

Reaching the World
in California:

THE
GREAT
COMMISSION
Begins HERE!

2010 CALIFORNIA MISSION OFFERING The Epicenter of the Great Commission

By Randy McWhorter

Acts 1:8 – *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* (NIV)

The 2010 Haiti earthquake was a catastrophic magnitude 7.0. The earthquake occurred at 4:53 in the afternoon Haiti time on Tuesday, January 12. An estimated 3 million people were affected by the quake and the Haitian government reported an estimated 230,000 people died, 300,000 were injured and 1,000,000 made homeless. They also estimated that 250,000 residences and 30,000 commercial buildings had collapsed or were severely damaged.

Saurel Labbe built his dream-house in the town of Léogâne (**pronounced** lay-o-gahn) in 2005 with the goal of spending the rest of his life there. But something happened on January 12 that changed everything. The epicenter of the Haiti earthquake was Léogâne. At the epicenter the earth shook so strongly that the road outside town literally cracked in two, at one part reaching 30 feet underground. Saurel’s home, along with many others, was totally destroyed.

An earthquake is produced by the rapid release of energy. That energy radiates out from the place where the rocks break within the Earth, and that place is called the focus. The energy moving outward from the focus of an earthquake travels in the form of seismic waves. The epicenter of an earthquake is the point on the ground’s surface directly above the focus. Someone, trying to be funny, said that an earthquake is Mother Nature’s way of showing her faults.

An earthquake is a powerful force of destruction on Earth, but I would suggest that the seismic waves

generated by our Master’s mandate to be His witnesses are a powerful force of salvation to all peoples of the Earth. The magnitude of the Great Commission cannot be measured in human terms, but in its power, focus and effect to the ends of the Earth, it is like an epic quake.

1. **Your life is to be an epicenter of the Great Commission.**

Jesus said, “ ... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon YOU.” These words were spoken to the Apostles after Jesus’ resurrection and before Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost the power came. And, by scriptural decree, when the Holy Spirit fills a human heart with His power and presence, He generates the passion to carry out Christ’s command.

The “power” generated in your life is immeasurably strong because of its source. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. How strong is God’s power? God’s power is infinite. The effect of the Holy Spirit is so powerful it can cause a literal earthquake. Acts 4:31 tells us, “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

The energy produced by the power of the Holy Spirit ought to shake you to your core. According to Acts 1:8, your life becomes an epicenter of God’s power that results in the rippling effect of being a bold witness where you are and everywhere you go.

There is a theological distinction between the "baptism" and the "filling" of the Holy Spirit. A believer possesses the Holy Spirit or is baptized by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. I Corinthians 12:13 affirms, *"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."* The "baptism" of the Holy Spirit is a once-and-for-all lifetime event. The baptism of the Holy Spirit marks His presence in the life of a Christian and is promised to all who believe. Ephesians 1:13 says, *"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit."*

However, the "filling" of the Spirit is a daily discipline. The Bible commands us to be filled with the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 5:18). It is possible to possess the Holy Spirit and not be filled with the Holy Spirit. Sadly, this is the case with many believers. Noted preacher Jerry Vines has said, "The average Christian and the average church are somewhere bogged down between Calvary and Pentecost. They have been to Calvary for pardon, but they have not been to Pentecost for power. Bethlehem means God with us. Calvary means God for us. But Pentecost means God in us."

I believe the average Christian is much like the Ephesian believers when the Apostle Paul came to them in Acts 19:2 and said, *"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.'* Though all believers possess the Spirit, many Christians do not understand the role of the Holy Spirit and they have not appropriated the power of the Holy Spirit in their own lives.

If God's name is to become famous in our time, YOU must become the epicenter of Holy Spirit power! Holy Spirit power can erupt within the core of your being and seismic waves of your words and good deeds will radiate from you. YOU will be His witness.

2. **Your church is to be an epicenter of the Great Commission.**

Jesus said, " ... and YOU will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Not only is the Great Commission personal in its application, its focus is intended to be the power that generates a corporate force strong enough to be felt to the ends of the Earth. Two verbs express the divine process of the Great Commission – the Greek verb translated "you will receive" speaks of the gift of God's power and the verb translated "you will be" speaks of the power of God's gift. Jesus said "you will receive power," but He also said, "you will be my witnesses." Just as the path of an earthquake can be traced to a certain point of origin – the epicenter – so every person who has been saved can trace back to a witness the path of how he or she heard the gospel. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer are intended to radiate outward from wherever we live in ever-increasing gospel waves that touch beyond one's community, reaching nationwide and ultimately worldwide. That's why we call it the GREAT Commission.

On the day of Pentecost Peter stood before thousands of people and shared the Good News. When about 3,000 people accepted Jesus as Lord and were baptized, a church was born. The epicenter of God's powerful church movement began in Jerusalem on that day. From Jerusalem that band of baptized believers began to boldly witness to everyone. As they went from Jerusalem they continued in the Holy Spirit's power to witness. They migrated to Judea and Samaria and continued in the Holy Spirit's power to witness. Ultimately, the Good News will reach the ends of the Earth.

God's work has biblically and historically emanated from the local church. One definition of a church is a group of baptized believers in Jesus Christ who have banded themselves together for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission. The power of the Holy Spirit in the unified life of each church can create an unstoppable force.

Every earthquake has an epicenter. It is the point where an earthquake originates. In most cases the energy at the epicenter determines how far the shockwaves travel and how long and strong the earth shakes. I believe the epicenter of the Great Commission is the local church. From the combined Holy Spirit power within the lives of believers that make up the local church, the Good News, like seismic waves, powerfully impacts the local area first and then begins to ripple outward to impact other communities, states and nations.

Oswald Smith said, "The light that shines farthest shines brightest near home." It could also be said that the church that is able to impact its local community will also have a gospel impact beyond its community.

Coca-Cola seems to be everywhere in the world. But how does it get there? Someone found this motto posted in the company's headquarters: THINK GLOBALLY, BUT ACT LOCALLY. What this slogan is to Coke, the Great Commission is to the church. With our ultimate goal being to reach every man, woman, boy, and girl in the world, we must boldly share the gospel with our friends, relatives, work associates and neighbors.

The reality is, with California's ethnic diversity, when you reach your neighbor for Christ it touches other parts of the world. In other words, the Great Commission's epicenter is you and your church. Like Jesus we must intentionally and with great passion seek and save the lost. The Great Commission starts right where you are!

If you have never before crossed the line of faith, I offer you the opportunity to confess Jesus Christ as your personal Lord. Your personal confession involves admitting and repenting from your sins, placing your faith in only Jesus to save you from your sins, and with your mouth confessing Jesus as your Lord.

For those who have crossed the line of faith, I ask you to search your hearts. Is your life an epicenter of Holy Spirit power? Are you a bold witness for your Lord everywhere? Will you ask God, in the name of Jesus, to fill you with His Spirit? That may involve repenting from sins that have weakened your witness. It may involve a commitment to total obedience to whatever God is speaking to you. It is only when we are willing to empty ourselves that God is willing to fill us with His Spirit.

Church, are we willing to become the epicenter of a Great Commission effort that will fulfill Christ's command to reach everyone, everywhere? If we are willing to be that church, it must begin right here, right now. Becoming an epicenter of the Great Commission means we will be willing to become bold witnesses in our community. It means we will give ourselves in a cooperative effort to reach our region of California by participating with other churches in our association. It means we will commit to cooperate with our state convention of churches to reach 38 million people in California who don't have a relationship with Christ. We will commit ourselves to cooperate with the Southern Baptist Convention to reach all of North America and the ends of the Earth.

Our church can become a powerful force as each of us commits to pray for the lost, go across the street or across the seas to share the gospel, and give our tithes and our offerings so the necessary resources are available to accomplish our task.

Pray, Go, and Give so that those near us and far from us may have the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel. The Great Commission begins here. May we become an epicenter of the Great Commission.

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The California Mission Offering is inspired by S.G. Posey, a CSBC missionary pioneer.