

Mission Round Table

The OMF Journal for Reflective Practitioners



Mission Goes to Work

Using one's vocation to see God's kingdom grow

Contents

Mission Round Table Vol. 20 No. 3 September–December 2025

03	Editorial – <i>Walter McConnell</i>
04	Missional Business Overview—Contradictions Between Opportunities and Challenges – <i>Michael Barbalas</i>
12	A Reflection on Mike Barbalas's Article – <i>William Dugan</i>
15	My Experience as a Marketplace Self-Supporting Worker – <i>Chan Ka Fai</i>
19	The Life Cycle of a Missional Business – <i>Lloyd Oppel</i>
23	Marketplace Ministry and the Church: A Practitioner's Perspective – <i>Jimmy Chao</i>
28	A Christian View of Work in Response to the Fall: Reflections that Will Hopefully Encourage Discussion – <i>Harvey Phillips</i>

Photo credits: Cover images - Galina, Stephen Gatehouse, Dean Koh, Ulrich Kohler, Roddy Mackay, Walter McConnell; Alexander Fung (13), Stephen Gatehouse (30), James Kuan (14), Roddy Mackay (9, 10, 17, 24, 25, 34), Kevin Morris (16, 26), Corrie Myhr (33), Lloyd Oppel (20, 21), Tim Pfennigwerth (7), Andrew Philip (29).

Donations:

If you would like to help cover production costs of *Mission Round Table*, you can send your gift earmarked for Project P74063 to any OMF center. Please visit omf.org/contact for more information.

Download:

PDF versions of *Mission Round Table* can be downloaded from www.omf.org/mrt.

Subscribe:



The editorial content of *Mission Round Table* reflects the opinions of the various authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the views of OMF International (IHQ) Ltd.

© 2026 by OMF International (IHQ) Ltd.

Editor: Walter McConnell walter.mcconnell@omfmail.com

Contributing Editor: Claire McConnell claire.mcconnell@omfmail.com

Editorial Office: int.research@omfmail.com

Graphic Design and Printing: IK Marketing & Productions

Printing: Yung Shung Printrade Pte Ltd



Mission Round Table is published by the Mission Research Department
OMF International (IHQ) Ltd., 2 Cluny Road, Singapore 259570

Editorial

Walter McConnell

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” (Gen 2:15 ESV)

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city … No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And … they will reign forever and ever.” (Rev 22:1–5 ESV)

From the beginning to the end of the Bible, work is understood to be something that God does and something that he has created humankind to do. Work is part of our royal duty of ruling creation under God as his image sharers. It is a duty that will continue when God's kingdom is realized and we worship—that is *serve*—him eternally by caring for and ruling over creation in alignment with his original, pre-Fall plan. As work is an eternal good that is only temporarily marred by the curse of sin, our “normal” work allows us to serve God by what we do *and* gives us an opportunity to demonstrate his creational love to others who do not recognize him and thus lead them to him. Work is thus missional—both as something that God intended us to do and as a means of revealing him to others so that they can worship him too.

Mission is thus not a task set aside for a special class of people who go “overseas” or “cross cultures” or are ordained (or quasi-ordained) gospel workers but something for all followers of Jesus to engage in, whether they live “at home” or “abroad”. Throughout history, many have used their occupation or vocation to share the gospel and lead people to Christ. As Michael Green reports, it was the “amateur” missionaries who spread throughout the world, “chattering to friends and chance acquaintances, in homes and wine shops, on walks, and around market stalls. They went

everywhere gossiping the gospel; they did it naturally, enthusiastically, and with the conviction of those who are not paid to say that sort of thing. Consequently, they were taken seriously, and the movement spread, notably among the lower classes.”¹ Such people propelled church growth in the first century and such people are needed today.

This issue of *Mission Round Table* focuses on how a person can use their “secular” vocation as a spiritual service in an overseas (even if not cross-cultural) setting. Mike Barbala, who has spent many years running missional businesses and training others to do so, sets the stage by showing that the opportunities and challenges of missional business come with significant contradictions that impact the way missional businesspeople are sent, received, and supported. He insists that workers and agencies need to acknowledge and address these contradictions so that those with the right training and personal make-up can succeed in their jobs. William Dugan, who has engaged in missional business with a different mission organization, reflects on Mike's paper, agreeing with much that has been said, building upon some of his ideas, and adding a few of his own. Taken together, these papers give prospective workers some crucial ideas to consider so they will be as prepared as possible for a job that is far from easy.

Our next two papers provide personal examples of what life in overseas missional business may be like. Chan Ka Fai records his experience as a marketplace self-supporting worker. Many readers will be interested to discover that though Ka Fai did not serve under a mission organization, he spent seventeen years working at three different companies in an East Asian country. His description of his work and ministry illustrates the kinds of pressure and possibilities that come to those who choose this life.

Lloyd Oppel's reflections on his many years of service as a “normal missionary” followed by many more as a missional businessperson give insight into some positives and negatives of both. His conclusion is that if he were to do it all again he would go the route of missional business. His simple definitions of different aspects of missional business and his description of the missional business cycle will prove helpful to many.

By describing his experiences as a marketplace worker who shares Jesus with others, Jimmy Chao challenges readers to consider how they relate to others in their workplace and how this might impact the way they practice their vocation in a foreign context. Many will find his description of the four As—Assembly, Academy, Agency, Agora—a helpful way to measure how they relate to each other and consider how they can or should build on these relationships.

In our final paper, Harvey Philips reflects on his experience working in East Asia as he examines biblical passages that lay good foundations for building a solid theology of work. He rightly begins with Genesis 1–2 to show God works and designed humankind to work as well. He then compares Bezalel's work to build the tabernacle with Aaron's work to build the golden calf to show the difference between what happens when we follow or reject God's intentions and directions. Work is good when done in God's way, but sinful, and possibly idolatrous, when done contrary to his will. Could the same be said about our work in mission whether done the “normal” way or in conjunction with a business venture?

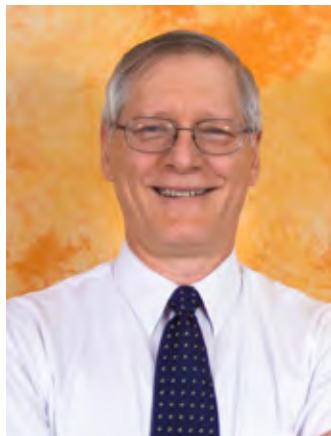
Walter McConnell

Editor, *Mission Round Table*

¹ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 24.

Missional Business Overview—Contradictions Between Opportunities and Challenges

Michael Barbalas



Mike has worked in East Asia in bi-vocational roles over the past thirty years and has had a chance to see the successes and failures of many missional businesses. Recently retired, he continues to encourage those who feel called to live and work out their faith in the marketplace.

Living and working in a Chinese world, one frequently encounters the word and concept of *矛盾* (máodùn)—contradiction. This is an appropriate word to use in discussing missional business. Within OMF, missional business has been talked about and practiced for over twenty years. Why take an issue of *Mission Round Table* and review the prospects and impact of missional business? The simple answer is that while missional business is seen as an important current and future mode of ministry, the contradictions around missional businesses continue to exist, continue to consume focus, time, and energy, and continue to create tensions and confusion.

If you look across Asia and even many other parts of the world, you can see:

- A growing interest in sustainable and integral mission models
- The rise of polycentric mission models
- A decline of traditional mission pathways (due to visa restrictions, donor fatigue, geopolitical pressures, creative access situations, etc.)
- A global rise of entrepreneurship and social enterprise
- A global rise of marketplace and Christian business ministries

All of these trends encourage and support the use of missional business concepts in mission strategies.

OMF's experience with missional businesses includes having established a BAM (Business as Mission) task force in 2009. Globally, the BAM Global movement under Lausanne started in 2011 after BAM conferences had been held for twenty years. Parallel with the growth of this movement has come a maturity in knowledge, experience,

and best practices. Many of the core BAM informational resources are available in multiple languages. A number of excellent books and guides about BAM and missional business can be easily accessed.

Missional business is far from a unique or new concept. The amount of information available is exhaustive and covers almost every possible topic and angle. There are well-developed organizations and networks supporting this global movement. These often go by different names such as Business as Mission (BAM), Faith Driven Entrepreneurs, etc. OMF has chosen to use “missional business” to clearly indicate that ventures within OMF should strongly align with OMF’s missional vision, mission, and values.

Between OMF’s own experiences and the availability of global BAM resources, the challenges faced in missional business are not a result of a lack of information and experience across multiple countries and mission agencies. We have access to a wealth of information, experience, and examples that should guide us in moving forward.

There is general agreement within OMF and the broader mission community that “missional business” refers to entities that have both a sustainable business operation and a valuable missional impact. By definition, a sustainable business is one that is profitable, covering all of its costs, and generating profits for future use. By definition, a “missional business” should have a missional impact. When both objectives can be realized, the potential impacts and benefits of a missional business are enormous. These are often spoken of as the quadruple bottom line (economic impact, social impact, environmental impact, spiritual impact) where a missional business is delivering measurable results across all four dimensions.

the path to ... successful missional businesses is littered with risks, pitfalls, and obstacles. The primary contradiction encountered with missional businesses is between the potential benefits of a successful enterprise and the potential pitfalls of getting to this ideal state.

However, the path to these successful missional businesses is littered with risks, pitfalls, and obstacles. The primary contradiction encountered with missional businesses is between the potential benefits of a successful enterprise and the potential pitfalls of getting to this ideal state.

To help explore the pitfalls, this paper examines the contradictions on the home or sending context, the field or work/ministry context, and the overall support of missional business practitioners.

Sending: Opportunities and challenges

Mobilization is one of the most challenging aspects of missions. Mission agencies incur huge costs and time investments in the mobilization and preparation of new workers. When we look at the missional business part of this ministry, we find several contradictions.

In many parts of the world and among many local churches, the acceptance of missional business as a valid form of ministry is not widely accepted. The common beliefs in the sacred/secular divide and that profitmaking is evil are non-starters that impact anyone attempting a missional business. The recent Lausanne Congress in Korea emphasized the role of every Christian in their place of work and included a workplace track. This supports the idea that these theological concerns are still common.¹ Often churches will only organize prayer for workers who they also support financially. A self-supporting worker may struggle to find churches that will support them in prayer since they do not fit the model for the majority of mission workers.

Another major challenge in mobilization is that one looks for someone who has the right skills, gifts, and abilities, a missional

calling, along with a team-oriented personality. In an average church, you will find that less than 10 percent of the people in attendance have the personality and wiring to become successful entrepreneurs. However, almost everyone has the ability to work in a role commensurate with their skills and experience. This suggests that it would be more productive to recruit people for marketplace opportunities overseas (still a form of bi-vocational ministry) than for missional business opportunities.

It is not enough for someone to have an entrepreneurial aptitude. Also needed is for them to have a missional calling and direction in their life. The majority of those who have business aptitudes will focus their skills and abilities close to home.

Those who have the personality traits needed to be successful entrepreneurs often have personality traits that make it hard to fit into a team structure. For example, those who are strongly driven to achieve their vision and are not deterred by problems and naysayers are often tone deaf to the

input of others. Most field ministry situations require working as part of a team that includes involvement in the team's vision and mission along with the team's cultural norms. Looking for the combination of these three aspects (entrepreneurial aptitude, missional calling, and team orientation) becomes a search for a needle in the haystack.

One of the certainties of missional business is that the risk of failure is very high. This is not unique to Christian-run businesses. Research on business provides abundant evidence that the majority of new businesses will fail within five years. The risk of failure only increases when one adds cross-cultural settings, different local languages, and differing political/business systems into the equation. That the risk of failure is so high is often difficult to accept in mission circles. Those who want to be involved in missional business and those who will support them in various ways need to be aware of this major challenge and risk. The high risk of failure is a given for missional business efforts.

It is worth noting that a business venture failure does not necessarily equate to a personal or ministry failure. There are examples of missional businesses that failed after a few years but left behind individuals with many more contacts in the community, greater familiarity with local culture and customs, a higher level of language fluency, and ideas for potential missional business ventures that could be attempted in the future. In these cases, the business venture failed to achieve sustainability, but the individuals involved came out better equipped for future ministry and business opportunities. Again,

It is worth noting that a business venture failure does not necessarily equate to a personal or ministry failure. There are examples of missional businesses that failed after a few years, but left behind individuals with many more contacts in the community, greater familiarity with local culture and customs, a higher level of language fluency, and ideas for potential missional business ventures that could be attempted in the future.

secular business research indicates that many successful entrepreneurs have had multiple business failures before achieving success. In some circles, early business failures are seen as necessary stepping stones to business success.

On the opportunity side, research on the future of missions done by Barna has shown that many young people are open to bi-vocational and non-traditional missions ministries. Among non-traditional pathways, 59 percent of young adults aged 18–34 who Barna classified as potential missionaries cited business as a good way.² Another high category was entrepreneurship. This openness to business as a potential ministry pathway is positive for mobilizing people for missional businesses.

One advantage of having decades of history (both internal and external) is that there is a set of best practices for missional businesses that address size, type, and geographic location. Many organizations, conferences, resources, training courses, etc. are available in most sending areas to help prepare potential missional-business practitioners. As the BAM ecosystem of organizations and individuals has developed over the past forty years, there are now gathering places (both virtual and in person) where individuals interested in missional business can find information, support, and potential agencies to work with. Mobilization of this segment of Christian workers probably happens most effectively in these gathering places.

Tension often exists between those whose work is to identify and mobilize people who feel God is directing them into missions and those in field leadership who are trying to lead teams to reach and disciple people in East Asia. This tension can be particularly acute in the case of missional business where the potential business practitioner may have a well-defined idea of what business/ministry concept they want to implement, but this may not fit well into a field strategy with its own mission and vision for its ministry. Trying to work out these differences can be a frustrating and time-consuming process. This can lead to tension between the sending side and the field side leaders, while also frustrating the potential missional business practitioner.

The contradictions do not stop on the sending side but carry over to the field or work/ministry context.

Receiving: Opportunities and challenges

From a field perspective, the attractions of missional business are often the opportunity to provide a visa for an expat worker, provide natural access into specific unreached communities, or to provide employment for national workers. Missional business is often seen as a means to an end (providing a visa for a worker). The problems arise when the agencies try to identify the missional impact a particular missional business might have. As a result, the missional side of a missional business is often the only one seriously considered and developed. A problem that results from this approach is that the business rarely becomes sustainable since the business aspects fall into second or third place in terms of time, energy, and focus. The ideal situation is to have an individual who sees their own calling and ministry as straddling business and ministry, where their life, work, and ministry are integrated and are different aspects of the same unified calling and work/ministry.

One of the best practices for successful missional businesses is to have a well-developed and integrated missional plan coupled with a business plan. However, having a well-developed plan does not guarantee success. It will reduce the risk of failure but not eliminate it. Not every business can be turned into a missional opportunity, and not every mission thrust can be turned into a business opportunity. Understanding the overlaps and synergies between the desired ministry and the potential business is critical to finding a workable path forward. Time spent in planning and developing an integrated plan forces one to develop a realistic review of whether a specific combination of business and ministry has the potential to succeed. In the planning process, it is common for

many possible paths to be rejected as not workable or not likely to succeed.

A variety of frameworks are available to help develop coordinated business/ministry plans. One of the newest ones that has come out in the past two years clearly integrates the vision/mission/values of the ministry side with the business value proposition of the business side. This Redemptive Business Canvas™ is a valuable tool for developing both aspects of the plan in an iterative process that includes all important aspects of a plan.³ This helps an individual or team to systematically and effectively work their initial ideas into a coordinated and consistent plan.

Another key contradiction is time. A worthwhile exercise is to analyze and see what happens to the 168 hours of a normal week. After accounting for the hours consumed by sleeping, eating, bathing, exercising, praying, work/ministry activities, etc. you will find that in any given week there are very few truly discretionary hours available in one's schedule. Evaluating one's work week helps them be realistic about what they can accomplish and what sacrifices may need to be made. It becomes instantly clear that there is an inherent conflict between work time and ministry time.

One advantage of a planning tool is that it can help someone work through potential synergies between the business and the ministry. There are some activities where it is hard to find a redemptive ministry aspect. For me, an example of this would be balancing the accounting books. This is not an excuse to sneak back into a sacred/secular divide view of the world, and I subscribe to the belief that all I do should be to the glory of God. However, I find it hard to

... the missional side of a missional business is often the only one seriously considered and developed. A problem that results from this approach is that the business rarely becomes sustainable since the business aspects fall into second or third place in terms of time, energy, and focus.

imagine how balancing my business books is contributing to evangelism and discipleship in any direct way. On the other hand, time spent in one-on-one Bible study with a friend is unlikely to add much value to my business. These are extremes and may be necessary or even frequently occurring extremes.

What an integrated plan should seek to identify and magnify are the opportunities for synergies and overlaps. Are there aspects of my business that can support and enhance my ministry? For example, are my customers, employees, or suppliers also members of my target people? Does my business occur in the areas of the city where my ministry also occurs? All of these potential overlaps help resolve the time contradiction and enhance the potential effectiveness of a missional business.

Spending time to plan allows for many problems to be avoided at a design stage. It is much easier and less costly to change a plan than to change operations of an ongoing business. Once you have leases, employees, printed materials, etc., the cost of changes becomes quite high. Involving various consultants, coaches, and resource people with prior experience in missional business can provide valuable input and perspective at the design stage. Many potential problems can be surfaced early and changes made to accommodate what is learned in the discussions and planning.

The best planning tool is of no value if it is not used as a map and guide for running the day-to-day operations of a business. No one should expect that their best laid plans will stay intact beyond the first few days or weeks of implementation. This is normal and should be expected. That changes will inevitably alter even the best laid plans is not a reason to avoid planning. The purpose of having a plan is not to lock yourself into a straitjacket approach but to provide a guide for reconciling your best thoughts and plans with the realities you encounter.

Having a well-developed plan allows conversations and reflections along the following lines.

- I thought that would happen as a result of our environment and work.
- I am seeing something else— —is happening (which may be positive or negative).



- As a result, to achieve my business and ministry goals, I need to adjust

This is like driving a car. Most drivers will look at a map or their cellphone GPS system and identify a route to their destination. However, as they drive down the road, they also make many small and large adjustments based on what they encounter and learn about the actual conditions and situations along their planned route. A business/ministry plan gives the practitioner

development. Surprises can arise, such as when funds are suddenly required to keep the business alive, when many of these surprises should have been obvious months in advance. To be successful, a missional business needs to be successful in both its missional and its business objectives. Both sides require ongoing attention, focus, and decision-making.

Without accountability we often find zombie entities where the missional business is not achieving its objectives on

The ebbs and flows of a business are often different from those of a local ministry team due to the inevitable conflicts of expectations.

and their accountability partners a framework and picture to understand what they see and, based upon that, make good decisions and adjustments that will give their missional business the greatest chance of success.

Another common contradiction is not providing accountability for both business and ministry results. Often this is a result of skill sets and experience of field and team leaders. Most field situations will have experienced leadership that can make good decisions about ministry-related work. These same leaders, however, may struggle to understand the business plan aspects, a reality that will hinder their ability to give advice and guidance on the business side of the entity's development. Such situations often mean that while decisions are relatively easily made about the ministry impact, the business side is left out of much of the planning and ongoing

the business side, ministry side, or both sides. Who has the authority to decide if such a venture should be terminated? To one extreme is a venture that becomes a highly profitable and growing business that exhibits negligible ministry impact. Who will make the call that while this is a successful business, it does not fit into the field ministry as a missional business? Is there a way to rapidly and greatly increase the ministry impact? Or is it time to sell or divest the business? The other extreme is a venture that never takes off as a sustainable business but has good ministry impact in the local context. Who will make the call that while this entity is a valuable project, it is not a viable missional business? If results on both business and ministry impacts are lacking, the best choice is to decide that the venture is not working and stop continuing to pour in resources of time and money. These are not theoretical decisions, as they affect

individuals, teams, supporting churches, and financial partners. Avoiding these hard decisions may delay some short-term pain and discomfort but will likely make the longer-term adjustments even harder and more painful.

The ebbs and flows of a business are often different from those of a local ministry team due to the inevitable conflicts of expectations. For example, a local ministry team meeting may be scheduled at the busiest time of the week or month for a business. When this kind of conflict arises, how will choices be made and who will make them? Longer-term cycles of field ministry and home assignment often conflict with business development and continuity. I have seen cases where missional businesses were told that they must adhere to the normal cycle for home assignment. There are few businesses that can be put on hold for several months without severely jeopardizing potential business success. This is one example where the needs and rhythms of a business strongly conflict with the rhythms of a traditional mission field.

Another challenge for both mission agencies and business practitioners is that no two missional businesses are alike. Even in an organization the size of OMF, across the various centers in Asia, there are no two similar missional business ventures. This lack of commonality is an additional hurdle to success. One way that many traditional companies expand while minimizing risk is to adopt a cookie cutter approach where each entity is similar in the majority of its design and operations.



The best-known examples of this would be McDonalds or Starbucks. You can go into one of these stores anywhere in Asia and expect to see pretty much the same menu, furnishings, products, etc. Only the language will differ from country to country and sometimes the menu will be tweaked to suit local preferences. There have been efforts to replicate this in the BAM world with ideas such as "BAM in a box", but these have generally not been successful or gained traction. As a result, each missional business is on its own, following its unique learning

the ones with the highest business potential. For example, a counseling center that focuses on a segment of society with low economic means will struggle to find enough paying customers to make its operation viable. Similarly, an unreached ethnic group may live in a part of a country that is known for its low economic output and potential. While these marginalized people may be a high priority for ministry, they may not provide fertile ground for growing a business. Examples can be given of missional businesses that have been successful

... one of the best practices for successful missional businesses is to have and use an integrated business and ministry plan. The planning phase is the best time to surface, consider, and plan for the contradictions that will exist for any missional business. The planning phase moves naturally into implementation with a rational and integrated set of expectations.

curve. With this level of uniqueness, it is difficult to benefit from the experience of others. This forces each missional business to find its own way and make many unique decisions and adjustments.

Many missional businesses are not located in the most business-friendly environments. Field strategies often focus on socio-economic segments and geographic locations that are not

in non-ideal situations and have even transformed parts of the local economy and living standards. They remain, however, the exception to the rule. These situations add another layer of complexity and difficulty to an already challenging ministry model.

One of the major benefits of a successful missional business is the natural connections and inroads to the local communities it provides. Missional business owners can both show and tell what they believe in the course of their everyday life and work. Successful businesses will often provide contacts and inroads that other ministry team members can benefit from. A business may have resources that the owner can deploy to help support the work of a local team. A successful business can be a long-term opportunity for engagement with the local community. It can often be passed from one owner to another. In many cases, this may be a local believer.

As mentioned above, one of the best practices for successful missional businesses is to have and use an integrated business and ministry plan. The planning phase is the best time

to surface, consider, and plan for the contradictions that will exist for any missional business. The planning phase moves naturally into implementation with a rational and integrated set of expectations. While success is not guaranteed by planning, good planning offers the best opportunities for a new venture to succeed. The plan also offers the metrics and expectations to measure whether the missional business is delivering the expected and needed results along both axes of ministry effectiveness and business profitability.

Supporting practitioners: Opportunities and challenges

The final aspect is looking at the opportunities and challenges for the missional business practitioner. Anyone attempting to set up and run a missional business is going into a high stress, high risk, high time demand situation.

With the combined experience of individuals and organizations over the last few decades, a business as mission ecosystem has emerged that includes:

- **Entrepreneurs** — Potential, budding, and experienced
- **Missional businesses** — Companies that integrate faith and missions into their operations
- **Mentors and coaches** — Experienced businesspeople and missionaries offering guidance and accountability
- **Investors and financial institutions** — Those providing “patient capital,” loans, or grants aligned with BAM principles
- **Churches and faith communities** — Supporting business people in their call to serve God through business

... each missional business is on its own, following its unique learning curve. With this level of uniqueness, it is difficult to benefit from the experience of others. This forces each missional business to find its own way and make many unique decisions and adjustments.



- **Educational and training institutions** — Universities, seminaries, and business incubators equipping BAM practitioners

- **Networks and partnerships** — Regional and global groups (like BAM Global, Lausanne Movement, or local BAM hubs) connecting practitioners and sharing best practices

- **Government and policy environment** — Legal and economic frameworks that affect business operations, ideally enabling faith-aligned enterprises

- **Customers and markets** — People and communities that benefit from the goods, services, and employment created by BAM companies

For the potential missional business practitioner, this ecosystem provides many opportunities and resources to learn from other practitioners and supportive partners. Anyone interested in missional business should be plugged into the various components of this ecosystem. No one agency has the scope

and scale to provide the detailed and subject matter expertise needed for every potential missional business practitioner.

There needs to be a realistic self-assessment of skills, interests, and abilities. This need was mentioned by one of the speakers at one OMF gathering.

And it is important to note that when we talk about business failures, it's often the wrong people trying to do the right thing. And we need to think in the same way as we think about Bible translation. If we want to have a Bible translation, of course we go for good linguists. If we want to have a medical clinic, we go for licensed doctors and nurses. The same thing applies when we talk about BAM. We need to go for people who have the passion and the skill set and we can't lower the bar just because it's business. We need to be equally strong on whether you are called, qualified, and passionate about doing translation, medical work, or business.⁴

Being called, qualified, and passionate about doing missional business is essential.

In many of the cases I have seen, a worker has decided to look at missional business after having exhausted other potential visa channels for working in their target country. The transition from a full-time ministry worker to a bi-vocational entrepreneur/missionary is not an easy transition. Depending on a person's background and history, learning a business may be a long, steep, uphill climb. It is challenging



to learn accounting, HR recruitment, contracts, purchasing, graphics design, social media marketing, and all the other aspects of running a business at the same time. There is a tremendous amount of material to process and implement. One of the reasons many missional businesses fail is that there is too much to learn and not enough time (and finances) to keep the entity going.

In addition to standard business school classes, there are now a number of Christian educational institutions offering courses on business as mission. These provide valuable opportunities to better understand both the business and missional aspects of a potential venture. These courses and programs can greatly shorten the learning curve for anyone moving into this type of ministry.

A good alternative for anyone making such a large mid-career change would be to seek out opportunities to intern or work with someone else. This greatly lowers the risk of failure and allows a potential missional business practitioner to learn at a manageable rate. While discussions have been held within OMF about setting up a training and internship center, these have not come to fruition. Within the BAM ecosystem, there are opportunities for internships and other opportunities to learn about doing missional business.

An area where contradictions quickly emerge is decision making. Who makes what decisions? In a normal business startup, an entrepreneur and their financing partners, if any, are involved in making significant decisions about business direction, growth,

strategy, etc. Within any given mission agency, the decision making tends to be much more convoluted and complicated. This additional overhead and complexity often contribute to missional business failure.

Many prospective practitioners will identify financing for their venture as the most difficult area to manage. My observation is that there have been plenty of sources to provide finances for good projects that will make an impact from both the business and ministry perspectives. In cases I have encountered, financing difficulties were really ministry or business planning issues. The plan (or its explanation) did not convince potential mission-minded investors and financers that it was doable or would have a significant impact. This is another reason for investing sufficient time in developing a business-missional impact plan and being able to clearly explain the vision for the venture.

Many individuals want to transition from their home country directly to a missional business context in their target country. Even if someone comes with well-developed business skills and experience, language and culture learning and cross-cultural ministry adaptation are not a simple add-on that anyone can quickly pick up. Some of the most successful missional business ventures have been started by individuals who developed ministry support in their home country that allowed them to spend time in their target country learning language, culture, the local social situations, and the local economic conditions. Most people will find that this requires a multi-year effort. These are not activities that most missional business investors would want to support or invest in. If language and culture fluency are seen as pre-requisite for a successful missional business, savvy investors know that not everyone who attempts to develop these fluency skills will succeed. Investors are much more interested when individuals come to them having put in the time to develop these cross-cultural understandings and skills and with a business concept that fits the local culture, ministry context, and economic situation.

Conclusion: Resolving the contradictions of missional business

The paper has highlighted the contradictions involved in missional business. While there are many potential benefits, there are also many potential pitfalls and obstacles along the way. Most of the contradictions mentioned cannot be willed or planned away. How should an individual or organization factor missional business into their strategy and plans?

Many individuals want to transition from their home country directly to a missional business context in their target country. Even if someone comes with well-developed business skills and experience, language and culture learning and cross-cultural ministry adaptation are not a simple add-on that anyone can quickly pick up.

Our normal approach to resolving contradictions is to focus on trying to remove or eliminate one side. . . . Another approach to resolving contradictions accepts the contradictions that exist and seeks to transform both sides into some kind of higher synthesis. This accepts both sides as a reality and then tries to find a way forward that incorporates both sides of the contradiction.

During the Fellowship's Reimagine initiative and a 2021 survey, a surprising one-third of leaders who were interviewed felt that missional business should be front and center in OMF's strategy. Over half of the interviewed leaders saw a need to have missional business as a valid ministry option.

Given the challenges and contradictions associated with missional businesses, I have a hard time seeing how missional business can be a major part of an overall field or organizational strategy. I think that having missional businesses as a valid ministry option is probably the best way to approach missional business, as long as this is accompanied with an understanding that there are a number of contradictions that must first be faced.

Our normal approach to resolving contradictions is to focus on trying to remove or eliminate one side. This is particularly difficult to do for missional businesses as the contradictions come from trying to unite different goals—effective missional outreach and business success. Another approach to resolving contradictions accepts the contradictions that exist and seeks to transform both sides into some kind of higher synthesis. This accepts both sides as a reality and then tries to find a way forward that incorporates both sides of the contradiction. This can be hard to do in a mission agency context where this synthesis can be seen as constantly bending the rules and conventions or giving special treatment to those in missional business.

I have tried to support those interested in establishing and running missional

businesses. However, I think I have spent more time trying to discourage people from taking this pathway than helping people along this pathway. I start with discouraging input because I want potential business practitioners to be realistic about the challenges ahead. I usually ask these individuals to go talk with their church pastor and then go to talk with a friend in management or ownership in some business. In both cases, I ask them to question their friends about their average week. Do they have sufficient time to do their job/ministry in excellent ways in every aspect? Do they come to their place of work/service knowing that all the people, projects, finances, etc. are working well? Anyone who starts this line of questioning with either their local pastor or business friend will typically be laughed at because it is crazy to even ask such questions or imagine that work and life can be balanced and consistently operate smoothly. Most working people are continually under a lot of stress and few feel they can ever get on top of their situation.

The reality is that someone who is committed to, well trained for, and focusing on their work full time will often feel that they can never do their job in a way that they or others think it should be done. If mono-vocational workers have these experiences and feelings, why do we feel that a bi-vocational worker would have an easier time when attempting to do two demanding, consuming roles in the same amount of available time? Analyzing your 168 hours in each week—sleeping, eating, praying, working, etc.—shows that you have very little discretionary time

each week. This time pressure only increases in bi-vocational roles.

For those who feel they want to continue their pursuit of missional business, I also raise the question of the risk of failure of new businesses. I push individuals to do the necessary homework, investigation, and planning that give them the best chance of developing a plan that may work when they start to implement it. Once an individual gets to this point, I will begin to start encouraging them.

Across the globe, there have been many examples of successful missional businesses. These provide ample evidence that missional businesses can be an impactful approach to cross-cultural ministry. But these successes should not be extrapolated to suggest that missional businesses will work in every country and every situation.

It takes a unique combination of personal drive and conviction, a workable business concept, and dogged implementation to produce one of these success stories. I do not see missional business as a main strategy for a mission agency due to the risks of failure, the high demands in two domains—ministry and business—and the uniqueness of every situation. However, I think being willing to consider and accept this type of bi-vocational ministry may offer some unique opportunities for unique individuals to make a significant contribution to the ministry impact of local teams. In these situations, handling the numerous contradictions inherent in missional business can result in a long-term, incarnational, and holistic ministry that makes all the challenges and investment worthwhile. **MRT**

¹ See Kina Robertshaw, "The Fourth Lausanne Congress—Equipping Believers in the Workplace," Lausanne Movement, 13 Mar 2025, <https://lausanne.org/about/blog/stories/lausanne-4-workplace-track-equipping-the-saints-for-workplace-mission> (accessed 11 November 2025)

² See <https://shop.barna.com/products/the-future-of-missions> and *Future of Missions: 10 Questions About Global Ministry the Church Must Answer with the Next Generation* by the Barna Group, produced in partnership with the International Mission Board (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2020), 46.

³ For more information, contact Hannah Lau by email at Hannah.Lau@Arukah.Works.

⁴ Quote from Mats Tunehag (BAM Global) at Global Fellowship Consultation, 15 April 2021, interview with Susan Kaur.

A Reflection on Mike Barbalas's Article “Missional Business Overview—Contradictions Between Opportunities and Challenges”

William Dugan

Will and his wife have served in missions for over thirty years, with most of that time based in East Asia with their family.

Will has been a full-time language student, an English teacher, a workshop manager (his effort at BAM!), and a regional leader for his organization. Currently living in Southeast Asia, he sometimes dreams of starting a travel company.

Introduction

Mike Barbalas has provided a review of how OMF, as an organization, has adapted to and utilized the strategy of missional business in cross-cultural settings. I have been asked, as one of the leaders for the Asia region of a sister mission organization, to provide reflections from our experiences. The reflections are organized according to the same three sections as the article.

Sending: Opportunities and challenges

Like many legacy church-planting mission organizations, our organization focuses on making disciples and establishing churches. While there are many definitions of “church”, a simple definition is a gathering of followers of Jesus at a specific time and place who together worship, read and preach the Word, pray, serve one another, witness to their community, and practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. While a church is thus fairly easy to identify, the process of making disciples can take place in a myriad of contexts. For example, we can make disciples in the home, in the neighborhood, at the local school or university, at the supermarket and in the hospital, at the office and in the factory, in the art studio, music hall, or on the sports field.

Mission organizations have been successful in using most of these people-to-people exchanges to enter other cultures and build relationships around common interests. While doing so, the cross-cultural worker

identifies with Jesus through both words and actions that hopefully lead to a clear presentation of the gospel. Yet one type of activity has not been as successful in missions as the others: the running of for-profit businesses.

I agree with the reasons stated for the lack of a vibrant mobilization movement of missional business entrepreneurs. In my experience, the barriers primarily fall into three categories that are inter-related.

The first barrier is what I would call the “sacrifice of the call”. Like any missions assignment, going to another country to launch a missional business means leaving home, saying farewell to family and friends, and, in the case of an already successful businessperson, walking away from a store, shop, restaurant, factory, or company that you sweated to build in order to go to a strange place to do it all over again. While many sincere Christian businesspeople have considered a missional business assignment, not many have answered this call. Indeed, the mobilization pipeline for all kinds of cross-cultural

workers has been reduced to a trickle, so we should not be surprised at the lack of Christian businesspeople willing to take their skills into a cross-cultural mission environment.

The second barrier is the need for the businessperson to become a “vocational missionary”. To become a businessperson, you may have obtained a business degree in university, gained on-the-job experience, or started your own company. If you want to do missional business in a cross-cultural setting, you will also need to be trained in Bible and missions to become a truly bi-vocational worker. This kind of training will require sacrificing time and energy away from work or other commitments to get yourself ready for the mission field. By its definition, “bi-vocational” means you have two vocations. In the specific context we are discussing, that means blending the vocation of launching and running a business with the vocation of planting and establishing a church. As pointed out in the article, you are not just watching the bottom line, you are watching multiple bottom lines.

... “bi-vocational” means you have two vocations. ... blending the vocation of launching and running a business with the vocation of planting and establishing a church. ... you are not just watching the bottom line, you are watching multiple bottom lines.

The third barrier is the realization that missional business is “really hard and really risky”. Trying to start a business in a part of the world where you don’t have connections and you don’t know how to navigate local laws and potential corruption means you are at a high risk of failure, financial loss, and possible legal problems. Trying to start a business and plant a church in a part of the world influenced by the Evil One through idolatry, false religions, and anti-religious teaching means that you, your family, and your team will come under spiritual attack.

Receiving: Opportunities and challenges

In the early years of the current BAM movement, it is true that there was pushback from mission field leaders to onboarding missional businesspeople as full-fledged core members of the team. Barbalas’s article delineates the key issues, ranging from business compatibility with the mission strategic plan, to time management, to accountability and supervision.

One issue that was not addressed directly is that of missionaries’ attitude toward money! I have heard this

Missional businesses answer three of the big questions field leaders grapple with: (1) entry; (2) identity; and (3) access to people.

sentiment several times, “Missionaries don’t make good businesspeople because all they know how to do is take other people’s money and give it away.” There is a kernel of truth in this statement. The church’s biblical mandate is to freely preach the good news and to assist the widow and the orphan, the sick and the poor, the uneducated, the persecuted and those in prison. These are not paying customers. They are the recipients of the Lord’s mercy and compassion through the hands and feet of his people. So, when the idea of running a for-profit business is introduced to a mission team, it comes as a truly different approach to participating in the local community and economy for the purpose of making disciples.

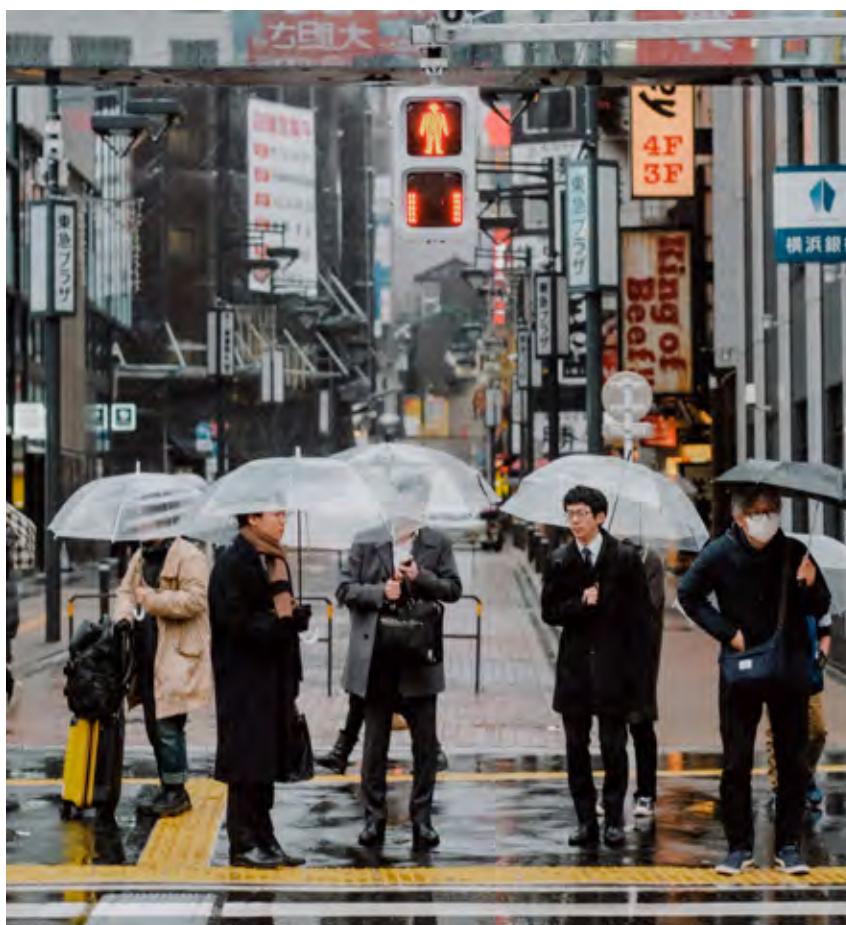
In a few places in Asia, like Japan and Taiwan, established mission organizations can still obtain

missionary visas for new workers. I have found that field leaders in those environments have been less flexible in considering new strategies like missional business. Most field team members are missionaries who can arrange their schedules for outreach activities and missionary gatherings in ways that a businessperson cannot. This situation tilts the preference of field leaders toward workers who can follow the conventional full-time missionary model.

On the other hand, when it comes to creative access nations, field leaders are usually so desperate to place workers that all pathways are up for consideration, especially businesspeople. Businesspeople are intriguing because they not only acquire a solid visa, but also have a clear and understandable identity in the community and begin engaging with local people immediately through their business activities. Missional businesses thus answer three of the big questions field leaders grapple with: (1) entry; (2) identity; and (3) access to people.

In creative access locations, each member of the team is usually busy maintaining a visa and an understandable identity in the community. For example, a team may have a couple of people learning the local language on student visas. Other teammates are on work visas as teachers of English, professors at a university, doctors at a private clinic, and businesspeople running coffee shops, tourism companies, or factories. Some people in mission circles refer to this as the “track and field” kind of team. Each member is off doing their own activity and building their own relationships. Then the team comes together for regular times of fellowship, mutual accountability, and sharing prayer requests.

With this kind of team, it can be difficult to maintain all of the conventional norms of operating a mission team.

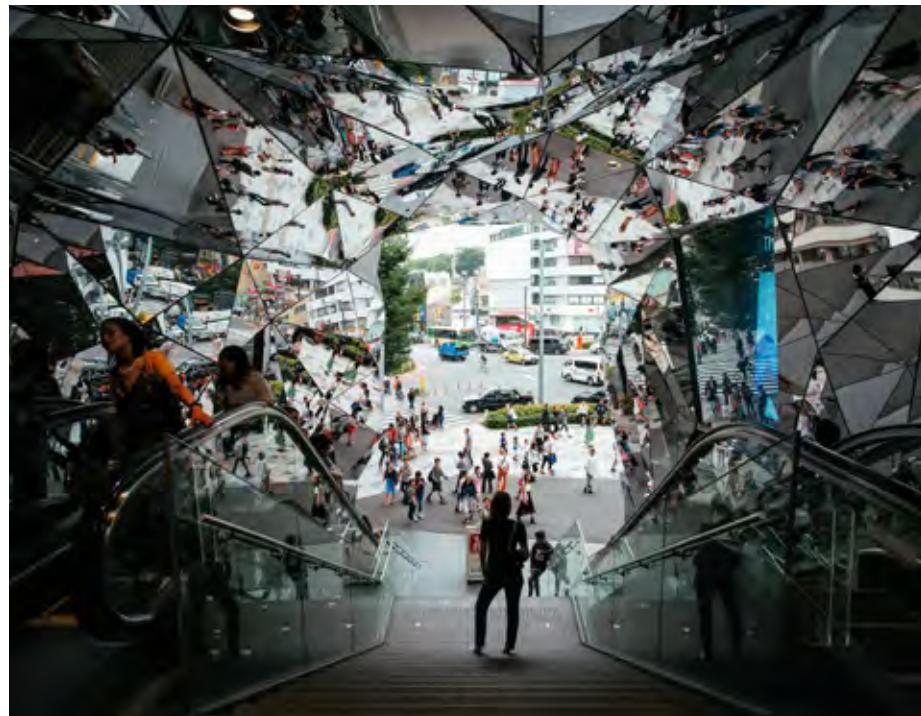


Scheduling any meeting or retreat where each and every member can attend is nigh on impossible. Due to security concerns, it may be wise not to link together certain activities or the people attending those activities. These kinds of limitations can degrade feelings of unity between team members.

Barbalas highlights the importance of planning and accountability for missional businesses. I too have seen the value of creating a combined business and mission plan. The combined plan should have the support of both business advisors and mission leaders.

Supporting practitioners: Opportunities and challenges

Truly, the missional business ecosystem has grown and expanded in the past twenty-plus years. Whenever someone comes to me with a question about blending business and missions in a cross-cultural setting, I point them to the Business as Mission website



and outreach. The wise missional businessperson will see this as an invaluable period of market research,

CONCLUSION

In the final paragraph of his article, Barbalas states, “I do not see missional business as a main strategy for a mission agency due to the risks of failure, the high demands in two domains—ministry and business—and the uniqueness of every situation.” I agree. However, whether a missional business venture succeeds or fails, the impact of the lives, work, and words of the missional businessperson, family members, and believing staff members may bring about gospel transformation in the wider community in countless ways. Therefore, those of us in mission organizations do encourage missional businesspeople to come start BAM initiatives of various kinds. Bring your business know-how and join us! We need every member of the body of Christ using every gift and skill to take the transforming message of the gospel to all peoples. **MRT**

In spite of the support that is promised by investors, partners, advisors, and mission team leaders, the life of a missional businessperson can be lonely.

(businessasmision.com). This is a global resource center containing articles, blogs, and videos, as well as connections to events and the “bglobal” community.

In spite of the support that is promised by investors, partners, advisors, and mission team leaders, the life of a missional businessperson can be lonely. Business consultants are usually found back in one’s home country. Mission leaders and teammates get busy in their own mix of visa-supporting and people-engagement activities. Who is standing at the side of the missional businessperson day-in, day-out?

Some of the most resilient missional businesspeople I know are those who built their business on the field from the ground up. This usually means starting out as a conventional full-time missionary in language and culture learning, as well as community service

business development, and networking with key people in the business community. When it comes time to launch the business, the missional businessperson will have the support of the local community as well as the local and expat staff members who have been hired to work alongside.

... whether a missional business venture succeeds or fails, the impact of the lives, work, and words of the missional businessperson, family members, and believing staff members may bring about gospel transformation in the wider community in countless ways.

My Experience as a Marketplace Self-Supporting Worker

Chan Ka Fai



Ka Fai was born in Hong Kong, where he grew up and was educated. He is an accountant by profession and, after graduation, worked in Hong Kong for 7 years. He subsequently worked and lived overseas for 28 years before returning to Hong Kong in 2021.

When we talk about marketplace ministries in mission, we usually refer to missionaries serving in areas that are closed to traditional missionaries for political, social, or religious reasons. Such areas are usually called “creative access nations” (CANs). Because Christian workers cannot go in as “missionaries”, to go in, they must find positions in business, education, medical relief, and other industries. This article shares my experience as an MSSW in business only.

Marketplace missionaries in business can be employees or business owners, identities that allow them to apply for visas to enter CANs. They carry out activities that are allowed by local governments and considered beneficial to the local communities. They reach out to others both at work and outside work.

Marketplace missionaries could be sent by missionary organizations. They may be supported spiritually and financially by churches, friends, and others. Even so, many Christian workers go independently of any mission organization. They do not call themselves missionaries. They make use of chances to work in CANs and share their faith with the local people they meet. Their living is compensated from their employments or profit from their businesses. I have recently learned the term marketplace self-supporting worker (MSSW). It is a very precise description of who they are.

For seventeen years, I was an MSSW in a CAN with no association with a missionary organization. During this time, I worked for three different companies in three different industries in two cities. All three companies were run by foreigners investing in the country. An accountant by profession, I worked as the local finance head

who reported to my boss overseas. The first job lasted less than two years. It was in a factory run by an electronic manufacturing service company. The second one was for five years. It was for an advertising agency owned by a public company listed in two stock exchanges in two Western countries. The third one, for ten years, was with a ship classification society owned by a charitable foundation in a Western country. I would say that all three jobs were God-given, as I did not look for them. It gave me strong assurance that God wanted me to stay in the CAN to witness for him. In what follows, I would like to share and reflect on my seventeen-year experience.

First employment in City A

But when the right time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. (Gal 4:4 NLT)

God answered my prayer in his time

From the age of eighteen, when I was still a student, I wanted to move to a particular CAN and remain long term. This was even before I became a Christian. I read a lot about the history of the CAN and the hard times the people went through. I wanted to stay with them. I took two trips to the CAN before I began my work life. Each trip lasted about three weeks. Touched by the people there, I hoped I could contribute to their situation. Ten years later, two months after I became a Christian, I prayed to God about my desire but did not go until another fourteen years later.

In 2002, the boss from my previous employment called and asked if I was interested in taking up the financial controller position at a startup factory in an industrial park in City A of the CAN. I quickly realized that this was God's answer to my prayer from fourteen years earlier.

About three months before my former boss called, I joined a short-term teaching team organized by a Christian NGO to teach in a university in City C of the same country. The Christian NGO recruited professionals to serve in the country. This was the first time I heard about using one's profession to serve God and to do outreach to non-believers. I decided to join the short-term team to gain experience. God gave me Galatians 4:4 to share with teammates in a morning devotion during our trip in City C. I thought about the verse all the time during the two months after the trip. I felt very puzzled. What did that mean? Then I realized it was God speaking to me through the verse. "When the right time came." What did that mean to me? Upon such a realization, I immediately recalled my prayer from fourteen years before. I thought it could mean I was going to work in the country I had long hoped to work in. However, I had no work experience in that country and no network to call upon. That's when my former boss called. It turned out he was only a referrer. His boss offered me the job. I accepted the offer in around a week. In three months, my wife and I said goodbye to our church, emptied our house, packed, and put our house up for sale. We shipped all our belongings to City A, foreseeing that my employer would help move our belongings back home when my contract term was up. I never imagined we would remain in the country for nearly seventeen years.

It was an unbelievable experience.

Work life

I started working almost immediately after I arrived. We stayed in a hotel for the first month while we looked for an apartment. Everything was new to us except for the language which we could speak and write. At first, I had quite a lot of free time after work, and weekends were always free. However, the honeymoon did not last very long. Since the company was a startup, I had to build the finance team from scratch, set up the finance system, and make sure that when production started, the system could run smoothly. In a few months, the first production line was set up. Senior managers came from different countries, but they did not have the final say since directives came from the headquarters that was located nearly 13,000 kilometres away.

Workload built up quickly when production started. I had to test the system, recruit staff, and handle reporting, budgeting, and forecasting. Several finance staff members were hired but not enough to complete all the routines. I always worked overtime, and the staff often did too. For a long time, I started at 8 o'clock in the morning and worked until 9 or 10 at night. When I asked for more resources, the headquarters refused, stating that since the factory was at its startup stage and not yet showing a profit, costs had to be controlled. As a result, work occupied most of my time. My boss at the headquarters only looked at results, not the day-to-day circumstances that affected his staff's performance. I did not perform as expected and was given a warning about my performance a few months later. I had planned to join the short-term teaching team from the same Christian NGO again to teach in the university. Out of fear that doing it might create a bad impression to my boss, I withdrew from it. Nineteen months after being employed in City A, I was escorted out of the factory. I lost my job.

Mission

Upon arrival in City A, we started looking for an apartment. At the same time, we began to look for a church where we could worship on Sunday. Since we knew no one before we came, we searched the phone books for churches. We found three and went looking for them. One of them was temporarily closed for reconstruction and there was no information about when it would be opened again. City A is not big, and church doors were only opened on Sunday. We chose one church for Sunday worship. That Sunday they shared the Lord's Supper. As it was during the SARS outbreak, we hesitated about taking part in it since the reusable plastic cups looked worn out.

We were very welcomed by the local churches. We normally attended church for Sunday worship. We met a few expatriate friends there. Our expatriate friends started a weekly English corner in the same church. Local young people came to the English corner. Some young people also went to the weekly young adult fellowship. We and a few expatriate friends formed our own cell group. Most members of the cell group also had a heart to reach out to young locals. My wife joined a women's group

that visited a local government children's centre weekly to care for newborn babies and children with cerebral palsy. The local church invited me to teach an adult Sunday School class. I also became one of the few people who interpreted the local language to English for foreigners during Sunday worship.

There were many opportunities to do outreach, and we saw numerous young people accept Christ in the young adult fellowship. However, my participation decreased as my work increased. So, when I found a new job in City B, my involvement officially ended. Most of our expatriate friends left City A at different times after we left. Expatriates come and go, following wherever their jobs lead. When their terms are done, they leave. Very rarely will an expatriate stay in one job for more than five to ten years. I had a non-Christian friend who has been the general manager of a factory in City A since I met him in 2003. It would be wonderful if he were an MSSW.

Second employment in City B

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. (Isa 55:8 NIV)

He led me through water and fire.

When I was still struggling in my first job, God had prepared another job in a different city for me. I received a message from a sister in another area. The company she worked for was looking for a financial controller in City B, which is not far from City A. The job



was for a creative advertising agency. Advertising was completely foreign to me. Due to my heavy workload at the factory, I requested the interview be scheduled for late evening. When I got off work, I took a fast train from City A to City B, finished the interview, and headed back to City A late at night.

I knew nothing about the company or about advertising. Instead of the interviewer asking me what I knew about the company and the industry, I did what was unimaginable in a normal job interview by asking the interviewer to tell me. When my employer told me I had to leave, I was so happy. On that same day, I was thinking about how I could resign. If I resigned before the contract term ended, I would suffer a monetary penalty. No penalty was mentioned in the contract if I was asked to leave.

Work life

Working at an advertising agency was much easier than working in a factory. The people were so different. They came to work at 11:00 in the morning and did not leave until 11:00 at night or even later. Sometimes they had dinner after 11:00 at night. I was one of them. I adopted the agency's work culture.

I spent a lot of time at work. I had two bosses, one British and one Taiwanese. They were responsible for two different business units in the same agency. My British boss often called me after work asking me simple business-related questions. He also arranged meetings over the weekend, including Sunday, because he was busy meeting clients on weekdays. I started to realize that work should not take priority in my life. I told my British boss that I had to go to church on Sunday, so no meetings should be scheduled on that day. I also committed myself to attend practice on Saturdays for a Christmas cantata to be held at an English-speaking expatriate church. When meeting times conflicted with the practice, I declined the meeting. In the end, I never missed any practice before the cantata. Work was important for me to stay, but I could not let it dictate my life. I was glad I made the right decision.

The most challenging thing I faced at this job was in the realm of business ethics. Corruption was and still is a fact of life in the country. Businesses often use bribes to secure deals. In the third or fourth year of my employment with

the agency, three smaller local agencies were acquired. Two of them openly admitted to this practice and asked me to turn a blind eye. My last two years at the agency were the lowest point of my career. Every day when I woke up in the morning, I felt very depressed. I did not want to go to an environment in which unethical practices were prevalent. In the end, I resigned from the job.

Mission

The churches in City B had much bigger congregations than the churches in City A. We started going to a big English-speaking church for expatriates. The church was very mission-oriented. It had ministries that focused on needy locals and vulnerable groups. We were not, however, allowed to share our faith with locals.

My witness at work did not change anything or anyone. Colleagues all knew I was a Christian. A senior manager once said I might hurt the agency because I was too honest.

A local friend we met in City A came to work in City B too. Her teacher at the university was a missionary, my longtime friend. She knew about Christianity. She went overseas to visit. I happened to know a couple who lived in the place she visited. The couple offered her a place to stay free of charge. She went to their fellowship and responded to a call to accept Christ. The husband of the couple texted me about her decision and asked me what to do. In response, my wife and I took on the task to follow her up when she returned. Due to this friend's decision to follow Jesus, I became acquainted with the leader of a church where I later became a frequent guest speaker during their Sunday service. My local friend started to attend that church. When the leader was studying for his MDiv overseas, I was regularly scheduled to speak at the church. I was glad God gave me an opportunity to help a church in this way.

We attended the English-speaking church for expatriates for about two or three years. We were quite active in the church. We joined a cell group. We joined the choir to sing a cantata for three Christmases in a row in church and in shopping malls before we started going to another expatriate church that spoke my mother tongue. The church's mission was to reach out to expatriates who lived in the city and spoke the same language. We continued to be active

in the second expatriate church. After I joined the church leadership, I tried to encourage the church to take part in more ministries focusing on the locals but did not have much success. The church did not want to draw the attention of the local religious authorities because connection with locals was sensitive.

Third employment in City C

"Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil." (Prov 4:27 NIV)

As an expatriate in the country, I had to renew my visa every year. If I quit from the employment that qualified me for a work visa, I would have to leave. When I was pondering if I could remain in City B, my former functional boss at the advertising agency who had quit a few months earlier asked me to join him in a ship classification society. Shortly thereafter, I quit the advertising agency and started to work in the ship classification society. Again, it was an opportunity that obviously came from God.



Work life

Working for the new company continued to be busy. Aside from the workload, I felt very relaxed. The company did everything according to the law. I headed a finance team of more than twenty people, not including those in branches in eight different cities in the country. I did not have to face unethical business practices in this company. It emphasized compliance with the law. The company developed a lot of rules that people in the industry had to follow strictly.

Finding a church to attend is similarly challenging. As an expatriate, I can choose an international church endorsed by the local religious authorities or a local church. Both choices come with positives and negatives from a missional point of view. Some people have preconceptions about them. Understanding them from the inside is very different from understanding them from the outside.

The first few years were again very crazy. The finance department was short of staff. A few senior staff members always worked overtime. My regional supervisor refused to ask the headquarters for more resources, believing that the requests would be rejected. When the Chief Financial Controller came from the headquarters to visit our office, I asked him directly, and the request was approved. I had to merge the finance departments of three companies into one to form a shared service finance center. Personnel were regularly hired and fired.

The company had structural and departmental changes every year during my ten-year tenure, most of which came directly from the London headquarters. I was later promoted from a country role to an area role at the global level. Then a global finance restructure eliminated my role. My role as an MSSW finally came to an end.

Mission

Since I had already worked in City B for five years before I started my third job, missional work started in the previous five years continued. The third job required me to interact frequently with bankers and district government officials in different cities. On one occasion, I flew with a banker to another city for a finance conference. During the flight I shared with the banker about my faith. I tried to share my faith with people I met. Unfortunately, very few took my faith as theirs.

After completing my diploma in theology online, I had opportunities to preach in a second expatriate church. My network with the local churches had grown as I stayed longer in City B. I continued to volunteer for the Christian NGO that recruited me to teach in the university in City C. Later I became leader of the teaching team for a few years.

God also gave my wife mission opportunities. She was a staff member of the first expatriate church for a few years. Later she became a staff member of a foreign-owned company that carried out missional activities.

City B is a large city with a lot of activities going on all the time. I was involved in many kinds of missional outreaches, like helping in a country-wide Christian summer camp for high school students.

Reflection

I thank God for both the work and mission opportunities I had in the country, though I do not think I did a very good job missional as work always took priority. I was trying to strike a balance between family, work, and mission. It was not easy. I needed to maintain strong job performance to keep my position. Otherwise, I would have had to leave. Performing at work in a foreign country is more difficult than performing in one's home country where the work culture and ethics are much more familiar.

To find a job overseas, one needs to possess certain professional skills. As I am a CPA, finding a job in finance and accounting was the only natural way to go. It would have been very difficult for me to find a job otherwise.

Finding a church to attend is similarly challenging. As an expatriate, I can choose an international church endorsed by the local religious authorities or a local church. Both choices come with positives and negatives from a missional point of view. Some people have preconceptions about them. Understanding them from the inside is very different from understanding them from the outside. I regularly went to a local church in City A and

sometimes attended the international church. In City B, I attended two different international churches at different times and a local church. There were mission opportunities in all those churches. Spending enough time to understand them is important.

I would send a local new believer to a local church where they can receive better fellowship and discipleship. Many of them would find it more difficult to grow in certain local churches, so they need to be helped to make a good decision.

I believe that if I had been associated with a missionary organization when I went to the CAN as an MSSW, my experience would have been very different. There is no denying that God brought me there, as he had paved the way for me to go. I knew a lot about the CAN before I went, including the religious environment. As I was not associated with a missionary organization or even a sending church, I had a lot of freedom to explore missional opportunities. I had no real strategy behind this but just took the opportunities when they came. However, when I faced challenges, I had little spiritual support from others. The last two years in the advertising agency were a horrible experience. I wish I had had somebody I could pray with.

For me, the challenges come more from my work than my missional outreach. I am not sure how a mission organization might help in this respect. Different careers and industries pose different challenges whether you are an employer or a business owner.

Does a MSSW network or fellowship help? Members of the network or in the fellowship may understand more about the pressure and challenges each is facing. Some MSSWs may need it, but I believe there are always MSSWs who are able or even prefer to be "lone rangers". I met quite a few MSSWs who had no association with a mission organization. Some of these did things like publishing Christian books and operating restaurants, but most of them were employees of different industries. They just lived out what God wants his children to be, bearing witness of their faith where God has placed them. I do not think there are any best solutions for MSSWs. Under all circumstances, God's guidance is most important. **MRT**

The Life Cycle of a Missional Business

Lloyd Oppel



Lloyd and Darlene Oppel joined OMF in 1981 and invested the next forty years in the Mekong region. The last seventeen years of their time in Southeast Asia was as missional business people in a creative-access country. In their own words, “Those forty years included hard times, but in retrospect, we would not have missed those years for anything. We are two of the happiest old missionaries in retirement. Every time we check the river of shalom, we find it is running deeper.”

Our missional business

In 2005, my wife and I arrived in a small, Southeast Asian country with the goal of doing intentional evangelism, disciple-making, and church planting. However, the political situation in the nation meant that we could not do this as normal missionaries. The conditions required that we open a business that would provide a vehicle for us to obtain a visa to enter the community.

God guided us to start a joint venture with two men from the unreached people group (UPG) we came to engage with the gospel. I was soon registered with the government as an international investor, and we set about opening a school to teach young adults subjects like English, Chinese, Vietnamese, and computing. The school took a year to build and another year to be up and running with enough students to be sustainable. In the meantime, we had the opportunity to build lots of relationships in the community.

During the next few years, God established our business so that we were able to bring the good news to the people we wanted to reach. Looking back over the past twenty years, we have seen more than 2,000 medical professionals, businesspeople, college students, police officers, military officers, and bureaucrats study at our center. During their time attending various courses, God’s word has touched many of them. In addition, a thriving church has been planted among the people we came to reach. As we have

reached this goal, our reason for starting the business has been realized, so we are now preparing to close it down. But before anyone thinks that preparing to close down a business is unnecessary, let me tell you that missional businesses should be seen as having a life cycle that takes them from conception to birth to maturity to death. Each step should be understood and valued. Even the last one.

This paper will relate the *whole life cycle* of how a missional business is conceived, gets started, operates for a given period of time, and comes to an end. We find that the more that can be said about the practical issues involved, difficulties faced—whether they are solved or not—and the benefits gained by the local community and church (not to mention the mission community), the better.

What is a missional business?

One can look at missional businesses in a number of ways. A foundational concept that should not be missed is that *a missional business is founded on prayer*. Before writing out a business plan or setting out his missional strategy, the missional businessman must seek God in prayer. Prayer must be the backbone of the missional business every day!

A missional business is a vehicle for reaching people with the gospel. This could include people who are part of an unreached people group or those who are not, but it is usually set up in a location where unreached peoples live. Many good

Many good businesses could be started, but not all of them will facilitate reaching a particular population.

It does not matter how successful the business is; if the people do not hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, the overarching goal has been missed.

At our school, every business decision is prefaced with the question: “Will this help or hinder our missional goals?”

businesses could be started, but not all of them will facilitate reaching a particular population. Good missional businesses bring the gospel message to places where people may not have been able to hear it before and do whatever is possible so that that group can be reached. For instance, if we had opened a hotel in our chosen area, we would have spent most of our time relating to tourists, not the people we came to reach. Our desire to reach people who live in the area motivated us to open a school for adults, which proved to be a much better vehicle than a hotel so that we could attain our goal.

A missional business is missional. There are many good businesses that have high standards of Christian ethics and serve the community socially and economically. I call these “Christian businesses”, and I am thankful for each one. But I see a *missional* business in a very different light, as it exists to see the gospel shared, disciples made, and churches planted. While a good Christian businessman may fill the need that people around him have for a product or service, his major aim is profit, not evangelism. In the country where we were living, evangelism and disciple-making do not come easy. But as we pray, ways to appropriately share the good news have repeatedly opened up. God always makes a way, even if it requires time, risk, and persistence. Missional businesspeople always look for a way to share the gospel and build the church.

A missional business is focused. There are two parts to a missional business. One is the business plan. The other is the missional strategy. The missional strategy could include ways to share the gospel with people who are not familiar with it and things that can be done so that a church can be planted. In a true missional business, the missional strategy must always

take priority over the business one. It does not matter how successful the business is; if the people do not hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, the overarching goal has been missed. At our school, every business decision is prefaced with the question: “Will this help or hinder our missional goals?” If a business decision does not aid the missional goals, it must be rejected.

A missional business must be disposable. Missional business owners must be willing to take risks for the sake of the mission even if it means that the business could fail or be shut down. Businesses come and go, but the will of God to reach the nations must never be sacrificed for the sake of preserving a business.

A missional business is not capitalistic. The goal of capitalism is to maximize financial profit. Jesus clearly said we cannot serve God and money (Matt 6:24). The goal of all businesses owned by Christians must be to glorify God.

Worldly businessmen lay up treasure on earth. Godly businessmen lay up treasure in heaven (Matt 6:19–20). This should drive all of our efforts to engage in missional businesses.

A missional business is accountable. A missional business must be able to withstand the scrutiny of local government officials and be found to be beyond reproach. A missional business must also be accountable to a body of fellow Christians (e.g., a board and/or mission organization) who can ensure that the missional business performs at the highest possible level, both in regard to business practice and mission.

The missional business cycle

Anyone who is considering starting a missional business must know what one is and recognize that a missional business has a shelf life. A time will come when it will no longer be needed. How so? By definition, a missional business exists to facilitate a missional strategy. When the goals of the missional strategy are met, the need for the business ceases to exist. For this reason, from the very inception, there needs to be an exit strategy for both the business and the mission. To help us get our heads around what this means from a practical standpoint, let's unpack the whole missional business cycle and consider how one step leads to the next all the way to completion.



Student assemblies were a great opportunity for sharing

Step 1. Owning the definition

As we have seen above, a missional business has definite strictures. It is only missional if it exists to facilitate a missional strategy. And while a missional business must model a biblical business ethic in the same way a Christian business does, it always serves the goal of the missional strategy.

This is exactly what we intended when we opened our business. While we needed it to be financially successful, its primary purpose was to create a bridge into an unreached people group for intentional evangelism, disciple making, and church planting.

Step 2. Developing the missional vision, mission, core values, and strategy

The first thing to be set in place must be the missional strategy. This follows

Anyone who is considering starting a missional business must know what one is and recognize that a missional business has a shelf life. A time will come when it will no longer be needed.

every instance work toward making the missional dimension successful.

Some of the business decisions we made regarding the adult-education night-school we intended to run took away from the possibility of the business becoming even more successful. They were nevertheless implemented because they contributed to the advancement of the missional goal. For example, by offering classes only three nights a week, rather than five, we were bound to receive

business can include both missional team members and a wide range of members of the community, both believers and non-believers. All employees, however, must adhere to the core values of the business so that it can function satisfactorily.

Step 4. Securing capital

To get a business up and running and keep it going, it is essential that one secures the necessary capital. Personally, I love the traditional CIM/OMF values of *non-solicitation* and *not going into debt*. In our case, these values augured well as we set up our business in a high-risk environment where repayment of loans would be difficult if not impossible. Others may find it essential to raise money that they will pay back over time.

Step 5. Implementing and operating the missional business

Many missional businesses will be set up in contexts where no similar businesses have existed before. This means that those who start them will not have examples to follow or learn from. In such a setting, flexibility is key. Things can, and probably will, happen that the business founder could never have foreseen. In our case, while we kept to our original vision and mission, almost everything else evolved as we moved forward. Without a certain degree of flexibility, the whole project could easily have fallen apart.

A missional business must be able to withstand the scrutiny of local government officials and be found to be beyond reproach. A missional business must also be accountable to a body of fellow Christians ... who can ensure that the missional business performs at the highest possible level, both in regard to business practice and mission.

the ideas familiar to those who have been taught how to articulate a vision, mission, and values as they develop their strategy. The vision statement needs to clearly articulate the specific intention of advancing the kingdom of God in a given context. The mission describes the road that will be followed to reach that outcome. The core values list standards of practice that will be upheld. Stated in this way, the missional strategy sets out the day-to-day details that must be implemented.

Having set this out for the missional aspect of the undertaking, the same needs to be repeated for the business dimension. It should be clear though, that the vision, mission, core values, and strategy of the business must in

a lower overall income. However, this decision opened up the other nights so that team members had the time needed for evangelism, disciple making, and other church planting activities in the community.

Step 3. Building a team

While building the missional team, it is essential to ensure that everyone whole-heartedly owns the vision, mission, goals, and core values. A team that is split over these things may add to the difficulties that are inherent in starting and running a missional business. In the end, it may be better to have a smaller team than one made up of people with different aims. Employees of the

Step 6. Evaluating the missional strategy

Anyone who runs a missional business needs to regularly evaluate whether they are fulfilling both their business and missional goals. I use the following index to evaluate how far our missional business has allowed us to fulfil our missional goals.

1. We are present and our business is operating.
2. We have potential long-term presence and are sustainable.
3. We have access to our target group.
4. We interact with these people.
5. We have opportunities to share the good news with the target group.
6. A context exists for discipleship, mentoring, and training.
7. We contribute to the felt needs of our intended audience.
8. We see that church planting multiplication is underway.
9. Our business plan and missional strategy are productive, symbiotic, and non-competitive.

Step 7. Assessing accomplishments

Working through these questions and others helps us know if we have accomplished our goals. To assess our progress, we need to answer two questions: (1) Has the missional goal been achieved? (2) Is the business a healthy contributing factor to reaching this goal?



Our school nearing completion in 2007

months for me to be granted a permit that would remain valid for fifteen years. With proper permission, we opened the doors of our for-profit business. In 2007, a neophyte church was started for the first time in human history to reach our selected unreached people group. The church and the business grew together in a cooperative relationship for the next two decades. Eventually, neither the newly-planted church nor the missional strategy needed the business. This led us to decide to close the business on 5 December 2025 with a thanksgiving celebration for

my wife and I served as “traditional missionaries” in a country that granted us visas as religious professionals. During those twenty-three years, I do not think any of the non-Christians we worked among understood what we were. From all they could tell, these foreigners had a weird profession. By contrast, serving as missional-business people for the past fifteen years has made our role understandable to people in our current community. The fact that they understand the concept of being “international investors” has meant that they can more readily accept our place in their community.

Now that I am in retirement, I look back with great joy as I remember how God used a business to help birth a church. We thank God for giving us this opportunity to serve him through our missional business. With all we have learned, we have determined that if we had the chance to do it all over again, we would definitely choose to be missional businesspeople rather than traditional missionaries. **MRT**

Few, if any, missional businesses should be started to continue in perpetuity. They exist as a means to accomplish the missional strategy. When that has been completed, the time may be right for them to be wrapped up or passed on to other hands.

Step 8. Exit strategy

Few, if any, missional businesses should be started to continue in perpetuity. They exist as a means to accomplish the missional strategy. When that has been completed, the time may be right for them to be wrapped up or passed on to other hands.

When I applied to become a foreign investor in 2005, it took eighteen

the work done over the years. From that date, the business will cease to exist, and its physical campus will become an asset of the local church.

Step 9. Enjoying long-term outcomes

It is often said that one can take pride in a job well done. This is definitely true when it comes to running a missional business. For twenty-three years,

Marketplace Ministry and the Church: A Practitioner's Perspective

Jimmy Chao



Jimmy is half Taiwanese and half Hong Konger, born and raised in Canada. Working with a mission called MoveIn, he lived six years in an urban poor setting while supporting himself as a tentmaker. His first encounter with OMF was at Urbana 2015 and it led to a Serve Asia trip in a location where he thought he might serve long-term while single. Now he's married with two young kids and is OMF Canada's Director of Special Projects overseeing IT, Communications, and Projects—one of which is our marketplace work.

Introduction

After a decade working in an engineering career, I heard the Lord's call into professional ministry. Who knew that OMF Canada could use a project manager to coordinate change? And who knew that those skillsets would be learned in the marketplace to serve kingdom purposes? God knew.

The latter part of my work in engineering had a clearer focus on doing discipleship in the workplace. In the eight years I spent with my last employer, I was able to interact with 150 colleagues, many of whom came from Hindu and Muslim backgrounds. As far as I am aware, there were only three evangelical Christians on staff—only 2 percent of the workforce. My colleagues knew early that I was a believer but may have just taken note. Towards the end, colleagues of various ages and backgrounds were seeking prayer and direction. These ranged from green juniors to seasoned veterans who were counting the days to retirement so they could draw from their nest egg.

Years of trust had to be built before doors to their hearts opened and questions such as the following poured out: "What am I doing here?" "What's the point of life?" "Why do we work so hard to save up so much just to retire?" Regardless of their religious backgrounds or circumstances, they contemplated common themes that highlighted existential questions of purpose.

This was the bridge to the gospel I was praying for. "Let me tell you about my God." And so began the journey of discipleship in the workplace.

The church in the marketplace

The workplace Christian has a tremendous part to play in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The Great Commission was

given to the whole church... the ministers and missionaries of the world will not be able to fulfill the Great Commission. They can't.
— Michael Oh, CEO of Lausanne

Ministry in the workplace—also known as marketplace ministry—is considered one of the last frontiers for missions as the world undergoes mass urbanization.¹ A few key roles that come under the umbrella of marketplace ministry are the marketplace worker, tentmaker, and missional business practitioner. All of these engage with the marketplace on some level, while each differs in their ministry focus and scope.

Marketplace workers see their places of work, their colleagues, and clients as their sphere of ministry. Their work experience opens doors to industries and employers where the church needs to be present as witnesses. And God has equipped them with the education, opportunity, and timing to do so.

Tentmakers may see their work as a means to fund their ministry. The term is a reference to the Apostle Paul who—for a season—made tents to fund the ministry he did outside of work (Acts 18:1–4; 20:33–35). In practice, workplace Christians may be involved in ministry in and out of their work too.

Missional businesses, on the other hand, "are profitable and sustainable endeavours that are intentional about kingdom purposes and their impact on people."² They have the potential to supply work to locals, contribute to the economy, transform communities, witness to the gospel, and more. Some examples within OMF include managing cafes, running English language schools, organizing touring businesses, and serving as consultants.

One missional business practitioner said, "Most of us in the church can hold a job, but few of us can start a successful

business.” According to an estimate cited at a recent BAM (Business as Mission) conference, only about 6 percent of the people in the church are potential entrepreneurs. In other words, most church members are in the marketplace, not as business owners but as workers. And if only a few might be able to start a business in their home culture, it is quite another challenge to do that successfully in a cross-cultural setting, considering government regulations, business practices, and the local market, not to mention language and culture.

In this article, I’ll outline several key aspects of marketplace ministry. The focus will be on the worker as well as the role of the wider church. The roles of tentmakers and missional business owners will not be discussed.

The need

While few may be able to manage a successful business, most of the church is comprised of people working a job in the marketplace. Where is the intersection of the Great Commission and what they do in their place of work where they spend a good portion of the week? How is their faith relevant to their careers or colleagues? There is a need to disciple the church to be witnesses in the workplace.

In a sermon I recently preached entitled “Why the Gospel is Good News in the Workplace,” I asked the congregation, “Do you know the challenge of workplace ministry for your Pastor,

... the East Asian work ethic in the urban setting can be grueling. At the same time, one key demographic that may be underrepresented in the local church is working-aged people. So, if the working-aged won’t come to the church, will the church go to them?

myself, and others in professional ministry? All of our colleagues are already believers.” The responsibility of ministering to colleagues belongs to the workplace Christian while the local church should be available to equip and support them. The role of Christian leaders in training others to do ministry is stated clearly by the Apostle Paul. “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:11–12 NIV 2011).

I remember my very first meeting with my manager at OMF. He started with, “Let’s pray before we begin.” That was a bit of a work culture shock for me coming out of a manufacturing industry where asking God to bless our meeting would lead to raised eyebrows and potentially a reprimand. I’m definitely in a Christian work environment now, I thought. That’s certainly not the case for most Christians where most of their colleagues are not fellow believers.

In Canada, as in many other countries, we have seen a trend that new graduates are overeducated for the available jobs. One of our local papers used a barista meter, measuring how many Starbucks baristas had a bachelor’s or master’s degree and saw an uptick year upon year. It’s no surprise that new Christian graduates are asking how their faith can be integrated with their education and careers. It’s a key part of their identity. This new generation of potential workers will be looking for support to minister in the workplace. How will the church respond to it? If we pass on the narrative that their career isn’t relevant to our mission, we will risk losing many inquirers.

In our fields, we’ve noted the mass migration of rural peoples to find work in the cities. Many have had to leave families behind in search of greater financial security. We’re also aware that the East Asian work ethic in the urban setting can be grueling. At the same time, one key demographic that may be underrepresented in the local church is working-aged people. So, if the working-aged won’t come to the church, will the church go to them?

There is a growing need to minister in the East Asian marketplace. Are we able to send workers into this space? Colleagues in this setting are from unreached people groups. The same is actually true in Canada where we have the largest percentage of immigrants within the G7 countries.

The ministry

“What do you think of the Pope?” “What do you do at church on Sundays?” “How do you pray?” “Why do you give money to your church?” These are just some of the questions I’ve been asked by former colleagues in the workplace. Those who are asking such questions are exactly the



demographic of the marketplace we desire to reach. There is curiosity about our faith but a lot of confusion. One goal is to bring clarity to the many questions people may have. Seeing a workplace relationship come to this point of trust and seeking is a *kairos* moment we should be praying for.

Relational evangelism in the workplace requires a long-term commitment. The opportunities to disciple are few between job responsibilities and expectations. But they won't come if relationships of trust aren't built over time. Those relationships may begin strictly professionally as trust is built on competence and not character. Interest expressed by colleagues may progress over time beyond professional contributions. And conversations of worldview, faith, and values may occur organically. At the right time, colleagues may ask questions of faith that they've been contemplating. And we hope the marketplace worker is the go-to person for these conversations after relationships of trust have been



relationships with colleagues so that they can be discipled within the church. A marketplace worker is then better understood as an outreach

Relational evangelism in the workplace requires a long-term commitment. The opportunities to disciple are few between job responsibilities and expectations. But they also won't come if relationships of trust aren't built over time.

developed. These questions mark the starting point of a discipleship journey.

In North America, it's quite typical for a Millennial to change jobs every three years as they pursue better development and pay. Some move even more frequently. But personal development and higher pay can't be the primary driving forces for one called to reach their colleagues with the gospel. With God's empowerment, career development and pay may take less of a priority than connection with colleagues. And the marketplace worker may find they're called to stay longer with an employer than their peers, as God leads.

Some have misunderstood that marketplace ministries aim to replace traditional missions. It's actually quite the opposite. It's meant to complement the work of church planting where its main ministry is to build trusted

representative of the local church. And the work of outreach won't occur without a local church; it can't. If there was no church, there wouldn't be a place to invite seeking colleagues. We hope that by deploying more workers into the marketplace, the working-aged can be better represented in our churches.

The marketplace also isn't an isolated sphere where discipleship happens. There must be connection with the

wider church as God intended. It would be difficult and not recommended to bring a disciple to maturity strictly in the marketplace. It can't be done without the church. Instead, it should be seen as a site for evangelism and invitation to the local church body. This synergy is possible when the local church is welcoming, has an outreach strategy, and the marketplace worker is encouraged to invite colleagues to "come and see".

Some marketplace workers have had the chance to facilitate Alpha courses in the workplace or have led Bible studies and prayer groups during lunch time or before work. The opportunities will differ depending on the employer and labour laws. To directly proselytize in Canada might get one in trouble with Human Resources, especially if it's in the power dynamic of a manager-employee relationship. However, addressing questions or topics initiated by colleagues is acceptable. Wisdom is needed to navigate the work culture.

One of our Marketplace Self-Supported Workers (MSSWs) who served in Sapporo

There is a growing need to minister in the East Asian marketplace. Are we able to send workers into this space? Colleagues in this setting are from unreached people groups.

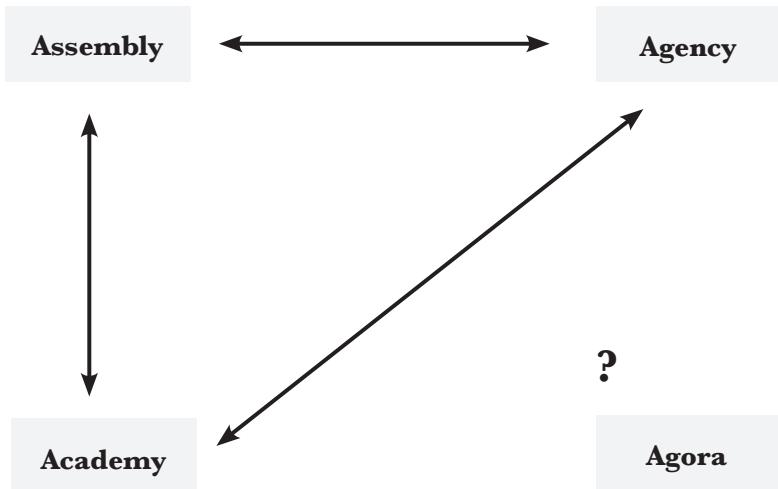
in a research lab for several years would invite colleagues to go on hikes on the weekend where they'd connect with other OMF workers. Such a connection arguably wouldn't have happened if our MSSW wasn't present in his workplace and building relationships with his colleagues.

The worker

Imagine if a congregant of a local church was asked by their pastor to invite their colleagues to come to a Sunday service. How could they be equipped to do this type of work? What credentials would they need to be successful? They are simply making an invitation to someone with whom they've developed a relationship of trust.

The marketplace worker should be a mature believer who can represent our faith to colleagues and who sees their workplace as the ministry God has called them to. That doesn't necessarily mean they need formal Bible training. They're not church planters, but instead networkers for the local church who support by pointing the way.

The degree of language and culture acquisition one might need depends on the demographic that is to be reached. If the marketplace worker is employed at a multi-national company, then colleagues may likely be fellow expatriates who use English as the primary language. However, with our vision to reach East Asia's peoples, it would be good for potential marketplace workers to have experience in a setting where East Asians work. Thus, it would be strategic to serve with a local employer. In such a situation, the degree of language and culture acquisition would need to be similar to a typical worker. Naturally, when competence in the local language is expected they would be screened by their prospective employer; otherwise,



they wouldn't be able to land the job. There's also an additional layer of professional language and work culture for the marketplace worker to grasp.



Unfortunately, a downside of this level of equipping is that marketplace workers can't stop their careers for a dedicated time to acquire language and culture.

... with our vision to reach East Asia's peoples, it would be good for potential marketplace workers to have experience in a setting where East Asians work.

If they had such a substantial gap in time in their resume (whether months or years), they may be less hireable. Instead, this training would have to take place before they're deployed so they can attain an adequate level as determined by their employer and then in tandem with their work going forward. The latter is where good mentorship with those that have already acquired language and culture would be most helpful.

The roles of the church

When considering the place of the church in the world, it is possible to discuss it in terms of four As.

1. Assembly – the *ekklesia*, the universal and local church that has been called out of the world by Jesus Christ in order to lead the world into his kingdom
2. Academy – theological schools, seminaries, Bible training centres, etc., that serve the church by training professional and lay leaders for kingdom ministry
3. Agency – the mission organizations that serve the church by creating an interface with the world that local churches may find difficult to do on their own
4. Agora – derived from the Greek term for public markets, this term can be used to describe the workplace and other public settings where Christians interact with others.

We should ask how these four As work together for global missions. The

Assembly is, of course, the source and goal of missionary activity. Only the church can share the gospel with a needy world and those who accept the good news about Jesus Christ instantly become members of the church who need to learn how to function as members. The interplay between the Assembly, Academy, and Agency should be reasonably obvious. But what about the Agora—the marketplace? How does the church relate to the Agora? How do the Academy and Agency help the church do this? Since the average church goer spends a high percentage of their time in the Agora, this is a major way in which the church interfaces with the world.

In Canada, the Academy may be ahead today in supporting marketplace workers. For years, they've been teaching students to integrate their faith with their careers—how to be a witness in the workplace. The Assembly is less so. In a survey of inquirers interested in serving as marketplace workers, very few said they heard a sermon in the past year that was targeted for the workplace. There can be a disconnect between their faith on Sunday and work on Monday—something that is sometimes called the sacred-secular divide. As for the Agency, there are some that have a particular focus on reaching the marketplace. But many historic mission organizations are still learning how this fits in with their church planting strategies. This is based on a recent doctorate study on a proposal to support marketplace workers where OMF Canada took part with six other missions.

The support

As with the above survey, not only have few heard relevant sermons preached in their church that mention marketplace ministry, but the broader matter of support is lacking. As with any ministry

It's not easy doing the “daily grind” without a good support system. The ones to especially pay attention to are the young adults who recently graduated and have started their careers. Not only are they settling into a new environment and rhythm of life, they're also new to living out their faith in the workplace.

that prioritizes relational evangelism and sees little fruit, it can be quite lonely and discouraging. It's not easy doing the “daily grind” without a good support system. The ones to especially pay attention to are the young adults who recently graduated and have started their careers. Not only are they settling into a new environment and rhythm of life, they're also new to living out their faith in the workplace.

Community is a key reason for inquirers to seek to partner with a mission agency so they can serve cross-culturally in marketplace ministry. They don't want to do it alone. They're looking for encouragement, accountability, and others to journey with. Those who have gone ahead can help them navigate cross-cultural work cultures. Training in how to share the gospel in a professional setting would be helpful as well. It would also be good for them to connect with a small group where they can authentically share the victories and challenges they're facing in reaching their colleagues.

The church environment is important as well. As marketplace workers invite colleagues to their local church, there needs to be a space for the continued work of discipleship to take place. This is especially true if they are to stay and grow in the faith. Interestingly, one of

our MSSWs found himself in the role of a small group leader, discipling locals to also be a witness in their workplace. This is a nice example of a full circle moment.

Conclusion

Lausanne has said that the marketplace is one of the last frontiers to reach the world with the gospel and it's the intersection where the majority of today's Christians engage with the world. An opportunity stands before us. Not only can we help the next generation see why their faith is relevant in the workplace, we can also equip and send them into this ministry. They seek community, accountability, and training. We also long for more of the working-aged to be represented in our church plants. As the worldwide church and the different institutions that support it work together, we hope to see this ministry flourish so that even more unreached peoples in the marketplace can come to faith. **MRT**

¹ Kina Robertshaw, “The Fourth Lausanne Congress—Equipping Believers in the Workplace,” Lausanne Movement, <https://lausanne.org/about/blog/stories/lausanne-4-workplace-track-equipping-the-saints-for-workplace-mission> (accessed 2 October 2025).

² Jo Plummer, “What is Business as Mission?,” The BAM Review (blog), 14 January 2015, <https://businessasmision.com/what-is-bam/> (accessed 7 October 2025).

As marketplace workers invite colleagues to their local church, there needs to be a space for the continued work of discipleship to take place. This is especially true if they are to stay and grow in the faith.

A Christian View of Work in Response to the Fall: Reflections that Will Hopefully Encourage Discussion

Harvey Phillips



Harvey has served in various professional capacities and leadership roles since he first went to China in 1982. He met his wife Linda at a conference in Hong Kong in 1985 and they eventually married in 1987. Their two children were raised in China, but are now back in the US. Harvey and Linda lived and ministered in China until 2008 when their oldest child went to college. Once both kids were settled into college, they moved to Hong Kong in 2011. They ministered there until late 2023, when they returned to the US.

The Judeo-Christian view of work is vastly different, perhaps one could even say radically different, than the view of work held by other ancient Near Eastern (ANE) peoples and supported by their religions. Actually, it is vastly different than the view of work held in most modern world religions. The foundation for most of these differences is found in Genesis 1–3. As all of us know, the theological concepts found in Genesis 1–3 are so deep and so fundamental that we can never fully explore them. Yet, while we can never exhaust their teaching, we cannot rush through these chapters as they lay the foundation of almost every theme of biblical theology. This is certainly true for a Christian view of work.¹ Whether our “work” is what is normally called “ministry”, or we are involved in the more “normal” work of professional service or a missional business, we must be careful to build our theology of work upon the foundations found in the biblical text.

This paper is divided into two sections.² The first addresses the theological foundations about work laid down in the initial two chapters of Genesis. The second section deals with the impact of the Fall upon our theology of work. After each section, I have included a few discussion questions suitable for small group discussion. I would encourage such group interaction about these issues because they are complex and each context we face is different. The general theological principles laid out in this paper must be brought to bear on specific situations. I believe this is best accomplished through group discussion.³

Theological foundations for work: Genesis 1–2

To begin our reflections, I want to list three theological truths that lay a simple foundation for a Christian view of work. Obviously, many more theological truths

could be stated, but these three will get us started. These truths are:

1. Our God is the Creator who works.
2. God made mankind in his own image.
3. Our current experience of work has been impacted by the Fall.

As I said, these truths are pretty basic. Nevertheless, the more you think about them, the more profound they become.

1. Our God is the Creator who works

Let's first explore the idea that our God is the Creator who works. In most ANE religions, the gods were completely separated from any thought of work. The gods created men to do work. They even considered it to be punishment. They would never even consider doing work themselves.

Yet the God of the Bible works. In Genesis 2:2–3, we see that God finished his work in creation. The word used is the same word used in Exodus 20:9 to describe human work. It is not really a special word. The scope of meaning of the Hebrew word is as broad as the English word “work”. Anyone from the ANE who read this would have been aghast. How could the Creator be involved in “work”? Yet we see this all through the Creation account. Our God did not just speak; he

1. “made, fashioned”—a very common word used for fabrication or manufacturing. You could make a robe or prepare food.
2. “formed”—the word used of a potter.
3. “planted”—refers to planting a garden or a vineyard. You could say our God got His hands dirty.

Some might argue that these words are just examples of anthropomorphism, but at least God allows himself to be described in terms of human work! He embraces work!⁴

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore all the texts that would relate to the issue of work, but God's endorsement of work continues throughout the rest of Scripture. The concept of Sabbath is a notable example (Exod 20:8–11). God set apart the day of rest from the days of work, in part, to allow people to rest instead of engaging in endless toil and, in part, to give them a proper perspective of their days of work. Throughout the Old Testament, God blesses those who work. David was a shepherd. Amos was a “herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs” (Amos 7:14). The “excellent wife” of Proverbs 31 is extolled for her work. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes frequently comment on work.⁵ The New Testament continues the view that work is a normal and blessed aspect of the life of a believer. Paul frequently instructs believers about their work,⁶ and even condemns those who refuse to work.⁷

We also need to look at Jesus himself. He was a carpenter! He got his hands and clothes dirty! He got sweaty. He would need to take a bath. He had to negotiate with his suppliers. He had to do marketing. I would not be surprised if at some time he bashed his thumb! Yet he also had the joy of designing and constructing a table or a cabinet for someone in Nazareth. He had the satisfaction of a job well completed. Work, then, is a part of Christ's sinless humanity.

In short, our God works and expects us to work. Because our God works, work in and of itself is not something that is lowly, unholy, or inherently cursed. Rather, it is something that should be affirmed and celebrated! When God looked at creation and saw all of his work, he said it was very good. Work is a very good thing.

2. God made mankind in his own image; we serve as his representatives

Now, let's look at the implications of the fact that God created us “in his image”. A lot of ink has been used to delve into the depths and implications of this truth, so there is no way that



we can exhaust the concept here.⁸ So, I just want to talk about how this impacts our view of work.

When we say that we have been created in God's image, we are obviously not saying that God is 1.77 meters tall, has gray hair, and is getting a little broad around the middle. Theologians have a lot of ideas, but the best explanation to me is that this terminology means that man is God's representative on earth. Actually, this usage was frequently used to describe kings in the ANE. This is what made the kings so powerful! They claimed that their power and authority came from the gods.⁹ Yet, here in Genesis, we have that radical idea that all of us are representatives of the Creator God. The fact that both males and females are created in God's image is equally radical. There is no distinction—we are all God's representatives on earth.

The significance of this radical identity is seen in that we have all been given a task by God. Our God works, so it is natural that as his representatives—humankind—will work as well. Our work manifests our identity as God's representatives in several different areas.

a. Exercise dominion and thereby enforce God's claim to dominion over all the earth

First, God has given mankind the task of having dominion over the earth. This is our right, privilege, and responsibility that comes from bearing the image of God. As we exercise dominion over the earth within our

sphere of influence, we enforce God's claim to dominion over all the earth.

Before the Fall, under perfect conditions, God put man in the Garden of Eden to “work it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). God expected man to work. He even created a “helper” to be with Adam (Gen 2:18, 20). The Hebrew used for “helper” was used in the Psalms of God himself (Pss 30:10; 54:4). The idea seems clear that Eve was created to help Adam fulfill the mandate that God had given—they both were to work, and they were to work together!

b. Display God's character through our work

Work is part of who God is; it is part of what he does. When God works, he displays his character. For example, how would we know God as Creator if he had not done the work of creation? As his representatives, then, it is only natural that we also work. But as his representatives, we should also seek to reveal the nature and character of God through our work. When we work in accordance with his righteousness, we display his righteousness and holiness. Though we obviously cannot do it to the same extent that he does, when we exercise creativity, we display that our God is a creative God. When we provide for our families, we display that our God provides for his children. When we protect other people or creation, we display that our God protects. When we paint a beautiful picture or compose a majestic symphony, we display that our God delights in beauty. When we plant a garden, we display that our God was the first Gardener. When we



discover new scientific truth, we display that our God delights in order. When we teach, we display that our God delights to reveal truth. When we fashion or transform materials into a useful tool, we display that our God is both an amazing designer and that he cares for our practical needs. I could go on, but I think you get the point. Work is a vital part of the way that we carry out our role as God's image!

c. Work as ambassadors of reconciliation

There are other aspects of God's work that we should also emulate as his representatives. Our God is the Savior, the Redeemer, the Deliverer. He works to bring about reconciliation. The New Testament calls us to be ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:20). Obviously, we cannot replicate the work of Christ on the cross or by our own efforts restore people's relationships with God. Nevertheless, we should strive to see that our work has a redeeming and reconciling effect on our communities. I believe that this is not just true of "work" that is "ministry", but that it should be a vital part of our goals in a missional business or our professional service.

d. Demonstrate faith through our work and our rest

Another theological theme to recognize is that our work should demonstrate faith. As we see in John 6:29, God works to bring about faith. There should be an element of faith in our work. When we consider the Sabbath, we need to realize

that it was instituted not just to make sure God's people got some physical rest, though of course physical rest is essential for us. The Sabbath was also a dramatic statement of faith! Think of life in an agrarian society. To not care for the fields or milk the cows one day a week required tremendous faith. The word for "rest" in Genesis 2 carries more the idea "to cease or desist from work". God did not "rest" on the seventh day because he was tired. As one commentator said, "It is the rest of achievement, not inactivity, for he nurtures what he creates; we may compare the symbolism of Jesus 'seated' after his finished redemption (Heb 8:1; 10:12), to dispense its benefits."¹⁰ God is setting the principle for the whole universe that there is more than just work or activity! Maybe we could say that God just wanted to enjoy his creation. For the nation of Israel, and for us, there needs to be a time when we focus on God and all that he has done and all that he is. So, our work should demonstrate faith, and our faith should demonstrate that work is not the ultimate purpose of our lives.

e. Work will exist in eternity

What about the end times? Is work only something we must do now? Despite all the images of us floating on clouds while playing harps, when we look more carefully at what the Bible says about the end times, we see that our God continues to affirm work. One of the most famous images of the end times is given in Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3—"they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks." But what are plowshares and pruning hooks? They are instruments of work! God is painting a picture of a time without warfare, but it is not a time without work!

Worship is a big theme in the book of Revelation. The normal Greek word for worship (*προσκυνέω, proskuneō*) appears, in various forms, twenty-four times in Revelation out of the total of sixty-one in the entire New Testament. In two cases, though, a different, more specialized word for worship (*λατρεύω, latreuo*) is used. These are in Revelation 7:15 and 22:3. You can see from the ESV translation notes that this word is sometimes translated "serve" and sometimes "worship". The verb refers to doing the cultic activity of worship, such as the practical work of the priests of the Old Testament. Thus, our worship in heaven will not just be singing—it will also include practical acts of worship. We will be doing work!

The first two chapters of Genesis and the few other passages we have looked at show us an ideal of what God intended work to be. But we all know that the consequences of Genesis 3 are still very much alive and well. Nevertheless, I think we need to affirm that the impact Genesis 3 has had on our work should not extinguish the ideal presented in Genesis 1–2. Christ has come to redeem the world,

... we should strive to see that our work has a redeeming and reconciling effect on our communities. I believe that this is not just true of "work" that is "ministry", but that it should be a vital part of our goals in a missional business or our professional service.

... our worship in heaven will not just be singing—it will also include practical acts of worship. We will be doing work!

and that includes the workplace. The ideal will not be realized until he returns, but that does not mean that we should relinquish the hope of that ideal. Rather, it should become part of our message of the gospel. When we present the “good news of Jesus Christ in all its fullness,” it must include this vision of a redeemed workplace.

Before going on to explore the impact of the truths of Genesis 3, I would encourage individual reflection and/or group discussion on the truths mentioned in this first section.

Different perspectives on the way to serve God at work

1. The way to serve God at work is to further social justice in the world.
2. The way to serve God at work is to be personally honest and evangelize your colleagues.
3. The way to serve God at work is just to do skillful, excellent work.
4. The way to serve God at work is to create beauty.
5. The way to serve God at work is to work from a Christian motivation to glorify God, seeking to engage and influence culture to that end.
6. The way to serve God at work is to work with a grateful, joyful, gospel-changed heart through all the ups and downs.
7. The way to serve God at work is to do whatever gives you the greatest joy and passion.
8. The way to serve God at work is to make as much money as you can, so that you can be as generous as you can.

Group discussion questions:

Reflect on the different perspectives on work given in the textbox below¹¹ in order to answer the following questions:

1. Which of the perspectives given in the text box best describes your view? Why?
2. Are there any statements that you think are unbiblical or wrong? Why?
3. How would you respond if someone replaced “The way to serve God is ...” with “The *only* way to serve God is ...” in any of the statements?
4. Do you feel that any one statement sums up everything about serving God in the workplace? Is there any way you could combine these statements to present a more complete picture? Is there anything you would add?
5. How would you describe your perspective on work in a single sentence?

Responding to the Fall: Building a Tabernacle or a Golden Calf (Genesis 3; Exodus 31–32)

Our current experience of work has been impacted by the Fall

All of us can attest that the high view of work presented above is not always our experience. The consequences

of Genesis 3 are still very much alive and well. The Fall has impacted our relationships, our values, our words, and our actions. This means our workplaces—even OMF offices—are not always fun places to be. Given my background as an engineer, I have often said it is much easier to work with lasers than with people as the former have on-off switches and reset buttons! When we read Genesis 3:17–19, we can easily relate to the pain and the sweat. We understand that there are many various forms of “thorns and thistles”, including injustice, alienation, pointless busyness, and so much more. We have also all seen that at times work can be depersonalizing, sometimes to the point that the idea that humans carry the image of God lies beyond our wildest dreams.

Yet, we must never abandon the ideal presented in Genesis 1–2. This vision must be a part of what it means to present “the good news of Jesus Christ in all its fullness.” When I thought about how to apply Genesis 3 to what it means for us as we work today, I thought of looking again at the temptations. I’m sure each of us have heard sermons on how the specific temptations given to Eve are archetypal for the temptations we face today.¹² In many ways, the temptations of Christ are similar. We don’t have time to go into a lot of details, but briefly, the three temptations can be summarized as follows:

1. Doubt God’s goodness. Surely God could do better at providing for your needs. Satan twists the word of God and expands the restrictions in a way that would make Eve doubt that God really cared for them.
2. Doubt God’s word. Surely you can’t believe in his promises or

One of the most famous images of the end times is given in Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3—“they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” But what are plowshares and pruning hooks? They are instruments of work! God is painting a picture of a time without warfare, but it is not a time without work!

Normally in the Old Testament, the terminology of “being filled with the Spirit of God” is associated with the judges, kings, or prophets. But Bezalel fits none of these categories; he is a craftsman. Why was he anointed with the Spirit?

trust his warnings. Interestingly, in the Hebrew of Genesis 3:4, the serpent quotes Genesis 2:17, but then puts a “*not*” in front of it. Here Satan goes beyond twisting the word of God to flatly denying it.

3. Doubt God’s plan. Surely there is a better way for you. God’s plan is not the best way. You will be better off if you don’t follow God’s plan. You can be much better off if you follow another way.

As we think about these temptations, I think you can see that we face them in many different ways in the workplace or in starting a missional business. When we don’t get a contract, do we doubt God’s goodness? When our visa or business registration is held up or even denied, do we doubt God’s promises and call? Has he abandoned us? When we work with officials for the registration of our business or we deal with the tax office, do we doubt God’s commandments to be pure and honest, and even to love our neighbor as ourselves? Couldn’t there be a better plan?

When I state it like this, the answers are fairly obvious. The problem of course is that life is rarely this clear cut. To explore more how these things are played out, I would like us to consider Exodus 31–32. These chapters contrast two people who are doing similar work. One builds a tabernacle; the other fashions a golden calf.

1. Building a tabernacle (Exodus 31–32)

In Exodus 31:2, we are introduced to Bezalel. Even those who are familiar with him would not consider him to be in the same company as Moses (Num 11:17, 25), Joshua (Num 27:18), Othniel (Judg 3:10), Gideon (Judg 6:34), Samson (Judg 13:25; 14:19; 15:14), David (1 Sam 10:6), Ezekiel (Ezek 11:5) or Micah (Micah 3:8). All of these people are described as being filled with the Spirit.

But in Exodus 31:1–11, we are told that Bezalel had also been filled with the Spirit of God to make the various objects required for the tabernacle. The truth is repeated in Exodus 35:31. The use of this terminology is remarkable, and the fact that it is repeated makes it even more special.

Normally in the Old Testament, the terminology of “being filled with the Spirit of God” is associated with the judges, kings, or prophets. But Bezalel fits none of these categories; he is a craftsman. Why was he anointed with the Spirit? He was to be creative—he was to design the articles to be used in the tabernacle. He was to transform gold and wood into objects used for worship. With the help of Oholiab, he was to lead men, who also were given ability by God, to do all this work. They were to do all that the Lord had commanded. To accomplish his assigned task, Bezalel needed to be filled with the Spirit of God.

This all sounds great, but we should not overlook the fact that all of this was very physical work. It required sweat; it required getting dirty; it meant that they would get tired. It was a project that needed leadership, management skills, financial reports, quality control, and engineering design. It required creativity and craftsmanship. It required many people working together.

But all this work was for something holy and special—the tabernacle—the place of God’s presence among his people; the place where he was worshiped. The work itself was an act of worship. Their work was done in obedience to God’s command. The workmen were seeking to use their gifts and talents, which were given to them by the Lord, to glorify their Lord. Their work was also an act that would lead others to worship. The result of their labor would be the center of worship for the nation of Israel for generations. It is instructive to note that Bezalel was from Judah and Oholiab was from Dan. So, after they completed the tabernacle and its implements, they would not be able even to touch the articles they made because they were not priests. They were not permitted to offer sacrifices on the altars they had built or burn incense using the utensils they had crafted. Once the Ark of the Covenant was put behind the veil and the glory of the Lord enveloped the tabernacle, they would not even be able to look upon the Ark, even though they had made it. Yet, their sacrificial work was not for their own praise or recognition. Their work and the work of their team was solely for the glory of God.

Obviously, we don’t build tabernacles any longer, but is it possible that we can stretch our minds a bit to see that our workplace could become a “tabernacle”? Jesus tells us that our worship is not tied to a location but must be in “spirit and truth” (John 4:21–23). Remember the purpose of the tabernacle—it was a sanctuary for the Lord’s presence and a place where he would be worshiped and praised and where he would reveal himself to his people. What would it take for our work to become some sort of “tabernacle”—where our work

It is instructive to note that Bezalel was from Judah and Oholiab was from Dan. So, after they completed the tabernacle and its implements, they would not be able even to touch the articles they made because they were not priests. ... Yet, their sacrificial work was not for their own praise or recognition. Their work and the work of their team was solely for the glory of God.



becomes an act of worship; where our work leads others to worship and praise the Lord; where our work reveals the Lord to those around us?

2. *Fashioning a golden calf*

But now look at chapter 32 where the people came to Aaron and wanted him to make a god for them. In this chapter, we also see someone at work, doing many similar activities to those that we saw in chapter 31. We see a form of leadership. We see people working together. We see creativity and artistry. We see generous giving. We see craftsmanship much like what is discussed in chapter 31. Yet, all of this work leads to a golden calf, not a tabernacle.

Aaron was the designated leader in Moses' absence. He provided leadership of a sort, but it was a failed leadership. The low point comes in verse 4 when the people say, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" They have forgotten who they are; they have forgotten who their God is. In verse 5, Aaron seems to finally comprehend that all of this is going in the wrong direction. He tried to cover up his failure with a call for a feast before Yahweh. But it was too little too late. He could not erase the confusion of who their God actually is. The people attempted to follow many of the outward trappings of God's commands—such as burnt offerings and peace offerings. But they had forgotten their true God, replacing the only object of true worship with an object of their own

design. So, in contrast to the work of Bezalel and Oholiab, Aaron's work led not to a tabernacle, the center of true worship, but to a golden calf, a symbol of corrupt and false worship.

The rest of Exodus 32–34 deals with how the Lord in his grace redeems and restores the nation in spite of their rebellion. This is extremely important for us to remember when we are faced with our own failures. We need the grace of God. He can redeem our failures.

3. *Work and worship*

But for our purposes in reflecting on the Christian view of work, I think it is significant to note what is recorded between the two incidents that I have described above. In Exodus 31:12–18, the laws for the Sabbath are repeated. Work was ordained for six days. Work on these days was expected, even blessed. But work was to take place within the realm of faith. Take special notice of 31:13: "Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths." Even more important than building the tabernacle was the observance of the Sabbath. As mentioned above, the

institution of the Sabbath was much more than just saying that we need a time of physical rest. The Sabbath was an expression of faith that was:

1. A sign of the covenant. The Sabbath reminds us of the goodness and grace of God. Our relationship with God is paramount. Our work must not distract us from proclaiming and developing this relationship.
2. A reminder of our identity. In his grace and goodness, he has sanctified us—he has set us apart for himself so we could be "his people".
3. A reminder to focus on the character of God. He is the Creator who worked and then rested. He is our Deliverer and Savior. His word can be trusted. Faith requires time to contemplate these truths.
4. A statement of faith that God could provide. Our God can be trusted to meet our needs and to give us fulfillment. We are to look to him, not our work, to meet these needs. God's plan, not our own work, will bring our greatest blessing.

The contrast between Bezalel building the tabernacle and Aaron making the golden calf would highlight the importance of keeping the Sabbath to the nation of Israel. For both the nation of Israel and for us today, keeping the Sabbath should be a reminder of the need of faith and obedience to fully experience God's blessing. As we seek to share the good news of Jesus in all its fulness to the nations, we must live out a faith that includes this high view of work and an equally high view of rest as an expression of faith and obedience. The activity of work is not what God honors and blesses, but rather work that flows out of faith. Faith demands that we recognize that the results of our work ultimately depend on God's grace and power, not our activity. Observing some sort of

What would it take for our work to become some sort of "tabernacle"—where our work becomes an act of worship; where our work leads others to worship and praise the Lord; where our work reveals the Lord to those around us?

Sabbath rest is one way to demonstrate such faith to those around us.

As we look at Aaron and the people, we can see how they, in so many ways, yielded to the same temptations as Eve in the Garden.

1. They doubted God's goodness. They doubted that the God who had led them out of Egypt was still with them and would still guide them. They doubted that the God who had provided manna and had brought water out of a rock could still meet their needs. Their actions denied their relationship with him.
2. They doubted God's word. They so quickly doubted the Lord's promise to lead them to the Promised Land and his call for them to be holy, set apart for him. By contrast, in Exodus 36:1, we find that Bezalel and Oholiab and all their team worked "in accordance to all that the Lord had commanded."
3. They doubted God's plan. They could not wait for Moses. Surely there was a better plan! They thought they had a better way to find fulfillment. Aaron tried to cover things up with his call for a feast to the Lord, but that plan was no better than the fig leaves sewn together by Adam and Eve to cover their sin in their own way.

All of us who seek to share the good news of Jesus to the nations are facing a task unfinished. This task requires us to work, regardless of whether our "work" is church planting, teaching, training, serving as a professional, or being involved in a missional business. Just like those involved in church planting, those involved in teaching, professional service, or missional business do so because they see it as a vital way to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in all its fullness. Need we doubt that Satan will seek to sideline us? He will tempt us to doubt God's goodness; to doubt God's word; to doubt God's plan. Our response to these temptations will determine if our work builds tabernacles or fashions golden calves.

Group discussion questions:

1. In what ways could our work lead to worship and a demonstration of God's presence among us? Think in terms of things like (but not limited to) how, through our work, we could:
 - a. Display God's character?
 - b. Build up the body and care for one another (not just through something like a Bible Study at work, but through our work itself). How could we lead people to worship, praise, or come to a better understanding of God's presence and character through our work?
 - c. Demonstrate God's dominion or maintain God's dominion over us and creation?
2. In what way do you see the three basic temptations—doubting God's goodness, doubting God's word, and doubting God's plan—impacting your work situation? In what ways could our work produce a "golden calf"? **MRT**
3. In what ways do you see that Aaron failed in leadership? How could he have turned this around? (Compare with Moses in Exodus 14:13; 15:25; 16:6–36; 17:2.) How would this apply to our situation today, even for those who are not in an organizational leadership role? **MRT**

¹ For more detailed discussions on the theology of work, see Ben Witherington III, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012 and London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2012); Wayne Grudem, *Business for the Glory of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003).

² This paper began as two devotional talks given to a workshop on missional business.

³ Other passages that could be useful additions to these discussions include Exodus 20:8–11 and the whole concept of the Sabbath; Proverbs 31:10–31; Ephesians 3:10; Colossians 3:23; and the theme of "good works" in the Pastoral Epistles.

⁴ In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "create" (בָּרַא) only appears with God as the subject. Thus, there are limits to the ways that mankind can participate in God's work. Only God can do the work that is *creatio ex nihilo*—creation from nothing.

⁵ Cf. Proverbs 16:3; 18:9; 22:9; Ecclesiastes 3:22.

⁶ Cf. Ephesians 6:5–8; Colossians 3:17, 23.

⁷ Cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:11–12; 1 Timothy 5:8.

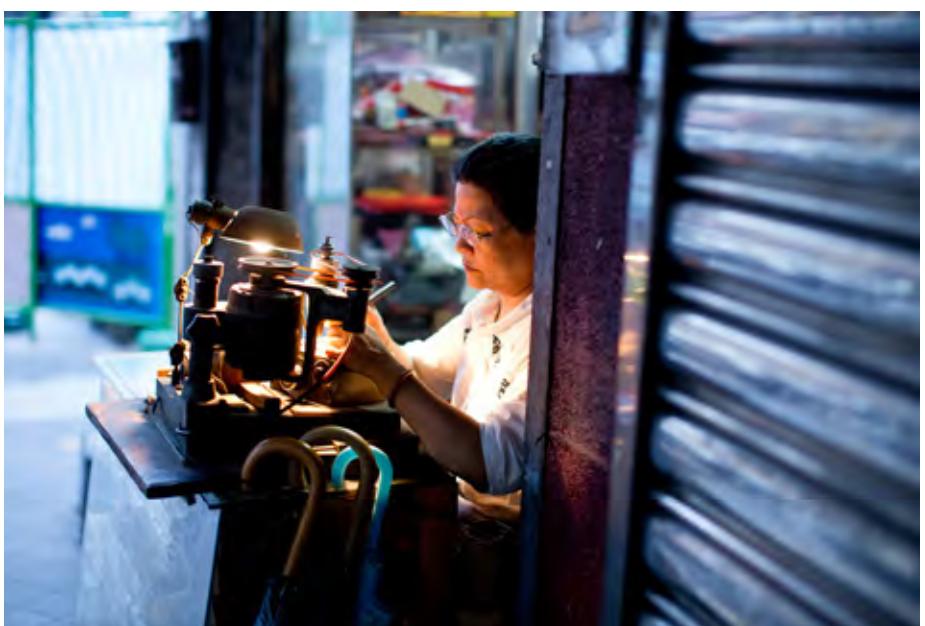
⁸ For more information, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 134–38 and the references given there.

⁹ There is an example of an ANE statue that uses the word for image to connect an ancient governor to his god. See "Tell Fekherya bilingual inscription," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tell_Fekherya_bilingual_inscription (accessed 17 October 2025).

¹⁰ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: IVP, 1967), 57.

¹¹ These questions come from Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 22.

¹² For an example of such an approach, see Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 130–38. Many of the ideas in this section came from an exegetical class on Genesis given by Dr. Ross at Dallas Theological Seminary.





Resources from Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOPs)

<https://lausanne.org/occasional-papers>

40

Occasional Paper

Marketplace Ministry

LOP no. 40

59

Occasional Paper

Business as Mission

LOP no. 59

This LOP addresses the gap that often exists between Sunday and Monday, examines the main reasons why the gap develops, and proposes ways for bridging that gap. To do this, it defines marketplace ministry and explains the rise in the use of the term and its setting in the context of the Lausanne movement. Practical themes that are considered include alternative models of marketplace friendly churches, marketplace spirituality, lay-oriented theological education for the marketplace, and models of mission or witness at work for the marketplace. The work concludes with a Marketplace Manifesto and a subject sensitive bibliography aimed at equipping churches to move into this ministry.

The paper starts by addressing the question “What is Business as Mission?” by clarifying key terms and expressions to aid us to communicate clearly and consistently, laying Biblical foundations for Business as Mission, and examining the context for Business as Mission in terms of opportunities and challenges. The next section focuses on the Business as Mission in practice, first fleshing out twelve essential principles of good business as mission, followed by case studies to show how these principles can manifest themselves in different practices and priorities of the business. The third section looks at practical aspects for mobilising for Business as Mission and Partnership. The last section provides specific steps for action and specific strategic recommendations that include useful, practical tips.

62C

Occasional Paper

Following Jesus in the Globalized Marketplace

LOP no. 62C

The first section of this paper by Chris Wright on “God and the Marketplace” looks at how the Bible clearly and comprehensively portrays God as intensely interested and involved in and in charge of the human marketplace. Building on God’s view of the public life and work of the marketplace, the second section addresses God’s call to saints as individuals who work in the marketplace, asking what ought to be the attitude, role, and mission of God’s people in that sphere. The last section addresses the role of the church as a corporate entity.

33

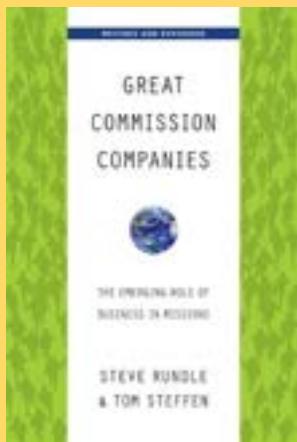
Occasional Paper

Holistic Mission

LOP no. 33

In this LOP, René Padilla provides a general introduction to holistic mission by examining four sectors: economic; health; hunger, agriculture, and water; and relief. The first three sector papers are followed by action plans for churches, NGOs, and the evangelical community as a whole. These papers are offered to the evangelical world in the hope that churches and individuals will take their truths to heart and put them into practice so that the world may know that Jesus is indeed Lord and turn to him in repentance and faith.

BAM Reading List



Great Commission Companies: The Emerging Role of Business in Mission, 2nd edition

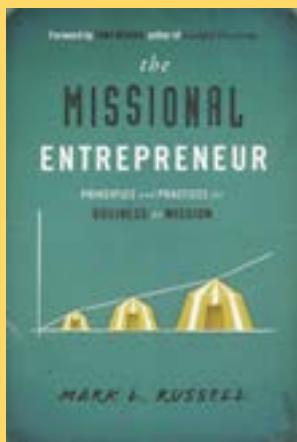
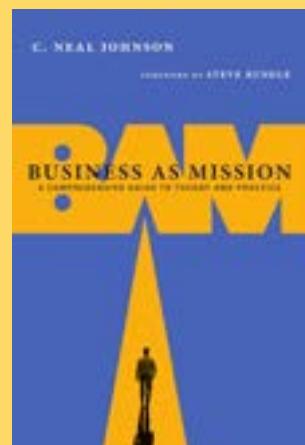
Steven Rundle and Tom A. Steffen (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011)

This book is one of the most widely cited in BAM literature, defining “Great Commission Companies” as businesses intentionally structured to advance Christian mission. The second edition expands on case studies, integrating lessons learned about balancing profitability and ministry effectiveness. It remains a cornerstone text for students, practitioners, and mission strategists.

Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice

C. Neal Johnson (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010)

Johnson provides both theological grounding and practical frameworks for BAM. The volume bridges missiological theory with real-world business practice, offering structured models for how BAM can thrive in cross-cultural contexts. This 500-page book gives an exhaustive overview of everything BAM. Widely used in seminaries and mission agency training programs.



The Missional Entrepreneur: Principles and Practices for Business as Mission

Mark L. Russell (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 2010)

Russell provides practical tools for Christians seeking to integrate entrepreneurial ventures with missionary goals. Drawing on real-life examples, the book outlines best practices and pitfalls to avoid when starting a BAM enterprise.

BAM Global

A global hub for BAM practitioners, scholars, and churches, providing reports, toolkits, and events. Their website serves as the central networking and research platform for the BAM movement. For reports and resources, see <https://bamglobal.org>.

For a recent report highlighting the role of BAM within mission agencies, see: Jo Plummer, *BAM and Mission Agencies: Why and How Agencies Engage in Business as Mission*, BAM Global Report Series (n.p.: BAM Global, 2024), available at: <https://bamglobal.org/reports> (accessed 7 January 2025).