



POCKET COMPASS *and* GOOGLE EARTH

PIONEERING · MISSION · IN · THE · 21ST · CENTURY

AHHH, THE GLORY DAYS OF MISSION. WHOLE TRIBES CONVERTED AND NATIONS DISCIPLED. SOULS SAVED. THOUSANDS BAPTISED. THE BIBLE TRANSLATED INTO HUNDREDS OF LANGUAGES. MISSIONARIES ON THEIR PEDESTALS WHERE THEY BELONGED. THEIR PIONEERING FLAGS FOREVER MOUNTED, PROCLAIMING GOD'S STAKE ON THE WORLD.

We read their gallant stories of sacrifice. Heading out with whatever belongings they could stuff into a coffin, an unflinching declaration of commitment that meant no turning back, for who knows how long. They battled foreign diseases and parasites, gave up worldly possessions (and a sense of fashion) and put their lives on the line to convert the natives.

THEY LIVED AND BREATHED CHRIST'S COMMISSION: "GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS."

But surely now, in the 21st century, all nations have been discipled? Aren't all corners of the globe covered? Can there be any people left who haven't heard? Surely with Google, Facebook and Christian radio, everyone would have had a taste of Jesus.

They've even seen the Jesus film in Azerbaijan and have a Koorong equivalent in Guadeloupe (wherever that is!).

Isn't the focus of mission work in our time more about supporting the churches that were established in the good ol' days of colonisation – making sure they're doing things right, taking communion regularly, straightening the steeple, cleaning the baptismal pool and ensuring that there aren't too many disputes? Right?

WRONG!

There are still billions of people on planet Earth who have never had the chance to hear the name of Jesus, let alone his message of Life. Of the 16,000 people groups in the world, more than 6,000 are considered unreached¹.

These groups do not have access to the gospel due to cultural, linguistic, political or other barriers. Less than 1% of people in these groups are believers, and Christians in nearby areas are not reaching out to them. That's an awful lot of people who haven't heard the Good News.

Currently 96% of Christian workers and resources are concentrated on the third of the world who already call themselves Christian. A further 3% is dedicated to another third who already have access to the gospel. **This leaves a third of the world who have never heard the gospel, for which we have dedicated less than 1% of Christian workers and resources.**



CHRISTIAN WORKERS AND RESOURCES

There is something seriously wrong with this picture! Whatever happened to making disciples of *all* nations?

We've all heard amazing stories of how the gospel is sweeping through China's millions – in fact, there are currently more Christians than members of the Communist party! While this is good news for the Han Chinese (the majority people group), it's a very different story for the minority people groups. Most are Muslim groups who are repressed economically, have limited freedom and are forcibly divided by the government.

Well-intentioned efforts by Han Christians to share the gospel with Muslims are unfortunately very Han in method and form. Their way of doing church doesn't relate at all, it's so foreign to their culture and worldview. **Being told that the way to God is to follow a different set of perceivably Western rules isn't going to cut it. It would be like committing social suicide - renounced by family, rejected by friends and colleagues.**

— SO, A DIFFERENT APPROACH IS NEEDED. —

Enter some pioneering cross-cultural workers of the 21st century: Aussies Lulu and Darcy from BrisVegas and Lola from Perth² join the Global Interaction team working in China. They've recently moved to a forgotten corner of the country to intentionally build relationships and empower the community to develop their own distinctive ways of following Jesus.

While these guys aren't kitted up with pith helmets or ten kilo Bibles, they're taking a leaf out of pioneering missionary Hudson Taylor's book. In order to connect with his new friends, Taylor controversially dressed in traditional Chinese clothes and styled the original mullet – a shaved forehead out the front and long pigtail out the back. While times and fashion have certainly changed, these new pioneers know it's important to identify with the locals. So they'll be sporting Levis and cotton Tees ('Made in China' of course!). The team will be teaching English in a local university, helping young adults gain skills in order to improve the conditions of their community.

Anticipating the move, Lola says: "I can't wait to unpack my 37 boxes and 5 suitcases, explore the surrounds, stock up on Muslim-friendly food, make friendships with the staff at the university and wait for God to bring those whom He chooses." Does she feel like a pioneer? "Nah, just honoured and absolutely privileged to the max." For Darcy, the challenges lie in "communicating well in a Muslim context for the first time, remaining teachable 24/7 and coping with the cold winters." Lulu is looking forward to "the exciting adventure of trusting God in the unknown."

Lulu, Darcy and Lola probably won't go down in the history books, their methods won't be taught in mission training schools and they won't have thousands of hits on their blogs. **But these pioneers don't do it for the glory. They do it for Jesus. They do it with obedience.** They agree with Hudson Taylor's words: "If I had a thousand pounds, China should have it. If I had a thousand lives, China should have them. No! Not China, but Christ. Can we do too much for Him?"

They don't anticipate filling their prayer letters with tallies of converts and photos of mass baptisms. They won't be teaching eager Christians in theological colleges or preaching in packed churches. They won't be building orphanages, schools and Baptist church buildings. It's slow, hard and at times frustrating work. It's not particularly glorious. Still, they dream of writing praise points about adding new Chinese words to their vocabulary; of emailing photos of their new neighbours; of sharing Jesus with their friends one-on-one. **They hope that some day, the ones will become twos, and the twos will become threes, and the new believers will share about Jesus in culturally appropriate ways with their communities. Then, the pioneers will be needed no more.**

WHAT IS OUR ROLE IN THE AGE-OLD STORY OF MISSION? WHAT WILL BE THE CONTRIBUTION OF OUR GENERATION? WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL AUSTRALIAN YOUNG ADULT CHRISTIANS MAKE? THE NEED IS GREAT, THE OPPORTUNITIES ARE ENDLESS AND THE TASK IS IMMENSE. LET'S GET STARTED. ONE BY ONE BY ONE.

NAOMI BARKER & SUSAN CAMPBELL



J. Hudson Taylor

¹For stats and info on unreached people groups go to www.joshuaproject.net
²You guessed it, not their real names!