

# What it Means to Be a World Christian

David Bryant

*In 1979, David Bryant published a book titled "In the Gap" which revived the concept of living as a World Christian. The book has recently been revised and abbreviated under the title, "Stand in the Gap." In the full-length book, Bryant uses the imagery of "the Gap" to describe the unfulfilled global purpose of God. "The widest end of the Gap" describes situations in which Christ is known and followed the least. Christ is seen as the sole mediator in "the Gap." This excerpt of the original book remains one of the clearest statements of what it means to be a World Christian.*

**W**hat, then, shall we call this discovery that can change us so radically and yet make us so healthy? And, what shall we call those who have experienced it?

By now it should be obvious that *all* Christians are born again *into* the Gap between God's world-wide purpose and the fulfillment of it. But there's more than one kind of *response* to that Gap.

Some are asleep, some are on retreat, and some are determined to stand in the Gap, particularly at its widest end where billions await the opportunity to hear of Christ for the first time. Some are heading into the "sunrise of missions" while others huddle in the shadows. Many move along at a sluggish pace, changing little in the Gap because of their own internal gap-of-unbelief. Others run the race before them setting no limits on how, where, or among whom God will use them.

Some are trapped in boxes of pea-sized Christianity, full of myths about missions that rob them of incentive to care about the unreached. Others have broken through into cause-Christianity, ready to reach out with God's love to the ends of the earth. They are determined to make Christ's global cause the unifying focus—the context—for all they are and do in the Gap. Yielded to the mediator, they are willing to be broken and remolded to fit in the Gap wherever they can make the most strategic impact. In turn, they're growing to know Christ, obey Him, and glorify Him as the mediator.

So, what shall we call the discovery that redirects Christians toward the needs of the Gap? And how shall we distinguish those who have made it?

Some Christians in the Gap are stunted by selfishness and petty preoccupations or by a cautious obedience and love reserved for the closest and easiest to care about. How shall



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we distinguish the others in the Gap whose growth in discipleship is unmistakable, with a vitality that comes only to those who help bring lost sinners from many nations home?

What shall we call this distinct group of Christians who have taken a stand that says:

We want to accept personal responsibility for reaching some of earth's unreached, especially from among the billions at the widest end of the Gap who can only be reached through major new efforts by God's people. Among every people group where there is no vital, evangelizing Christian community there should be one, there must be one, there shall be one. Together we want to help make this happen.

For a moment, let's call them WORLD CHRISTIANS. Of course, any new term might be misunderstood. For example, some might think I said "worldly" Christians, not World Christians. By now we know, however, if you are one, you can't be the other. If you are one you don't *want* to be the other!

No, the term is not in your Bible concordance. Don't worry. It isn't another cliché like the words of the bumper sticker that read "Honk-if-the-Rapture-starts." Nor is it an attempt to label some new spiritual elite who have a corner on a super-secret blessing. Rather, the term describes what all of us are meant to be and what some of us have started to become.

The term "World Christian" may have been coined first by Daniel Fleming in a 1920 YMCA book entitled *Marks of a World Christian*. More recently the term has appeared in publications of such groups as the World Team missions, Conservative Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, United Presbyterian Center for Mission Studies, the Mission Renewal Teams, Inc., and the Fellowship of World Christians, as well as Campus Crusade for Christ and Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

A World Christian isn't better than other Christians. But by God's grace, he has made a discovery so important that life can never be the same again. He has discovered the truth about the Gap, the fact that he is already in it, and the call of Christ to believe, think, plan,

and act accordingly. By faith, he has chosen to *stand* in the Gap as a result.

Some World Christians are missionaries who stand in the Gap by physically crossing major human barriers (cultural, political, etc.) to bring the gospel to those who can hear no other way. But every Christian is meant to be a World Christian, whether you physically "go," or "stay at home" to provide the sacrificial love, prayers, training, money, and quality of corporate life that backs the witness of those who "go."

World Christians are day-to-day disciples for whom Christ's global cause has become the integrating, overriding priority for all that He is for them. Like disciples should, they actively investigate all that their Master's Great Commission means. Then they act on what they learn.

World Christians are Christians whose life-directions have been solidly transformed by a world vision. This is not a term for frustrated Christians who feel trapped into the world missionary movement and sporadically push a few buttons to say they've done their part. Having caught a vision, World Christians want to keep that vision and obey it unhesitatingly.

World Christians are (in Corrie Ten Boom's phrase) tramps for the Lord who have left their hiding places to roam the Gap with the Savior. They are heaven's expatriates, camping where the Kingdom is best served. They are earth's dispossessed, who've journeyed forth to give a dying world not only the gospel but their own souls as well. They are members of God's global dispersion down through history and out through the nations, reaching the unreached and blessing the families of earth.

By taking three steps we become World Christians. First, World Christians *catch* a world vision. They see the cause the way God sees it. They see the full scope of the Gap. Next, World Christians *keep* that world vision. They put the cause at the heart of their life in Christ. They put their life at the heart of the Gap. Then World Christians *obey* their world vision. Together they develop a strategy that makes a lasting impact on the cause, particularly at the widest end of the Gap.

Many years ago a World Christian named John R. Mott, leader of the Student Volunteer Movement that sent out 20,000 new missionaries, outlined similar steps:

An enterprise which aims at the evangelization of the whole world in a generation, and contemplates the ultimate establishment of the Kingdom of Christ, requires that its leaders be Christian statesmen with far-seeing views, with comprehensive plans, with power of initiative, and with victorious faith.

Catch! Keep! Obey!—these are the three steps to becoming a World Christian. Let's examine them a little more closely in outline form:

### Step One: Catch a World Vision

- See God's world-wide *purpose* in Christ
- See a world full of *possibilities* through Christ
- See a world full of *people* without Christ
- See my world-sized *part* with Christ

### Step Two: Keep a World Vision

- *Be* a World Christian
- *Join* with other World Christians
- *Plan* to obey the vision

### Step Three: Obey a World Vision

- Obey as you regularly *build* your vision
- Obey as you *reach out* directly in love
- Obey as you *give* your vision to other Christians
- Obey as you *pray* your vision back to God.

How can someone know if they've taken these three basic steps toward becoming a World Christian? Here are some important clues:

#### STEP ONE: *Have I caught a world vision?*

**PURPOSE:** Do I see the big picture of Christ's global cause from God's point of view?

**POSSIBILITIES:** Do I see the Church's potential in our generation for closing the Gap between God's world-wide purpose and its fulfillment?

**PEOPLE:** Do I see the great scope of the earth's unreached peoples, espe-

cially the billions at the widest end of the Gap who have yet to clearly hear the gospel?

**PART:** Do I believe that I, along with other Christians, can have a strategic impact on Christ's global cause right now?

#### STEP TWO: *Have I kept a world vision?*

**BE:** Am I willing to stand in the Gap with Christ, to unite my whole relationship with Him around His global cause?

**JOIN:** Am I willing to team-up with other World Christians to stand in the Gap together?

**PLAN:** Am I willing to design specific ways to obey my world vision and help close the Gap?

#### STEP THREE: *Do I obey a world vision?*

**BUILD:** Do I take time to study the cause? Am I letting my world vision grow?

**REACH OUT:** Do I personally get involved in the cause? Am I helping to reach unreached peoples, especially at the widest end of the Gap?

**GIVE:** Do I transfer my vision to other Christians? Am I seeking more World Christians to stand in the Gap and serve the cause?

**PRAY:** In solidarity with the promises of God, am I interceding for those who cannot (yet) intercede for themselves? Even more strategically, am I seeking God for a spiritual awakening to Christ throughout the Church, which alone can mobilize and empower a fresh, vital missionary movement among the nations?

Ultimately, however, becoming a World Christian goes beyond "steps" that we take. It is the gracious work of Christ Himself! Our faith must always be in Him, not in any simple three-step process. It is Christ who opens us up to catch His world vision. He alone anchors us to that vision and then empowers us to effectively obey it. With the hymn writer all World Christians appeal to Christ: "Be Thou my Vision, Oh Lord of my Heart."

