



OUT OF
COMMISSION

GETTING EVERY CHRISTIAN
BACK *to the*
GREAT COMMISSION

PAUL CHAPPELL

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Striving Together Publications
4020 E. Lancaster Blvd.
Lancaster, CA 93535
800.201.7748

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O N E

A NEGLECTED MISSION

Remember those chore lists your mom would leave you with as she hurried out the door to an appointment? *You* probably hopped right to it and got your list completed before your mom returned. I didn't always. But those are stories for another time and place (particularly because my mom reads my books).

Mom doesn't leave me chore lists anymore, which I'm sure we'll all agree is an indisputable evidence of my maturity. But a few years ago, I found myself with that nagging unfinished chore list dilemma again. Only this time, it wasn't my mom I was going to answer to; it was my grandmother. And it wasn't a list before she left; it was a truck to repair before she returned.

When my granddad died, my grandmother gave me his 1988 brown Ford truck. For me, this was an invaluable gift. The truck

holds memories of time I got to spend with one of the greatest men I've known. If you knew my granddad, you would agree.

The only problem was that the truck needed repairs, and I didn't have time immediately to get it fixed. So it sat in my backyard—a model of memories. I was happy with the arrangement. Just seeing the truck from time to time reminded me of Granddad and the many memories I shared with him in the truck.

But then something happened that changed the way I looked at the model truck in my backyard. Grandmother planned a visit to California.

I love my grandmother and was, of course, excited for her to come—except for one thing. The truck. Looking at the truck through her eyes, I realized how sorely it had deteriorated. What I had enjoyed as a shiny model of memories was actually looking more like a neglected old pickup.

So I did what any kid would do before his mother comes home to see his uncompleted list. I hid it. Yes, I moved the truck to my married son's house so Grandmother wouldn't see it.

The pastor of our church's Spanish ministry helped me get the truck moved. As we finished, I began to feel a bit of remorse and wondered aloud what it would take to get the truck restored. I even asked him if he knew any mechanics who would be equal to the task. He said he did and would give me their contact information.

A few days later, Grandmother came. We had a great time together. And then she left. And I forgot all about the truck. Out of sight, out of mind.

Some months later, I celebrated my birthday. Actually, the Spanish department of our church celebrated my birthday—in

a big way. Weeks earlier, they had taken up an offering to pay for the restoration of Granddad's truck. With the truck safely hidden from my sight at my son's house, they had been able to haul it off and do serious work on it. A mechanic in our church helped, working on the engine during his off time for a few weeks. They had the seats reupholstered, bought new tires, and added shiny rims.

When the Spanish department presented Granddad's restored truck to me after the morning service one Sunday, I could hardly believe my eyes. What a gift! Their careful work had removed the evidences of neglect. Granddad would have been proud.

The old, out-of-commission truck is an example of the cost of neglect. What had once been a useable truck was put out of commission simply through neglect.

It is also an example of the possibility of repair. The neglect could be reversed! Now, I use the truck, and my own grandson, Camden, is building memories of his own of time with *his* Papa as we take it out on drives together.

Like my granddad's truck, many local churches are deteriorating through neglect of their purpose. Christ gave us a mission—we could call it a chore list, but it's far bigger than that. It is our solemn responsibility. That mission is to evangelize the world.

But we've neglected our duty. Sat down on the job. Forgotten our purpose.

The result? We're out of commission.

I'm not talking in terms of cosmetic damage. It's not just like our paint is chipped or our door handles are broken.

I'm talking in terms of our entire purpose. We've neglected the mission Christ gave us to accomplish.

And here's the real clincher: Jesus is returning any day.

What will He think of our neglect?

POWERLESS AGAINST DISUSE

During World War II, the United States produced warships in astounding numbers. Basically, it was a race to see if we could produce them faster than the Axis powers could sink them. We won the race, and after the war, the navy had more ships on its rosters than it could keep in service. Battleships are expensive to build, and that cost is fairly impossible to recover by dismantling the ships. So the navy came up with a solution—a reserve fleet. These ships would be harbored with minimal maintenance so that they could be activated within 120 days should the need arise.

The best known of these fleets is located in Suisun Bay, California, thirty miles northeast of San Francisco. Today, however, you couldn't find a ship in the fleet that could be ready for naval service within 120 days. Properly called the "Reserve Fleet," it's more commonly, and accurately, called the "Mothball Fleet." Once a mighty fleet (as large as a respectable navy in its own right), the ships here are in serious disrepair. Rusted, corroded, and neglected, they are one by one being tugged away to be turned into scrap metal or (as in the case of one fortunate ship, the *USS Iowa*) made into museums.

Originally numbering over 350 ships, the fleet is down to a mere 10 ships as of this writing. It is scheduled to disappear

entirely by 2017, leaving only twenty tons of heavy metal in the bay waters as evidence to the majesty that once was.

What transformed these mighty ships—the heroes of World War II sea battles—into mildewed and corroded skeletons? What disfigured these vessels into worthless relics of years gone by?

The answer in a word: neglect.

The ships that could engage world powers in battle—and win—were powerless against disuse. And so they sit.

Broken.

Rusting.

Out of commission.

They remind me of local churches who have similarly suffered the disgraces of neglect. Thankfully, we do not rely on the flesh, and the moving of the Spirit does not rest. Yet as disciples of Christ, you and I are engaged in a war which we must win. It is a spiritual war, and our commission, delivered by Christ Himself, was spoken with the assurance of the power we need to engage:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

—MATTHEW 28:18–20

And yet, *in the midst of the war*, I'm watching Christians and entire churches assign *themselves* to the mothball fleet.

While the battle rages, they neglect the life-or-death orders given by our Commander.

Sure, they *know* the commission; they've just forgotten its central importance. They've set anchor in the bay convinced that they're prepared to serve "if the need arises" or "when the opportunity comes."

My friend, the opportunity has come. The need is here. We live in a post-Christian culture proudly riding a landslide away from the truth. And swept in the landslide are millions—*billions*—of people speeding toward a Christless eternity.

Tragically, while the carnage takes place around us, we sit in the harbor, our mission neglected, bemoaning the fate of the world.

It's not that we're lazy. No, our churches are full of programs and activities. Our lives are busier than our grandparents would have believed possible. But for all our activity, we never leave harbor. Our ministries become more about service than about reaching lost men and women with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

According to the Barna Group, a nationwide research organization, three out of four Christians in the United States (74 percent) will share their faith only through "lifestyle evangelism"—unwilling to be a direct, verbal witness to the lost around them.¹ Only 30 percent (less than one-third) said they personally share the plan of salvation with anyone on a regular basis.²

We must not let this pattern continue. We must put our vessels back in commission and once again engage in the battle for souls.

Like the ships in Suisun Bay, I see our churches and individual Christians one by one pulling out of the battle. Great churches of the past stand as museums to what once was, while Christians today are losing influence and silencing their own voices in the cause of Christ.

So here we sit. Distracted. Rusting. Waiting our turn to be turned into museums.

But there is a job to be done! Christ commissioned the local church to be His vehicle for reaching the world with the gospel. Now is not the time to release our commission...or even to merely hold our ground. Now is the time to weigh anchor and reengage our vessels.

OWNING OUR BIBLICAL RESPONSIBILITY

To be entrusted with the gospel is a privilege. To fulfill that trust requires that we own it as a responsibility.

You've seen the sixteen-year-old who can't wait to get behind the wheel. He lives for the moment he will get his driver's license; and in his teenage mind, driving Dad's car is the entitlement that rides on the heels of that license. Then, the very day he is awarded that long-dreamed-of license, he totals Dad's car. That young man had a strong sense of entitlement, but a weak sense of responsibility.

When it comes to the Great Commission, we don't have the luxury of entitlement without responsibility. The church is *Christ's* possession—not ours. And the job *He* has given the church is to reach the world with the gospel in our generation.

The Apostle Paul got it. He saw the responsibility and made it his life purpose: “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:14–16).

Too many Christians today have gotten distracted with entitlement and have forgotten responsibility. While we squabble about issues of “liberty,” we neglect a world literally dying and going to Hell.

On one hand, there are the Christians who—like a teenage driver who abandons responsibility for the thrill of entitlement—abandon responsibility to reach the world and rejoice in their personal liberty. Their lives are consumed with defending their right to live in “freedom.” They will fiercely defend their liberty to drink alcohol, choose their worship style, or simply live life “my way.” Galatians 5:13 instructs, “...use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” Surely this serving one another involves sharing the gospel.

On the other hand, there are Christian leaders who are so focused on policing others’ liberty that they neglect the Great Commission. They fiercely preach against sin, but they don’t reach out to sinners with personal, consistent compassion. They become critical, self-promoting, fruitless leaders who will nearly break their arms to slap themselves on the back for constantly taking the high road of their own definition...while their lives and churches are failing to reach their communities. Yes, we must live holy lives. But Jesus has called us to bear fruit.

Our responsibility is to reach the world with the gospel. We must own our responsibility and personally engage in the Great Commission of Christ.

A PERSONAL COMMISSION

This Great Commission is for the local church—every local church. It is our responsibility to reach the world with the gospel of Christ.

But what makes up the local church? A missions budget? An outreach program?

No, the local church is comprised of people—you and me.

We can't bemoan any longer the ineffectiveness of the church to reach people with the gospel without personally engaging in the commission Jesus gave to us.

I believe that in our minds we tend to paraphrase Jesus' commission by omitting one word—*ye*. Jesus didn't just say, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel." He said, "Go *ye* into all the world and preach the gospel."

What would it take for you to engage personally in the Great Commission? Instruction? Repairs? Motivation? A reminder of the opportunity to make a difference? I pray this book will deliver all of the above. I write to challenge you to engage personally and passionately in the Great Commission of Christ.

This book explores what has pulled us out of commission. Why don't we evangelize as we should? It examines biblical motivations for reengaging our culture with the gospel. And it gives practical suggestions for getting the job done.

Are you ready to move forward? We'll begin in the next chapter by exploring what has been holding us back.

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- 1 Barna Group, "Survey Shows How Christians Share Their Faith" (January 31, 2005), <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/5-barna-update/186-survey-shows-how-christians-share-their-faith?#.UoEgtKVvdFw>.
 - 2 Barna Group, "Survey Shows How Christians Share Their Faith" (June 25, 2001), <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/5-barna-update/53-religious-beliefs-vary-widely-by-denomination#.UoEhNqVvdFw>.

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