

**The God-Equipped Magnificent Obsession:  
A Christ-Centered and Values-Based Strategic Intent**

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Jesus planted a magnificent obsession in the hearts of His disciples – to share the Christ they knew with the world using all the tools God had provided for them. Matthew records Jesus giving to His disciples what we now call the Great Commission, to make disciples as they were going, baptizing them and teaching them everything Christ spoke.<sup>1</sup> Motivated by Jesus' claim for absolute authority,<sup>2</sup> His charge to them,<sup>3</sup> and empowered and impassioned by the Holy Spirit, the disciples began God's church planting and evangelization ministry. Today, Jesus is charging believers, to embrace His magnificent obsession, to share the Savior we know with the entire world using all the tools God has provided for us.

This body of Christ, the believers making up the first-century church, engaged their world through the touch points of their time the Roman political system which provided safe travel and a network of quality roads<sup>4</sup>, the common Greek language and culture<sup>5</sup>, and the scattered post-Pentecost new Christian believers<sup>6</sup>. From those three touch points, we can see God had prepared a means of global interaction, global communication, and global strategic locations for these first century believers to share and live the Gospel message through missions and business.

This paper argues it was the first-century believers' Christ-centered core values which they held at an obsessive level that drove the evangelism behavior of the first century Christ follower. Core values still drive the behavior of many present-day believers. However, to enlarge the work of Christ's Great Commission, many more Christians will need to take on Christ-centered core values held at an obsessive level, and accept Christ's charge to go make disciples.

This paper also argues today's Christians need to engage our world through the touch points of our time: easy and fairly safe travel throughout the world, almost instantaneously global communication between nearly any points on earth, and an increase in open borders and businesses across borders. From these three present-day touch points, we can see God has prepared for us a means of global interaction, a means of global communication, and global strategic locations for today's believers to share and live the Gospel message. The question remains whether today's Christians will fully take up the challenge.

**The first-century church**

Roughly two-thousand years ago in Jerusalem during the festival of Pentecost, God's Holy Spirit poured out on one hundred and twenty followers of Christ and then three thousand more individuals.<sup>7</sup> It was there and then God imparted His power on the

people of God to witness, a power God intended to carry the church into the world.<sup>8</sup> It was there and then God intervened theologically into his creation.<sup>9</sup> It was there and then God created a living organism—the body of Christ, His church, filled by His Spirit.<sup>10</sup> God birthed a magnificent obsession in the hearts of three-thousand new believers who returned to their homes throughout the Roman Empire.<sup>11</sup> This was a turning point when God changed the course of history through God-empowered believers, with obsessive level core values for Christ and His Good News.<sup>12</sup> This God-obsessed church must be our model to change current history.

### *1. Global interaction.*

God had gone before His children to prepare a means of global interaction. God did not make this strategic preparation through Christians, yet He provided for them. The Roman political system allowed for relative safe and rapid travel. The Romans had built a network of quality stone and gravel roads throughout the empire<sup>13</sup> and protected them with a dispersed military and an empire without internal borders. This peaceful time allowed for safe commercial and personal travel.<sup>14</sup>

### *2. Global communication.*

God had gone before His children to prepare a means of global communication. When Rome defeated another country, they often took on some of the culture of the defeated nation. In Rome's defeat of Greece, the Roman culture absorbed so much of the Greek culture that history referred to it as the Greco-Roman culture.<sup>15</sup> With the Greek culture came the Greek language understood by the educated people throughout the entire Roman Empire.<sup>16</sup> With this common language came God's provision of global communication for His people.

### *3. Global strategic locations.*

God had gone before His children to prepare a means of global strategic locations for missions and business. God began to scatter the Jewish people during the Assyrian and Babylonian conquest. During the Persian rule, while many returned home, many stayed because they had families, jobs, or businesses.<sup>17</sup> More Jews moved from Palestine during the rule of Greece and Rome because of the freedom for travel and the freedom to set up and do business throughout the empire.<sup>18</sup> It was from these Greek-speaking Jews that God drew those who encountered Christ's Holy Spirit at Pentecost and who God sent back to their homes with the Gospel message.<sup>19</sup>

God had prepared all that the first century Christians would need to do His work. They just needed to let the Spirit-implanted obsession for Christ come out in their lives within the context of all God provided.

## **Core values drive behavior**

Malphurs defines Christian core values as “the constant, passionate”, biblical core beliefs that drive the ministry.<sup>20</sup> Core values are “why we do what we do” and influence our overall behavior.<sup>21</sup> Values inspire people to action.<sup>22</sup> Core values are not part-time

influencers of behavior; they are continuous and constant.<sup>23</sup> Core values drive a person or organization to passion, enthusiasm, or positive obsession. Christian core values flow out of God's word; they are not just the whim of man. Values drive the ministry because they drive behavior – both in the past and today.

If core values drive behavior, then behavior reveals core values. Unfortunately, not all Christian behavior flows from core values centered on Christ through His Spirit. According to Paul's letter to the Galatians in chapter five, believers battle with core values centered on their flesh and need continuously to make the choice to choose Christ-centered values. Therefore, Christian leaders need to base their leading on a firm "Bible-based values system."<sup>24</sup> In Galatians, Paul urges believers to embrace the Spirit, the giver of godly core values to drive out the flesh.

God calls leaders to value endurance in the battle and therefore evidence in their behavior the strength to continue to "fight the good fight", to continue "keeping faith", and to preserve "a good conscience."<sup>25</sup> Leaders are to value godliness and therefore lead godly lives<sup>26</sup> through their "speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity."<sup>27</sup> Leaders are to value Spirit-led discernment based on God's Word shown by a hunger for nourishment and true doctrine from the Word.<sup>28</sup>

Leaders must align their lives and their core values.<sup>29</sup> Paul stresses leader modeling as he encourages Timothy, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe."<sup>30</sup> In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul sets himself up as an example for his readers to follow.<sup>31</sup> Today's Christian leaders should also be able to put themselves up as an example of Christian living.

When Matthew recorded Christ's Great Commission to go and make disciples, the Disciples were to go and reproduce themselves in the lives of others. The Disciples were to pass on the same core values at the same obsessive level that drove the behavior of the Disciples. Although many view the word "obsession" as a negative word, this paper draws on Dr. Eric Maisel's definition. Positive obsessions are "insistent, recurrent thoughts or sets of thoughts, pressurized in feel, that are extremely difficult to ignore, that compel one to act [behave], and that connect to one's goals and values as an active meaning-maker."<sup>32</sup> Positive obsessions compel people to behave consistent with their values.

Oswald Chambers focuses this positive obsession on God Himself. "Our life inside and out is to be absolutely obsessed by the presence of God." Positive obsession is not about 'the work of God' or our Christian life, but about God.<sup>33</sup> Our obsessions drive both our inward life and our outward behaviors. Imagine if Christians all over the world walked with Christ at a positively obsessed level. The world would likely be a very different place.

### **The driving force of God-led positive obsessions**

When God-led positive obsessions control our lives and church, all our life will reflect His core values. We will live our lives on the Romans 12 ‘living sacrifice’ level. Our vision will be at the positive obsessional or compelling motivational level. We will see God’s work differently. We won’t limit our perspective, but will strive for the positive obsession God calls for in Romans 12:1.

Hamel and Prahalad call this positive obsession “strategic intent.”<sup>34</sup> While “strategic intent” seems like it focuses more on design and goals, it carries a sense of the depth of commitment to the design and goals. The words of Henry Varley (spoken later by Dwight L. Moody), captured the idea of positive obsession and “strategic intent,” “The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him. By God’s help, I aim to be that man.”<sup>35</sup> The person fully consecrated to God is a person with positive obsession. This positive obsession “strategic intent” drove Paul as he battled to reach the Gentiles for Christ. From a secular perspective, it was a positive obsession that compelled the U.S. Apollo team to put a man on the moon ahead of the Soviets.<sup>36</sup> “Strategic intent” is long-term and sustained ambition (or positive obsession) out of proportion to the currently available resources and capabilities.<sup>37</sup> It was positive obsession that drove the first century church and believers to abandon themselves to God’s purposes to grow His church.

### **What is necessary to achieve a strategic intent?**

Strategic intent occurs when leadership reaches beyond what they know is achievable and followers consistently witness this new positive obsession. Strategic intent occurs when leadership commits to step out of their comfort and safety zones to take risks beyond their current resources and capabilities. Before leadership can move the organization to an obsessive commitment of strategic intent, leaders must daily live the obsession; followers will only commit to the challenges they see the leaders reciprocally living.<sup>38</sup> Leaders will need to expand their traditional thinking to long-term strategic thinking. They will need to expand their thinking about their resources and capabilities.

### **Recognize God has gone before us.**

#### *1. Global interaction*

God has prepared what we need for cross-cultural interaction. Similar to the commercial climate of the early Roman world, today in the pursuit of the benefits of commerce and tourism many governments and businesses world-wide have cooperated to allow easy and relatively safe travel throughout the world. Travel that used to take weeks or months now takes hours.

#### *2. Global communication*

God has made available new global communication which ministries can use. With the arrival of the internet, telephone, radio and television, people communicate almost instantaneously between nearly any points on earth. Radio, television, or website-based news carries live coverage to people around the world. A crisis on the other side of the world flashes on the television or computer screen as if it was just down the street.

### 3. *Global strategic locations*

During the Greco-Roman era, the Jews scattered around the known world to do business and God used many of them to spread His Gospel by taking advantage of their strategic locations. With the increase of open borders and businesses across borders, God is now moving similarly, putting people in strategic locations for His purposes<sup>39</sup>.

#### **What do we Christians need to do to take advantage of what God may be doing?**

##### 1. *Expand thinking from a traditional missionary or leader profile*

Recognize there may be a decrease in the need for the traditional missionary or pastor; a minister may now be anyone with a Christ-centered Biblical values-based obsession to share Christ and His Good News.<sup>40</sup> Organizations such as Finishers Project<sup>41</sup> center their ministry on people with skills and life experience and with an obsession for Jesus, who want to step into a more significant life for Christ. Finishers Project provides a connection between the global needs and the resources and capabilities available.<sup>42</sup> Because of organizations like Finishers Project, people with an obsession for Christ and with the heart to serve Him anywhere in the world can now do so. From the springboard of their daily working which is their testimony in action, they can make the contacts that can lead to mentoring and discipling.

##### 2. *Expand thinking from traditional methods*

During the first century, Christians could independently travel to other cities and begin to minister without needing outside support. Paul is a good example. He made tents to support him while using his time in each city to evangelize those needing Christ and encourage those belonging to Christ. Today, we still have “tentmakers” doing mission work around the world. Only now, there are two types of tentmakers: those like Paul working to support themselves and a new group – those who set up a business as a ministry.

Modern “tent-making” is practicing a non-ministry profession as your income source while you actively minister in an area needing Christ. While this missionary approach does not add jobs to help the local economy, it does put the missionary in the mix of the local culture.

On the other hand, a new “Tent making” equates to what Matviuk calls “business as missions”. The business and the ministry or missions “constitute Kingdom Business” according to Ken Eldred in his book *God Is at Work*.<sup>43</sup> “Kingdom Business” follows practices of a successful business, integrating the business with the faith of the leaders. The Kingdom Business aims for both local economic development and the Gospel development. Its goals are both to transform the community and to transform lives. This boils down to three initiatives: “profitability and sustainability”, “local job and wealth creation,” and “advancement of the local church.”<sup>44</sup>

##### 3. *Expand thinking in leadership style*

Despite its likeness to secular leadership, Christian leadership has as its beginning a different assumption. That assumption flows out of a relation with Jesus Christ and the Spirit-given vision of His Kingdom. Although a Christian may have the title of ‘leader’, Christ Himself is the leader when a Christian is in proper relationship to Christ.<sup>45</sup>

Secular leadership is also now recognizing the importance of relationships. New studies show that “strong leadership arises out of a symbiotic relationship between leaders and followers within a given group.”<sup>46</sup> ‘Good leadership’ arises from the reality of a leader understanding his or her group and the actions the group values.<sup>47</sup> Effective leaders have the capacity “to shape what the followers actually want to do”<sup>48</sup> and to use the group identity as “a blueprint for action.”<sup>49</sup>

Because effective leadership arises out of the group, effective leadership style will fit the culture and values of that particular group. The style of the new missionary and leader may vary in how each interacts with others, but the underlying Christ-led core values will still reflect the “compassion of Christ.”<sup>50</sup> Paul had a similar flexible style with a commitment to “proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”<sup>51</sup> Organizational leaders must recognize their leadership task focuses on building and equipping people to perform at their potential within God’s will, not just to get organizational tasks carried out.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4. *Expand thinking in ministry scope*

Recognize that ministry opportunity is no longer limited to just the local community; the world is your ministry. With the growth and convenience of air travel, communication, and the internet, international communication is hardly distinguishable from local communication. The other side of the world is only a phone call or an e-mail away.

For example, today if a church wants to adopt an “unreached people group” they can through an organization called Antioch Network.<sup>53</sup> Westwood Baptist Church in Olympia, Washington decided it was time to expand their thinking. For years the mission pastor had been developing their mission capabilities and commitment. Now it was time to enlarge their global intentions. With the help of Antioch Network, Westwood currently fully supports all costs to reach an unreached people group – complete with missionaries; this is as well as keeping their other mission commitments. Westwood is a church with a strategic intent, a global scope, and an obsessive commitment growing out of Christ-centered core values.

#### 5. *Expand thinking on team selection*

A team must have the same core values, to have a group positive obsession or strategic intent. This means a critical activity is team selection, especially as it has to do with leadership team positions. If a person will be ministering and on the team, then core value alignment is critical.

### **What will drive your behavior today?**

Regardless of your skills and background, if your core values center on Christ and His Gospel; if you find yourself obsessed with Jesus and His love for you; if you seek to live your life committed Him with all the worldly risks that follow; if you are willing to think beyond your resources and capabilities – you will consider what God is doing today and join Him. Think of the implications if you and millions of other Christians around the world lived your lives poured out in a positive obsession for the person of Jesus Christ. It could become an overpowering work of God today.

Just like the early disciples, if you become obsessed with Christ making His core values your core values, His obsession your obsession, you will find yourself immersed in God's great strategic intentions using all of today's resources and capabilities that God provides for you to go make disciples and build His world-wide church.

#### Writer

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## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Matt. 28.18-20 (New American Standard).
- <sup>2</sup> Matt. 28.18 (New American Standard).
- <sup>3</sup> Matt. 28.19-20 (New American Standard).
- <sup>4</sup> Howard F. Vos, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners and Customs: How the People of the Bible Really Lived* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1999), 489.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 383-384
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.
- <sup>7</sup> Acts 1.15-2.47 (New American Standard).
- <sup>8</sup> William H. Willimon, *Acts. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1988), 32.
- <sup>9</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 38.
- <sup>10</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament, QuickVerse 6 CD-ROM* (Cedar Rapids, IA: Parsons Technology, 1997), "Acts 1.1."
- <sup>11</sup> Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 135.
- <sup>12</sup> Willimon, *Acts*, 29.
- <sup>13</sup> Vos, *Manners and Customs*, 489.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 383-384.
- <sup>17</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts. Commentary on the Book of Acts, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Revised ed.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 56.
- <sup>18</sup> Vos, *Manners and Customs*, 385.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.
- <sup>20</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 100.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.
- <sup>24</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership: Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 24.
- <sup>25</sup> 1 Timothy 1.18-19; 6.12 (New American Standard).
- <sup>26</sup> 1 Tim. 2.2; 3.16; 4.7-8; 6.3, 5-6, 11 (New American Standard).



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- <sup>27</sup> 1 Tim. 4.12 (New American Standard).
- <sup>28</sup> 1 Tim. 4.6 (New American Standard).
- <sup>29</sup> Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership*, 24.
- <sup>30</sup> 1 Tim. 4.12 (New American Standard)
- <sup>31</sup> Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership*, 24.
- <sup>32</sup> Eric Maisel, "In Praise of Positive Obsessions." *Creativity Newsletter* #28, October (2002), Talent Development Resources, <http://www.talentdevelop.com/articles/IPOPO.html>.
- <sup>33</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest: An Updated Edition in Today's Language*, ed. James Reimann (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1992), *QuickVerse* 6 CD-ROM (Hiawatha, IA: Parsons Technology, 1997), "June 2."
- <sup>34</sup> Gary Hamel and C. K. Prahalad, "Strategic Intent," *Harvard Business Review* 67, no. 3 (1989): 64, <http://eres.regent.edu:2048>.
- <sup>35</sup> "The World Has Yet to See," *Christian History and Biography* 1 Jan. (1990), Christianity Today Library, <http://ctlibrary.com/3690>.
- <sup>36</sup> Hamel and Prahalad, "Strategic Intent," 64.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 68.
- <sup>39</sup> "Business as Mission Resource Centre," YWAMconnect, <http://www.businessasmission.com/pages/AboutUs>.
- <sup>40</sup> Sergio Matviuk, "The Role of Christian Led Companies in the Global Market" *Regent Global Business Review* May/June (2007): 24-25.
- <sup>41</sup> Finishers Project, <http://www.finishers.org/core.html>.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Matviuk, "Christian Led Companies," 24-25.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 25.
- <sup>45</sup> Timothy Robnett and Allen Quist, *The Spirit-Driven Church: God's Plan for Revitalizing Your Ministry* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor/Cook, 2006), 87.
- <sup>46</sup> Stephen D. Reicher, S. Alexander Haslam, and Michael J. Platow, "The New Psychology of Leadership," *Scientific American Mind* Aug/Sept (2007): 25.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 28.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., 24.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Matviuk, "Christian Led Companies," 26.

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<sup>51</sup> Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 2001), 124.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-129.

<sup>53</sup> Antioch Network, <http://www.antiochnetwork.org/Pages/Strategic.htm>.

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