

Missions Analysis

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Introduction to Missions Analysis

In the following paper, I will explore the findings of an interview with a missionary who is engaged on the field in Queens, NY. I had the special privilege of personally engaging in the mission work itself to supplement my interviews. This paper will explore the need to be sensitive to the specific missional approaches that can be effective in a community based on the community's unique characteristics. Furthermore, I will explore how the house church model is a more beneficial compared to a western model for church in a missional context.

Interview Setting

I met with missionary Kenton Killebrew during the Cultural Immersion program at Alliance Theological Seminary during Immersion week: one week set aside where our class engaged with the Sikh population in Richmond Hill, NY. I partnered with three other seminarians for this interview and the week's events: Samuel Song, Athaley Albania, and Esther Neves. The interview setting was at Ateaz Organic Coffee & Tea in Kew Gardens, NY on March 18, 2023. The café seemed regularly busy on a Saturday, especially for an 11 am - 12pm timeframe. Outside of the interview, our team got to do ministry with Killebrew during a park outreach event and at his house church. Several weeks after Immersion week, I request a separate zoom interview with Killebrew regarding some follow up questions particular for this assignment. The latter interview was on April 26, 2023 and was approximately from 2 - 4 pm. Killbrew is a part of a ministry called the Global Gates Network (GGN), and is intentionally reaching out to the Sikh community in Richmond Hill, NY. Killebrew works alongside GGN laborer Billy Jones, another missionary from Alabama as well.

Missions Description

Kenton Killebrew and his wife Haley Killebrew are originally from Alabama, where their home church sent them out to be missionaries in NYC to the Sikh community. Both having successful secular careers, missions was not on their minds for several years. However, after they both went on a mission trip to Africa, they saw, “God’s hand in redeeming the nations.” The Lord gave them a sight for internationals in their midst. In 2011, they started going to a Sikh restaurant in AL, and they befriended the two workers. The Killebrews were amazed at their hard work, as they labored everyday, 7 days a week, and had no social network in America.. Kenton stated that God filled their eyes with “compassion” similar to how Jesus had compassion for the crowds before He fed the 5,000.¹ It was there that the Lord placed the Sikh community on their heart. The couple began to intentionally explore options for ministry. The Killebrews decided to not have a seminary degree, but were instead trained by GGN, and took a course called, “Perspectives,” based on the book, “Perspectives on the World Christian Movement” by Ralph Winters.

For Kenton, the nature of missions is the direct opposite of the “tower of babel.” In Genesis 11, after the great flood receded and the population had multiplied, they sought to build a great city, with, “a tower that reaches to the heavens.”² The work to establish a city and tower in Babel was to magnify man. Missiologist Timothy Tennet states that at the, “Tower of Babel, the people were determined to make a name for themselves,”³ and to build their own kingdom versus the Kingdom of God. The temptation for this elevation of humanity is commonplace in the secular, but also, and unfortunately in ministry contexts. Affirming quite differently, Kenton provided the following definition for mission, stating it is, “our partnership with God and His

¹ Matthew 14:14 (NIV)

² Genesis 11:4 (NIV)

³ Tennet, Timothy C. “Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century.” Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010. pg 107.

mission to redeem all people to Himself.” Kenton’s concept of missions is God centric, as he explains it is for, “His namesake. It’s His mission. It’s all about Jesus.” For Kenton, our calling as missional people should seek to point people to Christ, and elevate Him and His story in every aspect of life. In doing so, Jesus is ascribed His rightful place as God and Savior, while all man’s efforts for salvation are futile. A number of missional scholars would agree with Killebrew’s definition. Tennent states that,

“mission refers to God’s redemptive, historical initiative on behalf of His creation. Mission is first and foremost about God and His redemptive purposes and initiatives in the world, quite apart from any actions or tasks or strategies or initiatives the church may undertake. To put it plainly, mission is far more about God and who He is than about us and what we do.”⁴

For Tennent, God’s work to redemption is not just for humanity, but for all creation. It is God who initiates, and takes action to bring about salvation to the world. The church, submitted to Christ, has the incredible opportunity to partner with God in His work. However, many theologians would claim that missions has an added component, which is to to traverse across barriers in an effort to expand His Kingdom. Stephen Neill states, “Mission is the intentional crossing of barriers from Church to non-church in word and deed for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel.”⁵ David Bryant adds to this component, stating, missions is “the intentional, sacrificial penetration of major human barriers...to plant communities of responsible disciples of Jesus Christ among groups of people where none have existed before.”⁶ Therefore, mission has the added component of not only going across various barriers that divides humanity, but as Bryant states it is bringing the message of Jesus to those who have not heard or have not been priorly exposed. Kenton’s ministry philosophy assumes both of these additional factors, while not explicitly citing it in his statement.

⁴ Tennent, Timothy C. “Invitation to World Missions,” 2010. pg 54-55.

⁵ Van Engen, Charles, God’s Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of Local Church,” United States, Baker House, 1991. Quote extracted from: Neill, Stephen, “How My Mind Has Changed about Mission,” video recording produced by Overseas Ministries Study Center, 1984.

⁶ Bryant, David. In the Gap. United States: Regal Books, 1984. (class resource).

Regarding the various styles of mission work the Killebrews were engaged in, there are predominately four strategies that they employed. The first strategy was plainly attending their place of worship called the Gurdwara. The Gurdwara is more than just a temple for the Sikh people, but a gathering point for the whole community.

To explain how the Gurdwara is a gathering point, I first must touch on a few key elements of the Sikh faith. The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, claimed to have a mystical experience where he communicated with God. Following that encounter, Nanak claimed that, "There is neither Hindu nor Muslim,"⁷ there is only one God, and that all humans are equal, despite areas of "caste, gender, religion, and ethnicity."⁸ Therefore, Sikhism was founded to break down all social barriers in society. This specifically speaks to the caste system, a social hierarchy in India based in Hinduism where one is born into a certain status and profession, cannot move out of one's caste. One of the most profound expressions of this is a meal that is offered almost all day at the Gurdwara called the Langar. The Holy Book of Sikhism called the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, states that "The Langar - the Kitchen of the Guru's Shabad has been opened, and its supplies never run short."⁹ As it is a meal for all people, it had a profound effect on society in India, as Kenton states, "The Langar broke the caste system." Therefore, for the missionaries to attend the temple service, and then attend the meal afterwards was a natural way to connect with people. And attending their place of worship was also a way to be seen.

A second style of mission work that Kenton and his team attempted was street evangelism. In this effort, the team would walk around Richmond Hill in areas where Sikhs were prevalent, (for example: like the business district like 101st Ave), walk up to people and try to engage in conversations. The team pursued this effort for about 2 - 3 years, but they did not see

⁷ Largen, K. J., *Finding God Among Our Neighbors*, 37.

⁸ Largen, K. J., *Finding God Among Our Neighbors*, 37.

⁹ Guru Granth Sahib. 967. "Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji," English Translation by Dr. Sant Singh Khalsa, MD. Updated 2006. <https://www.srigurugranth.org/0967.html>

much fruit in it. A likely reason Kenton mentioned was that Kenton and Billy were viewed suspiciously when engaging in this way. As many in the community are undocumented, a visual of 2 white men approaching them on the street signaled that they could work for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and therefore be seeking illegals for deportation. After little success in this effort, they pursued a change in strategy. Our seminary team joined Kenton, Haley, and their kids on March 16th, 2023 at 3pm while they served in Phil "Scooter" Rizzuto Park, in South Richmond Hill, NY. The new strategy is having a table set up in the park, with some homemade Indian Chai tea and some booklets, a bible in Punjabi, as well as a few other pamphlets in a few Asian languages (Bengali and Hindi). The benefit in this context was, according to Kenton, the engagement was, "self selective." The people that come to the table are already interested in some level of conversation, or, they can walk on. And with a sign, tea, and bibles, it keeps the people's fear at bay regarding immigration. I was surprised that Kenton said no one became upset coming by the table, but conversely many Sikhs have come by glad that he has a table about God (even though the faith was different). For the Sikhs, since there is only one God, it doesn't matter whether one is discussing the Christian or Muslim, or another god. While this is a positive in one way, it does highlight the challenge in bringing Sikhs to Christ as they would have to renounce their faith and accept Christ.

The last form of ministry the Killebrews participate in is house church. The invitation is open to all, but particularly those they have developed relationships with or even met that same week. The 3 pm, Saturday service consists of worship, a small sermon, communion, followed by a delicious vegetarian, home cooked meal (vegetarian to accommodate all faiths and beliefs). Our team got to attend during our week in Richmond Hill, and it was an incredible time. There were 2 families that attended, with tragic stories. One was a single mother with 2 autistic children, whose father recently left them. The second was a married mother with her son, and it

was verbalized that there was physical abuse in the home. We engaged with the children and adults for several hours. All parties were incredibly blessed by the other company.

Concerning challenges to presenting the gospel, one of the biggest issues stems from syncretism. In eastern religions, there is often a lot of blending of the different faiths. For example, it is not uncommon for Punjabis in Richmond Hill to adhere to aspects of Hinduism, and Sikhism at the same time. As a result of this tolerance of merging different faith beliefs, the greatest challenge is for those who like or even adopt Christianity to fully reject the other faiths and choose Jesus as the *only* way. Even after a healing or miracles takes place in one's life, some Sikhs have no issue with simply taking on Jesus as Holy teacher, or for the Hindus another god, versus the only God.

Regarding social justice, there are a few primary issues the Killebrew identity as primary within Richmond Hill. Two that have the tendency to be interconnected is abuse and abandonment. I encountered the two former points at the house church. There Lady #1's husband abandoned her, and left her with two autistic children. Lady #2's situation was where she was beaten at home. Sadly, she even confessed to beating her son, but then stated she would stop herself. The Killebrews stated that this story is unfortunately common. During our Immersion week, we noticed a lot more men than women outside. This was not only due to a patriarchal society, but according to the Killebrew's, the women (despite the claims of equality in Sikhism) are viewed subserviently, not let out of the home, and physically abused.

Other forms of social justice that are real needs is immigration work and alcoholism. Regarding the former, many come to the US to work, and with the hope to make enough for their families to bring them. However, for many, especially married men who come along, they are left with the reality of hard, toilsome work. While the pay is significant for Indian Rupee's, as illegals, they are barely getting by in the states, while making enough to send money to support

their families back home, let alone to save enough to fulfill the dream of bringing their families to America. As local Punjabi Pastor Raj Paul, who drives uber and does ministry 5 nights a week, stated, “America is not for us, it’s for them.” The overwork, little pay, and being part from families often leads to severe alcoholism in the community. One of my first nights in Richmond Hill, I was eating alone at Sohna Punjab Indian Restaurant on Atlantic Ave. Half way through the meal, a door opened (that I didn’t know was there) and a Sikh man walked out of the basement. He was as surprised to see me as I was him. After him came 6 men of all ages (young and old), and one carried a big bottle of whiskey. Kenton informed me of a story about a basement full of married men away from their families. Every night, they would get drunk and cry longing for their families in Punjab. One father missed the whole life of his daughter, as he left when she was two, and saw her again 18 years later.

Missions Analysis

Kenton and Haley Killebrew were an incredible couple. I was very impressed with how they left a lucrative and comfortable life to pursue the call of God. One of the key takeaways from the interview was just how challenging ministry can be. While unable to explain the details, the Killebrews went through a depth of painful circumstances in Richmond Hill that was heartbreaking. I could sense their lament and struggle with God, and yet, their resolve to stay the course and complete the task God has for them. Aside from the personal difficulty, there were immense challenges of ministering to a different culture in so many ways. So many things were foreign, and it required immense patience and grace to stay the course. Jerry Trousdale describes suffering while on mission in this light:

“Of course, no one wants to suffer. A healthy Christian does not go around looking for trouble, trying to get himself martyred. However, it is not possible to describe the amazing willingness of those who have suffered grievously for the gospel to again and

again put themselves in situations where they suffer for the privilege of rescuing a few more Muslims from their despair to freedom in Jesus.”¹⁰

Trousdale describes, in a way, how Kenton’s team reacted to the suffering they experienced.

Though through tears, they were committed to continue to bring the gospel to the Sikh people with the hope that their neighbors will encounter the love of Christ.

Biblical Foundations

As a result of Adam's transgression against the Lord in Genesis 3, mankind was under the dominion of Satan and sin. The punishment of sin is death,¹¹ which has rippling consequences as this not only spoke to the physical death, decay and disease that would come over creation, but a spiritual death for humanity as well, unless God intervened. And yet, that is precisely what God did when He sent his son. Jesus Christ was sent by God the Father to earth to become man, and redeem all creation for the glory of the Father. He did this by taking our place in death, offering the penalty for sin. Being that Christ was sinless, “death had no mastery over him.” He arose from the dead, defeating sin and death, and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father.

Before He ascended back to heaven, Christ called his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”¹² In order to be fully on mission, the believer must do both of what this command requires: go and make disciples. The belief of being sent is not only in the NT, but in the OT as well.. In Isaiah, God asks those in heaven (with Isaiah present), ““Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”¹³ The Apostle Paul states, “how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”¹⁴ citing again the need to be sent. The believer intentionally going

¹⁰ Trousdale, Jerry, “ Miraculous Movements: How Hundreds of Thousands of Muslims Are Falling in Love with Jesus.” Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Inc. © 2012. pg 145.

¹¹ Romans 6:23 (NIV)

¹² Matthew 28:19 (NIV)

¹³ Isaiah 6:8 (NIV)

¹⁴ Romans 10:14 (NIV)

out to those who have not heard is not only in an act of obedience, but also it is walking in the will of God and not man's will. Christ only did what he saw the Father do, and as Christians, we should do the same.

The second part of this command is to "make disciples." This is an important distinction compared to making "converts to Christianity." Christ walked with his disciples for three years before He was crucified. As discussed in class, Jesus did not try to get the disciples to say a "sinners" prayer, but instead He said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."¹⁵ Becoming a Christian is becoming like Christ. The only way to do that is denying yourself in a total way, and following Christ and His example in scripture. Therefore, to make disciples is to walk alongside others in community, teaching from the word and showing with one's own life how to follow Christ.

Compare and contrast

I personally am quite aligned with Kenton's understanding of mission. He stated, again, that mission is, "our partnership with God and His mission to redeem all people to Himself." As this statement is all about Christ, bringing glory to Him, and not seeking one's own kingdom but Christ's, I support this totally. The only thing that I would add is an explanation of living out the great commission in Matthew 28:19 (explained above). However, in action, Kenton's ministry was not only obeying the great commission, but living it out well too.

Potential weaknesses in the missions approach

The only weakness that comes to mind is their current evangelism posture of the table being their primary mode of evangelism. It is a great idea and strategy, however, it requires people to come to them for engagement. Of the different social justice issues stated above,

¹⁵ Matthew 16:24-25 (NIV)

Kenton and Haley mentioned that they would happily like to work towards developing ministries that goes to seek out the abandoned, abused, or those stuck in alcoholism. However, in their limited capacity with a growing family, they do not have the bandwidth to take on those components meaningfully or safely.

Perceived strengths in the missions approach

The strengths of the Killebrews' approach was in successful engagement with the table outreach (mitigating immigration fears), meeting Sikhs in the community context at the Gurdwaras, and their house church. I think the most beautiful and meaningful part of their ministry at the moment is their house church. Creating that safe space for Sikhs to come and engage over the bible with believers and food is very inviting to the Sikh people. This safe space for the Sikhs, especially in the context of the women invited, was a way to share one another's sufferings in community.¹⁶ While small in numbers, I believe it will continue to grow as word gets out that there is a community that loves deeply, and where those who are in painful home environments are welcome (where they are not as welcome to share their struggles elsewhere because of honor / shame culture).

Another strength I didn't mention above was how Kenton connected with a "person of peace," as Jesus alluded to Luke 10. This person is one in the community that is kind and welcoming, and one that will likely lead to other open doors in the community. Jerry Trousdale states that, "people of peace in many cases are people of influence in the community."¹⁷ The person Kenton connected with, Harminder Singh Ahluwalia, is very influential. Ahluwalia is viewed as a hero amongst his peers, as he was instrumental in saving several Muslim women

¹⁶ Hirsch, Alan, "The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches." Grand Rapids, MI, Brazos Press. ©2009. pg 72.

¹⁷ Trousdale, Jerry, "Miraculous Movements: How Hundreds of Thousands of Muslims Are Falling in Love with Jesus." Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Inc. © 2012. pg 92.

from being abducted in Kashmir.¹⁸ I had the privilege of visiting his home, and he shared his moving story. While not a Christian yet, Ahluwalia has still opened many doors for Kenton to minister the gospel message to other Sikhs in the community.

What insights did you gain from this exercise?

Besides those that I've mentioned elsewhere, another insight is how much judgment people of other backgrounds endure. The Sikh people appear and dress a certain way which is foreign to many westerners. As a result, they are often subjected to a lot of discrimination. This is a tragedy since, at least in theory, their Holy Book the Guru Granth Sahib calls for equality for all, and protection of others even at one's own expense. Kenton mentioned this, but as I walked around Richmond Hill myself, I noticed a fear etched in some faces that spoke of being misunderstood, which was a sad, tragic considering how kind and warm many of them are.

Summary

Personal Impact

Probably the most significant impact of this course has been the beauty of the simplicity of mission. Throughout the semester, our class has been challenged to think beyond what is the normative form of church and ministry for the West. As one that has worked in a large and small church in differing capacities, and especially with my role of Operations and Volunteer management, I am familiar with many of the gears that are needed to keep a post Constantinian church running. Sadly, so much of those gears have nothing to do with actual ministry, but instead the maintenance of systems. It is my hope to move away from these western models and simply return to what the bible teaches for a healthy and thriving church.

¹⁸<https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/9/17429/A-Story-of--Compassion---When-Sikhs-Rescued-Kashmiri-Girls-Stranded-in-Patna-->

Missions Possibilities?

I can clearly see an opportunity to replicate aspects of Kenton's mode of ministry to the Turkish population in Patterson, NJ. Amongst some Turks, my actions could trigger a hateful response because I am Armenian, but also the tension between Islam and Christianity. However, also because of my Armenian heritage, it would be a palpial witness to other Turks of Christ's love, as a historic "enemy" would be committed to engage with them in love.

Regarding mission initiatives, I don't know how wise having a table would be on the main street, nor how well it would be received. It would likely be quite dangerous, and unless that was a clear directive from the Lord, I would not pursue that route. Of other mission avenues, learning English is a huge need among Turkish immigrants, and partnering with an ESL program or creating one would be an easy way to develop relationships. However, a big one that I believe can have a lot of success is inviting people over to one's home. As Muslims are very relational and hospitable, it would be a very kind and welcome gesture to invite them over a home cooked meal. Eventually, after several engagements and trust is built, I would invite them to a house church meeting.

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