

CATALYST

Are You going to Ride the Fourth Wave?

By Stuart Simpson

The Great Commission. Ask Christian believers what comes to mind

when they read or hear these words and my guess is that many times feelings of guilt, inadequacy and failure will surface. All sorts of images probably come into view based on a perception of what they think the Great Commission is all about. 'Isn't this what the really spiritual Christians invest their time in? Isn't it for those with evangelistic giftings or those who have received a special calling to go to China, India, or Timbuktu?'

Here's a question for you: What response or reaction do *you* experience when you read or hear those three words?

Disempowered Christians

Surveys indicate that most Christians feel disempowered. There are reasons for this. A lack of teaching that releases people to identify and pursue their God-given gifting. An end-times perspective that results in believers resigned to the way things are and biding their time, waiting for Jesus' Second Coming to rescue them out of this world's mess. Wrong dualistic thinking that separates the whole of life into two different categories: what is 'spiritual' and really important, and what is material or 'secular' and less important. This results in a division within the church between the clergy and the laity, those in 'full-time Christian ministry' and those who are not. Such thinking has robbed many believers of the joy of knowing their life can make a difference.

God has appointed and anointed some within his Body with equipping gifts. In the Bible, these are described as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. In line with all good leadership practice, these giftings are not intended to result in the leaders doing everything or controlling others. Instead, their purpose is to release and empower the rest of the Body to be all they have been anointed to be.

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the EQUIPPING of the saints FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY..." (Eph 4:11-12)

Given the clarity of this verse of Scripture, it begs the question why so many Christians feel they are in passive mode while a relatively small number of believers do 'the work of ministry'?

The truth is that *every* Christian believer has a special, God-given role and place in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. This task is not just for church workers or overseas missionaries. Whatever your vocation in life, you have a destiny to fulfill and a unique contribution to make. Your life has PURPOSE!

God's Story, God's Mission

Our life-story fits into God's bigger story (*HIS-story*). Our mission and purpose in life fits within his global mission and purpose. In the western world we have become so shaped by the culture of individualism that we can easily lose sight of what being a follower of Jesus is really about. Instead of focusing on God's agenda and what he is doing and wants to see accomplished in the world, we can so easily get drawn into pursuing other agendas centred around ourselves, or even the local church.

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For the past 16 years, I have been working with Youth With A Mission. What is exciting is to recognize that we have *all* been invited to be a part of *God with a mission!* God invites us to join him in his mission and be a part of writing his story. It is God's mission, global in scope, which will bring God's story to pass. This mission revolves around not just people entering his kingdom through salvation, but also seeing his kingdom established on earth, as a prelude to the day when *all* things will be under the reign of his King, Jesus Christ. The gospel writer, Luke, records that during the forty days between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension, of all the issues he could have focused on in his remaining hours on earth, his teaching centred on "things pertaining to the kingdom of God". His disciples were to occupy territory until he would return again to bring about a fulfillment of the kingdom, as portrayed in the Parable of the Talents. Likewise, God is calling us today towards the completion of his story and his mission. We are not called to idly wait for his return but to work for it, bringing God's will and kingdom on the earth, standing against the forces of evil, seeking justice and truth, shaping and writing history through our lives as part of his *missional* community.

So how does this relate to the emerging Fourth Wave? Over the past two hundred years of Protestant missions the gospel has been progressively carried through three missionary 'waves' to the *coastlands*, into the *inland regions*, and made its way to *people hidden behind social and cultural barriers*. Now, God is initiating a new wave - the Fourth Wave - which will cover and fill the whole earth, and impact every sphere of society. It will be larger than anything ever seen before, and it is on the horizon and headed our way. It is a wave of tsunami proportions but, unlike the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 or Japanese tsunami of 2011, this wave is not intent on destruction but is coming to deliver and redeem. I believe it is also coming to *mobilize the whole Body of Christ* – the global Church – in a way that will breathe new life, vision and purpose into every member. What is exciting is that God is inviting *each one of us* to join him in riding this Fourth Wave of missions which will carry the knowledge of God into every place and every sphere and area of life.

Reconnecting Every Believer to the Mission

We live in significant days and it is important we have a sense of purpose of what God is doing in the earth. We need to be the kind of people who not only "understand the times" from the comfort of our deck-chairs, but take up our surf-boards and ride the waves that are being driven by the breath of the Holy Spirit. It is only then that we will truly see and experience what God is doing. It will not always be an easy ride but it will be an adventurous one! However, many in the church are still sitting in their 'deck-chairs', in a passive mode, lacking a clear sense of life purpose. Christianity to them could be summed up by the phrases, 'going to church' and 'going to heaven'. Sadly, they are a product of a non-biblical paradigm and strategy of the enemy to disable and constrain the greater part of the Body of Christ. So, what is the nature of this demobilizing strategy?

In the West, our culture's secular worldview has reduced work to a career or a life dedicated to the endless consumption of more things. Whereas the purpose of education was to learn and prepare people for life, integrating work, character and spirituality, secularism has now reduced it to being able to find a job, leaving many simply working for a living and material rewards alone. The withdrawal from a biblically-informed worldview has had a grave impact on the Church, causing the lives and work of most Christians to become separated from God's mission. It has been a recurring problem throughout Church history.

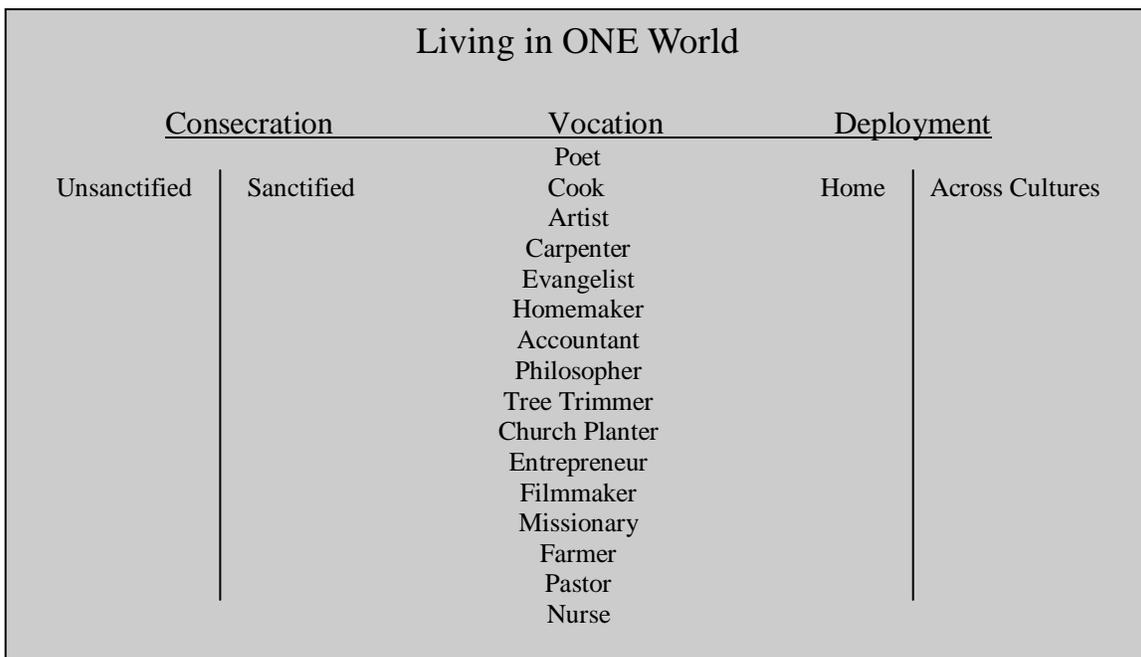
The Bible encourages a holistic worldview that does not divide the spiritual and material (or natural) realms, and maintains a unified understanding of life and relationship with God. However, other worldviews and philosophies have influenced the thinking of Christians during different periods of history. Greek philosophers such as Plato and Pythagoras introduced schools of thought that lessened the value of the physical world. This was strengthened by the Eastern worldview, found today in Hinduism and Buddhism, which emphasizes the reality of the spiritual realm whilst discounting the physical as a mere illusion of reality. In time, such dualistic patterns of thought impacted on mainstream Christianity as seen in the development of monasticism where there were two levels of Christian life. The superior religious class consisted of religious workers such as monks, priests, nuns, and theologians. Everyone else was seen as belonging to the common and spiritually inferior class. Does this sound familiar even today where we have divisions between the clergy and the laity, those in “full-time” Christian work and those who have “secular” professions? Even in missionary circles this unspoken hierarchy of ‘spirituality’ can be seen where working overseas is deemed more spiritual than working in your own country, and what is most highly esteemed is working amongst an unreached people group within the 10/40 Window. In order to reconnect our lives and work to God’s mission, we need to rediscover our sense of calling and our story-line within God’s Story.

In order to reconnect our lives and work to God’s mission and his coming kingdom, we need to rediscover our sense of calling.

Every believer has a Calling, God’s Story in You!

All Christians, not just religious workers, have a calling. We have all been created for a purpose. There is firstly a *general* call to enter the kingdom and receive life through God’s gift of salvation. We live out the Christian life within the framework of God’s three great mandates: the *Cultural Mandate*, given at Creation, to develop and steward the earth; secondly, the *Great Commandment* to love one another and to love your neighbor as yourself; and thirdly, the *Great Commission* to disciple nations. This creates the context for God’s *particular* call on each believer’s life, which is our unique work assignment to manifest and advance God’s kingdom in the earth.

With a biblical worldview we understand that all work, not just ‘spiritual’ work, can be considered a calling. As Darrow Miller explains in his excellent book *LifeWork: A Biblical Theology for What You Do Every Day*, we are not called to live in two different worlds, or live two different lives. All of life, including the hours of our work, is to be lived ‘before the face of God’ for the advancement of God’s kingdom and glory. The following diagram is helpful to show that regardless of a person’s vocation, the key and valid distinction is whether we are living a consecrated or an unconsecrated life. Are we living for him and the advancement of his kingdom, or are we living for ourselves and our own agendas? It also recognizes that for some their ‘occupying territory’ for Christ and his kingdom will involve cross-cultural ‘deployment’.



Every Believer has a 'Mission Field', a Place of Deployment

As a missionary who has lived overseas, in returning to the West I have sometimes been asked if I will once again return to 'the mission field?' Whilst I understand what is being meant, this question comes from a faulty paradigm that sees missions as only taking place overseas, preferably in a far and distant land. If we refer back to the diagram, our 'mission field' could be either at home or in another culture, depending upon our place of deployment. Whereas the term 'mission field' has traditionally been associated with the work of missionaries, as every believer finds their place in advancing the kingdom as part of the Great Commission mandate, they will also discover that though they may not be missionaries, they can be *missional* and have a mission field or place of deployment, wherever that may be. This will be another empowering characteristic of the Fourth Wave.

Every Believer Commissioned

Imagine the powerful impact the Church would have on the nations if all Christians lived missionally, seeing themselves as sent by God to redeem and restore the spheres of society where they are deployed?

In our previous e-zine, we referred to how exciting and empowering it would be if *every* believer in a local church community had the opportunity of being prayed for, commissioned, and sent out into their particular spheres of influence in society. There would no longer be scores of believers feeling disempowered in church meetings, feeling that their vocation in life is unspiritual, and that what they spend the majority of their waking hours and years of their lives doing is insignificant for the kingdom of God. Imagine the powerful impact the Church would have on the nations if all Christians lived missionally, seeing themselves as sent by God to redeem and restore the spheres of society where they are deployed?

For this to occur, a new way of thinking will be necessary. A biblically informed view of work and vocation will be required. Some churches run courses to help people in their congregations to identify their spiritual gifts so they can find their place and become more effective within the ministries of the church. This is good but it will not by itself address the reasons why many Christians feel disempowered in church. This is because the majority of believers are not called to work within the confines of a church setting. They need to be helped to discover and identify their true callings and God-given passions, and then be affirmed and released into whatever God has put in their hearts to be and do, in whatever spheres of influence that will take them. It is into these callings within the marketplace, within the political world, the educational world, the world of the arts and entertainment, the family, or wherever it may be, that each and every believer should be commissioned.

(This article is based on material from Stuart's forthcoming book, *The Fourth Wave: Every Believer finding their God-given place in the Great Commission*).

My Place in *HIS*tory: Discovering Your Calling

One way to help discover our calling is to look at how you have been equipped. Here are some areas to explore:

- **Motivation**—what do you love to do? What are your passions and dreams?
- **Life History**—the unfolding of one's life in the context of *HIS*-story
- **Design**—
 - **Natural Talents** → the **Highlands Ability Battery** is a great way to discover how God has 'wired' you!
 - **Personality**—your individuality and temperament, personal style
 - **Spiritual Gifts**
- **Preparation**
 - **Enculturation**—understanding the elements of your culture in forming who you are
 - **Training**—acquired skills and experience
 - **Education**—instruction and discipline
- **Interests**—part of the world, people group, hobbies, particular human need, sphere of society
- **Stations**—the 'fixed things in our lives' that create certain responsibilities (eg. being married, having children)
- **Connections**—networks, associations, involvements, relationships

Taken from a downloadable workbook published by the Disciple Nations Alliance (www.disciplenations.org). For more information on the Highlands Ability Battery, see my Empower Coaching site (www.stuartsimpson.me).

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