

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings  
With Thomas Hawkes and Bryan Wintersteen”  
Part Thirty  
October 18, 2020 • Sunday Evening

In this edition of our Q & A we have our missions pastor Bryan Wintersteen and our guest pastor for our Mission’s Conference Dr. Thomas Hawkes joining us. They will be taking questions around this matter of the Great Commission as we live it out in our nation. Our National Mission’s Conference leads us into our Every Member Canvas commitment and 50 percent of what we give in our tithes and offerings at Briarwood is committed to the work of missions and benevolence. A significant amount of that comes out of our Every Member Canvas as 50 cents of every dollar goes to the Great Commission, locally, regionally and nationally.

So I’d like to start with a short devotional. John 20:21 says [21] *Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”* What did the Father send Jesus to do? There are two ways one can know the answer to this. The overarching dynamic is that He is going to accomplish something to give glory to the Father and the preeminence of Jesus the Son and the exaltation of God the Holy Spirit. But what is the task or mission of the Incarnation of Jesus, His Advent? He was sent by the Father. Jesus says ‘I delight to do Your will’ (Psalm 40:8) and “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day” (John 6:39).

In Romans 8:35 it says no one can separate us from the love of God, why? It is because there is no charge against us because God is the One who justifies His elect (Romans 8:33). The Bible tells us that His Name will be Jesus – meaning Jehovah saves – because He will save His people from their sins. The elect of God are found in every tribe and nation which is why Jesus gives the body of Christ – His church – the commission to carry out what He has victoriously accomplished on the cross and affirmed in the empty tomb. Now He has already accomplished the work of redemption. Now He is working on the redeemed by sending His church into all the world to make disciples of all the nations.

We also have a conference that focuses on the Great Commission going internationally into the world but right now we’re looking at the Great Commission as we carry it forward to our nation and fulfill our mission statement as a church. Our mission statement as a church is for God’s glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ.

The Great Commission started its focus on Jerusalem, Samaria, Judea and the utter most parts of the world and this has all kinds of implications. One of those implications is that when you do world evangelism and discipleship with the Gospel you don’t start out there, you start right where you are. They started in Jerusalem which is found in Acts chapters 1 through 8. Then they went to Judea and Samaria which is found in Acts chapters 9 through 12. Then they took the Gospel to the world which is Acts 13 through the end of the book.

Our Jerusalem is Birmingham and then we move to our surrounding areas which is the state of Alabama throughout the Southeast. Then we move to our nation and then to all the nations of the world. It’s never an either or but a both and, that is national and international missions but you start where you are and you don’t stop where you are. When you do what you do well nationally you are actually setting up more resources to get it done internationally. How do you do that? You do it with Gospel evangelism, Gospel discipleship, Gospel church planting and Gospel church revitalization.

The leader of our mission here at Briarwood for this cause of fulfilling the Great Commission is Bryan Wintersteen and we'll hear from him shortly. Then we have with us Dr. Tom Hawkes. My book 3D Leadership: Defining, Developing and Deploying Christian Leaders Who Can Change the World is a product from the time when Tom was over the church planting for the Presbyterian Church in America, which was the training for the church planters, for he asked me to teach on leadership for the church planters. I didn't really have any information on it but he told me that he realized that but that I do it intuitively so he wanted me to think about how I do that. As a result of getting this together I ended up with a couple of books on it so I'm very grateful for that.

Secondly, Tom later came to be a part of a ministry in Charlotte, North Carolina and while he was there he and his family began to worship at Christ Covenant. At the time, I'm at Christ Covenant that was a church plant God very graciously had us a part of and from that other churches were multiplied from which we have three Presbyteries now in that area. One of the keys to getting that done was Tom was ready to go into church planting to train leaders for this so he went out to do Uptown Christ Covenant. Then at RTS he taught church planting with the Institute of Church Planting. So when Bruce and Bryan ask me about speakers for our National Mission's Conference I was so grateful we could get Tom to come because of his heart, his experience and so we can now ask him these questions to find out some insights for us as a church.

Of the 115 national ministries that we do, the predominant focus is on church planting and church revitalization. In this Q & A I think you will find out why this is our predominant focus. So now I'll hand it over to Bruce.

Bruce: One question to Tom, as Pastor Reeder referenced, could you speak about church planting and church revitalization as a priority of our endeavor?

Tom Hawkes: I would say there are two broad reasons why church planting ought to be prioritized. One would be strategic and one would be more theological. Strategically church planting tends to be the building of the resource base. You start with something small and it grows and grows and grows. It is unique that way with all the ministries and we need all kinds of ministries for the Kingdom of God to move forward but the planting and revitalization of the local church has a unique place in the whole expanse of the Kingdom because it becomes the resource space for all that we do. So if you fund a missionary you may fund them for \$10k this year, \$10k next year and in 20 years you may still be funding them for \$10k a year and it's a good investment but there's not necessarily a financial multiplying factor to the ministry they have. There might be people multiplying because they're not directly involved with church planting as good as those ministries are, you end up missing that resource base that's built.

When you start a church plant you are building this resource space and from that resource base you get all kinds of other churches coming out of it. So with Briarwood the \$5600 annual investment of 70 people, now Briarwood is giving away 6 million a year and now maybe hundreds of thousands of people have been sent out and that's a phenomenal resource base that you don't get with any other kind of ministry. So it makes great strategic sense for the Kingdom of God to invest in church planting.

The second reason theologically is maybe even more important than the pragmatic strategic reason for it. That is, as you look at the Great Commission theologically, when you understand what it means, it really is the great church planting commission. I'd like to put that

forward as a point. The Reformers understood this about true church which had to have three marks of the church. You had to have the authoritative preaching of the Word, the right use of the sacraments and thirdly, church discipline. If you look carefully at the Great Commission you see the three marks of the church are contained within it.

The Great Commission is found in Matthew 28:18–20 which says [18] *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

The first part of the commission is one of the marks of the church, particularly the discipline of the church for to make disciples implies that you have some authority. Jesus has authority and He has given it to the church. So you have ecclesiastical authority given to the church to disciple and discipline people to say in the midst of sin ‘no, you must stop and if you don’t stop we can do something about it.’ I could work in campus ministry and tell a student to stop sinning but they could just rub my nose in it and that’s the end of it. Where as a pastor I can say stop and if it doesn’t stop then it goes to the session have a trial and they can be suspended from the sacraments, ex-communicate, etc. so it’s an important key embedded in the Great Commission.

The second mark found in the Great Commission is ‘baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit’ so here Christ is giving the sacraments to the church, particularly to the church. To fulfill the Great Commission you have to have the authority to baptize people and baptism is not given to any one individual but it’s given as a sacrament of the church. Both baptism and the administration of the Lord’s Supper are given to the local church to properly use.

Thirdly, in the Great Commission He says to teach them to observe all that I have commanded you so it’s the teaching of the Gospel ministry of the church that goes forward. So we see the sacraments, the Word and discipline embedded in the Great Commission. Most ministries besides the local church cannot fulfill all those aspects of the Great Commission. The local church is really the only one that has the authority to do all of those. Ministries might do or two but not all of them.

When Jesus gave the Great Commission He meant it to be, I believe the great church planting commission and I think the Disciples took it that way. Immediately the Apostles went out and started planting churches. There are a lot of good ministries out there which we should be doing and supporting but the very core of it is as the Apostles went out preaching the first thing they do is start churches. This is what Paul did as he said to Titus in Titus 1:5, [5] *This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.* Paul knew the work wasn’t done just with evangelism and even with just disciples until the disciples were formed in local churches with proper discipline, the proper use of the sacraments and the ongoing preaching of the Word of God. So for these two reasons this is what most perfectly fulfills the Great Commission that we’re given.

Bruce: You have said that church planting is difficult and painful so I can tell this is not a smooth path. At Briarwood, almost without exception, you don’t hear church planting without church revitalization. The question I have, which I’d like to hear from Tom and Harry on this, is our church prays a lot for church planting, so how would you guide us in that difficult and painful part? How can we best pray for those who are church planting?

Tom Hawkes: I have a couple of thoughts on this. On the prayer side, I would definitely say pray for their hearts to be encouraged. Church planting is a ministry of perseverance. So if I had given up after five years or Harry had given up after five years or even Dr. Barker had given up after five years, we'd not be here telling these stories today. I think there is another practical thing that can be done along with prayer and that is coaching.

When we were sent out from Christ Covenant church, Dr. Reeder agreed to meet with me every month that first year or so and I hung onto those meetings like a drowning man hangs on to a life preserver. I would come each month with a long list of problems and questions and I had no idea how to solve any of them. He would sit down with me and take the time to work through one issue at a time. That was phenomenally helpful and encouraging. As a mother church, the financial resources of giving are obvious, but that's not the biggest challenge. The biggest challenge is the encouragement and the difficulty of it all. So the prayers for perseverance and encouragement are key and then to come along side wherever you can with that kind of coaching, mentoring and even just encouragement. You don't have to be an expert in pastoral leadership to be an encourager to a church planter.

You can be a member in the church who calls and says 'I'm here to pray with you about any needs you have and to see how you're doing.' That means so much to people to have that kind of encouragement. Those relational connections make a huge difference in church planting. You can't do everything for everybody but any touch you can have with them will make a big difference.

Harry: I would agree to all of that and just fill in a few filler statements. I always tell church planters that you think the key to the success of your initiative humanly speaking is who do you get to come and I think the key to your success is who you don't get, because church planting initiatives have a tendency to draw disgruntled people that are looking for leadership because they couldn't get it where they were or they are looking to do what they wanted to do but couldn't get the church to do what they wanted to do so a new church plant becomes an easy opportunity. They know church planters are wanting people so I pray for them because there are people they shouldn't get and that's going to be tough for them.

Secondly, I pray for them to have success events that will become the testimonies that you are hearing Tom share with us today. It's great that you can use them as stories later but it's really great that they become an encouragement. The other day I looked out my back window and saw a small cloud as it is pouring rain in the valley yet there is nothing but clear skies everywhere else. It was just one cloud by itself causing all this raining and a church planter knows what kinds of experiences those are so I pray for that.

Lastly, is exactly what Tom just said, perseverance. I try to tell men that it's probably not going to happen in the first three years or even in the first five years but it's that five to seven year mark that you begin to see what the Lord has planted in. The day that seed is planted in the ground you don't see it working. It is making progress but much of the initial progress of a Gospel ministry is unseen. Then you start seeing it when it comes up.

Bruce: Bryan remind us of our church planting pastors we have now, how our congregation would find out who they are and how to pray for them.

Bryan: It is listed on our website at <https://briarwood.org/missions/>. We also have our teams go to Gospel neglected areas. Our priority is going to areas that once had a strong Christian influence but now has become Gospel neglected. We have prioritized cities like that, like Detroit, Denver, and Boston. These are the cities we are targeting where the Gospel is not really strong and there is not a Christ-centered reformed Presbyterian church. That is where we are sending church planters, to those regions.

Bruce: There was one we heard from recently who had started a church plant with 100 in attendance on the first Sunday and then the pandemic hit but God is still working. There is going to be tremendous fruit that will come out of that. That raises a question for these days there is not a lot of positive news happening in our country so Dr. Hawkes tell us how it's going out there in the church planting area and help us have a fair perspective of it.

Tom Hawkes: There is no question that COVID-19 has been a challenge. I'm coaching church planters all over the world right now and several are just trying to get the core group together yet I'm absolutely shocked at how well it's working. These pastors are adapting to new meetings as they are using ZOOM online. They are doing social distancing. They are finding new ways to creatively reach out in their neighborhood.

I was recently talking with a church planter in Charleston and he was laid out with COVID for 14 days and again for 10 days in the midst of trying to start a church. He has been spending the time in prayer and Bible study so they had their first interest group meeting where they had 28 people show up in person and another 15 online. This just fabulous to see this in the midst of COVID. We are seeing that the Lord is using this crisis, as He does in crisis, to stir people up. You get someone's attention when you start threatening them with death. COVID does that to some extent, right? We see in the media every day how many have died from COVID. It has created an environment where it is difficult to communicate but where people are hungry. So as I am talking to church planters around the country and around the world they are seeing people respond and the church plants are growing in the midst of COVID-19, even under the social separation that is required.

I am shocked actually with all that is happening. I thought there would be no church planting going on in this period of time but all those men out there are pressing ahead, finding ways as the Lord is working in the midst of it and He is drawing people to the Gospel. People are getting saved in the midst of it. Overall it's an encouraging picture with those who are church planting.

Bruce: That is encouraging to hear because you certainly don't hear that on the evening news. So Briarwood is a sending church and that's a unique platform for Briarwood for to whom much is given much is expected so we certainly want to be good stewards of that responsibility but what would you say, Tom, from your experience, advice or counsel or direction, to us as a sending church?

Tom Hawkes: There is great joy and glory for the Lord in sending but it also costs. It's good to realize that it costs when you send out people. You send out some of your best pastors, interns and even when you're doing a daughter church, your best people.

I remember our very first daughter church, we were seven years old, had 400 people and we sent out about 80 to 90 people so it was about a fifth of the congregation and I remember

thinking ‘this will be great for most of the people I don’t like will go’ yet what happened was the people who were closest to me were the ones who really had the vision for it. The elder who was my best friend on the session called me one day and said ‘Tom, we decided to go with a church plant, let’s go to lunch because I want to talk to you about it.’ I said ‘We’ll have to talk about it but right now I have to take a deep breath because that hurts.’ I walked over to the church planter next door and said ‘I’m mad at him but I hate you.’ In the glamour of church planting, in the effectiveness of it, we fail to realize the human cost that it entails. Real relationships are lost as we send people out and I think that is important for you to recognize for you as a sending church.

I also think as you are encouraging church planters and trying to help them and missionaries understand the call I think it’s trying to view in their lives the relying on God. It’s too easy in our world today for leaders, pastors and church planters to think it’s all about me. I have noticed that young leaders will often have a trial that brings a conversion experience for them as they are working for the Lord, but they seem to be working with a bad paradigm that says ‘I’m working by my power and I’m kinda working for my glory.’ They will never say that or admit that but that’s kind of what is happening. I think more as church that you can help them break through that and see to only proceed and advance by the power of God.

You have to rely on God and you only advance for the glory of God. It’s not about you. As much as a pastor or missionary may be involved in the ministry, it’s ultimately the Lord’s ministry. I think as a church you can help prepare yourself for that when you count the relational costs as you’re trying to raise up leaders to bring them to that very difficult threshold of a leader of moving away from relying on themselves to relying on the Lord, working just for His glory.

Bruce: That would be very helpful. It seems to me, back in the day you really had to convince someone to be a church planter because this didn’t seem like the hero or novel thing to do. Somewhere along the way with denominational growth, being a church planter became the novel thing to do because now it seems like there is this plethora of people who want to do this, as if that was an easy thing to do. So here is a two sided question – one what is the key in assessing people in terms of church planting and two what is the key to training/equipping people in church planting?

Tom Hawkes: With assessment, the PCA has an assessment with over 20 different items and I think we could simplify it down to a few. You are looking for a man with a particular gift of faith. When you are going to plant a church you have to see what isn’t there and believe what you can’t see and so a really strong faith is important. Along with that would be leadership and vision because again you are trying to build something that doesn’t exist.

I remember talking with Randy Pope who started the Perimeter churches in Atlanta years ago about this. He told me when he started Perimeter Church he had no idea of how to start a church. There were no courses, no training and no books on church planting but he said he had an absolute crystal clear church of the church he wanted to plant. He had written it all out – exactly what it was going to look like. So when you’re looking for a church planter you’re looking for someone with a faith to believe that God can work and the vision to see what God will do.

I do think it helps to look for someone with entrepreneurial organizational skills. So one of the typical questions I’ll ask a potential church planter is, tell me about something you have started up – it might be a business, a ministry, a club – that would demonstrate those

entrepreneurial skills. One man I asked this had started a ski club back in high school and it grew to 30 kids as they would go skiing quite frequently. I told him that was entrepreneurial leadership but he told me he was just having fun. He was having fun with 30 other people.

The last thing I would put along with the faith, vision and the entrepreneurial organizational skills, is a heart for the lost – a heart for evangelism. If you don't want to be leading people to Christ you should find something else to do, but if you do then church planting is fabulous. I got into church planting coming out of the Billy Graham Association as an evangelist with a passion for evangelism and then being convinced that to fulfill the Great Commission you have to have the church. So I became a churchman and I already was an evangelist so when you put the two together you have a church planter. So this is the first side of your question that has to do with the assessment.

In training/equipping I think the most important thing is to focus on the character of the church planter. So that would be looking at their leadership characteristics – honesty, integrity, working for the glory of God and not for yourself. It's a lot easier to train a person in a skill especially when they have some basic skills but working on selflessness, loving people, serving the Lord – those all take time. So I would encourage you in your training to focus equally if not more on the character issues, as well as the skills. It makes a huge difference.

Bruce: Pastor Reeder, as you look back you went from church revitalization to church planting, so think back through your planting of the church in Charlotte, how would you respond as a church planter to 'I wish someone would have told me that' that you pass along to other church planters?

Harry: I'll repeat that when you didn't get someone you wished you had, it could be the Lord protecting you. I think about Abraham and Lot when Lot got the valley that was growing economically and all and Abraham gets the other side with all this rock and stone, called the Promised Land but what Abraham didn't know was Sodom and Gomorrah was in that valley. There are some real traps that people can bring to the church planting endeavor and you have to be really careful.

Secondly, I wished I had learned what I eventually learned when I first went and that is that resources seldom precede ministry for they follow ministry and then ministry clusters around leadership and leadership is drawn to a Biblical vision by Godly character. So with Godly character and a Biblical vision you begin to draw leadership who implement ministry and that's where resources come from.

As was said earlier, all of a sudden we have everyone wanting to be a church planter and yes there was a time no one wanted to be a church planter. In fact, when I started in church planting no one really wanted to go into the church, they wanted to go with Campus Crusade or InterVarsity, the parachurch organizations. Then churchmanship and the sacred position of the church began to be recaptured and then church planting. What are church planters? They are now resources because the vision of church planting was put forth in the PCA in a very powerful way under the leadership of Terry Geiger and Tom Hawkes. I remember that distinctly. Then there was focused church planting in California and other places. Then came the one that got me and I didn't want to go be a church planter.

They came to me and said 'we need somebody to go to a city where there is no PCA church to plant the church that will plant a presbytery.' Randy Pope on his own had just started that with Perimeter Church in Atlanta and they wanted to make that a strategy. This strategy was

already in the Bible. What did Paul do? He went to 28 different key cities, 22 of them were cultural or military or economic or political power centers, but that vision brought resources.

A church planter needs to know they are going to get challenged. Every pastor gets challenged but for a church planter there will be somewhere in that one to three year mark very significant challenge to them, the vision and what you are going to do. That is going to become the key moment – in how you handle it, what you do with it, your reliance on the Lord, how intercessory prayer is a part of that, how you look to the Lord by faith. That is one of the reason you need a man of faith, not only to see the vision but to stay with the vision when the adversity comes. If all this is important as we say it is, do you think Satan is not going to attack church planting and church planters? You better believe he is so we need to get the right support around them.

The last thing I would say has to do with something that intrigued me recently. I recently took a group of students to Princeton and did some lectures/talks on Samuel Miller, John Gresham Machen, Voss, John Murray, John Witherspoon, Archibald Alexander and others but one of them I talked about was Samuel Davies. Davies was called the apostle of Virginia. He basically planted the Presbyterian Church in the South. Here was his vision. He saw himself as an evangelist. He would go preach and start getting groups of people together. Then he would bring in what he thought was the church planter. We now have kind of put them both together – evangelist church planter. Tom said he was an evangelist with a heart for the lost and he can organize/build something. Davies actually pulled those two apart. I think there are reasons for that for one you don't always get those two together so he was the evangelist/pioneer going in and then go back to Princeton to recruit people to be the homesteader.

So we can look at tactics as well as strategy and those are some things I have thought about since I became a church planter. I believe there are three basic pastoral ministries – church planting, church revitalization and the next level pastor. In God's providence I have had the privilege to serve in all three and I never would have chosen it or thought it. I did church revitalization in Miami, church planting in Charlotte, and then next level building on the ministry God graciously established under Dr. Barker here at Briarwood.

Bruce: This is all incredibly helpful so thank you very much. Are time in almost up so Bryan can you give the people some direction on how they can join some of the ZOOM meetings during the National Ministries Conference and later.

Bryan: Go to the Briarwood National Ministries Conference page at [briarwood.org/nmc](http://briarwood.org/nmc) and as you scroll down you will see the seven national ministry partner glimpses videos we will have available for you to choose from to see.

Bruce: We encourage you to do that for it's so important to hear what the Lord is doing in these specific ministry partner's lives and how you can be praying for them. Know that we're praying for you and we hope this National Ministries Conference has an impact in your life. Continue to send your questions to [askthepastor@briarwood.org](mailto:askthepastor@briarwood.org) and Lord willing, we'll look forward to another session with Harry and Bruce to answer them with a special edition next week with Tom Hawkes, our National Ministries Conference speaker. God bless you.