



LEGACY INSTITUTE

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June 30, 2007

Dear Fellow-laborers in God's Harvest,

I have received a number of questions and comments about my last Legacy Letter. Here is one from a reader in Florida:

"We received the latest letter from Legacy. It was very encouraging to me and I especially appreciated the comments about how Satan can steal your life if you let him. No doubt, Satan is the god of this world and can put a hurting on us, although I certainly recognize that God is in ultimate control. Nonetheless, we need to be ever aware that Satan and his cohorts don't sleep. One note of positive criticism is that I wished Leon would have mentioned the personal mission each person should have to use their unique talents God so generously gives us. We need to see how and where we fit in the Big Picture."

Other readers have also commented along the same lines. Their comments go something like this:

"It is great that you remind us about mission and tell us we should all be doing it. But you give us nothing about HOW! How can I personally or my congregation be 100% engaged in the mission if we don't know HOW we are supposed to accomplish it?"

It is not uncommon to hear questions such as these in today's COG circles.

Why don't we sometimes know where we are going or how to get there? Have some of the Churches of God become stagnant and lackluster in energy?

Part of the answer is the lack of crystal clear definitions of *mission* and *vision*!

There is a difference between MISSION and VISION. It is easy to get the two mixed up. George Barna, church research guru, in his book entitled "The Power of Vision" says,

"Sadly the majority of churches I have studied have confused mission and vision. For some reason, most pastors equate the two. They believe the two terms are interchangeable. They are not. The mission statement is a definition of the key ministry objectives of the church. The vision statement is a clarification of the directions and activities the church will pursue toward making a true ministry impact."¹

If we are confused about MISSION, we will never gain a clear understanding of VISION. In other words, "if we don't know where we are going, we won't know how to get there!"

¹ *The Power of Vision*, George Barna, p. 38. Regal Books

Mission is our goal. Vision is HOW we get there!

The Church² was founded to be *the instrument* to help accomplish the Work Jesus was given by the Father. It is much like what took place in Genesis. The Creator God or “The Word” (*which John 1 clearly tells us was Jesus before His incarnation*), was the *instrument of creation*. All things were created through Him. But the Mission came from the Father.

In Eden, Our Heavenly Father began the process of re-producing Himself. The summit of the physical creation was the creation of Adam and Eve. Their potential was to become, quite literally, the children of God. But both Adam and Eve rebelled against God and became the slaves of Satan, the god of this world. Because of their disobedience, they were sentenced to eternal death (known as the *second death*.)

God banished Adam and Eve from the garden and posted angels with flaming swords at the entrance to prevent mankind’s access to the Tree of Life! Mankind was CUT OFF from eternal life!

Nothing has changed over the thousands of years of mankind’s sojourn on this earth. The children of Adam and Eve, through the centuries continue to be the SLAVES of Satan and all continue to be under this sentence of eternal death. Mankind is still cut off from the Tree of Life. So since God’s goal is to add many to His family, HOW does God bring His children back to Him?

Now we come to the *mission* of Our Lord Jesus Christ. What is the present *mission* Jesus was given by the Father? Why was Jesus sent to this earth in the first place?

Well, we know that it was to die for the sins of mankind. He died in our place as a substitute so that we do not have to suffer the *second death*. OK. But is that all? Some preach that Jesus’ job ended on the cross. This is not true. There is much, much more to His mission.

The MISSION GIVEN TO JESUS CHRIST IS THE SALVATION and RECONCILIATION of ALL MANKIND TO THE FATHER!

Luke 4:16-22

“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

*‘The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.’*

² I use upper case “C” when referring to the spiritual body and a lower case “c” when referring to a human organization.

"Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'"

This was Jesus' first recorded sermon. In it He outlines the purpose of His coming. He talks about liberty, recovery and healing. He says He is "...to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." Jesus is talking about Jubilee.

In God's system, every 50 years all debts are cancelled and God's people return to their *inheritance*. Can we find anything more fitting to describe the MISSION of Jesus than this? Jesus is bringing us BACK TO EDEN! The Father developed a plan with Jesus that brings us BACK into the relationship God has sought all along. It is a FAMILY relationship. It is what He has seeking since long before EDEN!

This is what I have always called THE BIG PICTURE. God is in the business of saving people. He is in the business of reconciliation. Adam and Eve's disobedience cut mankind off from God. Jesus is bringing us back to Him.

That is the MISSION! Jesus is the Center Point and Prime Mover of the mission. He is Head of the Church. We are His assistants and He has empowered us to help get the job done. Jesus was given a mission by the Father. He in turn gives His Church a mission to accomplish as part of the BIG PICTURE.

But HOW do we help Jesus accomplish His mission? *Now we come to OUR mission!*

Clarifying the Mission and Developing the Vision

Clarification of mission and vision is very important for each and every organization, including the Churches of God. Without clarity, we become confused and get off-track because we do not know *where* we are going nor do we understand *how* to get there.

Outlining a mission statement and a vision statement is one of the first things the Pastor or leader of any congregation must do. People NEED to know! Can you imagine any general NOT telling his men WHAT the objective is; NOT telling them HOW they must participate in reaching that objective?

Where is your church organization or ministry going? And HOW are you going to get there?

What is the MISSION of the Church? If we clearly understand the reason why Jesus founded the Church nearly 2000 years ago, we answer the question of the Church's mission.

Jesus empowered a small group of believers by giving them the POWER of the Holy Spirit on that first New Testament Pentecost day. He said that the Church would continue through the centuries and never be destroyed. Why? What is so important about the Church of God and what is its role in accomplishing the mission of Jesus Christ? **How does the Church fit into the Big Picture?**

The Church is the instrument Jesus uses in this age to fulfill His mission. He accomplishes this by sending forth the Church to preach the Gospel to the nations and help bring them back to God.

That is our mission.

Matt 28:18-20

“Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,’ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

Looking carefully at the above section of scripture, we see that it outlines HOW Jesus is currently carrying out the Mission God gave Him THROUGH the instrument of the Church! Notice that there are four ACTION words; *Go, Make Disciples, Baptize and Teach*. This is the outline of the Mission Jesus gave to His Church.

First the Church must GO! In **Mark 16** Jesus says, ***“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”***

So clearly, the first step is to **GO** forth and **TAKE** the Gospel to the nations. This can't be done if your congregation or organization has no clear-cut understanding of the Church's mission and an outline of HOW to accomplish it. Never forget that Satan is the author of confusion. If there is confusion about your church's mission or vision, you can count on the fact that Satan is right there! His goal is to continually keep us off-balance so that we get bogged down in our differences; real or imagined offenses; and petty, useless arguments. Satan also keeps us from focusing on the Church's mission and vision by tempting us to get involved in worldly pursuits that eat up our time and energy.

The only way we can stay focused is if LEADERSHIP continuously brings us ***back to the mission and vision of the Church***. It is a constant battle. And it is a spiritual one.

Eph 6:12-13

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

So **it is the job of pastors and church leaders** to battle Satan and help the congregations of Jesus' Church to stay ON-TRACK and focused on **GOING FORTH** with the Gospel message of Jesus Christ!

Satan will be working overtime – all the time – to get the people of God focused INWARD – on the SELF! When people become focused inward – on church politics and power plays; back-biting and gossip; offenses and hurts; jealousies; who is in charge of the tithes and how they are spent; physical pursuits and pleasures, etc., we are no longer participating in Jesus' mission! We get OFF-MISSION!

The Apostle Paul talks about the importance of getting out there and preaching the Gospel in **Rom 10:14-15**:

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?”

There is no magic formula in this. God uses no magic wand to bring His children back to Him. Instead, He sends forth Jesus and His servants.

John 13:20

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me’.”

John 17:20-22

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

In order to BELIEVE in and RECEIVE Jesus, people must hear the message. In order to hear the message, someone has to be out there PREACHING it! And the PREACHERS must be SENT!

Where are the Church’s young evangelists today? Who is sending them out?

The 1st Century Church of God was ACTIVELY engaged in evangelism. They were sending forth apostles and evangelists to the far corners of the Earth to spread the Gospel Message of the Kingdom. They certainly were not just expecting Jesus to do the job all by Himself! They had an understanding of their MISSION and a clear-cut VISION of how to accomplish it. They knew what they needed to do and they were actively DOING it! Rapid growth came to the Church in the 1st Century because the church congregations were actively SENDING forth those who would PREACH the GOSPEL!

The first century Apostles understood the vision. They had no confusion as to what they should be doing. The various congregations that supported the men who “went forth” also had no confusion about the mission and the vision. Here are some examples:

John 20:21

*“So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has **sent** Me, I also **send** you.’”*

Acts 8:14-17

*“Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they **sent** Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they **received the Holy Spirit.**”*

Acts 11:19-24

*“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, **preaching the Lord Jesus**. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a **great number believed and turned to the Lord**. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they **sent out Barnabas** to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And **a great many people were added to the Lord.**”*

Acts 13:1-3

*“Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, **“Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”** Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they **sent them away.**”*

Acts 13:4-5

*“So, being **sent out** by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they arrived in Salamis, they **preached the word of God** in the synagogues of the Jews.”*

Acts 19:21-22

*“When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, **“After I have been there, I must also see Rome.”** So he **sent into Macedonia** two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus ...”*

The 1st Century Church of God **lived** the vision!

Barna says the *“vision statement is a clarification of the directions and activities the church will pursue...”*

So, back full-circle to the question: *What can I do? What can my congregation do?*

The very first thing that needs to be done is to clarify the mission and vision of the church congregation you meet with. Then a step-by-step roadmap must be laid out for carrying out that mission.

Very simply put: How will your particular church organization or congregation take the Gospel to the Nations? How do you plan to take care of those who respond? How will you feed them? How will you help bring them back to the Father?

Has your leadership given you a clear vision about HOW you can actively participate to accomplish the mission? Do you have a clear “vision map” telling you HOW you are going to accomplish your part of the mission?

I can only propose an outline. Each individual organization, congregation and individual must discover where it/he/she fits into the VISION by assessing the spiritual gifts and inherent talents God has given each and every one of us.

There are actually TWO parts to the Matthew 28 mission of the Church. The first is evangelism: the GO and MAKE DISCIPLES and BAPTIZE part. The second is pastoral: the TEACH part.

One cannot survive without the other. The evangelist must go out and preach the Gospel; make disciples through careful and truthful explanation of the Bible; and baptize those who respond to the call of the Holy Spirit. But the evangelist cannot stay to conduct the building and edification of the new church congregations. He must continue on to new and fresh fields and continue to evangelize. Some must plant. Others must water and tend.

This leads to the collective job of each and every congregation. Those newly called need a safe, healthy and supportive church environment that leads them toward the Kingdom. Every member of every congregation must play an active part in providing such an environment. TEACHING is done both by *word* and by *example*.

Let's look at both evangelism and pastoral care.

Evangelism

Who should do the first part – *evangelism*? Every Church of God organization-- every congregation today – should be actively and DIRECTLY engaged in evangelistic effort. In the days of the 1st Century Church, they had no TV, radio or Internet. They went physically *out* to preach the Gospel. That approach should not change in our modern *end-of-the-age* world. Our modern day church organizations place *too much emphasis on electronic media* to do our job for us. The main problem with that is there is a dehumanizing element to the electronic media we cannot ignore.

People want to relate to people. The Holy Spirit God has placed in His people is POWERFUL and a catalyst for change in the human spirit of others! I have experienced this first-hand here in Thailand at the Legacy School. Our Church of God teachers and administrators are in contact with young students from the mountains of Thailand and Burma on a daily basis. That contact has a powerful EFFECT on changing character. They are exposed to the Spirit of God day-in and day-out. The same effect would not be there if the only contact we had with them was only by Internet or radio.

Someone needs to GO OUT and PREACH the Gospel. Not sit at home and let the electronic media do it for them! Media can play an important part in getting the message out, but it can never replace the human element and the POWER of the Holy Spirit we possess inside of each of us.

Acts 1:8

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Every congregation should have a clear plan of action for taking the Gospel OUT to the whole world! Every congregation should have a program to TRAIN and PREPARE young evangelists to take that Gospel message to others who may have NEVER heard it before. This effort could be half a planet away; or in your own back yard. Evangelism is the flagship of every Work of God.

Pastoral Care

If you think that pasturing the flock is the job of the pastor or minister only, you are mistaken. It is the job of every member of every congregation to make your church home one of peace and nurturing. The “little ones” need a PASTORAL environment in which to grow and bear fruit to the Kingdom.

Is your congregation *pastoral*? If you were God, would you send your newly-called maimed and broken-hearted to your congregation’s pasture to be HEALED!? This is a very serious question that may lie at *the very heart* of WHY we are not experiencing the growth we think we should be having!

Much of what is written in the New Testament letters by Paul, Peter and John is about the need for the churches to be a place of peace and safety where God’s chosen can grow in grace and love for one another. Do the scriptures below describe your congregation?

Rom 12:3-21

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Therefore

*“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
If he is thirsty, give him a drink;*

For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head”

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Does this sound like the congregation with which you and I meet?

What good does it do to set the prisoners free of oppression if we bring them into a congregation that practices more oppression? Why heal the broken-hearted only to break their hearts again? Why open their eyes to the truth only to lead them into blindness again?

I believe that our churches need a thorough house cleaning. And that cleansing must begin with each and every one of us!

Are you personally making every effort to get to know and care for the emotional and spiritual needs of others in your congregation? Or do you “cop-out” and “let the pastor do it”? Does your congregation pray for each other? Does everyone else you meet with KNOW that you, personally, CARE about them; are PRAYING for them; and consistently showing up when they need HELP? Do people call you HUMBLE? Are you willing to subordinate your own needs to those of others? Are you ENGAGED in pasturing your fellow members: *adults, teens, children, elderly, and widows*? Are you reaching out to others who have no hope?

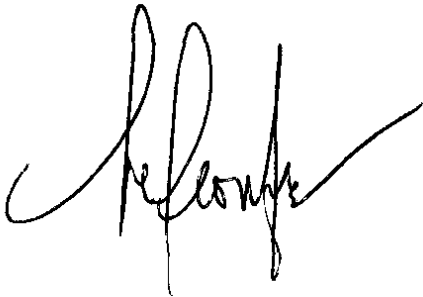
Jesus cried over Jerusalem. Do you cry for your own nation?

These are tough questions. But they demand answers! We ALL have a role to play. Each one of us is an important part of the BIG PICTURE. What is your part? I can't answer that from my desk here in Thailand. But the answer lies in the pages of your Bible and the voice of the Holy Spirit within you.

But you will never know unless you actively seek out that answer. Seek and you shall find!

I hope this answers some of your questions. And I hope that it raises a host of others!

As always, your fellow-servant in Jesus Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Leon Sexton', with a large, stylized initial 'T' and a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

T. Leon Sexton

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