

Sjogren, Bob, Bill Stearns, and Amy Stearns. Run With the Vision. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995. 288pp. \$10.99.

The writers of this book are experienced with the latest information about reaching this lost and hurting world with the good news of Jesus Christ. Bill and Amy Stearns are with World Christian, an association of “global activists for the cause of Christ”. Bob Sjogren is the Co-Founder of Frontiers, “an interdenominational faith mission agency seeking to establish churches across the heart of the Muslim world” (inside cover).

Written in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, this book attempts to motivate Christians to work together to take the gospel to every people, in obedience to Jesus’ Great Commission. Based upon Habakkuk 2:2, “Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run”, the writers desire to give a global perspective to all Christians. They state that “Because of God’s great love, woven together in His global plan is a personalized plan for your life. Your challenge is simply to see where God wants you to fit in” (22).

Run With the Vision begins with a general overview of God’s global plan. Examples of God’s recent movements are cited throughout the book, but the first chapter is especially dedicated to updating the reader on the spread of the gospel in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Although our own corner of Christianity may seem to be stagnant, recent conversions and incredible illustrations are given to show that the Spirit of God is indeed moving forcefully across the globe. Incredible as it may seem, they state that “South America has 50,000 new churches per year, while 60 churches per week are closing in the United States” (69). To give an overview of God’s heart for the entire world, the second chapter is mostly written as a skit, which can be used to educate people and churches. After this excellent overview, the writers go on to explain that it is time to focus on people groups rather than nations, that it is time for a closure mentality, and that the time has come for strategic action to carry the gospel to the remaining unreached people groups.

To present a general overview of the unreached people groups, the main religious strongholds are discussed as a general comparative overview. In particular, the authors discuss Muslim, Tribal, Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese world religions.

The second part of the book focuses on the four main roles that need to be carried out in order to serve the global cause of Christ. These four roles are goers, welcomers, senders, and mobilizers. Realize, however, that a person can fill more than one role at a time.

The first role that is addressed is that of goer. This role can be easily understood when compared to the traditional role of “Foreign Missionary”. These people are led by God to full time Christian service to a specific people group in order to lead them to faith in Jesus Christ. Although many are “career” missionaries, meaning that they are there for life, today many more people are going short-term. If utilized properly, short-term mission trips can be a useful tool for growing long-term missionaries and providing much needed support on the mission field.

The second role is that of welcomer. The welcomer is a person, who continues to reside in their own country, but reaches out to international students or aliens within their community. In this busy, hectic world, many people are traveling worldwide for business excursions or for educational purposes. The church of Jesus Christ should be there to welcome them in, to extend hospitality to them, to teach them about the culture, and to lead them through this relationship to faith in Jesus Christ.

The third role is that of sender. This person coordinates the itinerary of the goer. They prepare the way in any way possible, such as helping to raise finances, planning for tickets, vacations, and any backup plans that could be necessary. They could also be the liaison between the goers and the church, keeping each informed. The sender can also be the focal point of intercessory prayer for those on the field, and do any research and legwork that they need.

The fourth and last role is that of mobilizer. This person motivates others to become more aware of God’s global plan, and to begin leading a church to take an active part in its fulfillment. This role is best illustrated by the person who seeks to wake 100 sleeping firemen in order to put out a raging fire, rather than trying to put out the fire by himself (205).

Two themes stand out throughout this book. First, that God’s heart is for the entire world. Talking about His Word, they say “The heart of the story is God’s desire to bless us that we might be a blessing to every distinct ethnic group on the earth, all in order to bring our Father the greatest glory humankind could give Him” (38). Second, that interdenominational unity is required to carry out the Great Commission. To encourage this “functional unity”, they state that “It is possible for a Christian group to maintain their identity totally and yet to work together with another group of believers” (83).

The authors seem to carry two main assumptions into this book. The first is that the reader is a Christian and seeking to be obedient to God’s will. Although this is partly assumed, it is also directly encouraged, such as “To call Christ your Savior and Lord means to say to Him that you’re willing to ‘go anywhere, do anything, say anything for His Kingdom’” (113). Also encouraging is “God often looks for obedience before He reveals His will to you” (114). The second main assumption is that God would have every Christian involved in global missions in some capacity. This is stated most clearly, “Because of God’s great love, woven together in His global plan is a personalized plan for your life. Your challenge is simply to see where God wants you to fit in” (22). This is right on track with Jesus’ Great Commission to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” in Matthew 28:19 (NASB).

Run With the Vision has many strong points. It is very biblically sound, providing teaching and discipleship principles that will lead the reader into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ, if followed. For example, an entire section is given to prepare a good foundation for the reader to discover his / her “Specific Niche” in global ministry (113-123). Every chapter begins with an actual story from a mission field, which allows the reader to secondarily experience a specific adventure. The effect is very captivating, making the book very easy to read. This book is very encouraging to the Body of Christ, by focusing upon God’s bigger picture. It also presents and encourages a balanced lifestyle throughout the book, such as “learn to derive your joy from your relationship with Jesus rather than from serving Him” (149). The authors are incredibly forthright and open about all areas of global missions. They rely upon God’s provision, and indeed they encourage us to do the same (161).

In seeking for any weakness in the book, I could only find one. Upon closer inspection, however, it turned out to be a balanced viewpoint as well. The discussion to which I am referring has to do with being called to the ministry (124-125). Exhorting readers not to wait for “some sort of supernatural ‘call’ that tells you what to do” (124), the authors also go on to recommend not to “push ahead of God regarding finding your course in His great plan” (125). The fact that an individual needs to have internal confidence that he / she is supposed to be on the mission field was not mentioned, so I believe that the authors could have communicated this point more clearly.

In seeking the Lord’s will in my life, I have found this book to be very enlightening. As I currently believe that my future ministry will be as a preacher of God’s Word and a pastor of God’s people, I would be inclined to apply the role of mobilizer to my own life. I believe that to effectively minister the gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire world, we need goers, welcomers, senders and mobilizers, working across denominational lines, as the authors have suggested. But I also believe that we need to keep in mind that these roles are also needed to reach “Home Mission” areas here in the United States. With this in mind, I would heartily recommend this book to any growing Christian who is seeking a place to serve our Lord Jesus Christ.