

## BUSINESS AS MISSION



### Entrepreneurs on Mission: Two Barriers to Break Through

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**by Mark Russell**

There comes a day when we sit back and ask ourselves what we are going to do with our lives. In a sense, I am still asking myself that question. But many years ago I felt a nudge, a call if you will, to spend time in cross-cultural contexts advancing the gospel. At the time, I had no idea what that entailed. The only role models I had to look to were the missionaries I had met in Paraguay. They were either medical doctors or preachers. As a business student, it seemed I would have to leave behind my business interests and develop a new set of skills.

A few years into my overseas ministry, I began to ask myself some new questions about why

couldn't one be a businessperson and a kingdom builder at the same time. At the time I was working in a traditional missionary setting, but quickly found that a lot of people resonated with my search to integrate business and mission. Later, I realized that people all over the world were working independently to the same end. It seems God is up to something.

Over the years, as I have worked in various business as mission activities and talked to many others who have been likewise engaged, two points have emerged as worthy of examination.

## Breaking Categorizations

First, Westerners tend to live according to categories that are not always beneficial. This tendency is not limited to Westerners but is expressed more strongly there. This is the sort of categorization that leads us to designate one person a "missionary" and another person as not.

Paul was a tentmaker because that is who he was, who he was designed by the Designer to be.

For example, ask most people if the Apostle Paul was a missionary or an entrepreneurial businessman. They will tend to reply that he

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was a church planting apostolic missionary or something to that effect. Nevertheless, a close study of his life and work reveals that he was both. For many of us, it's difficult to accept that, so some in the church have taught over the years that Paul worked as a tentmaker solely for financial purposes i.e. to pay the bills so he could preach the gospel.

However, a closer look reveals that Paul lived and breathed the gospel everywhere he went and generally he went and worked as a tentmaker. Paul was a tentmaker because that is who he was, who he was designed by the Designer to be.

Our categorization causes us to force choices we should not have to face. Should a businessperson have to choose between their work and serving God? Nonsense. We can and should do both.

## Rethinking Mission

Second, we have troubling definitions of what it means to be engaged in mission.


This is particularly problematic when one realizes that the truth is **we are all called to be on mission with God**. It is not a unique or special call, but a reality that we should all recognize. In my way of thinking, to “be on mission” is not the same as “going into missions.”

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One of the unfortunate side effects of “categorizing” life is that we shift what should be ultimate into a category. Mission is one of those things. Frequently it is understood that missions (note the s) is serving in ministry in a cross-cultural context. Mission is different. Mission is being engaged with whatever God is doing wherever you are. That is what we are all called to do.

This means that our job or location can change but our mission should not. Maybe someone should change careers or locations, but that’s not at all necessary to be on mission.

I believe that these two points, our fondness for categorization and our inadequate definitions of mission, are barriers that have prevented countless Christian businesspeople from being actively involved in business as mission. When we realize that we are all on mission and our location or vocation does not matter, then we are released to be more fully and actively involved in mission as businesspeople.



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Recently, I traveled to a foreign country and confused some missionaries when I said that

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their greatest hope of reaching that country for Christ was to convince the local entrepreneurs that they were present-day Apostle Pauls. They were a bit confused because they considered the work of Paul to be focused on a church-based ministry as opposed to a marketplace one. Furthermore, they assumed mission, or missionaries, had to be cross-culturally engaged.

It is worth noting that globalization offers businesspeople everywhere the opportunity to be engaged with businesspeople everywhere else. Thus we have a unique opportunity to be engaged in cross-cultural work like never before, sometimes, without even moving. Not too long ago, I worked with a consulting company that set up a new company for a South African in Thailand. No one moved to Thailand, yet the South African now sources shirts and whatnot from there. This was all arranged by Americans. Almost every week, I have conference calls with people in India or China or somewhere else. When we welcome the idea of globalization, we see a brave new world with a bright future of opportunities.

Despite these wonderful opportunities for engaging cross-culturally, I still believe that our greatest hope is showing entrepreneurs all over the world how they can be engaged with God's mission right where they are.

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It is sometimes tempting to have grandiose imaginations that have us speculating about big scale multinational endeavors. But the truth is that most business is conducted through small businesses on a local level and most people come to Christ through genuine relationships with people they know and trust.

Business as mission should be focused on that reality.

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*First published on The BAM Review in October 2014 and reposted to go with our series on Paul the Apostle*

*[<https://businessasmission.com/the-apostle-paul-an-entrepreneurial-steward/>] this month.*

*For more on what we can learn from Paul for business as mission we recommend Mark's book The Missional Entrepreneur*

*[<http://www.businessasmission.com/resources/missional-entrepreneur/>] .*

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*[<http://www.businessasmission.com/resources/missional-entrepreneur/>] : Principles and Practices for Business as Mission and the editor/publisher of Our Souls at Work [[http://www.russell-media.com/\\_product\\_75924/Our\\_Souls\\_at\\_Work\\_-\\_How\\_Great\\_Leaders\\_Live\\_Their\\_Faith\\_in\\_the\\_Global\\_](http://www.russell-media.com/_product_75924/Our_Souls_at_Work_-_How_Great_Leaders_Live_Their_Faith_in_the_Global_)*

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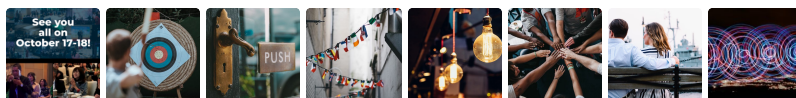
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