

Cross-Cultural Perspectives



Search or Harvest?

I often find myself in an inexplicable scenario. In just about any board meeting where we are interviewing missionary candidates, for appointment, we have families and singles that are endeavoring to answer the call. One feels called to a gospel resistant land where past experience shows they will potentially labor for many years and have only a handful of converts. Another is asking to go to a field where revival is spreading like wild fire, preachers are shedding Trinitarian beliefs and are being baptized in Jesus name, and church growth is at its peak. Which should be appointed? Which need is more important?

Our ecclesiology drives our missiology. What we believe about the church and its purpose will drive what we believe, and how we conduct, our global missions efforts.

James Gilmour once remarked, "Is the kingdom a harvest field? Then I thought it reasonable that I should seek to work where the work was the most abundant and the workers fewest." How does one judge where the work is most abundant? It haunts me that the population of places like India equals all of North America, Africa, and South America combined. It would be mind-boggling to compare the number of people of China with the rest of the world. And they have so few laborers.

Search theology involves preaching Jesus Christ where he has never been named. It is taking truth to where it has never been heard.

Harvest theology is all about reaping the harvest among the most responsive people to the gospel, in nations where they have heard or are hearing truth on a perpetual basis. Advocates of this viewpoint find out where God is at work, and join Him there.

So are we proponents of a search theology or harvest theology? It really is not an either/or case. We can be both. As David Sills says in *Reaching and Teaching*, “When mission strategies embrace one approach to the exclusion of the other, an imbalance in missions is a result.” Areas that have never heard must hear in order for us to be faithful to the great commission. Yet, we need to walk through all the wide open doors of opportunity that come our way.

Paul Orjala said, “When God wants to send a message, He wraps it up in a person and sends the person.” The decision of who to send, and to where, comes down to the will of God, the evident anointing of His Spirit on the candidates we meet and the missionaries we have. God directs. We confirm and encourage. He sends His message of hope, wrapped in a missionary, to nations where the soil is tough or easy; people are resistant or respondent. They serve as shining lights and/or harvest reapers so that the lost anywhere and everywhere have the opportunity to hear truth. Are we searchers or harvesters? Both!

