to the front” (pp. 145-146).

Following Jesus is the greatest adventure there is and will ever be. Together, we really can change the world in Jesus’ name, through individual faithfulness and also working together at a scale that reflects the realities of God’s power through us.

The local works allow us to organize and put to use our individual strengths to meet the needs of our neighbors, often face to face.

The Mission Match Discipleship Tree allows individuals to organize themselves by pooling their annual donations of \$48 with those of other concerned Christians, both locally and in other places. These combined funds then encourage and challenge churches to move toward at-scale mission by increasing the portion they spend on missions, particularly global missions, as a percent of their total spending. So, as an individual, you can participate in an effort with at-scale hopes. Call Shannon if you want more information about the Discipleship Tree.

And the research can help church leaders think about how to mobilize the entire church, at a scale that matches Christians’ potential for helping others, and also on a scale that could make a real difference in our neighbors’ needs, in keeping with Jesus’ promises. What a privilege to work with you in pursuit of these worthy goals!